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EVALUATION REPORT

PROGRAM EVALUATION OF USDOL-ILAB TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE UNDER THE USMCA MAY 2025

Lead Evaluator: Carlos Echeverría-Estrada, Ph.D.

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This report describes the program evaluation of DOL ILAB technical assistance under the United States – Mexico – Canada Agreement. Fieldwork for this evaluation was conducted in July - October 2024. NORC at the University of Chicago conducted this independent evaluation in collaboration with the project team and stakeholders and prepared the evaluation report according to the terms specified in its contract with the United States Department of Labor.

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Contact for questions:

Carlos Echeverría-Estrada, Contract Manager.

E-mail: Echeverria-Carlos@norc.org.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACCIONNAR	Building a Comprehensive Government of Mexico Approach to Combating Child Labor and Forced Labor
AHIFORES	Alianza Hortofrutícola Internacional para el Fomento de la Responsabilidad Social, A.C
AIR	The American Institutes for Research
AMCHAM	American Chamber of Commerce
CALLE	Improving Working Conditions in the Mexican Automotive Supply Chain
CAMEL	Complexity aware monitoring, evaluation, and learning
CAMINOS	Strengthening Mexican Inspectorate for Labor Enforcement
CANCHAM	Canadian Chamber of Commerce
CB	Collective Bargaining
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CDM	Centro de los Derechos del Migrante
CEACR	Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations
CFA	Committee on Freedom of Association
CFO	Comité Fronterizo de Obreras y Obreros
CIPCO	Centro Interamericano para la Productividad y la Competitividad
CJF	Council of the Federal Judiciary (Consejo de la Judicatura Federal)
CKDu	Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown etiology
CMEP	Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Plans
CNDH	Mexico's National Commission of Human Rights (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos)
COLSON	El Colegio de Sonora
CONACENTROS	National Commission of Labor Conciliation Centers
CONADESUCA	Comité Nacional para el Desarrollo Sustentable de la Caña de Azúcar
CONCAMIN	Confederation of Industrial Chambers
COPARMEX	Employers' Confederation of the Mexican Republic
COPIIJAL	Colectivo Pro-Inclusión e Igualdad Jalisco
CROC	Workers and Agricultural Workers' Revolutionary Confederation
CS	Change story
CSAAJS	Dominican Republic Civil Society for Action for Accountable Justice and Security
CSE	Selection and Evaluation Committee
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTM	Confederation of Mexican Workers
DRF	Data Reporting Forms
EAC	Evaluation Advisory Committee
EJEM	Judicial School of the State of Mexico
ENLACE	Enhancing Labor Conciliation in Mexico project
EQ	Evaluation Question
EQUAL	Equal Access to Quality Jobs for Women and Girls in Mexico project
FAT	Authentic Labor Front
FAI	Fundación de Apoyo Infantil

FCCLR	Federal Center of Conciliation and Labor Registry
FESIIAAN	Federation of Independent Unions of Auto, Auto Parts, Aerospace, and Pneumatics Industries
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FMCS	U.S Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
FOA	Freedom of Association
FOH	Fields of Hope (Campos de Esperanza) project
GEM	Gender Equity in the Mexican Workplace project
ILAB	Bureau of International Labor Affairs
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMSS	Mexican Social Security Institute
INDERLAB	Labor Reform Indicators and Statistics
INDEX	National Council of the Maquiladora and Export Manufacturing Industry
INEGI	National Statistical Agency
INFONAVIT	Institute of the National Housing Fund for Workers
INPI	Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas
IRB	Internal Review Board
IP	Implementing Partner
JCAs	Labor Relations Boards (Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje)
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCC	State labor conciliation center
MAP	Mexico Awareness Raising Project
MSC	Most Significant Change
NORC	NORC at the University of Chicago
OBSERVAR	Observation and Engagement for Rights Verification and Realization Initiative project
OCFT	Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (within ILAB)
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
OTLA	Office of Trade and Labor Affairs (within ILAB)
PADF	Pan-American Development Foundation
PII	Personal Identification Information
PIU	Primary Intended Users
PMP	Performance Monitoring Plan
PoA	Partners of the Americas
RGITAS	General Regulations of Labor Inspection and Application of Sanctions
RIRL	FCCLR's Labor Registry Information Repository
RRLM	Rapid Response Labor Mechanism
SAI	Social Accountability International
SAT	Mexico's Federal Tax Authority
SC	The Solidarity Center
SENDEROS	Sembrando Derechos, Cosechando Mejores Futuros project
SGLLE	Strengthening Government Labor Law Enforcement project
SIAP	Inspection Process Support
SIGNO	Sistema Nacional de Conciliación
SINACOL	Sistema de Gestión de Notificaciones
SLP	San Luis Potosi

SME	Subject-Matter Expert
SNTMMSSRM	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos, Siderúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana
SSI	Semi-structured interview
ST	Secretaría del Trabajo (state level)
STPS	Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Mexico's Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare)
SUSTENTAR	Project to Build and Strengthen Sustainability Systems in the Tomato and Chile Sectors in Mexico
TA	Technical assistance
TECLAB	Towards Effective Courts and Coordinated Labor Justice project
TPR	Technical progress report
ToC	Theory of change
ToRs	Terms of Reference
TSJEM	State of Mexico's Superior Court of Justice
UDT	Unidad de Trabajo Digno (STPS)
UIA	Universidad Iberoamericana (Plantel Santa Fe)
UIJL	Labor Justice Implementation Unit
UNAM	National Autonomous University of Mexico
UCJ	Una Cosecha Justa: Project to Reduce Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Other Forms of Labor Exploitation in the Chile Pepper and Tomato Sectors in Mexico
USDOL	U.S. Department of Labor
USG	United States Government
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement
UTD	Federal Inspection Directorate / Unit of Decent Work (Unidad de Trabajo Digno)
VZF	Improving Workers' Occupational Safety and Health in Selected Supply Chains in Mexico – A Vision Zero Fund
WVI	World Vision International

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

ILAB contracted NORC at the University of Chicago to evaluate its technical assistance projects and policy engagement efforts through its technical assistance in Mexico, funded through United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) implementing legislation, aimed to support Mexico's labor reform, enforcing labor standards, and combating child and forced labor through collaboration with government, labor, and private sector actors.

This program evaluation aims to assess ILAB's overall contribution through technical assistance and policy engagement in Mexico, focusing on outcomes—planned, emergent, or unintended—arising from 19 USMCA-funded projects and the Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM). In addressing ILAB's evaluation questions, NORC analyzed trends, identified success factors and challenges, and explored opportunities to enhance partnerships and further advance the labor reform. This study complements the evidence provided by project performance evaluations and does not replace them.

The evaluation team used a theory-based approach to map outcomes across the 19 ILAB projects, organizing intended and unintended changes into broad “domains of change”. The outcomes considered as part of these domains were concrete and visible changes in behavior, practices, policies or relationships among actors supported or affected by ILAB-funded technical assistance. NORC categorized the identified outcomes in five domains of change:

1. Worker advocacy for labor rights.
2. Private sector labor practices.
3. Strengthening and professionalization of labor justice and conciliation systems.
4. Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace.
5. Labor rights enforcement, inspection of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination

NORC used a utilization-focused, complexity-aware approach to engage key users and capture portfolio-level outcomes, including intended and unintended results, contextual influences, stakeholder perspectives, and the pace of change. The evaluation combined the Most Significant Change (MSC) method with a mixed methods approach in which triangulation of information obtained from systematic document reviews, monitoring data and secondary sources was essential to strengthen causal narratives and trace how local actors and projects contributed to outcomes.

The evaluation team conducted separate iterations of data collection and validation of the most significant changes identified. Between July and October 2024, the evaluation team conducted interviews and focus groups with 312 participants located in 19 states, including workers affiliated neither to any worker organization nor union in six industrial clusters, to gather data on significant changes related to ILAB-funded projects. Unaffiliated workers provided perspectives about workplace and labor rights that could not be captured from any other group in the sample. Then, from November 2024 to January 2025, 121 respondents—including workers, experts, and ILAB

Figure 1. Map with States Covered in Evaluation



staff and partners—validated and ranked significant change outcomes through an in-person Validation Workshop in Mexico City, surveys, phone interviews, and collective interviews, according to participants' accessibility to remote means, availability and domain of interest.

KEY EVALUATION RESULTS

The evaluation documented 21 change stories (CSs)¹ identified by respondents through the MSC method, across the five domains of change. Herein a summary of these outcomes.

DOMAIN OF CHANGE #1 – WORKER ADVOCACY FOR LABOR RIGHTS

Domain 1 reflects outcomes of worker organizations, collectives, and individuals advocating for labor rights, that ILAB technical assistance and other actors influenced directly or indirectly.

- ILAB's technical assistance helped reduce child labor and improve occupational safety in target sugarcane fields and coffee plantations in Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca, and Veracruz. By fostering trust and creating educational spaces, workers adopted safer practices, such as requesting and wearing protective equipment. For fostering sustainability, federal and state labor inspectorates must elevate the enforcement of private sector compliance with OSH standards, particularly in the agricultural sector.
- ILAB technical assistance strengthened the institutional capacity of five newly established democratic unions across the automotive, rubber, manufacturing, and mining sectors in San Luis Potosí, Morelos, and Coahuila. All five unions received certification from the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration (FCCLR), authorizing them to represent workers, after years of fighting for their freedom of association and collective bargaining rights. Several were designated as exclusive bargaining agents for their collective bargaining agreements (CBAs). The capacity built allowed these unions negotiate wage increases in a range of 7.1 to 30 percent in 2024.
- These unions have also adopted transparent practices regarding CBAs and union dues, laying the groundwork for financial independence and long-term sustainability—contingent on formalizing dues collection with employers and maintaining internal training on democratic union practices.
- ILAB implementing partners also promoted the advancement of labor rights through communication campaigns aligned with Mexico's 2019 labor reform, reinforcing the benefits from a broader policy and legal framework.

The USMCA's Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM) also played an important role in supporting these unions to receive employer recognition to exercise their labor rights.

The recently created independent unions, their CBAs, capacity to negotiate better wages and benefits, and union dues transparency practices have established conditions for medium or long-term sustainability. However, young democratic unions must gain financial independence through formalizing the collection of member dues with employers and must continue conducting their own training and refresher sessions on union democracy. Better OSH practices at target sugar refineries and other agricultural companies also have conditions for medium or long-term sustainability. Nevertheless, employer monitoring for compliance is not sufficient for systemic change; the role of federal and state-level labor inspectorates in enforcing these standards is key to promoting the sustainability of private sector compliance efforts to comply with OSH standards.

¹ In Annex G we include the 11 top-ranked CS by the validators of this evaluation; those CSs have been marked with an asterisk (*) in the first column of Table 24, in Annex G.

DOMAIN OF CHANGE #2 – PRIVATE SECTOR LABOR PRACTICES

Domain 2 reflects outcomes in the private sectors' labor practices, including behavior and relationships, influenced directly or indirectly by ILAB technical assistance and other actors.

- ILAB technical assistance led to the creation of a corporate social responsibility unit in central Veracruz, which has put into effect procedures to prevent child labor and protect cane cutters. Target sugar mills in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Nayarit also invested in better health and safety measures at work, increased the awareness of labor rights and OSH issues among of 95.4 percent² of target agricultural workers, and reduced workplace accidents.
- Through ILAB-funded specialized training on the Mexican labor reform and tailored consulting services, ILAB's technical assistance contributed to a multinational automotive company's effort, in San Luis Potosí, to create and implement a long-term program to support the prevention of workplace violence against women.

ILAB projects have contributed to cultural shifts against child labor in several Mexican states, but progress is still threatened by inconsistent awareness, economic pressures on families, lack of schooling options in rural communities, weak enforcement, and sustainability challenges in community-led alternatives. The role of federal and state-level labor inspectorates in enforcing these standards continues being key to promote the sustainability of these efforts. In the automotive sector, the implementation of a workplace and domestic sexual violence and harassment prevention program was also adopted in the collective agreement with the union, promoting its long-term sustainability.

DOMAIN OF CHANGE #3 – STRENGTHENING AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF LABOR JUSTICE AND CONCILIATION SYSTEMS

Domain 3 reflects outcomes in government institutions, officials, and public servants aimed at professionalizing and strengthening the labor court and conciliation systems at the and federal levels, with direct or indirect support from ILAB technical assistance.

- ILAB's technical assistance made it possible for the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration (FCCLR) to offer the public remote access to a complete archive of more than 600,000 digitalized collective agreements, labor rules and other labor documents generated by the old labor relation boards (*Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje*).
- ILAB technical assistance improved and refined the conciliations processes, including the civil service manuals, in several State Labor Conciliation Centers (LCCs), particularly in Chihuahua.
- ILAB technical assistance adapted the SIGNO and SINACOL digital platforms to meet the local needs of the State LCCs, enhancing the efficiency of the conciliation processes.
- ILAB also contributed to professionalizing the labor court staff in the State of Mexico and supported guidance to federal and state judges in collective labor law procedures through the preparation and wide dissemination of a bench book.

The new judicial and conciliation institutions and processes that the labor reform generated still need continuous strengthening as the capacity built is not homogenous across states. CONACENTROS and the new federal and state labor judges are actors that will continue requiring technical support and

² Fields of Hope data reporting form (October 2024). Calculated based on 458 surveys applied in coffee and sugarcane sectors in Oaxaca and Veracruz.

capacity building as the labor conciliation and justice continues being implemented and transitioning to more mature stages.

DOMAIN OF CHANGE #4 – ELIMINATING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN AT THE WORKPLACE

Domain 4 reflects outcomes in the behavior, relationships, and policies of organizations, individuals, and groups directly or indirectly supported by ILAB-funded technical assistance to eliminate employment discrimination and promote gender equality.

- ILAB technical assistance generated capacity for women in target communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz to increase their household income and financial independence by starting or expanding their businesses and expanding their participation in the coffee production process.
- ILAB technical assistance contributed to female workers at a maquila company in Nazareno, Durango to elect an independent union league to represent them. The new leaders renegotiated the collective labor agreement to increase their wages, benefits, and work conditions.
- ILAB technical assistance also led to the involvement of more female workers in a group of democratic unions in Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos. These workers have gained positions as delegates in union leadership bodies. A larger proportion of female delegates contributes to ensuring unions consider the interests of female workers in their decision making.

ILAB projects empowered female workers in the industrial, call centers and agro-export sectors through home visits, leadership dialogues, and skills training, strengthening democratic unions' capacity to promote labor rights and gender equality in the workplace. The contributions to creating independent unions led by female workers seem to be sustainable in the medium and long term. However, unions must continue conducting training and refresher sessions on democratic union governance and promoting the equality of women and men in the workplace and in the access union decisions. In contrast, increases in women's income from entrepreneurship, new trades, and expanded roles in coffee production face short- and medium-term challenges, as target communities heavily rely on seasonal harvest income. This limits disposable income for non-essential services and is further compounded by volatile market prices.

DOMAIN OF CHANGE #5 – LABOR RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT, INSPECTIONS OF LABOR STANDARDS, DISSEMINATION, AND COORDINATION

Domain 5 reflects changes in behavior, relationships in federal and state authorities' efforts to enforce labor rights and enhance labor inspections, supported directly or indirectly by ILAB-funded technical assistance.

- ILAB technical assistance enhanced collaboration between the Ministry of Labor's General Directorate of Statistics and the Federal Labor Inspectorate by promoting more efficient labor inspections through the development and application of machine learning-based technologies.
- At the state level, ILAB implementing partners supported labor inspection efficiency and employer engagement across 10 target states, with Querétaro³ serving as a documented example of improved collaboration.

³ While Querétaro's target labor inspectors showed conviction to incorporate the labor reform principles into their practice, the RRLM panel requested the Government of Mexico a review of labor conditions and the employer's respect for workers FOA and CBA rights at a facility

- The evaluation documented a lack of labor inspection presence in the San Quintín Valley, Baja California, where former workers and community leaders reported OSH violations by agro-export producers in the tomato and berry sectors. Agricultural child labor remains prevalent in the region, and most workers face lack of information about their rights under the 2019 labor reform

ILAB-funded technological support, training, and process reviews strengthened the capacity of the federal labor inspectorate and improved coordination with state-level counterparts, leading to more efficient and productive inspections. However, significant capacity gaps remain at the state level, particularly in inspection quality and protocol enforcement. These efforts are further constrained by low inspector salaries and insufficient equipment –vehicles, data collection devices– that limit their ability to deploy in high-need industrial and agricultural areas.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO USMCA LABOR PRIORITIES

Overall, ILAB’s technical assistance contributed to most priorities outlined in the USMCA’s labor chapter: advancing the effective abolition of child labor, protecting some vulnerable workers – indigenous agricultural workers who migrate domestically and seasonally–, increasing public awareness of labor laws, strengthening freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, improving working conditions, promoting workplace gender equality, and enhancing protections against workplace violence. ILAB also supported efforts to improve labor law enforcement through recordkeeping, reporting, conciliation, compliance monitoring, inspector training, and legal proceedings to address violations. However, the evaluation did not identify contributions to the USMCA priority to promote workforce diversity (e.g., age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation).

NORC also addressed evaluation questions concerned with the values that actors expressed about the collective outcomes identified through the MSC method. The results reflecting values on what outcomes were most significant to stakeholders and their rationale are available in Annex H. The report also documents the ability of ILAB-funded technical assistance to address the particular needs of groups of workers most-at-risk of labor exploitation, by domain of change. The results about the engagement of technical assistance projects and their contributions to address the needs of groups most-at-risk of labor exploitation –domestic migrant workers, child laborers, female workers– are described in detail in Annex I.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Federal budget cuts in Mexico and the United States, as well as the ongoing judiciary reform may hinder Mexico’s ability to meet USMCA labor commitments, risking setbacks in enforcing labor rights and OSH standards, despite recent institutional progress and capacity-building.
- ILAB’s technical assistance may boost demand for labor justice services, prompting supported projects to monitor both supply and demand –enabling comprehensive data on service quality, user satisfaction, and outcomes.
- While industrial workers continue increasing awareness about the labor reform and labor rights, many of them continue lacking information and having little to no incentives to demand better working conditions.

dedicated to producing metal alloys for auto parts in Queretaro. On April 16, 2025, the United States Government suspended liquidation of tariffs on goods from such facility.

- Labor rights often overlap and interact within workplaces and worker organizations. Strengthening institutions to protect and promote these rights is more effective through integrated approaches.
- Workplace interventions for female workers should use flexible home visit strategies to accommodate their complex schedules, caregiving roles, and household dynamics, ensuring effective engagement and feedback collection.
- Sustaining gains in democratic union governance and female representation requires ongoing training and awareness efforts, as legal protections alone cannot prevent setbacks from persistent anti-democratic practices in the labor sector.
- ILAB-funded technical assistance in Mexico showed that greater resources and longer project duration are linked to more significant and scalable outcomes.
- Unaffiliated workers perceived transparent union dues management and anti-discrimination as key changes, while highlighting poor public services as major burdens, noting that OSH, FOA, and CBA rights matter but don't address broader labor-related costs they bear alone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ILAB should leverage its technical assistance to support Mexico's labor rights and competitiveness, strengthen CONACENTROS across all LCCs, and engage early with the Judiciary Administration Body to align court reforms with ILO standards and efficient organizational models.
2. Consider further collaboration between technical assistance portfolio projects working in similar geographies to promote and enforce agricultural workers' rights.
3. Strengthen engagement with U.S. company subsidiaries in Mexico, encouraging use of ILAB-funded materials to promote labor reform and USMCA priorities, especially through organizations like AMCHAM and their supply chains.
4. ILAB and partners should document achieved and pending milestones before project closeout to inform local stakeholders, helping sustain progress and guide future replication or adaptation of effective strategies.
5. To advance union democracy in Mexico, labor rights campaigns must be tailored to diverse worker groups, clarify RRLM's role, highlight union gains, and adapt messaging to workers' education levels using accessible language free of anglicisms.

1. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES & BACKGROUND

The Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) has contracted NORC at the University of Chicago to conduct the program evaluation of its technical-assistance in Mexico under the United States-Canada and Mexico Agreement (USMCA). ILAB is responsible for monitoring and engaging with Mexico and Canada regarding their labor commitments under the USMCA. The USMCA implementing legislation included \$180 million for USMCA-related technical assistance projects to help the Government of Mexico implement labor reform, strengthen labor standards to protect workers, promote acceptable conditions of work, and address risks of child labor and forced labor.⁴ Specifically, technical assistance projects supported with these funds were working with tripartite actors (government, worker organizations, and private sector) to improve Mexico's capacity to:

- i. Implement its labor reforms, including training and support for the new labor courts and centers that will attempt to conciliate disputes and register unions and collective bargaining agreements.
- ii. Implement commitments related to collective bargaining, secret ballot voting for union representation challenges and approval of collective bargaining agreements, as recognized by the International Labor Organization (ILO).
- iii. Combat child labor and forced labor, enforce labor laws, and promote economic empowerment of vulnerable women and girls.

1.1. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify and assess the contribution of ILAB's technical assistance to any intended and unintended results in its engagement directly with the Government of Mexico and other tripartite partners in Mexico. These contributions included strategies pursued through the technical assistance projects and USMCA's Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM). The evaluation covers 12 OTLA and 7 OCFT technical assistance projects, outlined above, that were implemented in Mexico at the time of the evaluation, as well as these offices' policy engagement efforts through its technical assistance in Mexico.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Identify, analyze, and visually depict planned, emergent, and/or unexpected outcomes, achievements, and, to the extent possible, impacts to which ILAB's USMCA technical assistance projects and ILAB's engagements contributed through its projects;
- Identify and assess ILAB's technical assistance projects' contributions to the implementation of the labor reform in Mexico, protection of labor rights, and new or strengthened labor institutions;
- Identify, analyze and visually depict trends across the USMCA project portfolio so that ILAB can better learn from the challenges, success factors, and/or risks that the projects face;
- Identify emergent opportunities for enhanced collaboration and adaptation to improve the effectiveness of the technical assistance projects and engagement with stakeholders; and,
- Identify emergent opportunities for future programming and engagement to continue systemic change in Mexico.

It is important to note that this is not an implementation or process evaluation, and this is not intended to replace performance evaluations of individual technical assistance projects nor evaluations of

⁴ Most of the analysis and writing for this report was completed prior to the decision to cancel all ILAB projects in March 2025.

projects focused on certain industrial sectors. This program evaluation has reviewed ILAB's USMCA technical assistance to identify the planned and emergent outcomes that either have been achieved or were projected to be achieved by the projects based on project activities and progress. Some technical assistance projects were still early in their implementation and may not yet have achieved results and this must be factored into the conclusions and recommendations. Additionally, this reporting is not anticipated to be a project-by-project accounting of outcomes, but rather an analysis considering ILAB's work as a whole in Mexico.

1.2. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation questions (EQs) in Table 1 were approved by ILAB in June in the evaluation's Terms of Reference (ToRs), here with two slight modifications in language, per ILAB's request. Such modifications do not cause any substantial changes to the planned inquiry. The EQs explore both external and internal factors influencing outcomes, including shifts in socioeconomic and political contexts, implementation dynamics, and stakeholders' perceptions of project value. Addressing them required an exploratory approach to map and document emerging, intended, and unintended outcomes across ILAB's diverse technical assistance in Mexico. These six questions and their sub-questions drive the discussion in the results section "What We Learned".

Table 1. Final Evaluation Questions and Sub-Questions

1. What collective results (intended or unintended) have ILAB's projects and engagements contributed to in the last four years? a) What factors positively or negatively affected progress towards key outputs and intended/unintended outcomes? b) How do ILAB, its implementing partners in Mexico, and other local system actors value the results?
2. Whether and how have ILAB's projects in Mexico been able to address, and collectively contribute to, the labor rights priorities set forth in Chapter 23 of the USMCA?
3. Whether and how have ILAB projects collectively contributed to implementation of the labor law reform/new labor justice institutions and improved respect for labor rights in Mexico? a) What project strategies or components were most/least effective in making progress in the identified domains of change? Why? b) Were project strategies or components effective in addressing the needs of populations in Mexico most at-risk of labor exploitation? Why? c) What project strategies or interventions should ILAB scale up or replicate? What project strategies or interventions should ILAB curtail? d) What actors could scale up or replicate these strategies or interventions either with or without ILAB's support?
4. Given the changing political context, and if deemed appropriate and/or necessary, how should (or could) the existing implementing projects shift project strategies (including activities) to further advance labor law reform/ labor rights in Mexico?
5. Given the changing political context, what government institutions and non-government actors can ILAB and its grantees better leverage to improve realization of labor rights in Mexico? How? a) From a local systems approach, are there any Mexican structures/systems that ILAB and grantees can better coordinate with or support in making progress in the desired domains of change? b) How can ILAB and its grantees adjust their strategies/interventions to better respond to the needs/priorities of populations most-at-risk of labor exploitation? c) What are opportunities for future programming in Mexico relevant to the USMCA?

6. What portfolio results and outcomes have the greatest likelihood of being sustained?
- a) From the perspective of national (federal) and sub-national partners (state and local level), what are the key strategies to sustain the outcomes achieved?
 - b) What are the main enabling and limiting factors of the desired changes within the labor rights landscape in Mexico?
 - c) Are portfolio contributions to change able to receive and adapt to new feedback and shifting contexts over time? What inhibits or facilitates this adaptability?

1.3. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BACKGROUND

The Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) that provides a wide range of technical assistance around the world. Its mission is to strengthen global labor standards, enforce labor commitments among trading partners, and combat international child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking. The Office of Trade and Labor Affairs (OTLA) and the Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) are offices within ILAB.

Since 2019, ILAB has centered its efforts to promote workers' rights in Mexico on strengthening the capacity of Mexican institutions, unions/worker organizations, and employers to implement the Labor Chapter of the USMCA. ILAB's multi-pronged strategy engaged the public sector at the federal and state levels, the private sector, and unions and workers to promote labor law enforcement; employers' accountability; democratic unions; empowerment of workers, with emphasis on female and indigenous labor; and prevention and resolution of labor disputes. Overall, ILAB aims to improve working conditions in several strategic sectors in the USMCA, build institutional and local capacity, provide technical assistance, and combat child labor.⁵

The theories of change of the 19 ILAB projects included in this evaluation were varied and grantees operated at different levels of the labor rights landscape; they engaged with the judiciary and executive branches of the federal government and with authorities in at least 21 states. Table 2 summarizes the projects of OCFT and OTLA in Mexico covered in this evaluation:

Table 2. ILAB-Funded Technical Assistance Project Descriptions

OTLA Projects	
<i>Towards Effective Courts and Coordinated Labor Justice (TECLAB)</i>	TECLAB aimed to support independent state labor courts created by Mexico's 2019 Labor Law Reform to administer labor justice in an effective, efficient, and consistent manner.
<i>Strengthening Mexican Inspectorate for Labor Enforcement (CAMINOS)</i>	CAMINOS aimed to improve government systems for labor law enforcement through improved enforcement of labor laws by federal and state labor inspectorate, better administration of inspections, and enhanced engagement with supply chain actors in targeted USMCA sectors.
<i>Enhancing Labor Conciliation in Mexico (ENLACE)</i>	ENLACE aimed to support the state-level conciliation institutions established by the 2019 Mexican Labor Law Reform to help workers, unions, and employers prevent and resolve labor disputes in a transparent and efficient manner.
<i>Gender Equity in the Mexican Workplace (GEM)</i>	GEM worked to support women workers and worker organizations that need assistance in incorporating equality in institutional protocols and plans by supporting actions to increase the number of women in union leadership, strengthen protections, address discrimination and harassment at work, and augment wages for women.

⁵ The launching of some projects covered in this evaluation – EQUAL, Senderos, Fields of Hope, SGLLE and SC1 project – predated the USMCA's Labor Chapter. They received both USMCA-implementation funding and non-USMCA funding and thus, their objectives may not align fully with the USMCA's labor priorities.

<i>Mexico Awareness Raising Project (MAP)</i>	MAP aimed to support the government of Mexico, including the federal and state-level Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare, to design, execute, and sustain effective communication strategies that inform workers, unions, and employers of the legal ramifications of the country's labor law reforms.
<i>Engaging Mexico's Auto Sector in Labor Reform Implementation (Mexico Auto Employers)</i>	The project aimed to bring automotive sector employers into compliance with the country's labor law reforms while improving working conditions in the automotive supply sector.
<i>Improving Working Conditions in the Mexican Automotive Supply Chain (CALLE)</i>	CALLE worked to improve the quality of inspections and inspection follow-ups conducted by labor inspectors; strengthen government administration and coordination of the labor inspectorate and other institutions involved in labor law enforcement; and strengthen the ability of labor courts and other institutions to effectively conciliate and adjudicate labor cases, including administration and coordination of union representation challenges.
<i>Strengthening Government Labor Law Enforcement (SGLLE)</i>	SGLLE enhanced governments' capacity to create, implement, and monitor the application of labor laws by working with ministries of labor, labor judges, and other judicial labor authorities.
<i>Engaging Workers and Civil Society to Strengthen Labor Law Enforcement (SC1 project)</i>	This project sought to improve labor law enforcement, as well as compliance with labor-related U.S. trade provisions, by improving the involvement of workers and civil society organizations in this process.
<i>Building an Independent & Democratic Labor Movement to Protect Worker Rights in Mexico (SC2 project)</i>	This project aimed to strengthen the capacity of unions to organize by legitimizing collective bargaining agreements in the automotive, auto parts, aerospace, call centers, electronics, garment, industrial bakeries, logistics, and mining sectors.
<i>Strengthening Workers' Ability to Exercise their Labor Rights in Mexico (SC3 project)</i>	The project aimed to build the capacity of workers, support worker engagement and organizing, and strengthen democratic worker organizations in the aerospace, mining, and call center industries.
<i>Observation and Engagement for Rights Verification and Realization Initiative (OBSERVAR)</i>	OBSERVAR supported workplace democratic processes in Mexico through the impartial observation of workplace votes and the capacity building of key stakeholders on the issues of freedom of association and collective bargaining.
OCFT Projects	
<i>Una Cosecha Justa: Project to Reduce Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Other Forms of Labor Exploitation in the Chile Pepper and Tomato Sectors in Mexico (UCJ)</i>	The <i>Una Cosecha Justa</i> project aimed to increase protections for workers and reduce the risk of child labor, forced labor, and other labor rights violations among indigenous and migrant workers in the chili pepper and tomato sectors.
<i>Sustentar: Project to Build and Strengthen Sustainability Systems in the Tomato and Chile Sectors in Mexico</i>	The <i>Sustentar</i> project aimed to increase private sector stakeholders' accountability to uphold core labor standards consistent with Mexican labor laws and the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement's (USMCA) Labor Chapter, with a specific focus on addressing child labor, forced labor, and acceptable conditions of work.
<i>Building a Comprehensive Government of Mexico Approach to Combating Child Labor and Forced Labor (AccioNNar)</i>	ACCIONNAR sought to enhance the effectiveness of the Government of Mexico to combat child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking at the federal level, as well as in the southern states of Chiapas, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo.
<i>Improving Workers' Occupational Safety and Health in Selected Supply Chains in Mexico: A Vision Zero Fund (VZF)</i>	This project aimed to improve the occupational safety and health of workers in selected supply chains with a focus on COVID-19, female workers, and workers in vulnerable conditions.

<i>Equal Access to Quality Jobs for Women and Girls in Mexico (EQUAL)</i>	EQUAL sought to increase women and adolescent girls' economic empowerment by increasing job quality and safety, creating opportunities for economic participation, and addressing gaps in social programs to reach remote and impoverished families.
<i>Senderos: Sembrando Derechos, Cosechando Mejores Futuros</i>	This project was building government capacity to enforce labor laws in agricultural supply chains, improving private sector awareness and compliance with labor laws, and increasing farmworkers' knowledge of labor rights and grievances mechanisms.
<i>Campos de Esperanza/Fields of Hope (FOH)</i>	<i>Fields of Hope</i> sought to reduce child labor in migrant agricultural communities, particularly in the coffee and sugarcane sectors in Veracruz and Oaxaca. The project linked children and youth to existing educational programs and refers vulnerable households to existing government programs to improve income and reduce the need for child labor.

Aiming to generate themes around intended and unintended outcomes, the evaluation team took a theory-based approach to ILAB's technical assistance and created an outcomes map using the logic models of all 19 projects in the scope of this evaluation (see the Annex A. Methodological Note). NORC proposed the following themes, also called domains of change, primarily based on the actors participating and impacted by the intended outcomes, according to the theories of change contained in the 19 projects subject to the evaluation. We understand a domain of change as a broad area where change might be expected to occur. The definitions of domains below are deliberately left open to capture a diverse array of changes and interpretations within them.⁶ This MSC evaluation searched for *concrete* and *visible* modifications in behaviors and practices of individual and collective actors engaged with and affected by the ILAB-funded projects. The domains may have also included changes in the relationships between these actors and in the policies enacted by any groups and institutions supported or affected by ILAB-funded technical assistance.⁷

Hereby, we define each domain of change and identify the ILAB technical assistance projects whose work and contributions – further documented in the Results section – fall into each category.

Domain #1. Worker advocacy for labor rights. It refers to changes in actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of worker organizations, individual workers, or worker collectives to advocate for labor rights that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly supported. The SC1, SC2, SC3 projects, as well as FOH, GEM, MAP, OBSERVAR, *Senderos*, UCJ and VZF projects work towards achieving outcomes in this area.

Domain #2. Private sector labor practices. This area encompasses the changes in actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of the private sector that affect their labor practices and that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly impacted. Private sector actors include agricultural producers; small, medium and large domestic and multinational companies in key exporting sectors (e.g., automotive, sugar, coffee, tobacco, chili and tomato). The ILAB-funded projects working in this area are: FOH, *Mexico Auto Employers*, *Senderos*, *Sustentar*, VZF, and EQUAL.

Domain #3. Strengthening and professionalization of labor justice and conciliation systems. In this domain, we include changes in actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of government institutions, individual public servants, or groups of officials to professionalize labor court and labor conciliation staff, as well as to strengthen the institutional capacity of state-level labor courts, the Federal Center of Conciliation and Labor Registry (FCCLR) and the local labor conciliation centers

⁶ Davies, R., & Dart, J. (2005). The 'most significant change'(MSC) technique. A guide to its use, 10. Available at: <https://ahi.sub.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/MSCGuide-1.pdf>.

⁷ For a detail description of the MSC process, please see Section 2 and Annex A.

(LCCs), directly or indirectly supported by ILAB’s technical assistance. Notably, the ENLACE, MAP, SGLLE, and TECLAB projects have worked in this domain.

Domain #4. Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace. This area refers to changes in actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of organizations, individuals, or groups that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly supported to eliminate imbalances in employment and occupation and promote equality of women and men, that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly impacted. Projects whose work relates to this domain of change are EQUAL, GEM, the SC2 and SC3 projects, and VZF.

Domain #5. Labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination. This domain refers to any changes in actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of federal, state or local authorities to enforce labor rights, affect the frequency and quality of labor inspections, and improve dissemination and coordination systems to promote labor rights and OSH standards, directly or indirectly supported by ILAB-funded technical assistance. AccioNNar, CALLE, CAMINOS, Senderos and MAP’s work interrelate with this domain.

2. METHODOLOGY

To meet the evaluation objectives, NORC adopted a utilization-focused approach to the evaluation by engaging with primary intended users (PIUs) at key points in the evaluation process (see Figure 2). The utilization-focused approach increases the relevance and credibility of the evaluation findings, lessons and recommendations with PIUs.

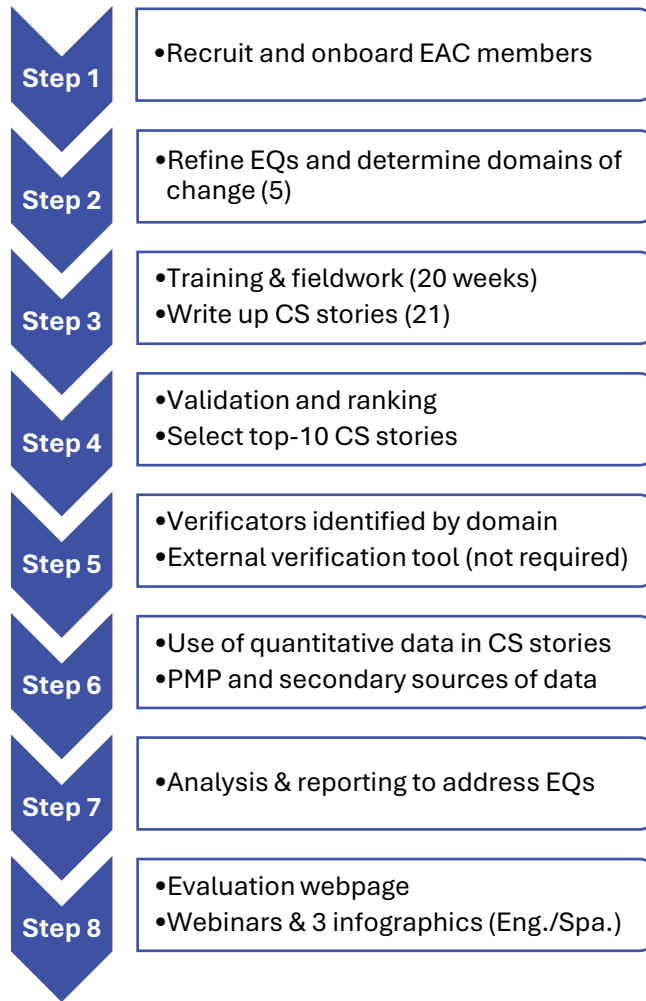
To answer the evaluation questions on emerging outcomes, the design needed to account for inability to predict the number and nature of portfolio-level outcomes emerging in the dynamic program context. NORC adopted a complexity-aware approach to collect evidence of changes, as well as contributing actors and factors. A *complexity-aware monitoring, evaluation, and learning (CAMEL)* approach helps evaluators to document, analyze and interpret complex elements, including: (i) unintended or incipient outcomes beyond those intended by the technical assistance projects, (ii) contextual aspects that influence technical assistance outcomes but are beyond the control of implementers, (iii) diverse perspectives of stakeholders, and (iv) changes in the pace of change, or how quickly or slowly change occurs.

2.1. EVALUATION METHODS

NORC’s evaluation design combined the Most Significant Change (MSC) method with document review of project monitoring and secondary sources of data. Using the MSC method, the evaluation team documented evidence of concrete and observable changes in actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of organizations, individuals, or groups that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly supported. This mixed methods approach strengthened the validity of the causal contribution narratives (see details on MSC in Annex A. Methodological Note). The significant change stories (CS) captured the causal pathways that led to the significant changes - the interactions between multiple local actors and ILAB projects that contributed to the changes.

Box 1. MSC Methodology

The significant change stories (CS) detailed **who** changed, **how**, **when** and **where**, as well as the **significance** of the change. The change stories also documented the change’s impact on **populations most at-risk of labor exploitation** and evidence of potential **sustainability** and ripple effects of the changes.

Figure 2. MSC Steps Taken

See Annex A. Methodological Note for additional details on the MSC milestones accomplished in this evaluation, according to the steps outlined in Figure 2. Some steps (e.g. data collection and triangulation) were conducted in parallel.

Change stories documented significant changes across five program areas, or domains across the technical assistance portfolio. For that purpose, the evaluation team reviewed program documents (logic models and results frameworks) to compile an outcome map that includes the 19 projects. Then, following a *participatory approach* to design and implementation, NORC consulted with the evaluation PIUs to prioritize the domains of change. As follows the list of the final domains of change:

- i. Worker advocacy for labor rights.
- ii. Private sector labor practices.
- iii. Strengthening and professionalization of labor justice and conciliation systems.
- iv. Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace.
- v. Labor rights enforcement, inspections

of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination.

2.2. DATA COLLECTION OVERVIEW

NORC conducted two fieldwork exercises between July and October 2024. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews (SSIs) and FGDs with a sample of project participants and local actors (see Table 20) to collect data on significant changes. As summarized in Figure 3, the evaluation team interviewed 192 respondents using the SSI protocol (see Annex B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide) and engaged with 68 FGD participants using the FGD topic guide (See Annex C. Focus Group Discussion Guide), both exercises with contacts from the primary and snowball samples. Overall, 113 (45 percent) were female and 139 (55 percent) were male respondents.

Figure 3. Summary of MSC Fieldwork

Additionally, to address ILAB's request to incorporate the perspective of workers at exporting industries with no union affiliation, between August and October 2024, NORC's SME conducted fieldwork with a convenience sample of 60 workers in six industrial clusters, using onsite recruitment outside the factories, at coffee shops, convenience stores, and bus stops and terminals. The gender distribution of respondents was similar among unaffiliated workers to the rest of the sample. This group of workers provided a list of most significant changes and ranked four pre-determined MSCs in 52 one-on-one interviews and two FGDs.

As part of the CS story drafting process, the team reviewed grantee data reporting forms (DRFs) and official statistics from Mexico's National Statistics Institute (INEGI), powered by the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Labor (STPS), including the Labor Reform Indicators and Statistics (INDERLAB), and ILAB's RRLM webpage to triangulate with qualitative data gathered during the SSIs and FGDs. After drafting the CS stories and translating them into Spanish, NORC conducted a validation and ranking web-based survey (based on the protocol in Annex D. Validation and Ranking Form (online and in-person)) to collect validation and ranking data about the identified outcomes from a subsample of 70 respondents. The evaluation team randomly selected this sample of validation respondents from the pool of SSI and FGD participants originated in the original sample. Each domain had a range of 10 to 17 validation respondents, according to the size of the fieldwork domain's sample (see A.3. Sample Design for more details).

Between November 2024 and early January 2025, 121 respondents validated the outcomes with a wide variety of respondent groups, including project participants, and local actors, unaffiliated workers, labor experts and academics sub-contracted to IPs, as well as PIUs (ILAB and implementing partners). NORC sent the survey link via e-mail to all respondents that had an e-mail address, with an attached copy of the relevant CS stories for their reference, according to the respondents' domain of interest. NORC sent weekly reminders and contacted respondents via WhatsApp or over the telephone between December 9th and 31st. For respondents with no regular access to the email, NORC administered the Validation and Ranking form over the phone; enumerator read aloud the change summary statements in the domain of interest (see Table 24 in Annex G. Significant Change Stories) more than once for these respondents to validate and rank them. According to Table 22 (see A.5. Fieldwork Results), as part of the survey interview and FGD discussions with 60 unaffiliated workers (45 percent female and

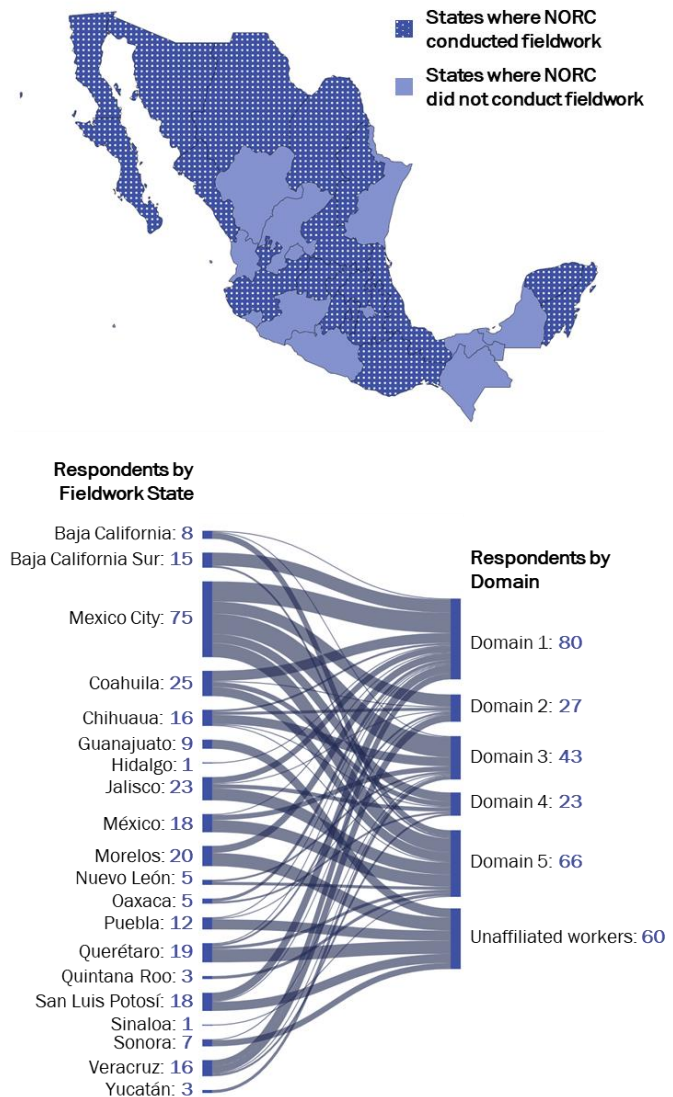
55 percent male respondents), they also validated and ranked four documented outcomes – i.e., CSs 1d, 1e, 1f, and 4d on Table 24 (Annex G. Significant Change Stories).

Fieldwork covered 19 states in Mexico, according to the location of sample respondents. Some respondents were based in the United States (n=12) and one in Spain. Figure 4 illustrates the geographic distribution of the covered sample. In the top quadrant, the map shows with a striped texture where respondents were based. The Sankey diagram at the bottom displays the states where respondents were located by domain of change in the sample. In addition, the diagram shows the states where unaffiliated workers resided; their insights informed this evaluation across domains and evaluation questions.

As part of the analysis task of addressing the evaluation questions, the team triangulated information from the CS stories with additional quantitative and qualitative sources to extend the validity of results and add detail to Section 3. Additional sources included grantee data reporting forms (DRFs), technical progress reports (TPRs), workplans and secondary sources of data from the Mexican government and ILAB.

For further details on fieldwork strategy, sample design, data collection, the validation and ranking process, analysis, and triangulation, please see Annex A. Methodological Note.

Figure 4. Geographic Distribution of Sample



3. RESULTS

In this section, we present the results of the evaluative analysis organized in three parts, to address the evaluation questions (see Section 1.2). The first part, comprising subsections 3.1 and 3.2, presents results related to ILAB-funded contributions to the USMCA labor priorities provisioned in its Chapter 23 (EQ.2) and the labor reform priorities enshrined in the 2019 legislative reform of Mexico's Federal Labor Act (EQ.3).

The second part presents outcomes and contributions to such changes by the five domains of change indicated in Sections 1.3 and 2.1. Within each domain, in sections 3.3 to 3.7, the evaluation team addresses evaluation questions inquiring about the collective outcomes to which the ILAB-funded technical assistance has contributed (EQ.1), the factors and obstacles associated to these contributions (EQ.1a), and the effectiveness of ILAB-funded interventions in contributing to such collective outcomes (EQ.3a). Additionally, each subsection answers, by domain, what strategies the evaluation team deemed worthwhile and feasible to replicate and scale up and by whom (EQs. 3d, 3d), what actors the ILAB-funded technical assistance projects should engage with to leverage in-country partnerships and further advance intended outcomes (EQ.4), and future programming opportunities and needs, as well as what are the conditions for the sustainability of ILAB-funded efforts (EQ.6).

After addressing these questions by domain, the third part discusses three areas relevant to all five domains of change the ILAB-funded technical assistance intended to affect (see subsections 3.8 to 3.10). Here, we discuss potential shifts in technical assistance to further advance labor rights (EQ.4), the factors and obstacles to attain the technical assistance's intended outcomes in general (EQ.6b), and the evidence collected on how adaptive the technical assistance was in contributing to these outcomes (EQ.6c).

Finally, NORC addresses the evaluation questions concerned with capturing the values that actors, by domain of change, expressed about the collective outcomes identified through the MSC method (EQ.1b) in Annex H. Ranking of Most Significant Change (MSC) Outcomes among Actors and the engagement of the technical assistance project to address the needs of groups most-at-risk of labor exploitation (EQs. 3b, 5b) in ANNEX I. Addressing the Needs of Groups Most-At-Risk of Labor Exploitation.

Across the questions, we refer to the significant changes and their related change stories (CS) in parentheses that capture each outcome individually (see the full list of significant changes in each domain below or in Annex G. Significant Change Stories-Table 24).

3.1. ILAB'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACHIEVING USMCA LABOR CHAPTER PRIORITIES

ILAB's technical assistance projects have collectively contributed to advance most of the priorities indicated in the USMCA's Chapter 23. As a reminder, the labor priorities of the agreement are displayed in Table 3:⁸

⁸ Governments of the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada. (2020). Chapter 23: Labor. Office of the United States Trade Representative. Available at: <https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/files/agreements/FTA/USMCA/Text/23%20Labor.pdf>.

Table 3. Labor Priorities Contained in USMCA Labor Chapter 23

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to freedom of association. • Effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining. • Acceptable conditions of work. • Effective abolition of child labor. • Elimination of discrimination to work. • Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor. • Workers' freedom from violence. • Protection to migrant workers. • Promotion of public awareness of labor laws. • Gender-related employment issues (e.g., elimination of discrimination, equal pay for equal work, occupational safety and health, prevention of gender-based workplace violence and harassment). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse workforce. • Monitoring compliance and investigating suspected violations. • Social dialogue. • Appointing and training labor inspectors. • Protection for vulnerable workers. • Seeking assurances of voluntary compliance from the private sector. • Requiring record keeping and reporting. • Providing or encouraging conciliation. • Sanctions and remedies for violations.
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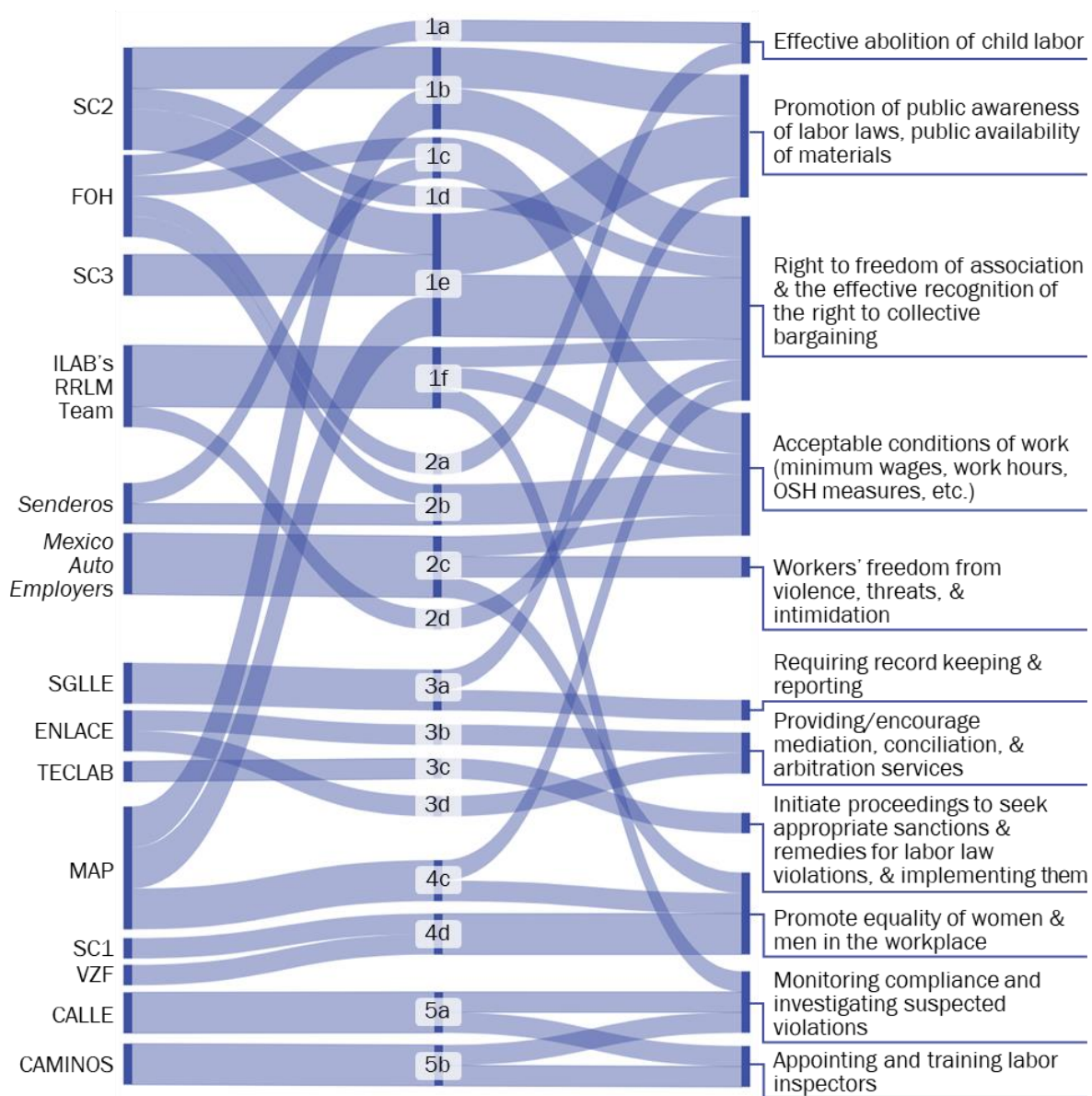
In this section, we include what CS identified in the evaluation align to these USMCA labor priorities and provide details of the technical assistance contributions in each case. Several ILAB-funded projects' contributions to the changes in each domain coincide with the contributions to address most of USMCA's Chapter 23 priorities.⁹ Figure 5 displays the connections between ILAB-funded interventions (left nodes), the outcomes of CSs (middle nodes), and the labor priorities enshrined in the Agreement's labor chapter (right nodes).

Overall, the figure illustrates that most ILAB-funded projects are aligned with the USMCA labor priorities. While their contributions to significant changes reflect the technical specialization of most projects – i.e., SGLLE, ENLACE and TECLAB supporting institutional regulatory, enforcement, and conciliation capacity (CSs 3a – 3d); and CALLE and CAMINOS strengthening labor inspections (CSs 5a and 5b) – some ILAB-funded projects also register a multiple priority alignment. On the one hand, FOH works with several actors in agricultural labor and private sector, impacting child labor reduction and the promotion of OSH standards. On the other, MAP has disseminated messages about labor rights and equality between female and male workers for public awareness (CSs 1b, 4c), provided communication support to worker organizations (CS 1e), and supported federal government enforcement.

The role of the RRLM as an instrument that complements ILAB's technical assistance in promoting the FOA and CBA rights became evident in CSs 1f and 2d. We include as follows, and in Figure 5 below, a more detailed description of ILAB's contribution to these priorities:

- The **SC2 project, SC3 project, and MAP** offered technical assistance, training, and awareness-raising for unions and workers on labor rights (especially CB and FOA) and provided financial and logistical support for unions. This aided in the creation and legitimation of independent unions and negotiation of collective bargaining agreements (CSs 1b, 1d, 1e, and 4c), which supports the USMCA priority of the **right to freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining**.

⁹ OCFT's EQUAL and FOH projects were funded and designed prior to the USCMA, so their objectives are not expected to align fully with USMCA priorities.

Figure 5. Summary of Technical Assistance Contributions to USMCA Labor Priorities

- **FOH** raised awareness and offered trainings to shift attitudes among workers and employers on brining children to work and the creation of educational spaces to keep children in school. This helped to reduce child labor and was supported by both workers and employers (CSs 1a and 2a). This contributed to the USCMA priority of the **effective abolition of child labor**.
- **FOH**, **Senderos**, the **SC2** project and **VZF** worked to raise awareness to shift attitudes among workers and employers about OSH measures, trained on their usage, and provided safety equipment. This led to a demand for and implementation of OSH measures (CSs 1c, 1e, 2b, 2c, 2d) that contributed to the USMCA priority of **acceptable conditions of work (minimum wages, work hours, OSH measures, etc.)**. Additionally, the ILAB-funded Solidarity Center's interventions – the SC1, SC2 and SC3 projects – and MAP contributed to enabling new unions in the automotive, mining and industrial manufacturing sectors to successfully negotiate **wages increases** of between 7 and 30 percent in 2024 (CS 1e).

- **Mexico Auto Employer's** technical assistance and training on labor rights, workshops with workers to identify priorities for collective bargaining contributed to the development and implementation of program to prevent sexual violence in the workplace (CS 2c) and the helped lead to USMCA's priority of **workers' freedom from violence, threats, and intimidation**.
- **MAP** conducted social media and/or radio campaigns and **SGLLE** provided support to create the RIRL – including uploading and indexing documents. These efforts led to increased awareness of labor rights and public access to information (CSs 1b, 1e, 3a) and contributed to the USMCA priority of **promotion of public awareness of labor laws, public availability of materials**.
- **MAP, SC1 project, and VZF** worked to train unions on issues of equality between women and men, including proportional representation by sex, and **Mexico Auto Employers** hosted workshops with workers to identify priorities for collective bargaining. From these programs, women's participation and leadership in unions increased (CSs 4c, 4d) and a program was developed and implemented to combat and prevent workplace and domestic sexual violence and sexual harassment (CS 2c). These efforts directly relate to the USMCA priority of **promoting the equality of women and men in the workplace**.
- **CALLE and CAMINOS** trained labor inspectors and offered support for systems and technological tools to assist inspectors, which led to institutional development at the Federal Labor Inspectorate and increased efficiency and effectiveness of labor inspections (CSs 5a, 5b). These results relate to two USMCA priorities: **appointing & training labor inspectors** and **monitoring compliance investigating suspected violations**.
- **SGLLE** provided support to create the RIRL –including uploading and indexing documents – which increased public access to information (CS 3a) and led to reporting the use of union member dues (CS 1d). This project and its results support the USCMA priority of **requiring record keeping and priority**.
- **ENLACE** provided digital tools and digitization, provided technical assistance and training to use the platforms, and reviewed/evaluated processes and systems. This improved the capacity of federal and state conciliation centers and led to a high-resolution rate of conciliation cases within short timeframes (CS 3b and 3d). ENLACE's efforts supported USMCA's priority of **providing/encouraging mediation, conciliation, and arbitration services**.
- **TECLAB** conducted institutional and operational assessments and worked on improvements to job profiles, which led to nascent support for labor courts (CS 3c) and supported USCMA's priority of **initiating proceedings to seek appropriate sanctions and remedies for labor law violations and implementing them**.

To highlight the ILAB-funded technical assistance's contributions to the USMCA priorities, the results in this summary include a mix of intermediate and more long-term outcomes and therefore may not exactly match the results presented at the beginning of the Results section for each domain in Table 4, Table 7, Table 9, Table 11, and Table 13 below.

The MSC analysis captured major outcomes that directly influenced 11 of the 19 labor priorities in USMCA's Chapter 23. However, the ILAB projects have also been working to pursue outcomes that correspond with the rest of USMCA labor priorities. For instance, AccioNNar devotes a considerable number of resources to help the Mexican Government enforce the instrument necessary to **eliminate of all forms of forced labor**. Senderos, Sustentar, and EQUAL also have objectives to combat forced labor, along with preventing child labor and addressing the needs of **vulnerable agricultural worker groups**. AccioNNar also has provisions to promote international collaboration on data exchange to

protect migrant children and UCJ aims to open spaces for **agricultural migrant workers to regularize and gain access to labor rights**. The Solidarity Center, which once conducted campaigns to create independent democratic unions, also has the purpose of promoting them to **improve social dialogue** among themselves, employers and government. Finally, TECLAB has been opening opportunities to upgrade professional resources and **improve access to 10 state-level labor court systems** and aims to accompany these state judiciary branches into their transition through the current Judiciary Reform.

3.2. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MEXICO'S LABOR REFORM

This section discusses the contributions of ILAB's technical assistance to the labor reform priorities. The evaluation documented significant contributions of ILAB-funded technical assistance to implement the Mexican labor law reform and strengthen the new labor justice institutions, as well as to improve the respect for labor rights and OSH standards. In this section, we report on the technical assistance strategies that contributed to both purposes. These strategies are more thoroughly described, by domain of change, in the first five Results subsections below.

On the **implementation of the labor reform and strengthening the new labor justice system**, several technical assistance projects – CALLE, CAMINOS, ENLACE, OBSERVAR, SGLLE, TECLAB – have been instrumental in helping the new labor conciliation and justice systems at the federal and state levels set up and launch large-scale operations with wide impact among workers and companies.

- **SGLLE** led the digitization of a vast amount of labor documents (union association or registration records, CBAs, records of internal labor rules, etc.) to help the FCCLR comply with its legal mandate. This project also developed the software solution to empower the RIRL, now providing access to a historic catalog of CBAs and other labor documentation – Trade Union Association files and internal labor regulations for companies – for dissemination and public access through a single digital interface.
- **CALLE and CAMINOS** have supported the labor inspectorate at the federal and state levels to increase efficiency and increase the quality of inspections. While the context of implementation presents challenges, especially in the states, these interventions are still at initial stages of implementation and are expected to mature their outcomes in the next few years.
- At the state level, **ENLACE** has engaged with 10 LCCs to help them streamline their conciliations processes, adapt the protocols, and professionalize their staff. The case of Nuevo Leon was outstanding in terms of its capacity to adapt the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms to expedite its cases.
- While still nascent, **TECLAB's** work with local labor courts has already supported the State of Mexico's judiciary on assessing its organizational systems and procedures, including the refinement of job profiles and the recruiting processes, for judges and court staff. The federal and state-level institutions will continue requiring digitization, software development and technical support to provide the adopted labor services and strategies. ILAB-funded technical assistance should replicate these practices in other target states, responding to the implementation context.

It is important to mention the work that the Solidarity Center's campaigns and the MAP project have pursued to support worker organizations to train their members on the new labor justice system. These efforts have contributed to worker organizations and unions' ability to prepare and file claims for the RRLM to review cases of violations of labor rights.

ILAB-funded technical assistance has also contributed to the **respect for workers' rights** by working directly with worker organizations in key exporting industries in several industrial areas in states including Durango, Morelos, Coahuila and SLP (CSs 1b, 1e). The Solidarity Center, MAP, and GEM have provided training, technical advice, and logistical support for union organizing, and promote their advocacy of FOA and CBA rights, incorporating more women in union bodies (CS 4d), and handling union member dues with transparency (CS 1d). The successful experiences portrayed in this evaluation suggest a positive environment for scaling up these efforts with additional worker organizations and exporting companies.

In the sectors of sugarcane and coffee, ILAB technical assistance built a strong capacity to deploy operations in and engage with target communities in Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca and Veracruz to develop cultural competence, trust-building in labor relations, incentives to adhere to OSH standards, and direct engagement with agricultural workers and their families, as well as with agricultural producers (CS 1c). The evaluation also documented the work the FOH and *Senderos* projects conducted with a sugar mill group in Veracruz and two sugar mills in Jalisco, respectively, to secure buy-in and promote institutional strengthening towards the adherence to OSH standards and reducing child labor in the supply chain (CS 2a). These efforts are more nascent in the chili and tomato industries and expect to yield outcomes as implementation continues (CSs 2d, 5c).

3.3. DOMAIN #1 – WORKER ADVOCACY FOR LABOR RIGHTS

Domain 1 captures the outcomes related to actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of worker organizations, individual workers, or worker collectives to advocate for labor rights that ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly supported.

In the following subsection, the evaluation team addresses evaluation questions indicated in the roadmap above, for the outcomes under this domain. Section 3.3.1 presents the collective outcomes identified within this domain, 3.3.2 describes factors contributing to these outcomes, 3.3.3 analyzes the effectiveness of technical assistance strategies, 3.3.4 describes scalability and replicability of ILAB interventions, 3.3.5 presents local actors that could be further engaged, 3.3.6 outlines possible future programming, and 3.3.7 addresses the sustainability of these outcomes.

3.3.1. OUTCOMES OF WORKER ADVOCACY FOR LABOR RIGHTS INFLUENCED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ILAB's projects have contributed to positive results in Domain 1 over the last four years. As projects have made progress in implementing their action plans, the evaluation team was able to find outcomes with more concrete evidence of change using MSC and validating such results. Table 4 below, presents the results to which ILAB technical assistance contributed under Domain 1, as well as exemplary specific significant changes for each result, as identified through MSC. The table presents each result/change identified and the ILAB projects whose activities address that theme (blue rows), as well as the individual change stories (CSs) that illustrate the change¹⁰ and the projects that specifically contributed to each CS (white rows). All these results were *intended*, in that they map directly to intended long- or medium-term outcomes in the results frameworks of the projects that contributed to the CSs. Specific project contributions are discussed more in section 3.3.2.

¹⁰ Numbering of the CSs relates to the order in which the stories were produced. Given that the stories were assigned these numbers early in the process and maintained them through the CS validation and ranking process, the final report kept the same numbering system.

Table 4. Intended Outcomes and Technical Assistance Contributions Identified by MSC, Domain 1 (Worker Advocacy for Labor Rights)

Result Identified	Projects Addressing Area of Outcomes
Reduced child labor and increased protection of children by workers.	FOH, Senderos, AccioNNAr, Sustentar, Una Cosecha Justa, VZF
CS 1a.* Across 2022-2023, children and adolescents stopped working or decreased the amount of time working in target sugarcane fields and coffee plantations in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz.	FOH
Increased knowledge of, demand for, and utilization of OSH measures by workers, particularly in agriculture and industry.	FOH, VZF, Senderos, EQUAL
CS 1c. In 2023, agricultural workers in Oaxaca and Veracruz began requiring their employers to adopt occupational health and safety measures, such as access to first aid kits, rest breaks, and hydration.	FOH
Increased knowledge of, advocacy for, and utilization of collective bargaining and freedom of association by workers (especially via independent and democratic unions)	SC2 project, SC3 project, MAP, OBSERVAR, Mexico Auto Employers, ILAB's staff operation RRLM
CS 1b.* Between 2020 and 2023, workers at five companies in Frontera, Coahuila, the city of San Luis Potosí, and Cuautla, Morelos created independent unions and democratically elected their union representatives.	SC2 project, MAP
CS 1e.* Since 2022, four independent unions in San Luis Potosí, Morelos and Coahuila received representativeness certificates and two of them became exclusive bargaining agents of their collective contracts, which workers legitimized before the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registry. Under Mexican law, a union must legitimize its collective contract to maintain legal authority to represent workers before an employer.	SC2 project, SC3 project, MAP
CS 1f. Between May 2021 and July 2023, three unions and a labor organization gained employer recognition and respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in a range of one to nine months, influenced by the intervention of the UMSCA's Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM).	ILAB's staff operating RRLM
Transparency in CBAs and union elections: Improved transparency of union dues usage**	SC2 project
CS 1d. Since 2022, four new independent unions in the mining and automotive sectors have adopted transparent practices regarding the use of union fees, breaking with old unions' corrupt practices such as diverting union funds to leadership and thereby improving relationships with union members.	SC2 project

Notes: (*) These significant changes are described in detail in a separate story each in Annex G. Significant Change Stories. (**) The main technical assistance portfolio contribution to independent unions adopting transparent practices in the use of union fees came from the SC2 project. While it is not considered a collective result to which more than one ILAB-funded project contributed, fieldwork results documented the portfolio's individual contribution, and the evaluation team decided to include it in the list.

3.3.2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OUTCOMES OF DOMAIN 1

In this section, the evaluation team explains factors and obstacles of progress towards intended and unintended outcomes, both dependent or related to ILAB's technical assistance and external to these projects. We grouped these factors and obstacles by major outcome as identified in Table 4 above – i.e., reduction of child labor; changes in workers' OSH practices and demand; changes in workers knowledge and behavior around FOA and CB; and adoption of union transparency measures.

Reduced Child Labor [CS 1a,] and Increased Demand for/Utilization of OSH Practices by Workers [CS 1c]

Positive Factors. ILAB projects and external factors worked together to positively affect progress towards demand for and implementation of OSH and child labor reduction practices by workers. The main factors were:

- **ILAB projects' intentional awareness raising and training/technical assistance** on these topics for workers. These activities have also contributed to a shift in cultural norms (see below) and implementation of these practices. For example, FOH's trainings and awareness building on the dangers of child labor and the importance of children's education influenced workers' viewpoints and behavior around bringing children to work in sugarcane fields in Oaxaca and Veracruz (CS 1a). A comment from an agricultural worker in Nayarit captures this reflection: *"I have harvested tobacco since I was 15 years old. Thanks to Senderos, I received training on forced labor, violence-free work, and child labor. I have learned that I have the right to work freely and also that child labor is not good."* Furthermore, FOH's and Senderos' awareness-raising and training on the importance and proper utilization of safety equipment and OSH practices in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Nayarit contributed to agricultural workers' demand for and use of such equipment (CS 1c). As mentioned in Table 4 above, the VZF project also promoted the implementation of OSH standards in Jalisco:

"Something that has seemed significant to me...is a type of empowerment of workers... after three cycles [of training] that we've worked on, of three harvest seasons, we notice a difference." – Senderos staff member

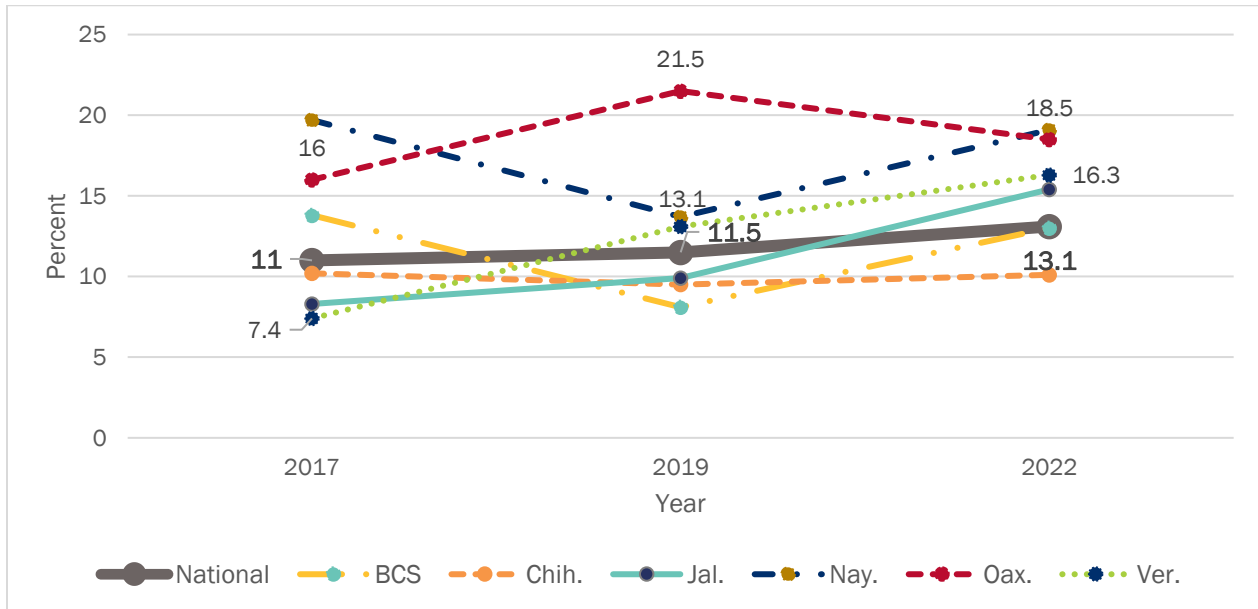
- **Provision of equipment and community spaces.** For example, ILAB projects provided safety equipment for agricultural workers (CSs 1a, 1c) and worked with municipal libraries to create educational spaces for children (CS 1a).
- **Shifts in cultural norms** about the presence of children at work and the use of OSH practices, such as safety equipment. Although slow-to-change cultural norms could be considered a negative factor that impedes progress, there is evidence that there has been some shift in these norms among workers and communities in areas of technical assistance. This shift has in part occurred on its own over time, and in part has been influenced by ILAB projects, as described above.
- **Socioeconomic factors.** Patterns of migration, urbanization, and access to technology have led to agricultural labor shortages in some areas and sectors (for example, sugar refineries and producers). This has created a dynamic where workers are able to demand better workplace conditions, knowing that employers may prefer to make changes than risk diminishing their workforce (CS 1c).

"This allows you to promote the loyalty of the cutters, right? That they say 'I'm staying here because they treat me well here, because they do protect me here,' right? So, for us it was a very good strategy, which perhaps, when this started, we did not visualize it from that point of view. But now that we are seeing this lack of workers [labor shortage], it becomes a strategy, right?" – Sugar mill staff member

Negative Factors. Factors that posed challenges to outcomes under this theme are longstanding cultural norms or practices among agricultural producers and workers about bringing children to work and a lack of understanding or skepticism about OSH practices. However, as noted above, these

challenges were ultimately not insurmountable in the target communities, with noted shifts in norms and knowledge. For a wider context and perspective of the remaining challenges on child labor, Figure 6 illustrates the evolution of child labor rate at the national level and in the target states where ILAB-funded interventions were deployed.

Figure 6. Child Labor Rate (National and Target States)



Source: ENTI 2017-2022

While the evolution of child labor rates was mixed across states, the national trend and those in Jalisco, Oaxaca and Veracruz –where EQUAL, FOH, VZF and *Senderos* worked– were positive between 2017 and 2022. Between 2017 and 2019, the rate of child labor saw decreases in Baja California Sur, Chihuahua –where UCJ recently started working– and Nayarit, but also increases through 2022 to levels similar to 2017, probably driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. Baja California rates of child labor (not shown in Figure 6) were some of the lowest in the country, but they increased from 5.9 to 6.5 percent between 2017 and 2022. Overall, ENTI data suggests child labor is a remaining issue with no signs of eradication in these states.

Increased Utilization of Collective Bargaining and Freedom of Association among Workers in Exporting Industries [CSs 1b, 1e, 1f]

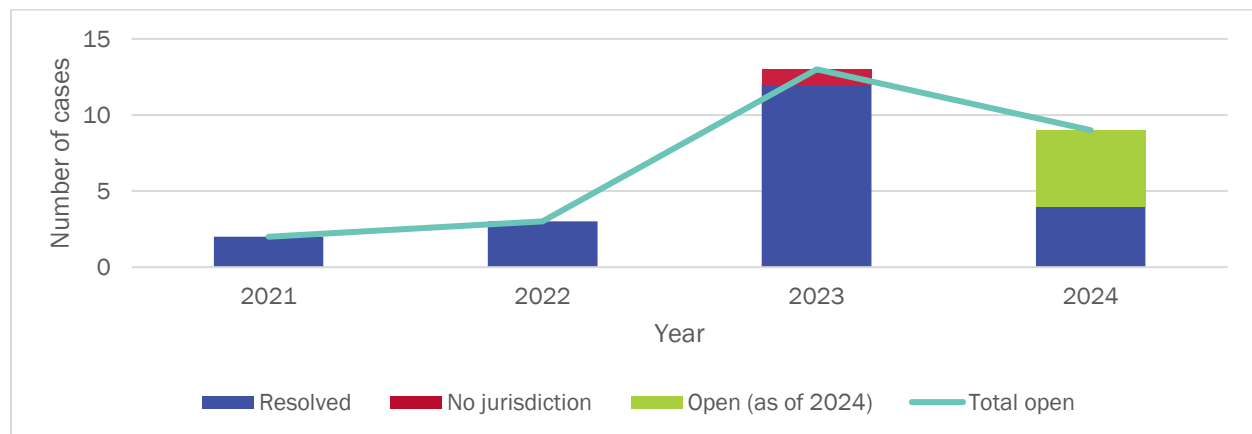
Positive Factors. ILAB projects and external factors positively affected progress towards increased knowledge, use, and recognition of collective bargaining (CB) and freedom of association (FOA). The main factors were:

- Awareness-raising on labor rights and technical assistance/training by ILAB projects.** ILAB technical assistance has contributed substantially to the use and recognition of FOA and CB by awareness-raising and training activities among workers on their labor rights and how to exercise them, as well as remediation; technical assistance and advice for incipient or existing unions and their leaders; and financial and logistical support. For example, the SC2 and the SC3 projects provided trainings on CB, FOA, and union representation, and also paid for worker organizing leaders to travel to Mexico City to attend trainings and negotiations (CSs 1b, 1e). ILAB projects also supported awareness-raising on sex parity in unions – such as through the

SC1 project's training for unions (CS 4d) – and on labor rights more broadly – such as through MAP's support of dissemination through social media content creators and radio stations (CSs 1b, 1e).

- USMCA Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM).** The RRLM allows Mexican workers employed at companies exporting to the United States or producing products or services that compete with those from the United States to file a petition for the USMCA Interagency Labor Committee, co-chaired by DOL and USTR, to investigate alleged violations of freedom of association (FOA) or collective bargaining (CB) rights. Evaluation respondents referenced several cases filed with the RRLM that have led to companies respecting workers' rights of FOA and CB, officially recognizing independent unions, and implementing remediation actions, such as reinstating workers or returning union dues (CS 1f). While these were the results of cases that were mentioned in primary data collection, the RRLM has resolved over 30 cases, with results such as securing CBAs that increase wages and improve working conditions, including at some of the largest exporters in the country.¹¹ The threat of a potential RRLM review or knowledge of these cases appears to have also had a spillover effect, influencing similar results in other companies (CSs 1f, 4c). Figure 7 provides a summary of all the cases the RRLM has accepted and disaggregates by status. Between July 2021 and October 2024, a total of 27 RRLM cases were investigated by DOL and USTR, mainly in the automotive industry (16), as well as in manufacturing (5), mining (3), services (2) and maquiladora (1) facilities. All of the cases involved alleged violations of FOA or CB rights. Of those, 21 cases were resolved, including 12 cases in 2023. The remaining six cases include one in which the RRLM panel lacked jurisdiction because the alleged violations predated the 2019 Labor Reform and five cases that are still open, all of which were filed and investigated in 2024.

Figure 7. Number of RRLM Cases since the implementation of the USMCA (2021-2024)



Source: ILAB (2025). <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/our-work/trade/labor-rights-usmca-cases>

- Workers' own organizing efforts.** Workers' own efforts to organize, advocate for their rights, and create independent unions have been critical for the successful realization of FOA and CB. For example, workers organized to create unions in several companies in Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos (CSs 1b, 1e).
- Negative factors.** One factor that has posed a challenge to workers exercising CB and FOA has been the prevalence and strength of a nationally based, multi-sectoral union that has been

¹¹ See the [USMCA Cases](#) page for more information.

historically pervasive in workplaces and known to negotiate agreements with employers behind closed doors that may not adequately represent workers' interests. Implementing partners and some worker leaders engaged with ILAB-funded projects emphasized the hardships that promoting industrial worker awareness involves. In many cases of unionization campaigns and capacity-building efforts, these interventions face mental models among workers that perpetuate their acquiescence to accept the labor conditions imposed by employers. This comment from a labor lawyer in San Luis Potosi captures the initial obstacle that this work may face: *"If you were born understanding that you must be thankful to whoever give you a job and restrain yourself from asking for your rights, it is very hard to trigger agency to demand labor rights."* While this has not prevented independent union organizing in many target companies, it remains a challenge in industries with presence in regions of low unionization and strong misinformation campaigns from employer-supported unions. The most common messages are threats about companies closing facilities if workers support an independent union and an alternative CBA with salary and benefit increases.

Increased Transparency in Use of Union Funds [CS 1d]

Positive Factors. Factors that positively contributed to union adoption of transparency practices when handling their members' dues included:

- **ILAB-funded technological support, training, and process review.** The SC2 project supported unions with one-on-one consultations with leaders and workshops about union management, including transparency practices. In the case of a union that was already collecting dues, the project reviewed and validated its transparency practices and helped the union institutionalize them.
- **Union buy-in.** The commitment on the part of leaders of four independent unions to provide transparency on their use of union dues is critical to implementing these exercises and ensuring that funds are not diverted for personal gain. In turn, this demonstration of transparent use of dues to the benefit of workers encourages workers to continue participating in unions.

An additional factor has contributed positively to the results under Domain 1:

- **Labor reform.** The 2019 labor reform and subsequent reforms have provided the context and legal backing in which many of these changes have taken place.

3.3.3. EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES SUPPORTING OUTCOMES OF WORKER ADVOCACY OF LABOR RIGHTS

Under Domain of Change 1, ILAB projects generally used capacity building, one-on-one consultations and financial and logistical support to worker organizations and increase their institutional capacity to bargain and represent workers democratically and transparently. ILAB-funded technical assistance also deployed effective awareness-raising communication campaigns to position a series of labor rights – FOA and CB primarily – enshrined in Mexico's 2019 labor reform. Additionally, ILAB projects built strong relationships with target agricultural communities and promoted the creation of educational spaces to promote OSH practices and reduce child labor. More specifically, strategies that worked in the domains of change were as follows:

- Training strategies cognizant, responsive and respectful of cultural context.** ILAB projects – such as *Fields of Hope* (FOH) and *Senderos* – approached sugarcane producers and cutters in Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca and Veracruz to plan and design training on acceptable working conditions and reducing child labor. Through a respectful and participatory process that addressed cultural norms and values in training content and delivery, FOH and *Senderos* developed tools to incorporate worker feedback and prevent their rejection or avoidance in practice. Attitudes related to OSH standards and the use of protective equipment changed among target workers. Although workers' awareness of labor rights and better working conditions increased, agricultural workers thought that sustaining the change in the demand for OSH standards requires more support for workers in terms of oversight and supervision from labor authorities in Oaxaca and Veracruz. Additionally, FOH used the project team's cultural knowledge and engagement with workers to adapt its OSH implementation support, changing the type of safety equipment provided to agricultural workers based on the workers' own feedback (CS 1c). Project staff also mentioned that adapting national norms and strategies to national contexts and accessible language, accommodating workers' schedules and preferences for meeting locations, providing participation incentives, and respecting workers' break times contributed to successful interventions.
- Trust-building, and direct engagement with agricultural workers and their families.** ILAB projects – such as FOH – approached their efforts to raise awareness and train on issues of child labor and OSH practices among agricultural workers and their families with an understanding and acknowledgement of cultural norms and reasons that communities might bring children to work or avoid using OSH practices, as opposed to judgement, contributing to the effectiveness of these activities. FOH created community-led children's committees in several target communities trained on sensitizing parents about child labor, which supported norm shifts (CS 1a). (above) expands on the work ILAB funded technical assistance does on child labor.
- Provision of educational spaces, including community involvement.** Another successful project approach was the provision of free educational spaces for children to encourage them to stay in school, as opposed to working in the fields (CS 1a). FOH worked with municipal libraries, schools, and community members to provide free reading and learning activities. This community involvement helped build trust and encouraged shifts in cultural norms.

Box 2. ILAB Technical Assistance - Child Labor (October 2024)

92.5% of minors in **FOH** target households regularly attended formal education services in the past 6 months. 189 STPS/ST labor inspection staff has completed one child labor training.

EQUAL promotes better practices in government and private sector to protect girls and adolescents from child labor. **96.36%** (target 90%) of project participant children in Oaxaca and Veracruz were attending school, and less than 5% engaged in hazardous child labor.

Senderos has reached **over 6,000 participants** in sugar and tobacco companies and plantations with training on enforcement of and compliance with child labor prevention laws in target communities of Jalisco and Nayarit.

- **Support and technical advice for union organizing and direct engagement with union leaders.** In supporting workers' awareness and utilization of CB and FOA, ILAB projects were effective in providing support and technical advice for organizing workers and incipient independent unions. This included informal conversations with organizers, awareness-raising and training for workers, and technical advice for union leaders on how to implement these rights (CS 1b, 1e).
- **Promote transparency in union member dues management.** In addition to support and advice for CB and FOA, ILAB projects provided one-on-one support and consultations with union leaders on good practices, such as the SC2 project's guidance for automotive union leaders on dues transparency (CS 1d).
- **Financial and logistical support to unions.** Another winning strategy for union-related successes was the provision of financial and logistical support for union organizers to assume an active role in project unionization campaigns. For example, the Building an Independent and Democratic Labor Movement to Protect Worker Rights in Mexico project paid for worker leaders to travel to Mexico City to attend trainings and negotiations with labor authorities and employers (CS 1b). According to leaders of target independent unions, this approach was instrumental for them to learn about union democracy, register their unions, and negotiate on behalf of workers:

"In a span of a year, we have basically achieved an almost 18% salary increase, something we have not seen in a long time. That was the difference and we achieved it with the advice of ... Casa Obrera and the Solidarity Center in a set of things that we have been doing; their comprehensive support to be able to carry out all this, since we, at the end of the day, are floor workers who did not have the knowledge of everything we could do..."
(Independent union Secretary General).
- **Media campaigns.** MAP's social media campaigns to spread awareness of labor rights and the 2019 labor law, including engagement with and strengthening of social media creators' content, appeared to have been successful in increasing general understanding of labor rights among workers and the broader population. This extended to radio media as well, with one radio station staff noting that MAP helped them enhance and better disseminate their messaging on labor rights (CS 1b, 1e). ILO's AccioNNAr Project noted that WhatsApp has been a successful method for information dissemination, and Senderos' staff reported success using Facebook and WhatsApp to socialize some project contents.

Box 3. SC2 Project Labor and Worker Center Interventions

The SC2 project partnered with five organizations, led by the UCLA Labor Center, to organize a **worker exchange**, with the goal of providing workers first-hand knowledge about the structure, organization, and activities carried out by worker centers in the U.S. The project also supported the creation of the new **Frontera, Coahuila worker center** ("Casa Obrera"), expected to start operations in January 2025.

The SC2 project worked to create three Labor Centers in Mexico to inform project strategies, conduct worker outreach and union organizing in the mining, call center, and aerospace sectors during the project lifecycle and beyond. The Labor Centers included:

- Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro (UAQ) labor center, operational since August 2022
- Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) Labor Center started operations in December 2022.
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) Labor Center, which began operations in May 2024.

"On social networks, we have been promoting labor rights since the end of 2022 and all of 2023. Since 2024, we have been insisting on the 40-hour labor reform, the reduction

of the working day. And in general, that people can have a moment of rest, that they can sit down, that they are not prohibited from sitting at work, because not resting causes them a lot of physical, and, even mental problems. We also have the issue of paternity leave and the extension of maternity leave, so in Mexico there are too many labor problems that are not being addressed.

That is why I think it is so important that we continue to spread information from social networks, even that we could find more support to do so at street level.” (MAP Social Media Strategist).

3.3.4. SCALABILITY & REPLICABILITY OF INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DOMAIN 1

This section addresses what project strategies or interventions should be scaled up or replicated under Domain of Change 1. For each strategy, we highlight the actors that participants and the evaluation team identified with the potential to scale up or replicate the strategies.

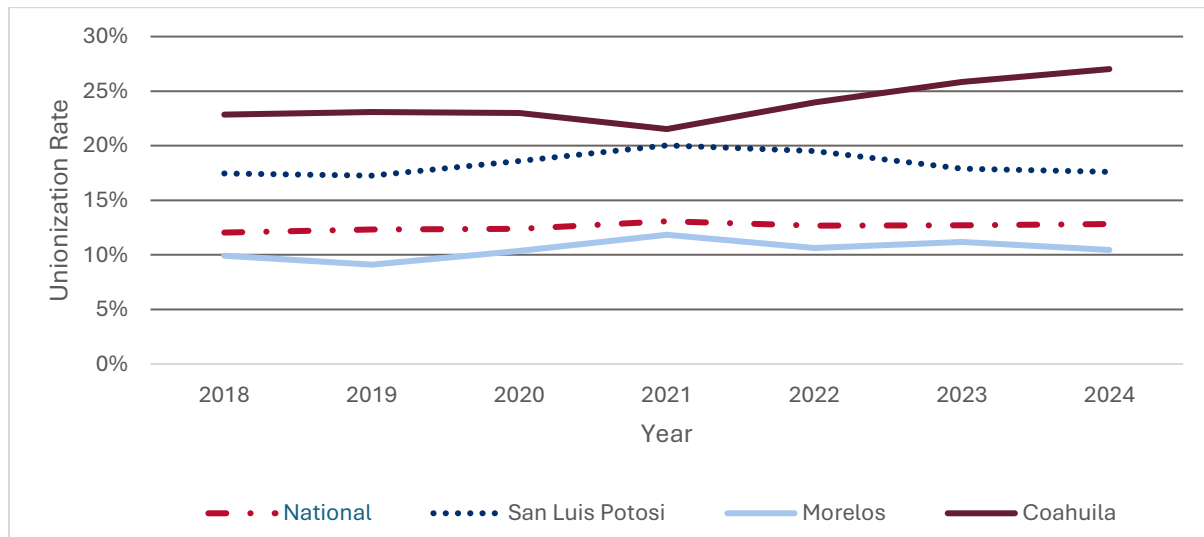
Overall, strategies that strengthen judicial institutions and processes, raise awareness of labor rights within communities, and generate structural or institutional change should be scaled up. Strategies to be adopted with context adaptations include tailoring programming and the communication to the unique needs of target groups (e.g., women workers, agricultural workers, migrant workers, indigenous workers). Finally, strategies that do not consider the preferences, needs and input of target groups should be curtailed.

Interested funders, democratic independent unions and worker organizations should consider scaling up or replicating strategies and interventions to achieve the following five goals:

Expand and Replicate Campaigns to Organize and Register Independent Unions in Exporting Industrial Areas

The perception of worker respondents and the low rates of unionization among workers displayed in Figure 8 suggest an important need for campaigns that support workers to organize and create independent democratic unions.

Figure 8. Percentage of Unionized Workers (2018 – 2024)



Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS), Indicadores y Estadística de la Reforma Laboral.

The ILAB-funded projects working on strengthening the independent union movement have gained considerable experience helping workers navigate the constraints and challenges they still face to exercise their FOA and CB rights freely. These conditions include the lingering preponderance of nationwide employer-supported unions with the largest number of registered CBAs at the FCCRL. The evaluation team, after analyzing the strategies the Solidarity Center campaigns and the MAP and GEM projects have developed, considers that these organizing, consulting and funding campaigns, along with robust capacity building and labor rights awareness campaigns, should continue expanding to new facilities in key sectors in Mexico.

Work with community members to increase awareness on labor rights and OSH standards.

FOH worked directly with domestic migrant agricultural communities in Veracruz and Oaxaca to raise awareness about the consequences of child labor and promote the protection of labor rights and OSH conditions (CS 1a). As a result, children and adolescents stopped working or decreased the amount of time working in sugarcane fields and coffee plantations in each state. Implementing partners highlighted the significance of communities changing labor practices that were previously seen as normal and forming community committees for monitoring child labor. Furthermore, scaling up community-level awareness raising interventions creates the opportunity for positive spillovers into neighboring communities. Potential actors identified to scale up or replicate these strategies include:

- **“Extensionistas”**, who are staff members from educational and research institutions, subsidized both by Mexico’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and some State Ministries of Agriculture to facilitate access to knowledge, information and technologies, to agricultural producers, rural economic groups, organizations and to other actors in the agricultural, fisheries and aquaculture sectors. In 2025, ILO-VZF trained 11 of them on OSH standards; these group worked with Jalisco’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER). Over time, “extensionistas”¹² may become potential replicating actors of this content to disseminate them to small producers, agricultural organizations, and rural families.
- **Community committees monitoring child labor**, especially those that have participated in ILAB-funded sensitization sessions and workshops. The FOH and EQUAL projects have established 15 mechanisms at the municipal or state level to promote child labor reduction and labor rights compliance, in Chihuahua, Oaxaca and Veracruz. Also called Community Committees, these mechanisms have been successful in becoming instances of social interaction with schools, municipal authorities, sugarcane producers, and community members, among others, to generate cohesion about the problems that affect the life of these communities. Among several topics, child labor has been prioritized in their management.
- The role of **school principals and teachers** as supporters of child education can be an effective tool to continue transforming community members’ and parents’ attitudes towards child labor, along with other challenges children face to stay in school. These challenges can also include bullying, substance abuse, or depression. The work in which FOH and EQUAL have used the vantage point of Community Committees to reach out to public schools in target communities seems to be a successful strategy for recently transferring the model on psycho-pedagogical care issues to 20 schools in Oaxaca and in 14 Veracruz. If expanded, the implementation could benefit additional communities in these states and promote further the reduction of child labor at the state level.

¹² For more information about these professionals, please visit the Ministry of Agriculture’s website at: <https://www.gob.mx/agricultura/articulos/extensionista-gestor-del-desarrollo>

Tailoring program and communication approaches to the needs of groups at-risk of exploitation

Implementing partners from *Sustentar* and *Senderos* indicated the need to replicate training, technical support and awareness campaigns to promote the adoption of OSH standards. However, they also emphasized tailoring program approaches to the unique needs and contexts of agricultural workers, migrant workers, and indigenous workers. Specifically, these interventions reported high uptake among target groups when communication strategies and trainings aligned with local contexts. *Sustentar* translated communications and materials into indigenous languages to reach migrant workers in Oaxaca and Guerrero. Furthermore, *Sustentar* and *Senderos* utilized different modalities (e.g., pictures, text, audio) and sources (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, community radio stations) to connect with target groups. *Senderos* planned programming around the distinct needs of agricultural workers, particularly the timing of activities during harvest periods. Similarly, implementing partners stressed the importance of tailoring protocols and tools for women workers and considering the distinct time and labor constraints that women workers face. For example, getting women to attend programming outside of work hours was difficult, given that many women workers in targeted areas would traditionally take on both economic and domestic responsibilities.

3.3.5. LOCAL ACTORS

In this section, we indicate a list of actors that ILAB's technical assistance could engage through a revisited approach to better leverage its resources and contribute to its intended outcomes. In this domain of change, the evaluation team assessed and identified labor and government actors with whom ILAB-funded technical assistance and government institutions already have built relations. However, ILAB could further adjust its approach as it aims to leverage the efforts invested and its resources to attain intended outcomes in the next few years. We summarize the list of identified actors and the suggested approach to take when engaging with each of them in Table 5.

Maintaining forward momentum to support democratic union governance, promote proportional representation of female and male worker leaders, and establish workplaces free of harassment and violence (Domains 1 and 4) require sustained awareness efforts among workers, as well as institutional backing by union sections and committees. As indicated in Table 5, ILAB-funded technical assistance has the potential to influence the democratic decisions of recently created unions that its projects have supported, as well as a wider target of larger unions that identify with a democratic agenda of labor rights.

Table 5. Improved Engagement with Local Actors

Actor or Institution	Approach
Promote Democratic Union Governance and Safe Workplaces for Women	
Target independent unions (past campaigns), Worker Centers and Labor Centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2025, promote union rules and “take of notice” documents¹³ that incorporate equality principles in female and male representation in leadership (short-term approach). Promote creating capacity building and training committees within the recently created democratic unions and the ongoing campaigns. Workers and labor specialists highlighted the need for constant training and reminders on key messaging, FOA and CBA rights to new workers, as union democracy is not sustainable in the target states yet, and non-democratic labor organizations continue competing for CBAs.

¹³ In addition to union registration before the FCCLR, once a union is constituted and changes leadership, STPS must issue a “take of notice” (toma de nota) and thereby certify the election of a union organization's leaders. For more information about this official process, please visit STPS webpage at: <https://www.gob.mx/stps/articulos/sabes-que-es-la-toma-de-nota-de-comite-directivo-de-un-sindicato?idiom=es>.

Actor or Institution	Approach
	<p>Echoing previous evaluation findings, the technical assistance could leverage the efforts spent and relations built by refining union leaders' negotiating, mediation and conflict resolution techniques at the 18 recently created democratic unions (medium-term approach).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While not specifically expressed by evaluation respondents, the Worker Centers supported by ILAB-funded technical assistance (two operational and three to-be-operational by 2024) should strengthen their role as labor rights hubs for workers, unions and CSOs supporting workers' rights. Further, through such processes of capacity building, Worker Centers could eventually undertake all technical support and capacity building, information and research, and dissemination activities so that the construction of the democratic labor movement is sustained (long-term approach).
Independent unions (e.g., CROC-SUMATE, LSOM, Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (FAT))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote union rules and "take of notice" documents¹⁴ that incorporate requirements in female and male representation in leadership (<i>short-term approach</i>).
FCCLR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Center officials to generate union registry process guidelines to promote proportional representation of female and male workers (<i>medium-term approach</i>).

Notes: STPS's official "Toma de Nota" when unions change their leadership.

3.3.6. FUTURE PROGRAMMING RELATED TO WORKER ADVOCACY FOR LABOR RIGHTS

The evaluation team assessed the areas of need that are relevant to ILAB's current technical assistance, the projects' expertise and the implementation partners' interest in suggesting the following interventions. The following are areas or strategies that future programming could incorporate.

Organization of agricultural workers and incorporation into formal economy. IP participants showed interest in providing technical support to agricultural laborers to organize themselves in collectives and helping state-level labor inspectorates generate trust and collaborate with employers in enforcing OSH standards and labor rights.

A collaborative and multi-pronged approach, involving public authorities, workers and agricultural companies, would be essential. First, to carefully select a group of worker organizations in good standing with agricultural workers and proven experience organizing and build worker capacity. The technical approach should leverage these organizations' capacity at target agricultural areas and sectors to further increase worker awareness, self-efficacy and knowledge to advocate for their labor rights, bargain with employers, and implement compliance with OSH standards. Second, technical assistance programming could support labor inspectorates in developing and implementing incentives for agricultural companies and small producers to learn more about OSH and comply with legal requirements. In particular, implementers should work with local partners to increase the availability and attractiveness of formal employment relationships for agricultural workers, while also providing flexibility of residence and being responsive to the mobility of workers who migrate across states to harvest different crops. This also involves some work with government institutions to improve workers' ability to access the benefits provided by formal employment, including participation in the public healthcare network provided by IMSS, pension contributions, additional guarantees for full payment of worked hours, and remedies for illegal working practices under informal labor agreements.

¹⁴ Idem.

Small agricultural producers and implementing partners stated that sugarcane, chili and tomato producers have different sizes and financial capacities that determine their ability to improve their labor practices. Thus, any future programming aiming to extend the coverage of formal agricultural employment should also capitalize from the implementers' long experience working with coffee, sugar and tobacco producers in Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca and Veracruz to create attractive alternatives to different sizes of agricultural producers. The success of these alternatives depends on how affordable they are to micro and small businesses whose owners often face financial constraints and poverty themselves.

Additionally, this multi-pronged approach, described in the last two paragraphs, would likely involve multiple implementing organizations acting as individual projects collaboratively. To support them to succeed in their own areas of intervention, implementers should take advantage of the lessons learned from the *Senderos* and FOH projects in terms of tailor-made strategies to address the deeper burdens that indigenous, domestic, and returning workers face.

As of September 2024, 86 percent of all agricultural workers in Mexico belonged to the informal workforce (about 2.73 million workers and mostly men)¹⁵, a figure that highlights the need for strategies to incentivize workers to organize and for authorities to tax them and assume the mandate to monitor and enforce labor rights of agricultural workers. The results captured in this evaluation about the informal demand for OSH measures in the sugarcane supply chain (CS 1c) and the absence of labor inspections and enforcement in the San Quintin Valley (CS 5c) constitute additional evidence that illustrates, with concrete examples, how necessary the organization of agricultural laborers is in the target supply chains – chili, coffee, sugar, tobacco and tomato. IPs agreed that this would be an unprecedented effort of technical assistance and expressed interest in a collaborative effort if funded by ILAB under the USMCA compliance umbrella. As described in CS 5c and in subsection 3.1.5, the evaluation team identified an important need for the *Sustentar* and UCJ strategies to work in tandem with ENLACE so that the technical assistance present in Baja California engages with agricultural workers, local producers, and state-level labor inspectors in a coordinated manner.

Dialogue with nationwide employer-supported unions. While ILAB-funded technical assistance has focused on working with emergent worker organization and independent democratic unions, the nationwide system of employer-supported unions still holds most of the contracts in manufacturing and a considerable amount of paid labor in the automotive supply chains. Establishing dialogue tables, probably led by ILO, GEM and Solidarity Center experts, to explore common interests between ILAB and CTM leadership, could enhance potential collaboration and buy in to work on a task, even if narrow initially, to promote democratic principles in one or more of their sections related to strategic USMCA sectors.

3.3.7. SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES OF WORKER ADVOCACY FOR LABOR RIGHTS

In this domain, the evaluation team found heterogeneity in the conditions for sustainability across the outcomes documented in subsection 3.1.1. We thus classify the outcomes according to the presence of sustainability conditions in the medium or long term, or just in the short term, and explain why in each case. We also specify the strategies required from federal, state and local partners to sustain these outcomes.

¹⁵ Government of Mexico (2024). Workers in Agriculture. Ministry of Economy. Available at: <https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/en/profile/occupation/trabajadores-en-actividades-agricolas?typeJob1=informalOption>.

Results Sustainable in the Medium- or Long-Term

The following ILAB-funded technical assistance portfolio results and outcomes have the greatest likelihood of being sustained in the medium- to long-term:

Maintenance of independent unions, including CBAs and union dues transparency (CSs 1b, 1d, 1e). The maintenance of several independent unions appears sustainable, at least in the medium term. Two of the four independent unions in Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos are collecting dues, indicating self-sufficiency (CS 1b). These four independent unions and the one in Durango have their CBAs filed and legitimized with the FCCLR, so the unions and their CBA terms (including any salary increases) are sustainable for the CBA length, between two and three years (CSs 1e, 4c). In the case of the four independent unions that are collecting dues and regularly disclosing their use, this practice appears sustainable for two reasons. It is mandated by law and the interviewed independent unions institutionalized their current practice of transparent management of member dues (CS 1d). This step has created a reinforcing cycle wherein union leaders' transparency builds trust among union members encouraging workers to keep paying union dues, and the sustained contributions in turn make union operations possible. One union leader noted, *"union dues are our best tool to have all we need to defend us, to get lawyers and other tools we need to defend our union and workers."*

- Risks to long-term sustainability. These include a lack of self-sufficiency for the two independent unions surveyed that are not collecting dues and are still reliant on ILAB project support (CS 1b) and a lack of experience among delegates to manage the union (CS 4c). Additionally, the longer-term sustainability of unions and their gains depends on organizing and motivation among the next generations of workers, which may require ongoing training and awareness campaigns for younger workers (CS 1e). Additionally, the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States are set to review acceptance of the USMCA in 2026 and potentially renegotiate it. Any modifications to the terms in the RRLM could affect the ability of this mechanism to promote the respect for FOA and CBA rights that, so far, it has expedited in collaboration with the Mexican labor authorities.
- Strategies to sustain outcome. Recently created democratic unions should gain financial independence through formalizing the collection of member dues with employers. Unions must continue conducting their own training and refreshing sessions on democratic union governance and promoting the equality of women and men in the workplace and in union decisions.

OSH practices at sugar refineries and other agricultural companies (CSs 1c). OSH measures at target sugar refineries and among target agricultural producers appear seem to continue.

Table 6. Ongoing OSH Practices at Sugar Refineries and Agricultural Producers

OSH Practices and Rationale for Likely Continuation	CS
Workers' knowledge about the importance and utilization of these measures has increased, and some project participants have spread this information to other workers.	1c
Recent labor shortages in the agricultural sector allow workers to demand better conditions and put pressure on employers to provide them to retain workers.	1c, 2b
Economic incentives of fewer occupational accidents (paired with a growing understanding and mentality shift surrounding the link between productivity and good working conditions) and external market pressure to provide safe conditions (i.e., obtaining the Bonsucro certification ¹⁶) encourage employers to maintain and expand these measures.	2a, 2b

¹⁶ For more details on Bonsucro certification, please visit: <https://bonsucro.com/what-is-bonsucro/>

OSH Practices and Rationale for Likely Continuation	CS
Several companies have included OSH measures and equipment in their budgets and have purchased a license for a tool to track OSH equipment usage and adapt accordingly.	2b
The sugar refinery that created a CSR unit has ensured some sustainability for these measures by budgeting for future OSH practices, and company leadership has expressed interest in expanding the CSR unit to other refineries in the corporate group.	2a
Monitoring by external bodies, such as the Sugarcane Production and Quality Committee, will also support sustainability.	N/A

- Sustainability risks. These include limited STPS oversight, limited enforcement of sanctions for employers in case of labor rights violations in some target states (Baja California, Baja California Sur, Oaxaca and Veracruz), and lingering resistance on the part of workers to some OSH measures – such as proper footwear (CS 2b). Sustained market incentives by buyers and consumers are also necessary to maintain the pressure on employers to provide safe conditions (CS 2b). Additionally, while certifications may be an effective incentive for larger employers, small producers may not have the means to pay for the cost of these certifications, and certifications alone are not enough to ensure institutional support for and compliance with human rights principles.
- Strategies to sustain outcome. ILAB projects' work promoting economic and market incentives for businesses to pursue seals and certifications of responsible production will help improve their adherence to OSH standards. However, the role of federal and state-level inspectorates as authorities who enforce these standards is key to promoting the sustainability of private sector compliance efforts. Replicating training and the training of trainers by key non-partisan actors (extensionistas, brigadistas, local emergency service providers, and the members of the sector committees for production and quality¹⁷) in all target states on the importance, legal grounds, techniques and strategies to engage agricultural workers and employers to follow OSH standards would be a powerful contribution to sustainable results.

“Something that contributes to sustainability is that a Quality Committee has been created in the sugarcane industry, as well as brigades to ensure compliance to work safety, creating elements for sustainability beyond the local [level]. The objective of the brigades is to ensure compliance or promote work safety and avoid child labor...They promote good machete use...their work is in the field with cane cutters and new workers, raising their awareness on said themes.” - Implementing partner

Results Sustainable in the Short-Term

In contrast, there are several results that appear only sustainable in the short term:

Reductions in child labor in agriculture (CS 1a). As noted, cultural shifts and societal pressure have moved the needle on the issue of child labor in target agricultural communities in Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca and Veracruz. However, there are significant risks that threaten this progress. Awareness-raising has not been successful in all cases, and it can be difficult to convince families to forgo additional household income (CS 2a). Additionally, sustainability is dependent on consistent inspection and enforcement by both companies and labor inspection authorities. Alternatives to children working in agricultural fields that ILAB projects have supported also face distinct sustainability risks, further compounding the issue.

¹⁷ The sugar sector has a structured organization around local committees in which both the sugar mills and the sugarcane suppliers participate (Comités de Producción y Calidad Cañera) and are regulated by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (SAGARPA).

- **Strategies to sustain outcome.** The role of local Community Protection Committees and school staff is key to continue changing attitudes and valuing of child education and its importance. While probably ILAB's technical assistance is not the only intervention to prevent child labor in all target communities, these actors' role would benefit from additional support on awareness, challenges to change community attitudes and practices, and framing alternatives for households. While some ILAB projects worked in these areas, the effects from those interventions fade over time if there are still incentives to perpetuate child labor practices (e.g., household poverty, substantial income gaps, shortage in educational services).

3.4. DOMAIN #2 – PRIVATE SECTOR LABOR PRACTICES

Domain of Change 2 captures the outcomes related to actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of the private sector that affect their labor practices and that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly impacted. Private sector actors include agricultural producers and small, medium and large domestic and multinational companies in key exporting sectors (e.g., automotive, sugar, coffee, tobacco, chili and tomato).

In this subsection, we address evaluation questions as indicated at the beginning of Section 3, for the changes identified in this domain. Section 3.4.1 presents the collective outcomes identified within this domain, 3.4.2 describes factors contributing to these outcomes, 3.4.3 analyzes the effectiveness of technical assistance strategies, 3.4.4 describes scalability and replicability of ILAB interventions, 3.4.5 presents local actors that could be further engaged, 3.4.6 outlines possible future programming, and 3.4.7 addresses the sustainability of these outcomes.

3.4.1. PRIVATE SECTOR OUTCOMES INFLUENCED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ILAB's projects have contributed to positive results in Domain 2 over the last four years. These collective results mirror the results in Domain 1 but are from the employer side. Table 7, below, presents the collective results to which ILAB technical assistance contributed to Domain 2, as well as exemplary specific significant changes for each result, as identified through MSC. The table presents each result/change identified and the ILAB projects whose activities address that theme (blue rows), as well as the individual CSs that illustrate the change and the projects that specifically contributed to each CS (white rows). All these results were *intended*, in that they map directly to intended long- or medium-term outcomes in the results frameworks of the projects that contributed to the CSs. Specific project contributions are discussed more in section 3.4.2.

Table 7. Intended Outcomes Identified by MSC, Domain 2 (Private Sector Labor Practices)

Result Identified	Projects Addressing Theme
Increased oversight by employers to increase compliance and reduce child labor.	FOH, Senderos, AccioNNAr, Sustentar, Una Cosecha Justa, VZF
CS 2a.* In 2024, a sugar refinery in central Veracruz created a corporate social responsibility unit, which has put into effect procedures to prevent child labor and protect cane cutters.	FOH
Increased provision of OSH measures (including safety for women) and equipment by employers, particularly in agriculture and industry.	FOH, VZF, Senderos, EQUAL, Mexico Auto Employers
CS 2a.* In 2024, a sugar refinery in central Veracruz created a corporate social responsibility unit, which has put into effect procedures to prevent child labor and protect cane cutters.	FOH

Result Identified	Projects Addressing Theme
CS 2b. In 2023 and 2024, sugarcane refineries in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Nayarit invested in better health and safety measures at work, reducing workplace accidents.	FOH, Senderos
CS 2c.* In 2023, an automotive company in San Luis Potosí created and began to implement a long-term program to support the prevention of violence against women.	Mexico Auto Employers, EQUAL
Increased recognition of collective bargaining and freedom of association by employers (especially independent and democratic unions).	SC2 project, SC3 project, MAP, OBSERVAR, Mexico Auto Employers, ILAB's staff operating RRLM
CS 2d. Since 2019, and with greater intensity since 2023, dozens of large companies located primarily in Central and Northern states which export products to the United States and Canada have modified their relations with unions to comply with the 2019 Labor Reform as specified by the USMCA Agreement.	ILAB's staff operating RRLM

Note: (*) These significant changes are described in detail in a separate story each in Annex G. Significant Change Stories.

3.4.2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OUTCOMES OF DOMAIN 2

In this section, the evaluation team explains factors and obstacles of progress towards intended and unintended outcomes, both dependent or related to ILAB's technical assistance and external to these projects. We grouped these factors and obstacles by major outcome as identified in Table 7 – i.e., increased oversight and collaboration to comply with combatting child labor; increased provision of OSH measures; and increased recognition of FOA and CB by the private sector.

Reduced Child Labor [CS 2a] and Increased Provision of OSH Practices by Employers [CSs 2a, 2b, 2c]

Positive Factors. ILAB projects and external factors worked together to positively affect progress towards demand for and implementation of OSH and child labor reduction practices. The main factors were:

- **ILAB projects' intentional awareness raising and training/technical assistance** on these topics among employers. For example, FOH's training and awareness building on the dangers of child labor and the importance of children's education encouraged employers in Oaxaca and Veracruz to disallow and conduct oversight of their suppliers to comply with this practice (CS 2a). Furthermore, FOH's and Senderos' awareness-raising and training on the importance and proper utilization of safety equipment and OSH practices in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Nayarit contributed to employers' provision of this equipment and institution of these measures (CSs 2a, 2b). In San Luis Potosí, ILAB's *Mexico Auto Employers* project led workshops with company representatives, which contributed to the company's creation of a long-term program to support the prevention of violence against women in the workplace (CS 2c).
- **Buy-in from employers and other private sector entities.** This was crucial to reduce child labor and implement OSH practices. For example, the vice president of an automotive company in San Luis Potosí actively promoted a policy of "zero violence" in the workplace (CS 2c), and executive bodies of a Sugarcane Production and Quality Committee worked with FOH to raise awareness within the sugar refineries in Oaxaca and Veracruz about OSH issues and advocate for the companies to budget for protective equipment (CS 2b).

- **External pressure and incentives.** This is closely tied to employer/company buy-in, and it has contributed to several employers' efforts to improve OSH measures or eliminate child labor. A sugarcane refinery in central Veracruz created its corporate social responsibility unit in part to implement actions necessary to obtain Bonsucro certification¹⁸, which would increase their possibilities to export and sell sugar at a better price (CS 2a), while the San Luis Potosí automotive company's creation of a program to prevent violence against women was partially influenced by pressure from the global headquarters to comply with national human rights laws (CS 2c). Additionally, the 2019 labor reform and subsequent reforms have provided the context and legal backing in which many of these changes have taken place. A comment from a Bonsucro representative captures the positive influence of the 2019 labor reform on this non-profit's approach to sugar mills in Mexico and that obtaining certification has become more attainable since the passing of the labor reform because the law aligned closer to the Bonsucro requirements, thereby presenting more incentives to obtaining the certification and contributing to reducing child labor in the sugar sector:

"Before the reform, many sugar mills used to say that Bonsucro asked them for more than what the law required, so they were not interested. Now they tell me, 'Hey, they already ask us for the same thing, so now I am probably more interested, that is, I am already closer to a certification'."

- **Socioeconomic factors.** As mentioned under Domain 1, patterns of migration, urbanization, and access to technology have led to agricultural labor shortages in some areas and sectors (for example, sugar refineries and producers). As a result, employers are more incentivized to provide better working conditions to attract and maintain their workforce in a competitive environment (CS 2b).

Negative Factors. There were a few factors that posed challenges to the outcomes in this area. For example, partners mentioned that when addressing issues such as violence against women, it can be hard to identify the right workplaces for interventions, as there is not a lot of available data on the breakdown of workers by sex at companies. Employers may also be resistant to training taking place during work hours. Project implementers also mentioned that they have had more traction with workers and employers on topics that are more tangible and easier to measure, such as OSH practices and child labor, as opposed to less visible issues such as sexual harassment and discrimination.

Increased Recognition of Collective Bargaining and Freedom of Association by Employers in Exporting Industries [CS 2d]

Positive Factors. ILAB projects and external factors positively affected progress towards increased knowledge and recognition of collective bargaining (CB) and freedom of association (FOA) by employers. The main factors were:

- **USMCA Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM).** As mentioned under Domain 1, the RRLM is a powerful mechanism to enforce respect for FOA and CB and also may act as a deterring factor for employers.
- **Private sector buy-in.** There are several companies and private sector organizations that have been proactive in supporting workers' rights to exercise CB and FOA. For example, some companies in Mexico have been consulting local law firms to ensure compliance with the labor

¹⁸ Bonsucro is a global sustainability platform that aims to promote sustainable practices in sugarcane crops. For more details on Bonsucro certification, please visit: <https://bonsucro.com/what-is-bonsucro/>

law and/or actively supporting unions' free elections and providing them with advice on how to comply with legal requirements in the labor reform (CS 2d). This factor is closely related to the RRLM and external pressure, in that a company's failure to comply with a course of action issued by a panel to address an RRLM resolution can lead to banning a company from exporting to the United States. To that end, several business organizations – the Employers' Confederation of the Mexican Republic (COPARMEX), the Confederation of Industrial Chambers (CONCAMIN) and the National Council of the Maquiladora and Export Manufacturing Industry (INDEX) – have held a wide range of events and training courses (face-to-face at local venues, and virtual) to inform its members about the changes in the labor reforms, and about the RRLM (CS 2d). While detailed attendance information is not available, local media coverage of one COPARMEX labor forum in Querétaro reported over 600 registered participants in industry, business, academia, and civil service¹⁹, suggesting that these events were well attended. Furthermore, respondents from CONCAMIN and BARBOSA reported that large exporting companies showed the most interest. Interview respondents noted that these events and courses contributed to businesses improving their compliance with laws through actions such as supporting unions' registration, election, and ratification, as well as human resources and contracting processes to be in line with labor laws.

- **Local academic institutions.** Academic institutions have contributed to a lesser extent by supporting trainings, such as the course targeting the automotive sector that PADF and the Universidad Iberoamericana coordinated, “Labor Justice System in the USMCA for the Automotive Industry” (CS 2c).

Negative Factors: A factor that has posed a challenge to exercising and recognizing CB and FOA has been employers' collaboration with a nationally based, multi-sectoral union, as described under Domain 1. While this has not prevented independent union organizing in many companies, it remains a challenge to interacting with employers.

3.4.3. EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES SUPPORTING OUTCOMES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S LABOR PRACTICES

Under Domain of Change 2, ILAB projects generally used demonstrations of the protective equipment effectiveness in the field, partnerships with agricultural companies to divide costs of protective equipment, and collaborative engagement with local sugarcane production and quality committees. These interventions contributed to promoting OSH standards and reducing child labor in target communities, as well as non-discrimination and equal rights to safe workplace conditions for women and men. More specifically, strategies that worked in this domain of change were as follows:

- **Working closely with company management and agricultural producers to secure buy-in and promote institutional strengthening.** In addition to engaging with workers and their families, ILAB projects – such as *Senderos* and FOH – worked closely with company management to build trusting relationships and raise awareness on child labor and OSH, which contributed to companies' increased understanding of how better conditions support productivity and their decisions to support and provide OSH measures and take steps to end child labor (CS 2a). The technical assistance also supported institutional strengthening, such as the aforementioned domestic and workplace sexual violence protocols (CS 2c). The *Senderos* approach to local sugarcane quality committees, that group together sugar mills and sugarcane producers,

¹⁹ <https://oem.com.mx/diariodequeretaro/local/anuncia-coparmex-foro-laboral-2023-17888577.app.json>

captures the benefits of building buy in and demonstrating the benefits of implementing OSH measures:

“With the approval of each Sugarcane Production and Quality Committee and the OSH subcommittees that we managed to form around each mill, we carried out the logistics of dissemination and a test of the protective equipment. We provide them with the cap, the shin guard, thermoses, and hydration items. We select between local and migrant cutters to have diversity, to try, right? That is, to receive feedback from workers. And in the second moment we reached an agreement with the associations that they, with all this feedback from the workers, would invest 50% for the equipment and the project the remaining 50%.” – Implementing partner

- **Tailored advisory services to incorporate labor rights priorities in workplace policies.** In the case of the automotive company in San Luis Potosí, the *Mexico Auto Employers* project’s workshops with workers on collective bargaining and their needs led to a proposed program to prevent sexual violence, which was adopted by the company (CS 2c). Project staff also mentioned that adapting workplace strategies to harmonize with national occupational norms, using accessible language, accommodating workers’ schedules and preferences for meeting locations, providing participation incentives, and respecting workers’ break times contributed to successful interventions.
- **Coordination and collaboration with academic institutions.** PADF also collaborated with the Universidad Iberoamericana, which provided a certificate course entitled, “Labor Justice System and Automotive Sector Labor Rights in the USMCA”, to train automotive sector employer representatives such as managers, human resources personnel, and legal staff on the labor reform and strategies to adapt internal processes accordingly (CS 2c). The course covered five modules: “Labor Law,” “Labor Reform and the Right to Unionize,” “The Federal Conciliation and Labor Registry,” “The Interamerican court, the UN system, the International Labor Organization, and their relation to Mexican Labor Law and labor norms,” and “Labor agreements in Chapter 23 and the Rapid Response Mechanism.” According to PADF’s TPRs, 50 participants each received certificates of completion for the first (March 2022 TPR) and second (October 2022 TPR) iterations of this course, and 40 received certificates in the third cohort (October 2023 TPR). Participants were primarily from Guanajuato, State of Mexico, and San Luis Potosí. Many participants reported in a virtual forum that the program provided them with knowledge relevant to their work, allowed them to connect with other companies and create a community of practice, increased their awareness of the labor reform and USMCA, and built their buy-in for adjusting their firms to comply with the labor reform. Additionally, TPRs indicate that this course opened the door for many firms to connect with PADF to receive the aforementioned tailored advisory services, including the firm highlighted in CS 2c. Box 4 (above) provides a wider perspective of the project’s scope of work and how the tailored services to companies contribute to its mission.

Box 4. PADF’s Auto Sector Employers

PADF, in cooperation with COPARMEX, created a certificate training program on negotiation and conflict resolution of labor disputes. This effort, along with a more in-depth diploma program on the labor justice system, has trained **677 automotive companies** in the auto sector supply chain, in partnership with Universidad Iberoamericana. Through tailored services, **216 employers** have developed plans to comply with new requirements in the labor law.

3.4.4. SCALABILITY & REPLICABILITY OF INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DOMAIN 2

This section addresses what project strategies or interventions should be scaled up or replicated with the private sector. For each strategy, we highlight the actors that participants and the evaluation team identified with the potential to scale up or replicate the strategies to achieve the following five goals:

Generate institutional change at the workplace

Strategies and interventions that generate institutional change should be scaled up or replicated because of the sustainability conditions they generate. FOH's work with a sugar refinery in central Veracruz is an example of how interventions that promoted incentives for corporate social responsibility (CSR) from third parties can generate institutional changes (CS 2a). As described earlier, training and awareness-raising on the dangers of child labor and the importance of children's education influenced both workers' and employers' viewpoints and behavior around bringing or allowing children into sugarcane fields. The project generated private sector buy-in and institutional change, by utilizing a sugary refinery's newly created CSR unit to implement the actions necessary to obtain a Bonsucro certification.²⁰ This certification increased opportunities for exporting and selling sugar at a better price, directly incentivizing the sugar refinery to improve OSH measures and eliminate child labor presently and in the future. Similarly, the GEM project created institutional change by developing workforce and union protocols against violence, in coordination with companies' management and human resources. These protocols and trainings to company staff and female workers have promoted conditions for institutionalized equality between women and men.

The following actors have a vantage point to continue supporting the needs of women and men workers and preventing sexual harassment at the workplace, as well as child labor and violation of OSH standards:

- **Private companies** in the agricultural, automotive, maquiladora, and other exporting sectors that have embraced policies with a lens on equality between women and men.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) units** in agricultural companies that have engaged with ILAB-funded technical assistance, and other ones interested in CSR certificates and seals of safe employment. These companies should have experience implementing consequential policies to reduce and ban child labor in their supply chains and include OSH standards as part of their practices, including monitoring and correction of any violations.

Tailoring Communications and Training Approach to the Needs of Multilingual Agricultural Workers

Implementing partners from *Sustentar* and *Senderos* indicated the need for replicating training, technical support and awareness campaigns to promote the adoption of OSH standards. However, they also emphasized the importance of tailoring the program approaches to the unique needs and contexts of agricultural workers, migrant workers, and indigenous workers. Specifically, these interventions reported high uptake among target groups when communication strategies and trainings aligned with local contexts. While these were not the only projects to consider local contexts, examples from *Sustentar* and *Senderos* relevant to Domain 1 include:

- *Sustentar* translated communications and materials into indigenous languages to reach migrant workers originally from Oaxaca and Guerrero

²⁰ Bonsucro is a global sustainability platform that aims to promote sustainable practices in sugarcane crops. For more details on Bonsucro certification, please visit: <https://bonsucro.com/what-is-bonsucro/>

who identified themselves as Tlapanecos, Triquis, and Mixtecos and had migrated to agricultural communities in Chihuahua state.

- *Sustentar* and *Senderos* utilized different modalities (e.g., pictures, text, audio) and sources (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, community radio stations) to connect with target groups.
- *Senderos* planned programming around the distinct needs of agricultural workers, particularly the timing of activities during harvest periods.

Agricultural companies that previously participated in designing protocols and materials, and in ILAB-funded training are ideal candidates to embrace these materials and replicate the training, even a streamlined version of it, to agricultural producers and workers after ILAB funds end.

Tailoring Consulting Services to Generate Mechanisms that Promote USMCA and Labor Reform Priorities

As described in Box 4 above, the results captured in CS 2c (see Annex G. Significant Change Stories for further details) and project monitoring information show the tailored advisory services that PADF provided to the automotive sector were an effective approach to support companies in their efforts to adhere to the priorities of the USMCA Labor Chapter and the labor reform. Further ahead, PADF should leverage the close relationship it has built with the automotive sector participants in the several rounds of the diploma on the labor justice system, in partnership with Universidad Iberoamericana. In an uncertain trade policy environment and facing a potential renegotiation of the USMCA, PADF and these automotive companies have the opportunity to collaborate on streamlining the companies' priorities in labor relations to guarantee labor supply and stability, address workplace safety and non-discriminatory conditions, and improve compliance with labor legislation to help prevent labor conflicts.

3.4.5. LOCAL ACTORS

In this section, the evaluation team assessed and identified the private sector actors and government institutions to whom ILAB could adjust its approach as it aims to leverage the efforts invested and its resources to attain intended outcomes in the next few years. We summarize the list of identified actors and the suggested approach to take when engaging with each of them in Table 8.

The approach to the private sector is the area where the evaluation found the greatest need for ILAB's technical assistance to advance its strategies further, using the scaffold of interventions it has built in the sugar, coffee and tobacco industries. Additionally, further outreach is required to expand the influence of this technical assistance, both on effectiveness and sustainability grounds. On the one hand, multinational companies based in the United States and sourcing from Mexico have not been a main target of the technical assistance projects, although their traction in their supply chains is consequential to change businesses' behavior. In the agricultural sector, the sustainability of the captured outcomes registered weaknesses, as employers' compliance with OSH standards was still discretionary, depending on workers' ability and leverage to negotiate. In the context of limited capacity of state and federal labor authorities to assess fines and penalties for violations, the importance of voluntary compliance by employers and worker ability to collectively demand safer working conditions is emphasized.

Table 8. Improved Engagement with Local Actors

Actor or Institution	Approach
Approach Private Sector and Technical Government Bodies with Refined Incentives to Promote Compliance with OSH Standards	
Agricultural business organizations*	Showcase of successful interventions (e.g., sugar mills in Veracruz) focusing on economic and market incentives.
Local Sugarcane Production and Quality Committees and CONADESUCA	Promote technical assistance to prepare companies and their supply chain members to earn certificates of responsible production processes (e.g., BONSUCRO certificate).
American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM)	Explore signing a memorandum of understanding for AMCHAM's Committee on Labor Affairs and Human Capital to receive the training and awareness raising materials from ILAB's technical assistance targeting private sector and disseminate to its membership.
Industria Nacional de Autopartes (INA)	Engage with partner automotive company(ies) that have successful long-term sexual violence mechanisms to explore showcasing experience with automotive companies and unions.
Red Nacional de Clúster de la Industria Automotriz (RED CAM)**	Explore further collaboration among ILAB's technical assistance projects to promote buy in of similar initiatives both at company staff and union leadership levels to promote replicability of anti-sexual violence mechanisms and including in CBA. Concretely, PADF's <i>Mexico Auto Employers</i> and Solidarity Center's SC2 and SC3 projects could coordinate some of their activities as each of them target the automotive industry. PADF, on private sector end, and the Solidarity Center, with emergent unions campaigns or through continuous support to recently established unions, could generate traction for creating mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment and violence on the basis of sex, also enshrined in the CBAs.
Ministry of Agriculture's "Extensionistas", local emergency responders on OSH Standards and Measures	Continue training and capacity building engagement with these groups of trainers. Share experiences to other technical assistance projects involved in the agricultural sector (<i>Senderos, Sustentar, Una Cosecha Justa</i>) to incorporate lessons learned into the materials, examples and case studies used in upcoming trainings of trainers. Rich lessons could be consulted from projects with an advanced level of implementation (i.e., EQUAL, FOH, <i>Senderos</i> , VZF)
"Brigadistas"	Explore how this group evolves and assess their needs and receptivity of further OSH training and communication materials for them to provide input and disseminate.

Notes: (*) Examples include Unión Nacional de Cañeros A.C., Unión Nacional de Productores de Caña de Azúcar A.C., Unión Nacional de Cafetaleros El Barzón, A.C. (UNORCA), Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras (CNOC), Coordinadora Estatal de Productores de Café de Oaxaca (CEPCO), and Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo (UCIRI), among others. (**) RED CAM includes a wide network of 11 automotive clusters in Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Coahuila, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Jalisco, La Laguna, Nuevo Leon, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Valley of Central Mexico.

The evaluation identified a long list of potential actors, at the local and federal level, who have the potential to become replicating agents. Such agents are capable of supporting ILAB's goal of a more effective and proactive adherence to OSH standards by affecting the awareness and attitudes of multiple agricultural producers and communities. The evaluation identified an important need for working with companies and agricultural producers to identify and demonstrate the benefits that OSH measures would have on their profits and supply chain conditions.

3.4.6. FUTURE PROGRAMMING RELATED TO PRIVATE SECTOR LABOR PRACTICES

The evaluation team assessed the areas of need that are relevant to ILAB's current technical assistance, the projects' expertise and the implementing partners' interest to suggest the following interventions. The following are areas or strategies that future programming could incorporate.

Expand tailored advisory services. In the case of an automotive company in San Luis Potosí, PADF's tailored advisory services to support negotiating and signing the union's CBA resulted not only in an agreement that improved working conditions – institutionalized workers' exercise of FOA and CBA rights – but also influenced the creation of a long-term program to combat and prevent workplace and domestic violence. Given the success of this example and the experience that ILAB-funded technical assistance has with the multinational export sector, this appears to be a promising tactic. To support effectiveness of this approach, future implementers could work with AMCHAM in Mexico to advertise these services and connect grantees with interested American member companies.

Create incentives to effectively minimize informal employment. Similar to the description in Section 3.1.6, future programming could aim to create incentives for employers to avoid circumscribing their legal obligations to offer workers formal work contracts and payment for their work. As mentioned above, the historic background of agricultural work in Mexico was characterized by agricultural producers fighting, punishing and disincentivizing worker collective action as international markets promoted low labor costs in exporting crops to achieve greater profits. Labor authorities allowed the violation of labor rights and OSH in collusion with employers through an advantageous interpretation of the law, permission for employer-unions to coopt labor organization and absent enforcement.²¹ In addition, a constant supply of poor labor, often from the poorest counties in other states, became a reserve pool that allowed producers to pressure wages and benefits down. While employers are legally bound to register workers to the healthcare network provided by IMSS, pay the pension contributions, and ensure full payment of worked hours, it is well documented that employers often committed several violations, including the absence of written contracts, retaining wages to pay for cash advances to workers, paying in-kind (*tiendas de raya*) and no payment of overtime.²²

The creation of incentives to formalize agricultural labor should capitalize on the stability of labor to support competitiveness, the economic benefits from fewer accidents, injuries and sick absences, and market value for responsible practices. Additionally, labor inspectors' collaboration with employers and effective enforcement play a key role in complementing the positive incentives described above. ILAB's technical assistance should capitalize from its long experience working with coffee, sugar and tobacco producers in Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca and Veracruz to find alternatives that result in affordable investments, according to the companies' size and capacity.

3.4.7. SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES IN PRIVATE SECTOR LABOR PRACTICES

The analysis found heterogeneous conditions for sustainability across the outcomes identified in this domain of change. We thus classify the outcomes according to their sustainability in the medium or long term, or just in the short term, and explain why in each case. We also specify the strategies required from federal, state and local partners to sustain these outcomes.

²¹ Flores Mariscal, J.R. Joel (2021). Determinantes de la precariedad del trabajo jornalero agrícola en México: un análisis histórico-institucional. *Región y sociedad*, 33. Available at: https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?pid=S1870-39252021000100134&script=sci_abstract.

²² Idem.

Results Sustainable in the Medium- or Long-Term

The following ILAB-funded technical assistance portfolio results and outcomes have the greatest likelihood of being sustained in the medium- to long-term:

OSH measures at sugar refineries and other agricultural companies (CSs 2a, 2b). OSH measures at target sugar refineries and among target agricultural producers appear likely to continue. Recent labor shortages in the agricultural sector allow workers to demand better conditions and put pressure on employers to provide them to retain workers (CSs 1c, 2b). Also, economic incentives from fewer occupational accidents (paired with a growing understanding and mentality shift surrounding the link between productivity and good working conditions) and external market pressure to provide safe conditions (i.e., obtaining the Bonsucro certification²³) also encourage employers to maintain and expand these measures (CSs 2a, 2b). Several companies have included OSH measures and equipment in their budgets and have purchased a license for a tool to track OSH equipment usage and adapt accordingly (CS 2b), and the sugar refinery that created a CSR unit has ensured some sustainability for these measures by budgeting for future OSH practices, and company leadership has expressed interest in expanding the CSR unit to other refineries in the corporate group (CS 2a). Monitoring by external bodies, such as the Sugarcane Production and Quality Committee, will also support sustainability.

- Sustainability risks include limited STPS oversight or consequences for employers for labor rights violations in several states (CS 2b) and the need to sustain market incentives by buyers and consumers to maintain the pressure on employers to provide safe conditions (CS 2b). Additionally, while certifications may be an effective incentive for larger employers, small producers may not have the means to pay for the cost of these certifications. Certifications alone are not enough to ensure institutional support for and compliance with labor laws and standards.
- Strategies to sustain outcome. ILAB projects' work to promote economic and market incentives for businesses to pursue seals and certifications of responsible production will help improve their adherence to OSH standards. However, the role of federal and state-level labor inspectorates as authorities who enforce these standards is key to promote the sustainability of private sector compliance efforts. As indicated in Table 8 above, to replicate training and techniques on the importance, legality and technical requirements to comply with OSH standards by key non-partisan actors (i.e., local agricultural production committees, extensionistas, brigadistas, first aid workers) is a powerful contribution to sustainable results.

Long-term sexual violence and harassment prevention program (CS 2c). This program at the automotive company in San Luis Potosí appears sustainable in the medium- to long-term because it was agreed upon between workers and employers and included in the CBA, which the FCCLR legitimized. The company is also incentivized to maintain the program to align with federal law and protect its ability to export to the U.S. and Canada. While the MSC inquiry found no risks to sustainability, concerns related to privacy and confidentiality of sexual violence victims have been a concern to monitor the results of the domestic and workplace anti-sexual violence mechanism. PADF could leverage from its contribution to CS 2c and explore with the implementing union and other interested unions to conduct confidential monitoring registering cases at the company level to prevent disclosing personal identity data via triangulation with other information.

²³ For more details on Bonsucro certification, please visit: <https://bonsucro.com/what-is-bonsucro/>

Results Sustainable in the Short-Term

In contrast, there are several results that appear only sustainable in the short term:

Reductions in child labor in agriculture (CS 2a).

As detailed in Section 3.2.1, target sugar mills collaborated with ILAB-funded projects to enhance monitoring of sugarcane cutting practices, promoting adherence to OSH standards and the prevention of child labor. These efforts were part of broader corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Notably, a sugar mill in Central Veracruz and its affiliated corporate group adopted phased policies to improve labor conditions and eliminate child labor in their supply chains.

Through partnerships with local Sugar Production and Quality Committees (CPCCs) and awareness-raising campaigns, some mills helped shift community norms. However, these gains remain fragile. CSR policies, while valuable, are voluntary and lack public accountability. They cannot substitute for robust labor law enforcement, which is essential to ensure consistent compliance and worker protection.

Awareness efforts have not reached all families, and economic pressures continue to drive child labor. Sustaining progress will require ongoing engagement by sugar mills and producers through CPCCs. Additionally, while ILAB-supported alternatives—such as community-led educational events—show potential, they face resource constraints that threaten their continuity (CS 1a).

- Strategies to sustain outcome. Federal and state labor inspectorates should continue training and directing inspectors to implement the National Protocol for Inspections to Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor and Protect Adolescent Workers, developed with support from the Senderos project. Sugar mills should maintain the use of CPCC structures to regularly engage sugarcane producers in monitoring compliance with occupational safety and health (OSH) standards and enforcing the prohibition of child labor.

3.5. DOMAIN #3 – STRENGTHENING AND PROFESSIONALIZATION OF LABOR JUSTICE AND CONCILIATION SYSTEMS

Domain of Change 3 captures the outcomes related to actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of government institutions, individual public servants, or groups of officials to professionalize labor court and labor conciliation staff, as well as to strengthen the institutional capacity of state-level labor courts, the Federal Center of Conciliation and Labor Registry (FCCLR) and the state-level labor conciliation centers (LCCs), directly or indirectly supported by ILAB's technical assistance.

As follows, the evaluation team addresses the evaluation questions outlined at the beginning of Section 3, for the outcomes identified in this domain. Section 3.5.1 presents the collective outcomes identified within this domain, 3.5.2 describes factors contributing to these outcomes, 3.5.3 analyzes the effectiveness of technical assistance strategies, 3.5.4 describes scalability and replicability of ILAB interventions, 3.5.5 presents local actors that could be further engaged, 3.5.6 outlines possible future programming, and 3.5.7 addresses the sustainability of these outcomes.

3.5.1. OUTCOMES INFLUENCED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ILAB's projects have contributed to positive results in Domain 3 over the last four years. Table 9 below presents the results to which ILAB technical assistance contributed to this domain, as well as

exemplary specific significant changes for each collective result, as identified through MSC. The table presents each result/change identified and the ILAB projects whose activities address that theme (blue rows), as well as the individual CSs that illustrate the change and the projects that specifically contributed to each CS (white rows). All these results were *intended*, in that they map directly to intended long- or medium-term outcomes in the results frameworks of the projects that contributed to the CSs. Specific project contributions are discussed more in section 3.5.2.

Table 9. Intended Outcomes Identified by MSC, Domain 3 (Strengthening and Professionalization of Labor Justice and Conciliation Systems)

Result Identified	Projects Addressing Theme
Improved capacity of federal and state conciliation centers.	SGLLE, ENLACE, MAP
CS 3a.* In 2023, the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration launched the Labor Registry Information Repository (RIRL), a repository of digital labor documents available to the public.	SGLLE
CS 3b.* From October 2022 to July 2024, the Labor Conciliation Center of Nuevo León has conciliated 81 percent of its cases using the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms.	ENLACE
CS 3d. From October 2022 to September 2024, the Chihuahua Labor Conciliation Center (LCC), through its conciliation process, has resolved 88% of labor cases in 45 days or less.	ENLACE
High resolution rate of conciliation and labor cases within short timeframe.	SGLLE, ENLACE, MAP, TECLAB
CS 3b.* From October 2022 to July 2024, the Labor Conciliation Center of Nuevo León increased to 81 percent its rate of case resolution within 45 days (per legal requirement) by using and adapting the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms.	ENLACE
CS 3c. Since 2020, the labor courts of the State of Mexico have resolved most (52 percent) of their jurisdictional cases in an average of seven months or less rather than in one or more years.	TECLAB
CS 3d. From October 2022 to September 2024, the Chihuahua Labor Conciliation Center (LCC), through its conciliation process, increased to 88 percent its resolution rate of labor cases within 45 days or less. This high level of effectiveness in conciliation is largely due to the conciliator's level of technical capacity.	ENLACE

Note: (*) These significant changes are described in detail in a separate story each in Annex G. Significant Change Stories.

3.5.2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACTORS

This subsection explains factors and obstacles to attaining intended within Domain of Change 3 – Strengthening and professionalizing labor justice and conciliation systems– outcomes that are displayed in Table 9.

Positive Factors. ILAB technical assistance and factors of the implementation context, in government agencies, worked together to positively affect progress towards strengthening institutional capacity building, streamlining processes, and adjusting the existing tools to improve the delivery of conciliation services. The factors were:

- **ILAB technological support, training, and process review.** ILAB projects worked closely with federal and state entities to support the reported results in both domains. A key area of support was technology – this included developing or supporting the development of technological tools (such as SGLLE's development of the software programming for the RIRL in CS 3a), providing training to use the technology, and providing ongoing technological support (such as

ENLACE's support desk for SINACOL and SIGNO in CS 3b). Additionally, ILAB projects have reviewed operational processes, systems, procedures, and manuals at the conciliation centers, labor courts, and inspection authorities, subsequently helping to develop or update them. For example, ENLACE supported the Chihuahua LCC to develop a conciliation procedures manual, as well as to strengthen its institutional program and civil service registry (CS 3d). ENLACE implemented institutional strengthening activities according to the priorities of each target LCC.²⁴ In Chihuahua, the prioritized tasks for institutional strengthening were the following: Making recommendations for improving and adapting the Institutional Strategic Plan; supporting the development of civil service provisions and documentation; supporting the revision of the Matrix of Results Indicators (MRI); preparing, revising, and adapting the organic statute; and proposing improvements to the organizational chart, the profiles of key positions and the recruitment and selection of conciliators.

"We started working with AIR immediately soon after opening the Center in January 2023. The first collaboration was a self-diagnosis that was a perfect fit for us and led us to prioritize our work with them on planning and how to structure our institutional plan. They helped us facilitate meetings with other areas at the LCC and conversations with operational areas. We are also appreciative of the number of seats we had at the training sessions AIR instructed to the staff of several other centers and Chihuahua. During the synchronous sessions, the most rewarding part was to learn about cases in other states." (Staff member, LCC Chihuahua).

- **Commitment of federal and state government.** The commitment and efforts of federal and state entities has been critical for strengthening capacity and improving efficiency.
 - Local conciliation centers and labor courts have worked to systematize operations and adequately staff up. For example, STPS prepared for the installation of the FCCLR by creating a directorate of information technologies to oversee the RIRL (CS 3a), and the National Commission of Labor Conciliation Centers (CONACENTROS) brings together the directors of all the state LCCs and the FCCLR to share experiences, such as use of the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms (CS 3c).
 - At the state level, the State of Mexico's Superior Court of Justice (TSJEM) created the Labor Justice Implementation Unit (UIJL), which designed an operational management model for labor courts, and the Judicial School of the State of Mexico (EJEM) provided training for labor court officials (CS 3c).
 - In the State of Chihuahua, the evaluation documented that the LCC's Selection and Evaluation Committee (CSE) conducted a rigorous process to hire conciliators (CS 3d). Other target LCCs²⁵ engaged in similar processes as part of their institutional strengthening activities.
- **Labor reform.** The 2019 labor reform and subsequent reforms have provided the context and legal backing in which many of these changes have taken place.
- **Local academic institutions.** Academic institutions have contributed to a lesser extent; for example, support from state universities in Chihuahua administered exams for conciliator applicants for the Chihuahua LCC (CS 3d).

²⁴ In 2023 and 2024, ENLACE worked closely with 10 individual LCCs (Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Yucatán) on their institutional strengthening plans, specifically on the activities that the LCCs designated as priorities from the work plan.

²⁵ Idem.

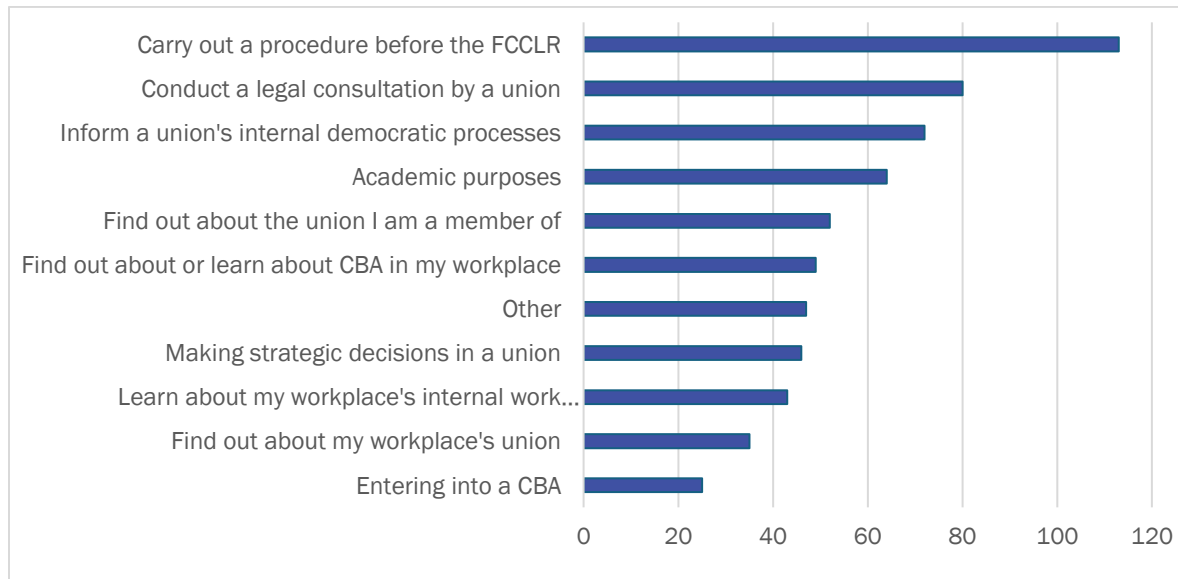
- **Support from other international entities.** In a few instances, international donors or entities apart from ILAB contributed to the changes. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank initially developed the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms (CS 3b). Additionally, ILAB signed an Inter-Agency Agreement with the U.S. Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services (FMCS) in April 2020 to provide mediation and conciliation capacity building support to STPS, the FCCLR and state-level conciliators at the LCCs, including Chihuahua.

3.5.3. EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES SUPPORTING OUTCOMES IN STRENGTHENING THE LABOR CONCILIATION AND JUSTICE SYSTEM

ILAB projects generally conducted technical consultation and support, training, and awareness-raising on a variety of topics related to labor rights and Mexico's 2019 labor reform. These strategies contributed to strengthening the labor conciliation and justice institutional protocols and performance and build institutional capacity at the federal and state levels. More specifically, strategies that worked in the domains of change were as follows:

- **Digitization and provision of digital tools and platforms.** ILAB projects have supported efficiencies in labor courts, conciliation centers, and STPS offices at the federal and state levels through support for digitization, platform development, and provision of digital tools, as well as technical assistance and training on how to use and update the tools and platforms. For example, SGLLE developed the software programming for the RIRL and supported scanning/digitizing and indexing documents (union registrations, CBAs, internal union regulations/statutes/by-laws, etc.) for the repository (CS 3a), and ENLACE made the final adjustments for SINACOL and SIGNO and provides ongoing technical support for staff at the Nuevo León LCC (CS 3b). ENLACE provided technical assistance to LCCs for adapting the software platforms that support notification and conciliation system updates. This comment synthesizes a contribution of this technical assistance, among several others:

"We received technical assistance to make an update to SIGNO, now staff that notifies of conciliations here in the state are automatically assigned addresses in pre-designated areas of the state. This saves us time from assigning addresses manually and saves commuting time to the staff. Also, a module for electronic signatures, that are required by law, is also ready to be used in the platform." - IT staff member, LCC Nuevo León

Figure 9. Purpose of Using the RIRL (December 2024)

Source: Implementing partner's (AIR) web-based exit survey (2024).

These technological advances have supported transparency and availability of information on union documentation through the FCCLR's RIRL and more expeditious case resolution in some state labor courts and conciliation centers. This intervention has helped several users find documents necessary to accomplish different purposes. The most commonly reported purposes in 2024 are displayed in Figure 9 above.

- Review/evaluation of systems, processes, and procedures, including job profiles and recruiting.** ILAB projects have also conducted reviews of systems and processes internal to state-level labor courts and LCCs, providing feedback to improve their functioning, including statutes, internal regulations, organizational frameworks, staff profiles, manuals, processes, and procedures. For example, ENLACE helped the Chihuahua and Quintana Roo LCCs develop its conciliation procedure manual and career service regulations, including job profiles, whose institutionalization have helped streamline processes (CS 3c). While still nascent and lacking evidence of effectiveness, TECLAB conducted an operational assessment of the State of Mexico's labor justice systems and proposed improvements to communication practices with parties in labor disputes, and job profiles, which both TECLAB and the State of Mexico labor courts began implementing (CS 3d).

"The TECLAB team was receptive to learn and understand our processes. Their team presented the diagnostic methodology to the President of the State Judiciary and when they presented results, we were ready to listen what was wrong. The diagnostic reported scores over 75 percent across areas, except communication with conflicting parties, beyond their legal representatives. We needed to further disseminate the advantages of implementing the labor reform and how the technological and process innovations benefit workers and employers." - Visiting Labor Attorney – State of Mexico

3.5.4. SCALABILITY & REPLICABILITY OF INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DOMAIN 3

This subsection addresses what project strategies or interventions should be scaled up or replicated. For each strategy, we highlight the actors that participants and the evaluation team identified with the potential to scale up or replicate the strategies.

Overall, STPS and FCCLR, in close coordination with the new federal judicial institutions –the Judiciary Administration Organism (OAJ) and Judicial Discipline Court (TDJ), CONACENTROS and any funders, including ILAB, should scale up strategies that strengthen judicial institutions and processes, following the positive response registered with the national labor conciliation and justice system.

Strengthening of judicial institutions and processes

The ENLACE has contributed to new labor justice institutions through the provision of digital tools and platforms for SINACOL and SIGNO (CS 3b) and the review and assessment of systems, processes, and procedures for the Chihuahua LCC (CS 3d), as well as Quintana Roo and other target LCCs. This programming promoted information and resource sharing among CONACENTROS, building internal capacity and promoting streamlined labor conciliation processes. Additionally, the OBSERVAR project socialized local judicial institutions on international labor standards through training and capacity building, leading to increased interest in union pluralism among local judges, including the content of ILO Conventions 87, 98, and 135. These interventions demonstrate the positive impacts of strengthening judicial institutions and processes through technical assistance and capacity building.

Potential actors who could scale up or replicate the strategies include:

- **CONACENTROS**, a central actor in the development of the labor conciliation system nationwide. This commission works closely with the vast network of conciliation centers, including the FCCLR, to coordinate the efforts of increasing access to conciliation resources, strengthening conciliation protocols and adapting tools, innovating technologies, and improving continuously. CONACENTROS could also become an entity that promotes evaluation and learning for the labor conciliation system. IPs mentioned the importance of qualitative assessment to evaluate the quality of conciliation outputs and its impact on groups of workers most at-risk of labor exploitation.
- **Federal and state-level labor judges** have expressed interest in learning strategies on how to promote union pluralism at companies and promote the knowledge among workers that they can change or elect alternative unions. Both federal and local courts are key actors who could replicate the learning efforts to train other judges, labor lawyers and worker organizations on the priorities of the labor reform in terms of union democracy. Federal and local judges can leverage from and use one of the first milestones in the matter of collective labor law produced by TECLAB, the bench book on collective law procedures (see Box 5), launched in March 2024.

Box 5. Series of Labor Reform Bench Books

In 2023-2024, the TECLAB project allocated ILAB funds to develop a **bench book** designed to guide federal and state judges on implementing the new procedures in collective labor law, according to the labor law reform.

TECLAB coordinated workshops and two learning trips –to Chile and the U.S.– while collaborating extensively with the Federal Judicial Council, federal labor judges, state judges in Mexico City, Queretaro, Sonora and the State of Mexico, ITAM, ILO, and postulating layers to prepare and review the bench book.

The bench book provides friendly and illustrative content from expert practitioners on the provisions of the Federal Labor Law on how union-related disputes and strikes are handled in court. It includes topics such as types of hearings, how evidence is presented of the process of filing demands, confirming legal representation, the role of judges in early conciliation, and how strikes are prepared and officially recognized.

Between 2025 and 2027, the strategies TECLAB has implemented targeting local labor courts will be facing a paradigm shift amid a federal and state-level overhaul of the Judiciary. Also, while Mexico's Federal Judicial Council has been an ally of ILO on similar efforts, it will be decommissioned and replaced by a Judicial Discipline Court and a judicial administrative body in 2025. The evaluation team does not consider that conditions will be suitable to replicate any of the successful ILAB-funded interventions until the judiciary reform establishes its new disciplinary bodies and the first wave of labor judges is elected.

3.5.5. LOCAL ACTORS

The evaluation team assessed and identified the actors and institutions to whom ILAB could adjust its approach as it aims to leverage the efforts and resources invested to attain intended outcomes under Domain of Change 3 in the next few years. For consistency with other sections that focus on collective outcomes, Table 10 lists the local actors and institutions by the five domains of change that structured the MSC inquiry.

Through its projects, ILAB has been an influential actor in raising awareness on and supporting union registration, facilitating open access to Labor Relations Board (JCA, per its acronym in Spanish) documents²⁶, improving judges' capabilities to implement the new labor justice model, and supporting the new conciliation bodies. Table 10 identifies strategies that would support sustainability of the new labor justice model, particularly in the context of Mexico's recent judicial reform that must be completed in federal and state courts by 2027. ILAB's potential role partnering with the soon-to-be constituted Federal Judicial Administration Organism (OAJ) on training for and streamlining of judicial procedures is an important opportunity for influencing the justice system to be more worker centered. Although not explicit in the table, ILAB's technical assistance should include interventions to support interinstitutional coordination between the federal and state level and between local agencies, in particular between labor authorities, LCCs and the new labor courts to be created in the next few years.

²⁶ ILAB-funded project SGLLE implemented the digitalization of over 600,000 documents hosted by the old Labor Relations Boards (Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje), which included historic archives of union association files, labor collective contracts and internal labor manuals for private companies and government.

Table 10. Improved Engagement with Local Actors to Sustain Progress in Institutional Capacity Building of the Local Conciliation and Justice System

Actor or Institution	Approach
CONACENTROS	Support its capacity building as a learning and innovation center for the network of 32 LCCs and FCCLR.
New federal judicial institutions (Judiciary Administration Organism-OAJ and Judicial Discipline Court-TDJ)	Track progress of reform on identifying candidates to become new OAJ and TDJ members; introduce technical assistance provided to federal labor judges, local labor courts, and FCCLR/LCCs.
Local labor courts	Support the advance of the judiciary reform locally (2025/2027), introducing the labor reform principles into manuals, procedures, job descriptions, and other procedural instruments. Respond to federal and local judges' interest to receive training at the state courts on Conventions 87, 98, and 135, which encompass principles of the USMCA more widely but are not yet explicitly enshrined in the local labor laws.

3.5.6. FUTURE PROGRAMMING RELATED TO CONCILIATION AND LABOR JUSTICE

The evaluation team assessed the areas of need that are relevant to ILAB's current technical assistance, the projects' expertise and the implementation partners' interest in suggesting the following interventions. The following are areas or strategies that future programming could incorporate.

Institutional Support to CONACENTROS. As a central actor in the new labor conciliation system, CONACENTROS has the potential to continue supporting the FCCLR and all 32 LCCs in the systems' learning, innovation, consolidation and adaptation as the labor reform progresses and these institutions' needs change. ILAB-funded technical assistance can capitalize from the successful experiences with FCCLR and at least two LCCs (CS 3a, 3b, 3d) to provide software support, for user platform solutions, institutional protocols, and communication outreach to propose and co-create a workplan in close coordination with CONACENTROS's leadership. By helping CONACENTROS become a learning center to understand more about the labor conciliation experiences across states, and support adaptive management, it can generate ripple effects within the system and in external institutions. Examples include fostering social incentives in democratic unions, journalists, law schools, academia, and other labor agencies to strengthen and protect the conciliation institutions and galvanize them to advance the principles of the labor reform and USMCA further.

3.5.7. SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES RELATED TO THE LABOR JUSTICE AND CONCILIATION SYSTEM

The evaluation found heterogeneity in the conditions for sustainability across the outcomes documented through the MSC method in Table 9. For that reason, we classify the outcomes according to the presence of sustainability conditions in the medium or long term, or just in the short term, and explain why in each case. We also specify the strategies required from federal, state and local partners to sustain these outcomes.

Results Sustainable in the Medium- or Long-Term

The following ILAB-funded technical assistance portfolio results and outcomes related to local conciliation and labor justice have the greatest likelihood of being sustained in the medium- to long-term:

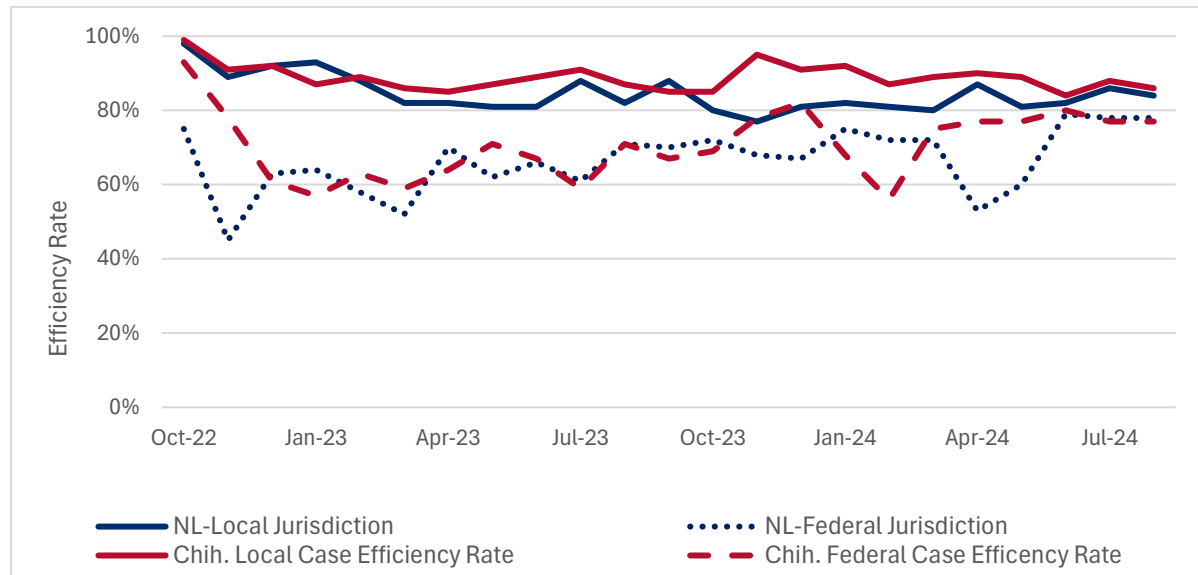
Maintenance of the RIRL (CS 3a). Now that the RIRL has been created, launched, and houses all relevant historical documents (such as union registrations, CBAs, internal union regulations/statutes/by-laws), it seems likely to be sustained. It has legal backing and is accounted for in the FCCLR budget, and FCCLR staff continue to upload new documents there. Relevant FCCLR staff are also trained to manage the code and can make minor improvements to it.

- Sustainability risks. These include a lack of capacity within the FCCLR to make large-scale improvements or adjustments to the RIRL, which is currently managed by the SGLLE project. Interview participants described limited technical capacity within the FCCLR's directorate of information technologies (DTI) to continue updating and adapting the RIRL for future needs. Additionally, the FCCLR faces considerable reduction in its budget in 2025, following a trend since 2024, imposing further pressure on the Center's technical resources and its ability to disseminate the benefits from RIRL among a wider base of unions and workers.
- Strategies to sustain outcome. According to implementation partners and FCCLR staff, the Mexican Congress and STPS should defend the independence and resources of FCCLR for it to continue rolling out its key role in the new model of labor justice. The reduction in FCCLR's budget in 2025 may tarnish its autonomy as an impartial body enshrined in its organic law. According to union leaders and implementation partners, FCCLR's autonomy and commitment to a transparent exercise of FOA and CB rights has built trust among worker organizations. A shortage of resources may reduce its capacity to conduct the role it has played in union elections and CBA processes in its young life, and relatedly, may hinder the Center's capacity to sustain the results ILAB's technical assistance has helped it accomplish. FCCLR authorities expressed positive impact from the supply of RIRL among labor actors:

"We're bringing back real collective bargaining—no more unions that exist only on paper. Workers should know their contracts, have open access through the RIRL, and take part in negotiations. If they disagree, they can say NO. If they agree, they'll continue having a say in reviews every two years."

"Businesses are responding positively. They're free from union extortion—before, they paid standard fees just to hold agreements that weren't even negotiated with workers. This shift also lifts the burden of dealing with ineffective union structures, since employers often had to negotiate directly with their workers anyway." - FCCLR staff member

High rate of labor conciliation and justice case resolution in short time periods (CSs 3b, 3c, 3d). High rates of case resolution in short time periods at target LCCs (see Figure 10 for examples in Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon) and state labor courts appear to be sustainable. A strong factor for sustaining these rates is the strong reliance on the adapted SINACOL and SIGNO platforms, which continue operating effectively. LCC IT personnel, such as those in the Nuevo León LCC, have been trained to manage the platforms and can make small adjustments without external support (CS 3b). Most of them have expressed feeling comfortable handling the administration of these platforms locally in the absence of ILAB-funded technical assistance.

Figure 10. Individual Labor Dispute Conciliation Efficiency Rate in Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon

Source: INDERLAB (2024).

Another factor contributing to sustainability of these results in the Chihuahua LCC – and other ENLACE target LCCs per monitoring data in Box 6 below – is its institutionalized civil service regulations which can be maintained even if current conciliators leave and encourages hiring and retention of trained conciliators (CS 3d). According to monitoring sources, ENLACE also developed civil service provisions and documentation for the LCC in Quintana Roo and kept a similar task as a priority for Veracruz and Yucatan in 2024.

“After collaborating on the planning documents, we started working with AIR on the first three of our five civil service programs – incoming, training, performance assessment, institutional development and termination. AIR supported us to design an organizational structure from an entanglement of services because in Chihuahua, the only public servants who had civil professional service were at the state police. So, we asked them if they had any knowledge of this area. They shed light on how to start a structure and write the rules of civil service at the LCC. We thought other centers already had similar rules and it turns out we were pioneers! Just yesterday, these three programs, now called

projects, were signed off by the Government Committee, after going through administrative process review.” - Staff member, LCC Chihuahua

Regarding labor courts, the operational model for the State of Mexico’s labor courts has been largely institutionalized. Aspects of this model that are particularly likely to be sustained include the ExLab²⁷ file system, manuals, and infrastructure (CS 3c).

Nevertheless, there are risks to sustainability, including a lack of enough personnel or technical skills at all LCCs to adjust SINACOL and SIGNO and the absence of an active role by the National Commission of LCCs (CONACENTROS)²⁸ in managing the platforms (CS 3b) and maintaining the safety of personal identification data. This comment from an IT Manager in the Nuevo Leon LCC suggests illustrates concerns:

“My main concern in the medium term is the potential for some LCCs to make further progress in their development of SINACOL and some others to be left behind. Any updates to the framework, made at the central level by CONACENTROS, can affect the centers’ ability to use the adaptations programmed previously and lead to divisions between centers in their approach to SINACOL. My recommendation is that all LCCs engage in working groups through which all IT teams remain accountable of their software changes and the integrity of their databases within each LCC.” - Senior manager, LCC Nuevo Leon

Box 6. ENLACE’s Multisite Coverage

ENLACE has provided all 16 target LCCs with technical assistance on the use and maintenance of SINACOL and SIGNO, including providing consultations with IT managers, legal directors, and conciliation directors and coordinators to ensure that SINACOL and SIGNO updates aligned with their needs.

ENLACE provided tailored assistance to LLCs: due to the frequency and complexity of SINACOL AND SIGNO requests from the Mexico City LLC, the project provided on-site technical assistance. The project provides chat for immediate support to the Jalisco LLC, helped the Yucatan LLC map its remote reconciliation processes, and designed SINCOL to allow remote reconciliation for LLCs in Yucatan, Jalisco, and Coahuila.

Perhaps the most delicate threat to sustainability is the September 2024 judicial reform, which will result in the resignation of all current judges and popular election of new ones, both in the Supreme Court and federal courts, as well as in the 32 states. These new judges may vary in experience and will need to be trained on procedures, which may impact on resolution rates and timing (CS 3c). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that although the high rates of resolution in short time periods are important outcomes, they do not speak about the *quality of resolutions* (i.e., how well they uphold workers’ rights). Furthermore, high resolution rates do not indicate whether institutions are conducting any practices to artificially “resolve” cases within certain time limits by closing and reopening several cases for the same proceeding; more research is needed on these topics to examine the extent of this practice.

- **Strategies to sustain outcome.** As indicated in Table 10 above, ILAB’s technical assistance has an opportunity to help CONACENTROS become a learning and innovation institution to guide the evolution of the conciliation system in Mexico. Amidst an overhaul of the Judiciary between

²⁷ The Labor Dossier System, or “Expediente Laboral” (ExLab), is a platform to register, manage and consult labor files.

²⁸ While larger adjustments to the platforms are made at the central level, states can make some small adjustments for their own contexts. CONACENTROS provides a space for the LCC information system directors to exchange experiences and propose coordinated improvements to the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms, ensuring that major differences do not exist between the LCCs in terms of how the platforms operate or the definition and calculation of FCCLR and LCC performance indicators.

2025 and 2027, CONACENTROS's role would be essential as a custodian of institutional knowledge and steward of technical resources for LCCs to assimilate the changes in the courts at the state level without stepping backwards in capacity building and provision of technical solutions.

3.6. DOMAIN #4 – ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT AND OCCUPATION AND PROMOTING RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Domain of Change 4 refers to the outcomes related to actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of organizations, individuals, or groups that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly supported to eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation and promote equality of women and men, that the ILAB technical assistance directly or indirectly impacted.

As follows, the evaluation team addresses evaluation questions indicated in the roadmap at the beginning of Section 3, for the outcomes and project contributions identified in this domain. Section 3.6.1 presents the collective outcomes identified within this domain, 3.6.2 describes factors contributing to these outcomes, 3.6.3 analyzes the effectiveness of technical assistance strategies, 3.6.4 describes scalability and replicability of ILAB interventions, 3.6.5 presents local actors that could be further engaged, 3.6.6 outlines possible future programming, and 3.6.7 addresses the sustainability of these outcomes.

3.6.1. OUTCOMES INFLUENCED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ILAB's projects have contributed to positive results in Domain 4 over the last four years. One of these results represents a gendered aspect of results reported under Domain 1 (worker perspective) and Domain 2 (employer perspective). Table 11 below presents the results to which ILAB technical assistance contributed in Domain 4, as well as exemplary specific significant changes for each result, as identified through MSC. The table presents each result/change identified and the ILAB projects whose activities address that theme (blue rows), as well as the individual CSs that illustrate the change and the projects that specifically contributed to each CS (white rows). All these results were *intended*, in that they map directly to intended long- or medium-term outcomes in the results frameworks of the projects that contributed to the CSs. Specific project contributions are discussed more in section 3.6.2.

Table 11. Intended Outcomes Identified by MSC, Domain 4 (Elimination of Discrimination in Employment and Occupation and Promoting Rights of Women and Men in the Workplace)

Result Identified	Projects Addressing Theme
Increased knowledge of, advocacy for, and utilization of collective bargaining and freedom of association by female workers, including female union leaders (especially via independent and democratic unions).	SC1 project, MAP, VZF, GEM
CS 4c.* In 2024, female workers at a maquila company in Nazareno, Durango elected a union league to represent them as an independent union, successfully renegotiating their collective labor agreement, and securing better benefits for the workers.	MAP
CS 4d.* Since 2021, more female workers in a national union and three independent unions in Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos have gained positions as delegates in union leadership bodies.	SC1 project, VZF
Increase in women's economic participation and income generation abilities, and empowerment in decision-making.	EQUAL
CS 4a. In 2023 and 2024, women in communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz increased their household income by starting or expanding their businesses.	EQUAL

Result Identified	Projects Addressing Theme
CS 4b. In 2023 and 2024, women coffee producers in communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz expanded their participation in the coffee production process.	EQUAL

Note: (*) These significant changes are described in detail in a separate story each in Annex G. Significant Change Stories.

3.6.2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACTORS

In this section, the evaluation team explains factors and obstacles of progress towards intended and unintended outcomes related to equality and on-discrimination at work, both dependent or related to ILAB's technical assistance and external to these projects. We grouped these factors and obstacles by major outcome as identified in Table 11 – i.e., increased knowledge and utilization of FOA and CB by female workers and union leaders and increases in women's income-generating abilities and economic participation.

Increased Utilization of Collective Bargaining and Freedom of Association by Female Workers in Exporting Industries [SCs 4c, 4d]

Positive Factors: ILAB projects and external factors positively affected progress towards increased knowledge of, use of, and advocacy for CB and FOA by female workers, including female union leaders. The main factors were:

- **Awareness-raising on labor rights and technical assistance/training by ILAB projects.** ILAB projects supported awareness-raising on sex parity in unions – such as through the SC1 and MAP projects' training for unions (CS 4d).
- **USMCA Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM).** The RRLM allows Mexican workers employed at companies exporting to the United States to file a petition for the US Government to investigate allegations of violations of FOA or CB rights. Evaluation respondents referenced a case of a maquila facility in Durango where the threat of a potential RRLM review or knowledge of these cases influenced the company's acceptance to respect FOA rights and engage in CBA negotiations with female unionized workers (CS 4c).
- **Workers' own organizing efforts.** Female workers' own efforts to organize, advocate for their rights, and create independent unions have been critical for the successful realization of FOA and CB. An example was the first time a majority female workforce vote at a maquila facility in Durango elected its independent union (CS 4c). In another example, female workers in Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos were involved in union organization activities and subsequently gained some leadership positions in democratic unions once employer and labor authorities recognized these unions (CS 4d).

Negative Factors: One challenging factor, according to some partners, was that it was particularly difficult for women to attend trainings outside work hours due to their home obligations and other commitments. However, these challenges were ultimately not insurmountable, with noted successful interactions with women workers (see section 3.6.3 for details on successful strategies). Cultural resistance to female leadership at the workplace and in union governance, particularly among male workers, continues. This comment from a female union delegate describes a strategy how she has dealt with it at her workplace:

“There is some resistance of some men who come from more rural areas and among the older ones, but it is not generalized. It's also a generational issue. When you talk to them, you

suddenly realize more rejection from men than from women to female workers in power. What do they tell you? That it's not fair, that she doesn't treat them well, or that she has preferences for other colleagues. So, as a delegate, I must analyze the situation and help them clarify it's not like that, no. It's just a perception, a thought, their own beliefs.” - Union delegate, Jalisco

Increased Women’s Economic Participation [SCs 4a, 4b]

Positive Factors: Factors that positively contributed to this change included:

- **ILAB projects’ intentional awareness raising on sex-based discrimination issues and training/technical assistance on entrepreneurship, and other employment skills.** ILAB project activities on awareness raising have also contributed to shifts in cultural norms. For example, EQUAL gave talks about equality between women and men in these communities to both men and women to encourage community buy-in for women’s participation in its trainings on trades, coffee production, and entrepreneurship, as well as to reduce any potential community backlash (CSs 4a, 4b). Additionally, EQUAL provided training on a variety of trades and abilities needed for entrepreneurship and further supplied some equipment for female coffee producers (CSs 4a, 4b).
- **Shifts in cultural norms about the role of women in the household.** This shift in views on women’s economic participation, as well as decision-making, in communities in Veracruz and Oaxaca has in part occurred on its own over time, and in part through ILAB’s influence, detailed above.
- **Socioeconomic factors.** Economic crises in recent years resulting from COVID-19 and climate that has impacted the price of agricultural goods, coupled with outmigration by men, has driven women in communities in Veracruz and Oaxaca to search for ways to economically diversify and/or increase the quality of their agricultural goods to increase their income potential.

Negative Factors: Cultural norms about roles of women and men posed a slight barrier to women’s economic participation in target communities. However, influenced by the socioeconomic factors and awareness-raising outlined above, this mentality has begun to shift.

“Since World Vision came, they told us we also had to know everything about coffee. Yes, we also have to know exactly everything and also to consume coffee of higher quality. Women benefit because we gain men’s respect and gain confidence in ourselves. We know what it costs to earn every penny and also to be able to share the economy between the two.” - Coffee producer, Veracruz

3.6.3. EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES SUPPORTING OUTCOMES IN ELIMINATING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Under Domain of Change 4, ILAB projects generally used home visits with female industrial workers to promote their awareness about labor rights, hosting female union leaders’ dialogue inside and outside the workplace to identify common interests and organize collective action, as well as training on trades and entrepreneurship in rural areas. These strategies contributed to building capacity at democratic unions about labor rights, in particular among female workers, and promoting the equality of women and men in the workplace. More specifically, strategies that worked in the domains of change were as follows:

- **Support and technical advice for union organizing, and direct engagement with union leaders.** In supporting workers' awareness and utilization of CB and FOA, ILAB projects were effective in providing support and technical advice for organizing workers and independent unions. This included informal conversations with organizers, awareness-raising and training for workers, and technical advice for union leaders on how to implement these rights. The effectiveness of this strategy was enhanced by adapting to circumstances, as in the case of the Border Committee of Workers (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras y Obreros, CFO, per its acronym in Spanish), a sub-awardee for the MAP project, *conducting visits to female workers' homes* to learn about labor rights violations rather than attempting this in the workplace (CS 4c). In addition to support and advice for CB and FOA, the SC2 project worked directly with organizing workers and provided training to union leaders on proportional representation by sex has also been a successful strategy to encourage increased women's leadership in unions (CS 4d).

"The first thing that CFO did was to educate and train these female workers, especially in terms of their labor rights, issues such as salaries, time off, Christmas bonus. Why? Because it was very important that they had that training; through that education and training, they were going to empower themselves and take this type of individual and collective action... to demand their rights...so, since March or April last year, we did a first approach at their homes, so that they knew about their rights, they knew about our work, and later we conducted these more formal workers trainings." - ILAB subawardee, Coahuila

- **Encouraging women's participation and leadership in union activities.** The SC3 and VZF projects worked to promote women's leadership through capacity building activities. Specifically, the project facilitated a meeting of a network of women trade unionist leaders. Participants debated issues facing women in the workplace and in their unions, including leadership responsibilities for women in unions and the need to strengthen women's trade union advocacy network.
- **Promoting the rights of both women and men in the workplace.** In recent monitoring reports, the GEM project noted the importance of their efforts to empower women workers and promote parity between female and male at workers' organizations in Jalisco. GEM gathered women workers' organization leaders and created women-dominated spaces, which enabled women to safely share their experience of sexual-based discrimination and labor rights violations. This led to the creation of concrete proposals for preventing discrimination.
- **Increasing women's economic participation.** The EQUAL project's training on trades and entrepreneurship skills for women (trades such as embroidery and baking; skills such as inventory management; and processes for high-quality coffee production) and soft skills trainings (decision-making, conflict resolution, etc.) have supported women to increase their economic participation and earnings, as well as empowering them in decision-making. The

Box 7. ILO's Vision Zero Fund: OSH & Effects on Union Female Leadership

In 2024, VZF piloted its toolkit for the identification, analysis, and prevention of psychosocial risks in the chili and tomato supply chains, a tool to comply with NOM-035-STPS-2018.

90 government officials, smallholders, employers, and workers from medium and big companies participated in the toolkit trainings.

A democratic union related to the chili and tomato supply chain embraced the toolkit and replicated it across its OSH and equality of women and men committees, highlighting the importance of a safe workplace for all.

project has also provided some equipment and material support to start their businesses or produce higher-quality coffee (CSs 4a, 4b). By the time of data collection, the percentage of participating women with increased income was below the target of 50 percent of participants. Project monitoring data reflects an increase up to 51.7 percent by October 2024, suggesting while these interventions alone have not been successful for all women, more of these participants are obtaining benefits.

“Yes, we had heard about processes to refine coffee, but we always believed that this was only for rich people, and we didn’t believe that we could make them ourselves. And the truth is, they supported us with a lot of patience and with the course they paid for us with a specialized coffee producer from Oaxaca. Although we already had notions that we had to cut only ripe grain, we had to nourish the plant, that we had to fight the drill bit, they gave us pesticides, they taught us how to make the traps, they motivated us a lot.” - Coffee producer, Veracruz

- **Inclusion of both men and women in awareness-raising.** EQUAL engaged both men and women in target communities in talks on issues of equality of women and men and their roles. This was effective both in getting women to participate in the trainings and in contributing to shifting attitudes about the role of women in these areas.

3.6.4. SCALABILITY & REPLICABILITY OF INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DOMAIN 4

Senderos utilized different modalities (e.g., pictures, text, audio) and sources (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, community radio stations) to connect with target groups. The project planned programming around the distinct needs of agricultural workers, particularly the timing of activities during harvest periods. Similarly, implementing partners stressed the importance of tailoring protocols and tools for women workers and considering the distinct time and labor constraints that women workers face. Getting women to attend programming outside of work hours was difficult, given that many women workers take on all economic and domestic responsibilities in their households.

3.6.5. LOCAL ACTORS

In Table 12, the evaluation team suggests a list of actors that ILAB’s technical assistance could engage with through a revised approach to better leverage its resources and contribute to the intended outcomes in this domain and whose contributions were captured in this analysis. ILAB could adjust its approach to these actors and institutions as it aims to leverage the efforts invested and its resources to attain intended outcomes in the next few years.

The agenda of democratic union governance, promoting parity between female and male workers, and establishing workplaces free of harassment and violence against women (Domains 1 and 4) require sustained awareness efforts among workers, as well as institutional decisions within union sections and committees. As indicated in Table 12, ILAB-funded technical assistance has a vantage point to influence the democratic decisions of recently created unions that its projects have supported, as well as a wider target of larger unions that identify with a democratic agenda of labor rights.

Table 12. Improved Engagement with Local Actors

Actor or Institution	Approach
Target Independent unions (past campaigns)	Promote creation of capacity building and training committees within recently created democratic unions. Promote union rules and “take of notice” documents* that incorporate equality principles in female and male representation in leadership.

Actor or Institution	Approach
Independent unions (e.g., SUMATE, LSOM)	Also, promote union rules and “take of notice” documents* that incorporate quality principles in female and male representation in leadership.
FCCLR	Support officials to generate union registry process guidelines for proportional representation of female and male workers.

Note: (*) In addition to union registration before the FCCLR, once a union is constituted and changes leadership, STPS must issue a “take of notice” (toma de nota) and thereby certify the election of a union organization’s leaders. For more information about this official process, please visit STPS webpage at: <https://www.gob.mx/stps/articulos/sabes-que-es-la-toma-de-nota-de-comite-directivo-de-un-sindicato?idiom=es>.

3.6.6. FUTURE PROGRAMMING RELATED TO EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AND NON-DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

The evaluation team assessed the areas of need that are relevant to ILAB’s current technical assistance, implementers’ expertise and interest. The following are areas or strategies that future programming could incorporate.

Accordingly, we suggest ILAB continue funding and coordinating capacity building and technical support activities targeting independent unions. IPs with experience working with worker organizations identified opportunities to strengthen their support to advance the labor reform principles. IPs stressed the importance of further capacity building regarding equality between female and male workers, which has fallen short in several unions since the 2019 labor reform. However, several unions of large exporting companies or representing workers at multi-site facilities will have their “taking of notice”²⁹ expiring in 2025. Many of them did not include principles such as the promotion of equality of women and men in the workplace and ensuring work environments free from discrimination and violence. ILAB’s technical assistance can take advantage of its successful experience working with unions on similar campaigns (CS 4c) to attain this goal and expand the workers’ support for a comprehensive union democracy.

3.6.7. SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES RELATED TO EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AND NON-DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

In this domain, the evaluation team also found heterogeneity in the conditions for sustainability across the outcomes documented in subsection 3.6.1. We thus classify the outcomes according to the presence of sustainability conditions in the medium or long term, or just in the short term, and explain why in each case. We also specify the strategies required from federal, state and local partners to sustain these outcomes.

Results Sustainable in the Medium- or Long-Term

The following ILAB-funded technical assistance portfolio results and outcomes related to equality and non-discrimination at work have the greatest likelihood of being sustained in the medium- to long-term:

Maintenance of independent unions, including CBAs (CS 4c). The maintenance of a maquiladora union, composed mostly by women, in Durango appears sustainable, at least in the medium term. This

²⁹ In addition to union registration before the FCCLR, once a union is constituted and changes leadership, STPS must issue a “take of notice” (toma de nota) and thereby certify the election of a union organization’s leaders. For more information about this official process, please visit STPS webpage at: <https://www.gob.mx/stps/articulos/sabes-que-es-la-toma-de-nota-de-comite-directivo-de-un-sindicato?idiom=es>.

union has filed its CBA and legitimized it before the FCCLR, so the union and its CBA terms (including any salary increases) are sustainable during the CBA validity of about two to three years (CSs 4c).

- Risks to long-term sustainability include a lack of experience among delegates to manage the union (CS 4c). Also, the longer-term sustainability of unions and their gains depends on organizing and motivation among the next generations of workers, which may require ongoing training and awareness campaigns for younger workers. In addition, the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States are set to review acceptance of the USMCA in 2026 and potentially renegotiate it. Any modifications to the terms in the RRLM could affect the ability of this mechanism to promote the respect for FOA and CBA rights that, so far, it has expedited in collaboration with the Mexican labor authorities.
- Strategies to sustain outcome. Unions must continue conducting their own training and refreshing sessions on democratic union governance and promoting the equality of women and men in the workplace and in union decisions. The following comment from a union delegate summarizes an example of these efforts:

“Involving these union committees has worked a lot for us, surveillance committees, learning committees, knowledge committees, those networks are very good. They conduct surveillance work for the union, the networking within the state-wide union is facilitating the work that we want to do with the ILO’s convention 190 to prevent and eliminate workplace sex-based violence and harassment, and Mexican norms 33 and 35 on safety and security. With this networking, we also promotes female worker participation and continue training them to take all these programs with them. It’s very good.” - Union delegate, Jalisco

Results Sustainable in the Short-Term

In contrast, there are several results that appear only sustainable in the short-term:

Increased women’s income from entrepreneurship, new trades, and expanded involvement in coffee production (CSs 4a, 4b). Although there have been some cultural shifts in communities – including increased motivation among women to participate in economic activities and men’s increased acceptance and recognition of the economic benefits of women’s participation– the long-term sustainability of increases in women’s income from these activities depends on the overall economic environment of their communities. This includes dependence of target communities on seasonal income from harvests, which compromises expendable income for new services that may be considered not essential (CSs 4a, 4b), as well as volatile market trends for coffee (CS 4b) and other commodities.

- Strategies to sustain outcome. The evaluation assessed that local capacity to sustain these changes was limited and the market preferences and volatile conditions were obstacles for participating women to become resilient to these challenges. ILAB’s technical assistance could explore alliances in the coffee sector with chambers and associations to find replicating actors who can help female producers refine market strategies, associate, and find financing for the equipment required in high quality coffee production.

Increase women’s leadership in unions (CS 4d). Sex parity in unions has legal backing in the 2019 labor reform, male leadership in some large unions has been supportive of sex parity, and some female leaders in smaller independent unions appear to be recruiting other women into their cadres. However, the sustainability of increased women’s leadership in unions appears tenuous. For some of the

independent unions, women ended up in leadership positions due to their involvement in initial organizing, and not due to union members' intrinsic support for equality between women and men. In larger multi-company unions, sustainability depends on support and commitment from current (often male) leadership, so any changes in this leadership may threaten continued advances. Additionally, the identified significant changes did not reveal any concentrated demand by workers themselves for sex parity in union leadership. It is worth noting, however, that in a small sample of 60 workers not affiliated with any union, 28 percent (17 respondents, 12 being women) ranked increasing the proportion of female workers in union representation as the most significant change across other potential benefits for unionized workers who participated in ILAB-funded technical assistance.³⁰

- Strategies to sustain outcome. As part of ILAB's technical assistance projects' approach to unions, the consolidation of the capacity built in them should incorporate contents to promote the equality of women and men in the workplace and women's participation in union leadership. These exercises should also enable unions to replicate training practice and generate communication campaigns reinforcing these messages. In a volatile union environment with incentives to backslide to anti-democratic union practices, reiterating these messages is necessary to sustain the achieved results.

3.7. DOMAIN #5 – LABOR RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT AND INSPECTIONS OF LABOR STANDARDS

Domain of Change 5 captures the outcomes related to actions, behaviors, policies, practices, or relationships of federal, state or local authorities to enforce labor rights, affect the frequency and quality of labor inspections, and improve dissemination and coordination systems to promote labor rights and OSH standards, directly or indirectly supported by ILAB-funded technical assistance.

In these pages, the evaluation team addresses similar evaluation questions as in the other four domains above, for the outcomes related to labor inspection tasks. Section 3.7.1 presents the collective outcomes identified within this domain, 3.7.2 describes factors contributing to these outcomes, 3.7.3 analyzes the effectiveness of technical assistance strategies, 3.7.4 describes scalability and replicability of ILAB interventions, 3.7.5 presents local actors that could be further engaged, 3.7.6 outlines possible future programming, and 3.7.7 addresses the sustainability of these outcomes.

3.7.1. LABOR ENFORCEMENT-RELATED OUTCOMES INFLUENCED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ILAB's technical assistance projects have contributed to positive results in enforcement-related outcomes (Domain 5) over the last four years. Table 13, below, presents the result to which ILAB technical assistance contributed to Domain 5, as well as exemplary specific significant changes for each result, as identified through MSC. The table presents the result/change and the ILAB projects whose activities address that theme (blue row), as well as the individual CSs that illustrate the change and the projects that specifically contributed to each CS (white rows). This outcome was *intended* in that it maps directly to intended long- or medium-term outcomes in the results frameworks of the projects that contributed to the CSs in this domain of enforcement and labor inspections.

³⁰ The sample of unaffiliated workers was asked to rank four identified changes according to the relevance to their work lives: 1d, 1e, 1f, and 4d. The evaluation team collected rankings for these four outcomes because, at the time of data collection with unaffiliated workers, NORC had collected enough information to prepare a causal path for each of these changes and explain contributions. The significant changes 1a, 1b and 1c emerged from data collection at a later time. For more details about the ranking please, see Section 3.3.

Table 13. Intended Outcomes Identified by MSC, Domain 5 (Labor Rights Enforcement, Inspection of Labor Standards, Dissemination, and Coordination)

Result Identified	Projects Addressing Theme
Increased efficiency and effectiveness of labor inspections.	CALLE, CAMINOS, AccioNNar, MAP, SC1 project, Senderos
CS 5a.* From 2019 to 2024, the Federal Inspectorate at the Ministry of Labor increased its collaboration with the General Direction of Statistics to promote inspection visits efficiency through technological development (AI tools).	CALLE
CS 5b. Since 2023, labor inspectors in Querétaro have made their inspections of workplaces more efficient and collaborative, improving relationships with employers.	CAMINOS, Senderos

Note: (*) These significant changes are described in detail in a separate story each in Annex G. Significant Change Stories.

Under Domain 5, the evaluation team also captured a case of no or limited change in a region with a background of worker advocacy for labor rights and OSH standards in Baja California state. According to CS Story 5c, agricultural workers have experienced violations of OSH standards in the San Quintín Valley since at least 2022, in the absence of labor inspections (see Table 14 for a summary statement and the full CS 5c story in Annex G. Significant Change Stories). This suggests that more work is needed in this region of the state to improve effectiveness of labor inspections. Projects that started working in this state whose experience could contribute to future improvements include CAMINOS, *Sustentar*, and UCJ.

Table 14. Story of No Change Identified by MSC, Domain 5

Story #	Change Statement	Contributing Projects
CS 5c*	Since 2022, labor inspection authorities in Baja California have not monitored the labor conditions at agricultural facilities in the San Quintín Valley. Former workers and community leaders denounced two exporting agricultural companies in the tomato and berry chains violated OSH standards in a region where agricultural child labor persists, and most agricultural workers ignore the rights enshrined in the 2019 labor reform.	CAMINOS, <i>Sustentar</i> , UCJ

Note: (*) These significant changes are described in detail in a separate story each in Annex G. Significant Change Stories.

The *Sustentar* and UCJ projects started outreach to local stakeholders recently and had not yet launched implementing activities in the region at the time of the evaluation. As indicated in the CS 5c story, respondents expressed complaints regarding the labor practices of an agricultural company in the San Quintín Valley after the *Sustentar* staff administered an initial training on OSH standards and labor rights mandated in the 2019 labor reform to a group of agro-export businesses, including the aforementioned company. The evaluation found that while large exporting companies in the area complied with labor rights and did not involve minors in their operations, violations and child labor practices were still present among agricultural suppliers to some of these companies. The long-standing absence of labor inspections in the area promoted the status quo of labor rights violations and lack of adherence to OSH standards among agricultural producers. Within the San Quintín Valley, the evaluation team identified an area of high-need relating to the ILAB-funded CAMINOS, *Sustentar*,

and UCI efforts. Workers in the area need both renovated support for attaining collective action and for exporting companies to be open to being more aware of responsible practices in terms of supplies and agricultural workers. Given this, future funding to promote labor rights should leverage the experience of these implementing partners working with local labor authorities, private sector and agricultural workers.

3.7.2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACTORS

Positive Factors: In this domain, the primary factors influencing the identified intended outcome – Increased Efficiency and Effectiveness of Labor Inspections [CSs 5a, 5b] – are:

- **ILAB technological support, training, and process review.** ILAB projects worked closely with federal and state entities to support the reported results in Domain 5. A key area of support was technology – this included promoting internal collaboration between STPS offices –UDT and the Direction of Labor Research and Statistics– and developing or supporting the development of technological tools, such as CALLE’s support for creating SIDIL (as described in Story 5a), an AI tool that facilitates communication among the different databases to identify noncompliance probabilities. Additionally, ILAB projects have reviewed operational processes, systems, procedures, and manuals for state-level inspection authorities, subsequently helping to develop or update them. For example, CAMINOS provided the Querétaro ST with guidance on creating simple Excel sheets to house private employer information and updated procedural manuals and has also begun to provide training to inspectors (CS 5b).
- **Commitment of federal and state governments.** The commitment and efforts of federal and state entities have been critical to strengthening capacity and improving efficiency.
 - Within Domain 5, federal and state inspection authorities –as well as the labor inspectors themselves– have been critical in increasing efficiency at the national level (CS 5a) and a group of states (CS 5b). For example, in response to changes in staffing and reduced resources, STPS developed and implemented a federal labor inspection policy that prioritized labor inspections at companies with the highest probability of non-compliance with labor standards and higher occupational risk (see story CS 5a in Annex G. Significant Change Stories for details). To do this, STPS improved its Inspection Process Support (SIAPI) database and signed agreements with other government entities, including the National Social Security Institute (IMSS), the Institute of the National Housing Fund for Workers (INFONAVIT), and the federal tax authority (SAT) to share their databases.
 - At the state level, the labor inspection teams in the Querétaro ST have been open and invested in changing their approach to working with employers, contributing to a more collaborative relationship (CS 5b).
- **Labor reform.** The 2019 labor reform and subsequent reforms have provided the context and legal backing in which many of these changes have taken place.

Negative Factors: In contrast, the main factors that have negatively impacted the effectiveness of labor inspections are:

- **Limited state resources and buy-in.** The Baja California ST has limited financial and staff resources (10 inspectors), which are not enough to sufficiently cover the large geographic area of the state. Furthermore, the inspectors in this state do not appear to have as much interest in changing their relationship with employers to be more collaborative, in comparison with the inspectors in the Querétaro ST (CS 5b). Some validation workshop participants also noted that there may be

collusion between inspectors and employers in some cases in Baja California, with inspectors warning employers to remove children from the premises prior to inspection, for example. Constraints in financial and logistical resources for labor inspections are not only present in Baja California. Several teams of labor inspectors in Baja California Sur, Coahuila and the State of Mexico reported similar conditions to the evaluation team, limiting their ability to disseminate information on labor rights and conducting their work with quality:

“That labor reform information can’t arrive to those areas in San Quintin Valley or in our own state and we can’t defend labor rights in the communities in general because of the same lack of resources, because of the same staff shortages. Why? Because being so limited in vehicles, fuel, travel expenses, in all that, then obviously we focus on getting the job done, the one with the highest priority, the ones that already comes to complain, the one with larger political stakes, the one that has a large economic impact and then we discriminate by not attending to the least.” (Labor inspector, State of Mexico).

- **Project timing.** While the CAMINOS project has started training inspectors to improve their practices in Queretaro, it may be too early to see results (CS 5b).

As to the situation of the San Quintin Valley, the ILAB-funded technical assistance had just started exploratory work setting the foundations to launch implementation with local actors. *Sustentar* and *UCJ* are still at early stages of implementation to capture contributions to any changes. However, the evaluation identified important challenges for the advocacy and observance of labor rights in the San Quintin Valley on which ILAB’s technical assistance, including these both projects and CAMINOS could work coordinately to frame conditions for institutional and workplace change in the San Quintin Valley.

3.7.3. EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES SUPPORTING OUTCOMES IN IMPROVING THE LABOR INSPECTION SERVICES

ILAB-funded projects supporting the outcomes in Domain 5 utilized software expertise to develop an AI solution that informed data-driven targeting of federal labor inspection, as well as training and technical support. Training and accompaniment to build capacity of state-level inspectors has also received appraisal among participants. More specifically, strategies that worked in the domains of change were as follows:

- **Digitization and provision of digital tools and platforms.** ILAB projects have supported efficiency in STPS offices at the federal and state levels through support for the provision of digital tools, technical assistance and training on how to use and update the tools and platforms. For example, *CALLE* supported the development of the *SIDIL* platform for the federal STPS (CS 5a) and *CAMINOS* provided guidance to the Querétaro ST on creating Excel sheets for managing sensitive or confidential information about cases (CS 5b). These technological advances have supported more efficient STPS labor inspections at the federal level and in some states.

“In 2020, the head of the Labor Inspection Directorate (UDT) called me and told me ‘I need you to do this precision shots for me to be able to find subcontracting practices.’ When he told me that, I felt that I had been assigned a task worthy of Hercules because the national job survey does not capture economic units. Shortly after, he told me that they had secured funds from USDOL and were going to contract assistance for it. For legal reasons, we could not provide the databases to AIR, but we gave them a sample with fictitious data to develop the R code. And we have reviewed it in-house, a work of chipping stone. The result was a

very robust and complex product, all in R. It predicts the probability of identifying risks for each sub-subject of labor inspection. After much cleaning, it was left in a registry of 350,400 work centers for which they have identified inspections.” (Staff member, Federal Ministry of Labor).

- **Review/evaluation of systems, processes, and procedures, including job profiles and recruiting.** ILAB projects have also conducted reviews of internal state-level labor court and LCC systems and processes, providing feedback to improve their functioning. For instance, CALLE supported the federal STPS’s development of an inspection protocol to eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation and promote equality of women and men in the workplace (CS 5a), and CAMINOS helped the Querétaro ST update its procedural manuals (CS 5b). This comment from an employer in Querétaro, referred through the state inspectorate, expresses satisfaction with a labor inspection they witnessed:

“The ones we saw were really well done, actually spectacular. The inspectors adjusted their approach to interviewing the workers, they got really engaged. They went to the ranches, all in. They checked where we complied with what the law. They spent about four hours there talking to the workers, touring around in vans all the ranches, pointing out if something was missing, if we complied. I saw then the inspection was really well done and even on the spot they could notice what we had, what we didn’t have. Inspectors were really good telling us the procedures for the collective contract that had to be registered before the Federal Center. They seemed really savvy.” (Employer, Querétaro State)

3.7.4. SCALABILITY & REPLICABILITY OF INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DOMAIN 5

This section addresses what project strategies or interventions should be scaled up or replicated. For each strategy, we highlight the actors that participants and the evaluation team identified with the potential to scale up or replicate the strategies.

Overall, ILAB should scale up strategies that strengthen judicial institutions and processes, raise awareness of labor rights within communities, and generate structural or institutional change. Strategies to be adopted with context adaptations include tailoring programming and the communication to the unique needs of target groups (e.g., women workers, agricultural workers, migrant workers, indigenous workers). Finally, strategies that do not consider the preferences, needs and input of target groups should be curtailed.

ILAB should consider scaling up or replicating strategies and interventions to achieve the following five goals:

Strengthening labor inspection processes

As mentioned previously, CAMINOS provided technical assistance and training for labor inspections to Querétaro ST, improving labor inspection efficiency and effectiveness (CS 5b). Potential actors who could scale up or replicate the strategies include each state-level inspectorate, dependent on the State Ministries of Labor. The inspectorates have the mandate to advance the labor reform through the enforcement of labor rights.³¹ However, as the ENLACE project has reported, each state faces funding

³¹ According to Article 123 of the Mexican Constitution, clause XXXI, implementing the labor laws, including inspections and enforcement of labor rights, corresponds to the state-level authorities, of their respective jurisdictions, except for certain industries, topics, and at certain facilities. The industries exclusive of federal jurisdictions are the following: textile, electrical, cinematography, rubber, sugar mills, mining,

and institutional capacity restrictions that limit their ability to promote quality of inspections, innovation and effective coverage. As CAMINOS continues its implementation in eight states through August 2027, the evaluation team was not able to identify any state-level inspectorates that could replicate these professionalization efforts in the absence of ILAB funding.

3.7.5. LOCAL ACTORS RELATED TO ENFORCEMENT AND INSPECTION

In Table 15, as displayed for each domain of change above, the evaluation team suggests a list of actors that ILAB's technical assistance could engage with through a revised approach to better leverage its resources and contribute to its intended outcomes. These actors and institutions to whom ILAB could adjust its approach as it aims to leverage the efforts invested and its resources to attain intended outcomes in the next few years.

Table 15. Improved Engagement with Local Actors

Actor or Institution	Approach
Deepen Partnership with Labor Inspectorates	
STPS-UDT	Preserve the collaborative approach of ILAB's technical assistance, especially in a volatile political environment in the bilateral relationship. Consult UDT officials on the convenience of assessing technical capacity and any need for training refreshment and other technical assistance after the end of CALLE's implementation. Maintain a close relationship with federal UDT on the CAMINOS project's progress, successes and challenges.
State-level inspectorates	Capitalize on the trust built through the current approach to strengthen labor authorities' commitment to secure resources necessary to attain the intended outcomes (e.g., inspection vehicles, IT equipment, competitive salaries, among others).

Finally, the evaluation did not identify any additional actors to engage with under the professionalization and strengthening of the labor inspections system (Domain 5). However, the lessons from the CALLE and CAMINOS projects and the IPs' reflections suggest the need for deepening the ILAB technical assistance team's relationships with leadership at federal inspections directorate and state-level Ministries of Labor. The evaluation proposes that ILAB technical assistance engages with these institutions and share the results of CAMINOS's capacity building and technical assistance across states so far, being receptive to feedback and able to nimbly adapt the project's delivery to align to the federal and state-level Ministries' own objectives. This approach requires an intensive exchange with government counterparts to promote institutional coordination between government levels, as well as collaboration and sharing of experiences and lessons between local inspectorates.

metallurgical and steel, hydrocarbons, petrochemical, cement, lime, automotive, chemistry, pharmaceutical, pulp and paper, vegetable oils and fats, food processing, beverages production, railroad, and basic timber, stained glass, tobacco, and banking and credit services. Enterprises under federal jurisdiction are those administered directly or decentralized by the Federal Government; those acting under a federal contract or concession and related industries; and those that carry out work in federal zones or that are under federal jurisdiction, in territorial waters or in those included in the country's exclusive economic zone. Federal authorities have jurisdiction over the following labor areas: the registration of all collective bargaining agreements and trade union organizations, as well as all related administrative processes; the application of labor provisions in matters related to conflicts that affect two or more states; collective agreements that have been declared mandatory in more than one state; employers' obligations in educational matters, under the terms of the law; and obligations of employers in terms of training and training of their workers, as well as safety and hygiene in the workplace (OSH), for which the federal authorities will have the assistance of the state authorities, in the case of branches or activities of local jurisdiction, under the terms of the corresponding law.

3.7.6. FUTURE PROGRAMMING RELATED TO DOMAIN 5

The evaluation team assessed the areas of need in which ILAB's technical assistance was relevant, as well as the projects' expertise and the implementation partners' interest in suggesting the following areas or strategies that future programming could incorporate.

Organization of agricultural workers and incorporation into formal economy. ILAB and IP participants showed interest in working in an unexplored area for this technical assistance, to provide technical support to agricultural laborers to organize themselves in collectives, and state-level labor inspectorates to generate relations of deeper trust to collaborate with employers in enforcing OSH standards and labor rights.

A collaborative and multi-pronged approach is essential for such an enterprise to respond to the complex context of implementation in any site. The coordinated purpose would impact agricultural workers, federal (depending on the agricultural sector) and state labor authorities, and agricultural producers and companies. First, such a plan should leverage worker organizations' capacity to advocate for their labor rights, bargain with employers, and implement compliance with OSH standards. Second, for labor inspectorates, technical assistance would emphasize a collaborative approach to incentivize agricultural companies and small producers to learn more about OSH and find strategies to comply. Third, an intervention outcome should aim to create incentives for employers to offer and laborers to engage in formal work. Any future technical assistance, involving a group of implementing organizations, should consider the lessons learned from the *Senderos* and FOH projects and capitalize from their long experience working with coffee, sugar and tobacco producers in Oaxaca, Veracruz and Jalisco. They adapted through tailor-made strategies to the challenges and burdens that on the one side, indigenous and migrant agricultural workers, and on the other, small agricultural producers, faced to participate in formal labor relations. The interventions' knowledge of different sizes of agricultural producers and their markets enables these organizations to work with them to find affordable solutions to incentivize them to offer formal job agreements to agricultural workers and fair practices to prevent occupational illness and accidents.

As of September 2024, 86 percent of all agricultural workers in Mexico belonged to the informal workforce (about 2.73 million workers and mostly men)³², a figure that highlights the need for strategies to incentivize agricultural workers to organize and for authorities to tax them and assume the mandate to monitor and enforce labor rights of agricultural workers. Additionally, as mentioned in section 3.2.6, agricultural companies and their suppliers should comply with their legal obligations to provide written labor contracts and benefits to workers, and restraining from practices that harm workers, such as violation of OSH standards, using child labor, wage suppression, roll-over payment deductions to pay for cash advances, and payment in kind. Two results captured in this evaluation are concrete examples of how necessary the organization of agricultural laborers is in the target supply chains – chili, coffee, sugar, tobacco and tomato. First, a positive outcome in the demands for OSH measures that agricultural workers in the sugarcane supply chain recently started making (CS 1c) still depends on the companies' and agricultural suppliers' willingness to comply. Second, the absence of labor inspections and enforcement in the San Quintin Valley (CS 5c). Overall, IPs agreed that such a collaborative and multi-pronged approach would be an unprecedented effort of technical assistance and expressed interest in a collaborative effort if funded by ILAB or any other donor.

³² Government of Mexico (2024). Workers in Agriculture. Ministry of Economy. Available at: <https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/en/profile/occupation/trabajadores-en-actividades-agricolas?typeJob1=informalOption>.

Scale up support for state inspectorates. Given the success of CALLE and CAMINOS in terms of stakeholder buy-in and satisfaction with training, AIR believes it possible and recommendable to scale up activities with state-level inspectors in states not covered by those projects. By onboarding additional labor inspectorates, the presence of a program like CAMINOS in each state opens the gate to other key actors in the labor system, especially exporting companies in target sectors. The evaluation's fieldwork with unaffiliated workers and target agricultural communities suggests the following state candidates to expand CAMINOS's coverage: Guanajuato, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sonora, and Veracruz.

3.7.7. SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES IN ENFORCEMENT OF LABOR RIGHTS AND INSPECTION OF LABOR STANDARDS

The outcomes supported by the ILAB-funded technical assistance projects and identified in this domain of change (see Table 13) are likely to be sustained in the medium- to long-term.

Efficiencies and collaboration of labor inspections at federal level and Querétaro state level (CSs 5a, 5b). Efficiencies in inspections at the federal level are likely to continue due to the institutionalization of its new policy, as well as recently hired staff with statistical skills who can continue to improve the targeted use of information to maintain a high rate of labor inspection completion (CS 5a). ILAB-funded technical assistance acted as a catalyst for institutional learning, as illustrated in the following comment:

“With the information generated by SIDIL, they calculate the probabilities of labor violations. Once they get to it, there is also a work of chipping stone. There was an acquisition of knowledge, because the UDT team had to learn R from scratch and today they handle it well, ough? They can do more, and they have incorporated the SIDIL data into each of the different processes that they do and learn. It has helped innovate and, renew what is done at the Labor Inspectorate.” (Staff member, Federal Ministry of Labor).

The picture is more complicated at the Querétaro ST, however (CS 5b). Here, the change in inspectors' outlook about their relationship with employers is likely to be sustained, as it represents a shift in mentality and has improved interactions with employers –although maintenance of this relationship is also dependent on continued employer receptiveness and cooperation. However, while state-level inspectors in Querétaro appear committed in the medium-term to maintaining efficient and quality inspections, limited human, material, and financial resources – few inspectors, poor-quality cars, no financial or logistical support for inspectors' travel, one shared tablet, and low salaries – pose significant risks to longer-term sustainability.

- **Strategies to sustain outcome.** In addition to the CAMINOS project's programmed technical assistance, the evaluation identified additional needs for sustained effectiveness of labor inspections. These included poor transportation and logistical resources for inspector deployment, low salaries, and limited technological tools at the state level. Improving these conditions is necessary to capitalize on the change in attitude and commitment that CAMINOS is building among local inspectors with their practice.

The preceding sections 3.1 through 3.5 describe results specific to the domains of change used for the MSC process. However, several evaluation questions do not map directly to a specific domain. In part, this is because the domains were largely selected to align with actor groups – workers (Domain 1), employers (Domain 2), local and federal conciliation centers and labor courts (Domain 3), and labor

inspectories (Domain 5) – as well as one domain focusing on equality between men and women in the workplace (Domain 4). While many EQs allowed for a domain-by-domain analysis, other EQ themes were more cross-cutting or did not speak specifically to any domain. Three remaining EQs are covered in the following sections: shifting ILAB’s technical assistance strategies to support its goals in a changing landscape (3.8), overall factors and obstacles to ILAB’s goals (3.9), and the capability of ILAB programs to adapt (3.10).

3.8. SHIFTING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES TO FURTHER ADVANCE LABOR RIGHTS

To further advance labor law reform and labor rights in Mexico, implementing projects should shift to or adopt project strategies that develop a thorough understanding of the landscape of local actors and institutions and target individuals and activities that are less impacted by political changes. More specifically, the evaluation team suggests the following strategies to ILAB and its team of implementing partners:

Continue developing a thorough understanding of the landscape of local actors and institutions and strategically engage with them. To advance labor law reform and labor rights in Mexico, existing projects need to continue studying the landscape of local actors and institutions who directly or indirectly impact project outcomes. This monitoring of external actors and dynamics – factors that are sensitive to complexity – does not need to be permanent and must be revised frequently to capture the information on enabling factors and mitigate obstacles when necessary. For example, success in impacting female workers’ participation in labor unions depended on GEM programming’s identification of and strategic engagement with key political actors, who facilitated and promoted desired changes in equality between women and men and female representation at unions (Domain 4). Similarly, understanding and engaging with different profiles of local judicial institutions at the state level was an important aspect of strengthening and professionalization of labor justice and conciliation systems (Domain 3). For example, the OBSERVAR project found that a streamlined process to register labor and union documents between states required engagement with local courts to keep records in a repository. In contrast, LCCs have different registration criteria that make the records unreconcilable within a single registration repository.

Target individuals and activities that are less likely to be impacted by political cycles of change in the public administration. Overall, IPs and subawardees agreed that actors that maintain their role across political cycles are more effective targets of technical assistance for capacity building and institutional development over time. Examples of these actors include:

- *Domain 1* – Local community committees, target community school principals.
- *Domain 2* – Local production committees where private sector and agricultural producers are represented, local chapters of manufacturing and industrial associations, such as the national cluster system or REDCAM.
- *Domain 3* – CONACENTROS as a potential coordinator of the national conciliation strategy and repository of knowledge, the new management body of the Federal Judiciary – the Judicial Administration Body (OAJ).
- *Domain 4* – Private sector associations, female worker organizations and collectives of female local rural producers.
- *Domain 5* – The changes in this domain are encompassed within the sphere of governmental capacity and the heads of the labor inspectorates are subject to political cycles. However, the evaluation found that the results from capacity building efforts targeting federal and state-level

labor inspectors remain in the inspectorates' practice as long as these teams receive the salary and equipment necessary to implement thorough and collaborative inspections.

Reflecting on the sustainability of changes, IPs suggested that workers and employers, in addition to unions, should receive training to ensure that programming impacts remain even when union leadership changes (CS 1b). IPs also mentioned that worker organizations and other actors advocating for labor rights need training and technical support to use some of the recently created platforms to advance the labor reform, especially the RIRL. While many projects are working with individuals that are in a vantage point to promote sustainability, it is important for all technical assistance to consider turnover among stakeholders – including, but not limited to, union leadership – and sustainability when designing trainings and identifying participants. To mitigate loss of program impacts due to changes in decision-makers, TECLAB renewed its efforts to sustainably build local court capacities through creating and implementing technological tools, procedural changes at judiciary branches, and training local personnel (CS 3c). Lastly, GEM worked with both unionized and non-unionized women workers so that improvements to the equality between women and men remain at the workplace, regardless of workers' leadership or labor association status.

3.9. FACTORS AND OBSTACLES TO INTENDED OUTCOMES

In this section, the evaluation team analyzes more in-depth factors and obstacles to attain high-level outcomes, including the perspectives of non-affiliated workers.

Enabling Factor: Increased knowledge of labor rights facilitated positive changes within the labor landscape

- Increased awareness among workers and employers: Unaffiliated workers reported that workers and employers became more cognizant of OSH practices thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing overall awareness of labor rights. With increased awareness of labor rights, workers are better able to hold companies accountable in providing expected social and fiscal protection. For example, workers in Hermosillo, Sonora are more aware that they can verify how their employment is registered with the IMSS. If a company underreports the salaries of its employees, they receive less disability (should they get injured or sick due to their employment) and a lower retirement pension. This greater awareness among workers has disincentivized companies from lying to workers about registration status and salaries. Reportedly, some companies advertise “*we register 100% of your salary with the Social Security Institute (IMSS)*” to attract and retain talent. Like CS 1c and CS 2a, greater awareness enables positive changes in working culture and corporate behavior. Similarly, increased awareness of labor rights among migrant agricultural communities in Veracruz and Oaxaca has helped shift cultural norms around child labor for workers and employers (CS 1a). Also, through the SC2 project campaigns and MAP's associated strategies, ILAB-funded technical assistance has crafted messages to raise more in-depth awareness of stories and concepts associated to the rights enshrined in the reform.
- Changes in union leadership and CBAs that affect company-union relations: The achievement of democratic unionization and ratifying CBAs negotiated by new independent unions provide legal protections to these unions and workers. For instance, the adoption and negotiation under a CBA of a long-term protocol to protect female workers from sexual violence at the workplace (CS 2c) sets a precedent in the automotive industry that the company's union endorses but could be replicated in other companies in the same sector. These efforts have

become more likely through an increase among female workers who have participated in ILAB-funded training on leadership and promotion of equality of women and men in the workplace. For example, the preparation of worker leaders and the election of an independent union at a maquila company by female workers in Durango (CS 4c) constitute a case in which workers have been able to use the legal instruments enshrined in the labor reform to exercise their FOA and CB rights and obtain benefits from these processes. Such legal instruments include fair and transparent elections protected by FCCLR rules, the ability for a union to become exclusive bargaining agent, and CBA ratification.

- Increased awareness within institutions: Institutionally, greater awareness of labor rights among government agencies and unions helped facilitate improvements in protocols within workplaces and more efficient labor inspection processes. For instance, CAMINOS' diploma course (training) for labor inspectors on the 2019 labor reform improved labor inspection efficiency and collaboration with employers (CS 5b). Staff from CAMINOS' implementing organization commented that inspections became collaborative rather than punitive, fundamentally changing relations between businesses and inspectors and increasing inspection efficiency.

Overall, increased knowledge of labor rights enabled positive changes in the labor rights environment; if maintained, awareness-raising activities could continue to positively impact this landscape.

Limiting Factor: Short support from employers in the private sector and insufficient government resources may limit desired labor rights changes in Mexico

In contrast, one of the main restricting factors is the continuous isolation of a considerable proportion of workers. This evaluation had the opportunity to talk to a small sample of 60 non-affiliated industrial workers in the automotive and textile sectors. This group expressed the most daunting challenges to claiming their rights to FOA and CBA and union transparency: their isolation and the limited resources (time, money, and social structures) to consider investing time to organize with other workers. This limiting factor interacts with insufficient and inadequate state-provided infrastructure and services in the localities where respondent workers live.

- Insufficient public services and employer due diligence: Perspectives from unaffiliated workers revealed that in addition to the presence of inadequate public services, such as transportation and affordable housing close to work, some companies do not engage in responsible employer practices due to deficits in capacity or interest. This passes on the costs of local resource gaps to workers. For instance, non-affiliated workers in Cuautla, Morelos described how the lack of company-provided transportation makes it difficult and costly for workers to safely travel to and from work. The insufficiency of the role of employers as facilitators of better conditions for their workers in urban and industrial areas contrast with the positive health and safety improvements in the sugar industry examples in target areas of Oaxaca and Veracruz, described in CS 1c, and the advancements in agricultural corporate social responsibility (CSR) described in CS 1a. Nonetheless, given that efforts of CSR have been advanced to different degrees across the country, implementing partner staff from *Sustentar* acknowledged that small companies may struggle to incorporate CSR due to a lack of replicable models and insufficient resources to implement programs and policies (as was an issue in CS 2d). For example, one company staff member may be tasked with spearheading an entire company's CSR initiative. ILAB's technical assistance could be a beacon for promoting and guiding the interest of companies that would like to positively affect the lives of their workers. ILAB's

implementation partners have expertise in working with diverse sizes of companies and sectors. According to non-affiliated workers though, the main challenges are around the industrial clusters in Sonora, Coahuila and San Luis Potosi, where they reported the transportation, mobility, and infrastructure challenges to be more burdensome.

- Inadequate public services: Unaffiliated workers from Cuautla, Morelos also reported that underdeveloped municipal infrastructure and public services (e.g., a dearth of public transportation options, road shortages, drain problems, and unlit streets) makes commuting dangerous and expensive. For these workers, in the absence of CSR and adequate government services, as captured in this comment from a non-unionized worker in the auto parts sector: *“the costs of everything are paid by the workers.”*

Regardless of capacity, employers’ inadequate due diligence and insufficient government investment in public services (i.e., public transportation, affordable housing) exacerbate one another and limit desired changes within the labor rights landscape. If these inhibiting factors are not addressed, future positive changes in the labor landscape may be undermined.

Limiting Factor: Workers’ limited awareness about labor rights

Consistently, evaluation respondents agreed that most agricultural and manufacturing workers throughout the country continue registering knowledge gaps and, in many cases, resistance or discomfort with the labor rights explicitly enshrined since the labor reform. For instance, social media influencers that worked with MAP, union lawyers participating in Solidarity Center campaigns, and even worker leaders of recently organized unions described the immense lack of knowledge among industrial workers of legal provisions to gain access to exercise FOA and CBA. Probably more problematic were the instances in which workers have resisted training or organization efforts for fear of retaliation from employers or to be perceived as ungrateful for the work companies provide to workers, as these workers share a paternalistic mental model, inherited from generations in Mexican labor relations.

The lack of knowledge about labor rights is more pronounced in agricultural areas, where an economic system that has privileged the labor relations individually between employer and workers, has allowed employers to take advantage, in multiple instances, of workers’ economic need for work, compromising them financially through loans and low wages and engaging them in informal work agreements. This results in disadvantages, isolation, and violation of workers’ legal rights to minimum wages, overtime, and benefits. While the demand for enforcement and respect of labor rights must be driven by workers, gaps in information and trust in the authority continue to limit the extension of democratic labor organization and respect for labor rights, both in the exporting sector and throughout the manufacturing and agricultural industries.

Limiting Factor: Volatile Markets and Socioeconomic Conditions in Rural Communities

In times of lower incomes – which is not uncommon for agricultural communities who depend on the income from seasonal harvests to sustain them throughout the year– community members are less likely to spend expendable income at nonessential businesses. The EQUAL project’s efforts to promote women’s entrepreneurship in beauty salons, for instance, may be vulnerable to these substitution effects from a lower income. Although the skills training allows women to find employment in these activities in addition to opening their own businesses, this external socioeconomic factor remains a challenge.

Some women also noted that trade skills require constant updating and training, and high-quality coffee production requires expensive equipment; many cannot afford the time and financial investments (CSs 4a, 4b). Additionally, the volatility of coffee prices poses a challenge for female coffee producers, who would need reliable access to higher-paying markets (CS 4b).

Limiting Factor: Scarce Resources for State-Level Labor Inspectors to Conduct Visits

As discussed in Section 3.7, state level inspectors in Queretaro and other target states of ILAB-funded technical assistance (the CAMINOS project) face considerable restrictions in equipment, technical resources, and income for inspectors. These conditions have concrete consequences in their inability to visit the totality of their states, develop efficient strategies to select companies, and conduct the visits with scrutiny and adherence to standards, among others. The example found by the evaluation team in San Quintin, Baja California, reinforces this description.

3.10. ADAPTABILITY OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In the areas in which the technical assistance has reached maturity of implementation, some interventions have demonstrated flexibility and adaptability, particularly for strategies that engaged diverse local actors and generated user buy-in. Examples include the *Fields of Hope* (FOH) and team adapting training, technical assistance and the types of protective equipment provided for sugarcane workers in Oaxaca and Veracruz, according to workers' preferences and needs in the fields. In the labor conciliation area, ENLACE's digital and technical support to LCCs adapted its approach in Nuevo León to modify the tracking and notification platforms in Nuevo León according to institutional needs.

Barriers to overall technical assistance adaptability include external factors like changes in decision makers at local institutions, personnel at companies, and market factors.

Technical assistance contributions to changes that successfully received and adapted to new feedback and shifting contexts shared similar characteristics:

- **Engagement with local actors:** The MAP project connected with LCCs through CONACENTROS to provide more information about the LCCs' functions to workers and unions (related to CS 3b). However, imminent cuts in government budgets threaten the sustainability of this work. In response to this shifting context, MAP has adopted a strategy of expanded engagement with local actors to create synergies between organizations. MAP worked with journalists to promote research on labor conciliation issues and connected with law schools to expose graduates to the new labor justice system. Similarly, AccioNNar strategically identified and engaged with local actors to implement a strategy against commercial sexual exploitation related to tourism in Quintana Roo. Aligned with the ILAB-funded technical assistance portfolio's work on labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination (Domain 5), AccioNNar identified "local allies" (nonprofits, authorities, and labor rights advocates against sexual exploitation) with similar interests to build synergies and implement a context-specific strategy.
- **Generation of internal buy-in:** Staff from Partners of the Americas (PoA) reported that their nascent programming related to the promotion of equality of women and men in the workplace and workplace safety for female workers (Domain 4) and negotiations with unions "awakened" interest in developing protocols against violence and the formation of sex-equality committees. PoA strategically generated buy-in from internal actors by engaging with both unions and employers and targeting institutional-level changes. Similarly, the *Senderos* and FOH projects

demonstrated proper use of safety equipment, showing sugarcane workers who had previously been resistant to using safety equipment its benefits (CS 2b). This demonstration was “the hook” that helped create internal buy-in among workers, contributing to their increased demand for OSH measures from their employers. Staff of both projects also provided agricultural communities in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Nayarit with training on labor rights and OSH measures, including the use of appropriate clothing and protective equipment (CSs 1c, 2b). In the case of FOH, workers provided feedback that the equipment initially provided was uncomfortable and obstructive, so the project changed the type of equipment provided.

- **Responsiveness to institutional needs.** The technical assistance also opened ears to the needs of new local institutions as their officials advanced the labor reform. The contributions documented in CS 3b – adaptations to SIGNO and SINACOL platforms – are an example of the intervention’s flexibility to adopt tailor-made approaches of technical assistance. First, staff from the ENLACE project have adapted the SINACOL settings to help LCCs attain their goals. The MSC strategy captured in detail the experience in Nuevo Leon, where ENLACE helped the LCC modify certain standard set-ups in SINACOL. These adaptations allowed the LCC staff to assign conciliators to different courtrooms, according to institutional needs. Second, project staff also responded to local needs by improving the SIGNO platform to assign predetermined zones to an LCC notification agent in Nuevo León, rather than random addresses, increasing their efficiency.

External factors that may limit the technical assistance’s ability to adapt to shifting contexts include:

- **Changes in decision-makers and personnel in government:** TECLAB staff stated that advances in judicial reform among local courts may be threatened by changes in federal and local judges (CS 3c). As discussed in EQ4, TECLAB staff is renewing efforts to build the capacity of local courts, so they take ownership of training programs, technological tools and procedural changes. Nonetheless, these efforts are still vulnerable to expected changes in the upcoming laws and regulations to elect judges and personnel turnover. The CALLE implementing organization also expressed concerns about the sustainability of the progress in federal labor inspections (CS 5a), given the limited number of personnel at the STPS with the technical knowledge to oversee the changes stipulated in the labor reform. Similarly, these efforts are not fully institutionalized yet, and therefore their progress is vulnerable to changes in personnel.
- **Market factors:** Prices for agricultural products will continue to be an external challenge to attain the goals of the *Sustentar* project. SAI staff commented that the price of chiles remains unchanged, while producers bear increasing production costs. Currently, collaboration between producer organizations and other relevant bodies to increase prices is not occurring and businesses are not incentivized to consider the high production costs that small producers bear. These market realities particularly hurt small-scale producers with limited technology and minimal margins. As such, these conditions also limit the project’s ability to provide incentives for small producers to shift their strategies in terms of OSH standards and social responsibility in a way that is affordable for these businesses.
- **Volatile coffee prices:** The volatility of coffee prices limits the EQUAL project’s ability to adapt and expand its range of services for coffeemakers to sustain their production. This volatility poses a challenge for female coffee producers, who need reliable access to higher paying markets. Furthermore, some women noted that high-quality coffee production requires

expensive equipment they cannot or prefer not to buy considering it a risky investment. Overall, high production costs and low input prices limit the technical assistance's ability to adapt to shifting contexts. Careful attention to these facilitating and inhibiting factors can help ILAB's implementing partners adapt their project interventions and plan ahead as contexts continue to shift and they receive additional feedback from participants and other stakeholders.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation results and learnings were obtained and interpreted through five domains of change that cover the breadth of ILAB's technical assistance. We use the same structure to frame the conclusions as follows.

4.1. DOMAIN OF CHANGE 1 – WORKER ADVOCACY OF LABOR RIGHTS

Significant changes include reduced child labor and increased demand for OSH measures in sugarcane and coffee-producing communities in Jalisco, Nayarit, Oaxaca and Veracruz. The legal recognition of new democratic unions and their role in collective bargaining also marked a major shift. Independent union leaders, nonprofits, and small agricultural producers ranked the formation of independent unions and child labor reduction as the most significant changes. However, consulted unaffiliated workers valued union transparency and control over member dues the most. ILAB's technical assistance supported USMCA labor priorities, including freedom of association, collective bargaining, and acceptable working conditions. Effective strategies involved culturally competent OSH interventions, trust-building, direct worker engagement, financial and logistical aid for unions, and media campaigns on labor rights. The changes positively impacted child workers, migrant laborers, and female household heads. While the 18 new democratic unions show potential for sustainability, their success depends on collecting member dues. Although the significant changes linked to ILAB-funded technical assistance are important as evidence of contribution to outcomes, the overall impact in union democracy and the implementation of OSH standards is limited when considering the low unionization rates countrywide (Figure 8 above), migrant worker mobility across communities and states, and the low capacity of smaller producers to monitor and comply with some of these standards. Additionally, child labor reduction and OSH demands remain vulnerable to labor market shifts. ILAB could leverage its experience with unions to boost women's representation in decision-making and include traditionally underrepresented workers in labor rights advocacy and negotiations.

4.2. DOMAIN OF CHANGE 2 – PRIVATE SECTOR LABOR PRACTICES

Significant changes include increased income and workforce participation among female household heads in rural areas of Veracruz and Oaxaca without compromising childcare responsibilities. Other key developments include a long-term protocol to prevent violence and harassment against women at an automotive company, and business preparation for labor reform compliance. Validators in this domain considered the establishment of a sugar mill's corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit in Veracruz to prevent child labor and protect sugarcane cutters, as well as the creation of a sustainable program to prevent sexual harassment in an automotive company in SLP as the most significant changes. While small in scale, both changes are concrete and have comprised transformations in institutional policies and relations between employers and workers. The evaluation identified these good practices and recommended to follow up on the other implementation sites where ILAB-funded supported similar changes, to adapt and scale up to other relevant industries, including agriculture and the automotive sector. Respondents reported the resulting mechanism to prevent sexual harassment at the target automotive company has caused changes between women and men in the workplace. This shift describes a change that also belongs to Domain 4 "Eliminating Discrimination in Employment and Occupation and Promoting Equality of Women and Men in the Workplace" but the evaluation maintained it in Domain 2 due to the implementing partner's focus. These outcomes align with USMCA labor priorities by promoting workplace equality and freedom from violence, threats, and intimidation. As described above, ILAB projects contributed to better labor rights protections for child

workers in agricultural communities, domestic migrant workers, female automotive workers, and female migrant laborers. The sexual violence prevention program's integration into the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) ensures sustainability. However, increased female incomes through entrepreneurship and new trades may lack long-term viability due to market conditions. Efforts to enhance small agricultural businesses' social responsibility should adapt to producers' capabilities and labor conditions.

4.3. DOMAIN OF CHANGE 3 – NEW LABOR JUSTICE AND CONCILIATION SYSTEMS

Significant changes valued most highly by participants in this evaluation include the RIRL, a public repository for CBAs and labor relations documents (union registrations, CBAs, internal union regulations/statutes/by-laws, etc.), enhanced notification and tracking systems for Nuevo Leon's Labor Conciliation Center (LCC) (see Box 6 for full breadth of ENLACE services), updated job profiles for labor court candidates in the State of Mexico, and institutional protocols for labor conciliation career service for LCCs. Validators considered the launch of the FCCLR's Labor Registry Information Repository (RIRL) and the successful case resolution rates using Nuevo Leon's SINACOL and SIGNO platforms as the most significant outcomes documented in this domain (see Box 6). ILAB's technical assistance contributed to USMCA labor priorities, including public awareness of labor laws, record-keeping, reporting, and conciliation services, and thereby strengthening Mexico's labor justice system.

While RIRL has legal backing and budgetary inclusion, the FCCLR faces funding cuts and lacks in-house capacity for large-scale improvements. The sustainability in Nuevo Leon and Chihuahua LCCs, along with the technical support with SINACOL and SIGNO in the 16 target states stems from staff training, robust technical support (in one case in-person, at the Mexico City LCC), and formal protocol approvals, but these institutions still face some capacity limits that make them rely on the ENLACE project. The 2024 judicial reform introduces uncertainty, limiting the sustainability of labor court efforts at the state level.

4.4. DOMAIN OF CHANGE 4 – ELIMINATING DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT AND OCCUPATION AND PROMOTING RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Significant changes captured by MSC include women in Oaxaca and Veracruz starting or expanding businesses and increasing their participation in coffee production, female maquiladora workers in Durango electing an independent union, and greater female representation in union leadership across Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos. Other ILAB-funded projects implement similar efforts, such as GEM in Chihuahua, Jalisco, and Mexico City, where the project has established five union committees to support the rights of both women and men.

ILAB's technical assistance contributed to USMCA labor priorities, including freedom of association, collective bargaining rights, workplace rights of women and men, and improved labor rights in Mexico. The workers most at-risk of labor exploitation that were directly impacted by these efforts include female unionized maquila workers in Durango, unionized mining sector workers in Coahuila, and unionized workers of the chili and tomato supply chains in Jalisco.

EQUAL's technical assistance for women to increase their skills and/or start their own businesses in Oaxaca and Veracruz was helpful for many female heads of households who were single mothers or whose partners had migrated to the United States. This support was also impactful for single mothers, as some skills such as baking allowed them to work from home and care for their children at the same time. Through this assistance, many women saw increases in their incomes.

While many outcomes appear sustainable in the short term, long-term success is uncertain due to local market conditions, coffee price fluctuations, and potential changes in union leadership. Women's representation in unions could also face setbacks if leadership shifts. However, the newly established independent union in Durango has secured legal protections that ensure its long-term viability, offering a foundation for continued progress in female representation and labor rights.

4.5. DOMAIN OF CHANGE 5 – LABOR RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT, INSPECTIONS OF LABOR STANDARDS, DISSEMINATION, AND COORDINATION

In this domain of change, the evaluation team documented change stories of progress and one in which the status quo prevailed. Key changes with ILAB contributions include an increase of collaboration between the Ministry of Labor's (STPS) inspectorate and its Statistics Directorate to develop evidence-based solutions for more efficient labor inspections and improved collaboration between labor inspectors and employers. In contrast, the lack of change in occupational safety and health (OSH) and labor rights conditions in the San Quintín Valley, Baja California, highlights an area of opportunity for the work that both the *Sustentar* and UCJ recently started planning and exploring in the area.

ILAB programming contributed to a rise in efficient labor inspections at the federal level and more professional and collaborative relations between state-level labor inspectors and employers. But the absence of inspections in the San Quintín Valley suggests lack of change and that results from relevant ILAB programming in the state were still incipient. OTLA staff and implementing partners emphasized innovation and the focus on agricultural workers' OSH rights as reasons for the importance of this programming in this region. These positive contributions changes align with USMCA labor priorities, specifically with monitoring compliance and investigating suspected violations of labor law and appointing and training labor inspectors.

While improvements in inspections benefit child agricultural workers, migrant domestic workers, and female industrial workers, sustainability remains uncertain. Federal and Querétaro state inspections have the training and awareness needed for long-term success, but limited state-level resources threaten continuity. The lack of progress in the San Quintín Valley signals a critical gap where ILAB's technical assistance could leverage its experience, coordinating efforts with key stakeholders to strengthen labor rights and OSH enforcement for agricultural workers in the region at risk of labor exploitation.

5. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. LESSONS LEARNED

The evaluation team presents the following lessons gleaned from the significant change stories (CS), as well as collected from the experiences of project participants, federal and state authorities, consultants, academics, private sector, the IPs and ILAB during the implementation of the evaluated technical assistance.

- 1. Challenges in Upholding USMCA Labor Commitments Amid Judicial Reforms and Budget Cuts:** Due to budget cuts at labor agencies and the 2025 judiciary reform, Mexico's Federal Government and state-level labor authorities will continue facing challenges in meeting its USMCA-related labor commitments, particularly when it comes to preventing the violation of FOA and CB rights and enforcing OSH standards in industrial and agricultural supply chains. The labor conciliation and justice systems have built considerable capacity and expertise on labor law since the labor reform and their efforts seem to be founded on firmer conditions of sustainability. However, the replacement of many federal and state judges after the elections of the Judiciary opens the possibility of a wide gap of knowledge on protocols and practices to implement the new dispositions in the labor law, both for individual and collective cases.
- 2. Increased Demand for Labor Justice Services Driven by Worker Organization Progress:** The progress of worker organizations impacted by ILAB's technical assistance (TA) may increase the demand for labor conciliation and justice services in their states. This increase in demand may be reflected in the implementation of some ILAB-funded projects supporting LCCs and local labor courts in certain states. Its monitoring and cross-reporting between project teams will lead to comprehensive data on the supply and the demand sides of these services, including quality, satisfaction, and effects of services.
- 3. Workers' remaining information gaps on labor rights.** While industrial workers continue increasing awareness about the labor reform and labor rights, many of them continue lacking information and having little to no incentives to demand better working conditions, both in agro-export and manufacturing exports.
- 4. Adapting Outreach Strategies to Female Workers' Schedules and Household Dynamics:** Based on the experience with female workers' busy schedules, interventions that aim to increase awareness and collect feedback on main concerns at the workplace should consider a home visits format. The logistical strategy should be flexible as some female workers have several commitments and may live in multigenerational or mixed status households with caregiving activities or perform activities outside home after their shift and have other obligations.
- 5. Sustaining Democratic Union Governance and Female Representation Through Continued Awareness:** Legal protections and using the labor reform institutions does not guarantee the sustainability of gains made in democratic union governance and female representation. Since lingering anti-democratic practices in the labor sector may lead to reversals in union representation, awareness about the fragility of union democracy and its benefits for workers need constant training, awareness campaigns and reminders.
- 6. Impact of Program Maturity and Resources on Technical Assistance Outcomes:** The ILAB-funded technical assistance in Mexico under USMCA has reflected that scale and significance of outcomes is correlated with maturity level of program implementation and available

resources.³³ That is, more resources and longer project involvement resulted in larger outcomes and increased significance, especially for certain labor rights and OSH standard outcomes (e.g., FOA, non-discrimination, monitoring of adherence to OSH conditions).

7. **The promotion of labor rights overlaps requiring an integrated approach.** Labor rights often overlap and interact within workplaces, worker organizations and labor authority institutions. Strengthening these structures to protect and promote these rights is more effective through integrated approaches rather than in silos.
8. **Worker Perspectives on Union Transparency, Discrimination, and Broader Social Service Deficits:** Workers not affiliated with any union considered changes related to the transparency in the management of union member dues and eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation the most significant. They also explained the low quality of social services their communities receive outside the workplace – e.g., infrastructure, safety and transportation – critically affect their life as workers. While OSH, FOA and CBA rights are considered important, there are other costs that workers pay when providing their labor, which neither employers nor authorities absorb.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below respond to the information obtained from conversations with respondents, ILAB staff, and IPs related to capacity to replicate, adapt, sustain and scale up technical assistance strategies and outcomes. The recommendations are addressed to technical assistance implementation partners and ILAB.

FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

1. **Strengthening Government Engagement for Labor Reform Support:** Continue strengthening the instances of engagement between implementing partners and federal and state governments. These connections, both at the leadership and user levels, are essential to obtain buy-in from them and support labor reform in areas of digitization, capacity building, software solutions, and help with protocols and internal procedures.
2. **Track and Share Democratic Union Experiences with Justice Services:** Track democratic union experiences with labor conciliation and justice services and communicate them in Mexico. This coordination would address an important need to learn about the quality of conciliation and justice services and how its outcomes impact groups of workers at greater risk of labor exploitation, beyond average time length and rates of completion.
3. **Promote Union Democracy and Female Representation Through Training:** Consolidate the awareness of democratic union governance principles and practical strategies to increase female worker representation in unions, through further training, awareness campaigns and reminders to target democratic unions and their local sections.
4. **Leverage Business Interest in OSH and Child Labor Prevention:** Capitalize on the interest in OSH standards and abolishing child labor generated by technical assistance among companies by finding incentives for them to monitor practices in their supply chains.
5. **Collaborate with Change Agents to Expand Labor Rights Training:** Engage with other change agents –target democratic unions, Mexico’s Ministry of Agriculture (SAGARPA) “Extensionistas” at the federal and state levels (in prioritized states), and local protection community

³³ Benschoter, E. (2023). Meta-Evaluation of Labor Rights-Related Outcomes. U.S. Department of Labor. Available at: <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/Meta-Evaluation-Options-Paper-April-2023-508.pdf>.

committees, among others– to maintain their interest in replicating OSH standards and labor rights training to agricultural families and industrial workers.

6. **Refine Union Democracy Campaigns for Broader Worker Inclusion:** The strategies to promote a systemic change in democratic union governance in Mexico have primarily relied on campaigns to promote the advocacy of labor rights enshrined in the labor reform and the USMCA. It is important to refine some interventions to the needs of particular groups of workers to expand union democracy more inclusively and comprehensively (i.e., non-affiliated workers in states with low unionization rates). Campaigns to increase knowledge and awareness of labor rights among workers should explain the purpose, role and effects of the RRLM, showcase the gains in labor rights and union democracy from new constituted unions, and adapt messaging content and delivery modes to the schooling levels of workers, usually adults who completed only middle school. Scripts, materials, influencers and speakers should avoid anglicisms and words in English.

FOR ILAB (AND LABOR ATTACHÉ OFFICE) OR OTHER DONORS

7. **Position ILAB Technical Assistance as a Strategic Asset for Labor Reform and Judiciary Engagement:** Continue positioning ILAB's technical assistance portfolio as an asset for the Mexican Government to advance labor rights and regional competitiveness. A clear approach to support CONACENTROS a guiding body, discussion space, and knowledge repository would multiply the benefits of building capacity within it across all 32 LCCs. As to the Judiciary Reform, ILAB, ILO and TECLAB should monitor and start making early approaches to the Judiciary Administration Body (OAJ). The changes to the Judiciary are profound and ILAB-funded interventions should take advantage of this opportunity to help the OAJ frame the labor courts' performance within the ILO conventions and the organizational models of efficiency designed in the past for court staff and local judges.
8. **Foster Collaboration Across Projects to Advance Agricultural Labor Rights:** Consider further collaboration between technical assistance portfolio projects working in similar geographies to promote and enforce agricultural workers' rights. An example is the future work to be implemented in San Quintin Valley, Baja California.
9. **Engage U.S. Subsidiaries to Promote Labor Reform in Supply Chains:** Increase the engagement with U.S. companies' subsidiaries in Mexico to further promote labor reform and USMCA priorities in their supply chains. Concrete examples include AMCHAM and an option for them to embrace ILAB-funded communication and, training materials on labor justice and FOA/CB rights for them to disseminate and administer them to their membership and their vendors.
10. **Document and Share Project Milestones to Sustain Impact Post-Closeout:** While each project was different and faced distinct contexts of implementation, ILAB and the implementing partners would benefit from documenting the attainment of leverage points and milestones attained (e.g., laws passed, commissions and committees created and in operation, policies adopted, etc.) to catalog them, as well as those unachieved. Before closing out, projects should inform in-country actors in private sector, government and labor of what was attained and what remained in process. While the termination of all ILAB-funded projects will disrupt the progress in outcomes, documenting the leverage points can guide other actors in the system on what is available to own, replicate, or adapt locally.

ANNEX A. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

In this section, we describe in detail the evaluation design for this study, as well as the data sources NORC used to address ILAB's evaluation questions. We also include details about fieldwork and the analytical strategy conducted to address each of the aforementioned questions.

A.1. EVALUATION APPROACH

The nature of the evaluation questions ILAB proposed for this contract (see Table 1) required a lens for design and analysis that enabled awareness of the diverse and wide ILAB's portfolio of technical assistance in Mexico, and the complexity of its multiple implementation contexts. The questions ask about identifying and documenting any emerging, intended, and unintended outcomes across projects in a portfolio that engages with multiple actors across federal and state-level governments, industrial and agricultural workers in several states, non-profits, automotive and other private sector companies, academics, and sub-implementers. Thus, this evaluation aims to capture and document outcomes at the portfolio level, a task for which a mixed methods approach to collect and analyze the information to provide answers is appropriate.

MIXED METHODS STRATEGY

The nature of the evaluation questions (see Section 1.2) requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of research and evaluation to address them. As the outcomes that this evaluation aims to capture have developed or emerged with the influence of several actors – local institutions and communities, ILAB-funded projects, other interventions impacting worker rights – and context variables, this mixed methods approach uses a dominant qualitative strand to guide the identification of most significant changes or outcomes (see the Most Significant Change section below). In addition to qualitative inquiry, NORC proposed to take advantage of statistical data, comprising both counts and percentages of project outputs and intended outcomes; official labor justice, conciliation and inspection outputs; and socioeconomic conditions in the portrayed communities and states. The first purpose of using statistical data is to provide references to a *wider context* in which the identified changes take place; thus, the evaluation team may contrast the change with past conditions or with sites where a portfolio intervention was absent. For this, we compared the results mapped in the change description to the conditions of similar groups in the same municipality, state, or industry. The second reason to quantify the evaluation results is to document the *significance* of the described change by depicting the size of the change in a given municipality, state, industry, or in the country. In both cases, our main sources were existing Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) data and secondary sources of data produced by in-country portfolio official counterparts, including Mexico's Ministry of Labor (STPS) and National Statistical Agency (INEGI).

COMPLEXITY-AWARE MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING (CAMEL)

A complexity-aware approach captures changes that are unfinished, emerging, unintended, sometimes contested, and to which multiple actors and factors contributed. The evaluation questions inquire about outcomes immersed in a context of implementation of relative uncertainty and unpredictability, especially as both Mexico and the United States recently start new federal administrations in October 2024 and January 2025. The judiciary reform in Mexico, started in 2024, has also increased the uncertainty among foreign investors and Mexican political actors. Furthermore, recent signals from the White House that the U.S. may negotiate new terms of international trade have

contributed to diverse perspectives and opinions among stakeholders about the goals of U.S.-Mexico trade relations. These conditions bring complexity to the evaluation context, which is important to acknowledge and address throughout data collection and analysis.

The evaluation questions also inquire about elements sensitive to complexity that influence the outcomes of interest. These four types of elements are: (i) contextual factors, (ii) dynamic pace of change, (iii) stakeholders' diverse perspectives, and (iv) emergent or unintended outcomes. For ILAB's technical assistance, the contextual factors include shifts in the socioeconomic and political context that directly affect the conditions of implementation, such as legislative reforms, changes in the labor market, and decisions that affect the trade balance between the USMCA partners. Second, the dynamic pace of change shapes irregular cycles of progress. These dynamics open the door to new programming opportunities and needs that could influence new developments, partnerships, adjustments, ripple effects, and the emergence of unintended results. Theory-based monitoring and evaluation alone is insufficient to capture this fluctuation in the pace of change and its potential effects. Third, program implementers and recipients have diverse perspectives about the value of projects and outcomes. The evaluation includes a participatory component where stakeholders validate and rank the significant changes identified, so that we document the plurality of actors' perspectives. Fourth, as mentioned above, the evaluation questions aim to identify and document not only intended (predicted) outcomes, but also emergent and unintended outcomes. Accordingly, NORC proposed a CAMEL approach to evaluation design and analysis with which the evaluation team addressed the evaluation questions. With this approach, NORC kept its outlook to consider these four angles of complexity awareness in data collection and analysis. The evaluation team operationalized the evaluation using a method with the capacity to comprehend these four elements of social complexity: the Most Significant Change (MSC).

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE (MSC)

NORC's MSC involved developing compelling narratives – significant change stories (CS) – about important changes that program implementers and recipients, as well as other related actors, experience in areas where portfolio stakeholders expect to see changes in behavior, relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices of individuals, groups, communities, organizations, or institutions. In MSC, we call these areas *domains of change*, and the CS stories capture and describe cause-and-effect mechanisms that may involve more than one project and multiple contributing actors. In these narratives, the evaluation team described *who* was involved in the change, *how* and *when* the change occurred, *why* it happened, and other dimensions of interest, including the *significance* and *sustainability* of the change, and any differences in experiences that groups most at-risk of labor exploitation have had with these changes. The CS stories became an interim product of this study.

Table 16. MSC Steps Taken (as of January 2025)

#	MSC Step	Main Results	Timeline
1	Create Evaluation Advisory Committee and finalize EQs	Recruitment of 11 EAC members (implementing partners, OCFT, OTLA). Meeting with EAC members to present MSC method (05/14/24). EAC member feedback on EQs (web survey) and final version to ILAB.	April – May 2024
2	Define five domains of change	Outcome synthesis for 19 projects. Proposal and refinement of five thematic domains of change by group of actors. Included in evaluation's ToRs.	June 2024
3	Collect stories of change	Data collection included 260 respondents located in 19 states through 192 KIs and 13 FGDs with 68 participants, 54% administered remotely and 46% in person.	July – Oct. 2024
4	Triangulation: Validate and rank stories of change	In workshops with PIUs, NORC collected rankings to propose additional edits to the top 10 CS stories (out of 22 CS) for ILAB's use (n = 121). Validation and ranking survey with randomized subsample of project participants and local actor respondents. Confirmation of factual details by conferring with relevant respondents from data collection and project documents.	Dec. 2024 – Jan. 2025
5	Triangulation: Verification by independent respondents	External verification with independent entities (third parties that were not originally involved in data collection but who have independent knowledge of the changes) was not required per feedback from PIUs and validation respondents.	N/A
6	Triangulation: Incorporate quantitative data from project secondary sources	NORC included monitoring data from project Technical Progress Report (TPR) and Grantee Data Reporting Form (DRF), as well as secondary sources of data from Mexico's National Statistical Agency (INEGI) and Ministry of Labor (STPS) to provide context to 21 of the 22 outcomes captured in the CS stories.	Aug. – Nov. 2024
7	Analyze, formulate lessons and recommendations	NORC analyzed all 21 CS stories to answer the EQs; results below in the section "Results". In addition, the evaluation team triangulated results with PMP and secondary sources of data.	Dec. 2024 – March 2025
8	Dissemination	According to the ToR, NORC will produce three infographics and a social media campaign in English and Spanish. NORC will lead a learning webinar in Spanish and a learning session in English.	April 2025

According to Table 16, NORC has conducted a *highly participatory process* to identify and document the outcomes and address the EQs. After creating an Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC)³⁴ to guide the sampling design by domain of change, and the refinement of EQs (Step 1), NORC mapped the result frameworks of all 19 projects included in the portfolio subject to this evaluation. After several iterations, NORC proposed to ILAB structuring the MSC strategy through five domains of change to guide the sampling and instrument design, described in Table 17 (Step 2). ILAB's portfolio includes interventions of varied technical approaches, geography, and target groups. For this reason, identifying and naming domains of change was critical to segment the areas of investigation for most significance

³⁴ The Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC) is a group of two ILAB staff members and nine representatives of the implementing partners organizations in the portfolio, one per organization, independently of the number of grants implemented in Mexico. Their role was to provide an initial sample of respondents according to each domain of change, mapped to their project(s) results framework, and to help the evaluation team facilitate the access to respondents. The EAC members also validated and ranked the stories in December 2024 and provided comments on the CS stories to rectify some factual information in the narratives. In addition to the EAC members, an Executive Committee comprised by the evaluation contract's COR and Alternative COR, supports the evaluation with technical guidance and decision-making on technical and contractual topics.

change and simplify interviews with respondents of various levels of technical familiarity with the changes and the MSC methodology.

Table 17. Domains of Change

Domain # and name	Description	Potential Groups of Respondents	Related Grants
1. Worker advocacy for labor rights	Changes in workers' and worker organizations' actions / behaviors / policies / practices / relationships regarding the promotion and advocacy for their own rights in the interaction with employers and authorities. This may include promoting workers' abilities to use mechanisms of labor rights enforcement, including to initiate labor inspections, collaborate with private sector to address labor issues, reduce child labor, and protect child workers and victims of forced labor.	Male/female workers affiliated to independent unions (portfolio target), male/ female workers affiliated to independent unions (non-portfolio target), male/female workers and leaders of non-democratic unions, male/female agricultural workers, legal consultants/ advisors, implementing partners, sub-grantees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AccioNNar • FOH • SC1 project • ENLACE • MAP • <i>Sustentar</i> • <i>Una Cosecha Justa</i> • GEM • SC3 project • SC2 project • VZF
2. Private sector labor practices	Changes in employers' actions / behaviors / policies / practices / relationships related to labor rights. This may include changes in employers' practices to respect and comply with OSH laws and policies, USMCA's labor standards, prevent labor law violations by adopting new policies and procedures for compliance, remediation; and changes in compliance with labor reform and USMCA requirements regarding freedom of association (FOA) and Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs).	Agricultural and food processing businesses, domestic exporting companies, multinational companies, private sector associations, legal advisors, implementing partners, sub-grantees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fields of Hope</i> • Improving Workers' Occupational Safety and Health in the Chili Pepper and Tomato Supply Chains in Mexico • <i>Senderos</i> • <i>Sustentar</i> • PADF • CAMINOS • EQUAL • PADF • ENLACE • MAP
3. Strengthening and professionalizing the new labor justice and conciliation systems'	Changes in actions / behaviors / policies / practices / relationships of labor courts and conciliation authorities and staff to support the implementation of the 2019 labor law reform. This may include changes in actions / behaviors / policies / practices / relationships of CCLRs at the federal or state levels regarding the promotion of tripartite dialogue, verifications that effectively identify anti-union practices, responses to and sanctions of anti-union practices, application of sanctions, formalize CBAs, and registry of unions and CBAs. It may also include changes in actions / behaviors / policies / practices / relationships within labor courts.	FCCLR and LCCs staff, federal and state-level judges, federal and state-level court staff, implementing partners, sub-grantees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENLACE • SGLLE MX • TECLAB • OBSERVAR

Domain # and name	Description	Potential Groups of Respondents	Related Grants
4. Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation, and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace	Changes in actions / behaviors / policies / practices / relationships of authorities, employers, and worker organizations related to reduce vulnerability of women and girls of legal working age. It may include changes in complying and promoting occupational safety and health; combatting and preventing violence against women at the workplace; and changes in leadership proportion by sex in worker organizations.	Male/female workers affiliated to independent unions, male / female agricultural workers, private companies, federal and state labor authorities, legal advisors, implementing partners, sub-grantees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging Workers and Civil Society to Strengthen Labor Rights Enforcement Improving Workers' Occupational Safety and Health in the Chili Pepper and Tomato Supply Chains in Mexico Improving Substantive Gender Equality in the Mexican Workplace (GEM) EQUAL/<i>Fields of Hope</i> PADF <i>Sustentar</i>
5. Labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination	Changes in actions / behaviors / policies / practices / relationships of labor authorities, at the federal and state levels, to enforce labor laws emanated from the Labor Reform and those regulating OSH, child labor and forced labor violations, and other unacceptable conditions of work; and promote policies and programs to engage with private sector and workers' organizations to prevent and reduce labor rights violations. This may include changes in coordination and compliance systems to alter labor inspections coverage and effectiveness in detecting OSH, labor rights, and child labor violations; and changes in the authorities' tripartite approach to engage with worker organizations and the private sector on preventing and reducing labor rights violations.	Federal and state-level labor authorities, federal and state-level labor inspectors, agricultural companies in portfolio target areas, implementing partners, sub-grantees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AccioNNar CALLE CAMINOS Campos EQUAL/<i>Fields of Hope</i> Improving Workers' Occupational Safety and Health in the Chili Pepper and Tomato Supply Chains in Mexico MAP <i>Senderos</i>

NORC's trained in-country team administered key informant interview and focus group discussion instruments to a purposeful sample of respondents and also stayed in touch with them iteratively to ask them precise questions about the information provided and refine the change descriptions (Step 3). Through a snowball strategy, NORC reached out to 250 voluntary respondents distributed across project implementers, grantees, program recipients, and external actors relevant to ILAB's portfolio – i.e., government officials at STPS, FCCLR, LCCs, state-level ministries of labor, and labor courts; unions that ILAB projects did not directly support or engage; other colleague organizations; and the private sector. In close coordination with the in-country team and the EAC members, NORC used statistical

data from ILAB portfolio grantee data reporting forms (DRF) and technical progress reports (TPR), and from STPS and INEGI to generate quantitative content that provided relevant content on a wider context and significance of each change (Step 6).

In addition to grounding the narratives and the identification of outcomes from respondents, NORC also validated such CS stories and inquired about the value that the described outcomes represented for the actors who experienced such changes (Step 4). From the sample of MSC respondents, NORC selected a subsample to validate all CS stories and obtain their ranking by domain of change, as well as their ranking criteria. The primary intended users (PIUs) of the evaluation – ILAB staff and implementing partners in Mexico – were also invited to validate and corroborate the outcomes as needed. With this strategy, MSC allowed the evaluation team and ILAB to understand what outcomes different stakeholders – ILAB, implementing partners, workers, private sector, federal and state-level officials, judges, and others – value most, and reveal pathways for how change happened, potentially leading to unintended and emergent outcomes, beyond the assumptions of project theories of change.

This report and an Evaluation Brief document the analysis stage (Step 7) of the MSC strategy, and NORC will complete the dissemination (Step 8) before the end of this contract during the second quarter of 2025.

UTILIZATION-FOCUSED EVALUATION

Along the lines described above, NORC has succeeded in completing the five steps³⁵ of the utilization-focused approach to program evaluation, suggested by Michael Q. Patton. First, the evaluation team identified the *primary intended users of the evaluation (PIUs)* – i.e., staff at both OCFT and OTLA, ILAB's Mexico team, and its implementing partners in Mexico – and created, in collaboration with ILAB, an EAC of 11 members representing nine implementing partners in Mexico and both funding offices. The EAC had a short and key list of tasks, such as helping NORC refine the evaluation questions within the contractual scope of work, provide a first wave of the sample frame by domain of change, validate and rank the captured outcomes in CS stories, and engage with NORC in discussions related to shifting strategies in the ILAB-funded portfolio to better accomplish outcomes.

Second, the EAC met in May 2024 to receive information about the evaluation and *agreed* on its members' participation in the evaluation action plan, namely providing input during sample design, supporting NORC during fieldwork, and validating and ranking the CS stories during the Validation Workshop. Third, the EAC members provided input to *refine the evaluation questions* and NORC engaged directly with two implementation partner organizations (IPs) to *reframe Domains of Change 3 and 5*, using the IPs expertise in the field, to facilitate the fieldwork process and increase the validity of evaluation results. During the entire process, NORC worked closely with ILAB to make sure all contractual and technical decisions had the donor's buy in.

Fourth, the evaluation team grounded its analysis and interpretations of results using the outcomes that were validated both by ILAB and the implementing partners who participated in the Validation Workshop. NORC also summarized materials from collective discussions during the workshop in which ILAB and IPs shed light on shifts to current portfolio strategies, recent and emerging challenges in the institutional context, and needs to promote sustainability of outcomes.

³⁵ Better Evaluation (2021). Utilisation-focused evaluation. Available at: <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/utilisation-focused-evaluation>.

Finally, towards the end of this contract, NORC will *disseminate results* making this report public and by producing three infographics in English and Spanish and a public webinar in Spanish, all of which will be released through the evaluation's webpage hosted at NORC.org.

A.2. INFORMATION SOURCES

To address the evaluation questions and sub-questions, the evaluation team conducted a desk review, collected a comprehensive sample of actors related to ILAB's portfolio in Mexico, obtained rankings and criteria from a subset of respondents, and complemented with learning and prospective information by facilitating discussions with ILAB staff and representatives of ILAB's implementing partners in Mexico. Table 18 lists the data sources and how the role of the information played in the evaluation. Overall, project participants were the main sources to identify and describe significant changes. To triangulate the content of the CS stories, NORC engaged with IPs, sub-awardees, labor experts and academics sub-contracted to IPs, and consulted quantitative data from project documents and official secondary sources. The validators of CS stories by domain included a subsample of respondents, the full body of IP representatives, ILAB staff, and a sample of workers non-affiliated to any union or worker organization.

Table 18. Evaluation Data Sources

Source	Data Collected
Project participants (unionized and agricultural workers, representatives from agricultural businesses, automotive sector and private sector associations) and local actors (federal and state-level authorities, conciliation centers, labor courts, and local labor inspectors)	Data for 1) stories of significant change, and 2) triangulation and ranking of stories of significant change
Unaffiliated workers employed in the exporting sector at six industrial clusters of the automotive sector (Hermosillo, Sonora; León-Silao, Guanajuato; CIVAC-Morelos, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosí) and the textile industry (Puebla)	Data on values assigned to significant changes
Secondary sources including official statistics from Mexico's Ministry of Economy ³ , the Ministry of Labor (STPS)	Data to triangulate with primary data on stories of significant change
Documents and data from ILAB-funded projects and their monitoring systems	Data to inform domains of change Data to triangulate with primary data on stories of significant change
ILAB's RRLM webpage ⁴	Data to triangulate with primary data on stories of significant change (Domains 1 and 2)
Implementing partners and sub-awardees of ILAB-funded technical assistance	Data to triangulate with primary data on stories of significant change Data on evaluation questions related capacity to replicate, adapt, sustain and scale up portfolio strategies and outcomes Data to validate/interpret evaluation findings and co-create lessons and recommendations
ILAB PIUs	Data on validation and ranking of stories of significant change; input into evaluation questions related capacity to replicate, adapt, sustain and scale up portfolio strategies and outcomes
Labor experts and academics sub-contracted to IPs	Data to triangulate with primary data on stories of significant change Data on values assigned to stories of significant change

DESK REVIEW

NORC received 758 documents from ILAB, related to the 19 projects included in the portfolio. Most of them were received in late March 2024, including grant award notices, grant modifications, workplans, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plans (CMEP), logic model and results framework documents, branding plans, analytical tools, monitoring data reporting forms (DRFs) – most updated as of April 2024 – and technical progress reports (TPRs). Between April and May 2024, NORC received from ILAB the TPRs in which grantees reported progress made between October 2023-March 2024 related to all projects submitted to OCFT and OTLA in April, except for the SC1 project.

The evaluation team identified the intended outcomes across all projects to map the portfolio intended outcomes at large. After cataloging the materials, the evaluation team prioritized analyzing the projects' CMEPs and theory of change, logic models, and results framework documents. The analysis identified the intended outcomes and organized them in a spreadsheet to map them out by creating clusters of outcomes. During a couple weeks in May 2024, the evaluation team internally proposed and reviewed different iterations of the outcome maps and concluded that five domains of change, tied to different groups separately affected and engaged with the thematic subjects of the portfolio interventions. Based on the grouping of all project outcomes, NORC proposed five domains that served as the structural foundation for the evaluation design, transpiring the sample design, as well as the fieldwork strategy and the validation and ranking exercises that nurture the evaluation results. The domains of change approved by ILAB are:

1. Worker advocacy for labor rights
2. Private sector labor practices
3. Strengthening and professionalization of labor justice and conciliation systems
4. Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace
5. Labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination

In preparation for fieldwork in July 2024, NORC consulted the project modifications and workplans, as well as the last two or three TPRs from each project to frame the recruitment materials that were sent to the initial wave of respondents. All nine implementing partners (IPs) provided an initial sample of respondents based on the five aforementioned domains of change. During recruitment, with the purpose of promoting respondents' familiarity and trust, we used the information from these TPRs to refer to the activities with which actors had been likely to interact as part of each grant.

MSC RESPONDENTS

To address evaluation questions 1, 2, 3, and 6, NORC decided to use primarily the material collected through the MSC method, captured in the CS stories. Considering the utilization focused approach of this evaluation, NORC requested ILAB and its implementing partners to designate an initial sample of respondents for the evaluation team to interview them regarding the most significant changes within each domain of change listed in Table 17. These sources are first-hand references of the evaluation's PIUs. As indicated below, NORC collected a different list of potential respondents for each domain of change. The initial sample provided by IPs included projects implementers, sub awardees, project participants – workers, representatives from agricultural businesses, automotive sector and private sector associations, federal and local labor authorities, and federal and local labor inspectors.

NORC recruited all sample actors to participate in semi-structured interviews (SSIs) or focus group discussions (FGDs), either in person or remotely, according to the respondent's preference. As suggested in the SSI and FGD guides included in Annex B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide and Annex C. Focus Group Discussion Guide, the respondents guided the topics of significant changes during these conversations. As part of both guides, interviewers and moderators inquired about any additional actors that were knowledgeable of a given domain of change and the significant change(s) identified during the SSI and FGDs with the initial sample. Through this snowball strategy, NORC added respondents to each domain of change until finding saturation, a point in which each additional actor identified the same significant change when being administered the same MSC instruments.

The interviewers and moderators organized the responses to identify convergences and differences across respondents within each domain. The result of this strategy is captured in the outcomes described in the MSC stories.

PERSPECTIVES OF UNAFFILIATED WORKERS EMPLOYED IN THE EXPORTING SECTOR

In response to ILAB's request to engage with industrial workers out of reach from its current portfolio, NORC modified its sampling approach from the TORs approved in July 2024. The evaluation team created and executed a plan to collect the perspectives on most significant changes from industrial workers at six industrial clusters of the automotive sector (Hermosillo, Sonora; León-Silao, Guanajuato; CIVAC-Morelos, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosí) and the textile industry (Puebla) who belong to neither an independent union nor a union whatsoever. These voices have been traditionally underrepresented; this evaluation team compared the ranking of significant changes that these workers reported versus those of independent union workers, and other actors related to Domain 1 – Workers' advocacy of labor rights.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT CONTENT (PORTFOLIO ACTORS)

EQs 4, 5, and 6 included some inquiries that were not captured by the MSC strategy, including learning and prospective questions. To collect information that helped us address these questions, NORC added discussion sessions with ILAB staff representing both OCFT and OTLA, as well as all nine IPs in Mexico. These topics included capacity to replicate, adapt and scale up current portfolio strategies, identifying local actors to shift the current activities to further attain the portfolio goals, the extent to which the portfolio has founded pillars for outcome sustainability, and flexibility to adapt such strategies.

MSC STORIES AND SUMMARY STATEMENTS

NORC captured and documented the most significant changes brought up by SSI and FGD respondents in significant change stories (CS). Each story had a thorough headline with a summary statement including the change, its main actors, the geography and time period for quick reference. To capture ILAB's, its implementing partners', and other local system actors' valuing of the identified outcomes, NORC used a Validation and Ranking Form (Annex D. Validation and Ranking Form (online and in-person)) and the CS stories. The evaluation team administered the form, and the CS stories related to the given domain through a web survey and over the telephone to a randomized subsample of 8 to 12 respondents per domain for them to rank the identified outcomes in terms of their significance to their own work, mission, or labor conditions. For telephone respondents with no e-mail service, the enumerator read the summary statements aloud twice to them. The portfolio actors – ILAB staff and its implementing partners in Mexico – provided their validation and ranking during the evaluation's

Validation Workshop in December 2024. As to the unaffiliated workers, NORC elicited their ranking of CS stories 1d, 1e, 1f, and 4d during the second part of the onsite structured interviews.

ILAB PROJECT PMP DATA AND SECONDARY QUANTITATIVE SOURCES

After initial drafting of the CS stories from primary qualitative data collection, the team conducted a careful examination of the Grantee DRFs for the projects who contributed to the CSs, according to the MSC respondents. While NORC consulted monitoring data from all 19 ILAB-funded projects to provide a wider context of their implementation, our team used Grantee DRF data to include quantitative evidence in-depth in the CS stories, from the following portfolio projects: CALLE, ENLACE, EQUAL, FOH, GEM, MAP, SC1 project, SC2 project, *Senderos*, SGLLE, and *Sustentar*.

Additionally, the evaluation team consulted official statistics from Mexico's National Statistics Institute (INEGI) and the Ministry of Economy³⁶, the Ministry of Labor (STPS), including the Labor Reform Indicators and Statistics (INDERLAB)³⁷, and ILAB's RRLM webpage³⁸ to complete the quantitative content of the CS stories.

A.3. SAMPLE DESIGN

Following the MSC principles of purposeful sampling to capture the changes from the actors that are considered the most knowledgeable about the five domains of change listed in Table 17 (above). After the first meeting with the EAC members on May 14, 2024, NORC requested to all nine implementing organizations and to ILAB a sample of project participants, co-implementing partners, authorities, external consultants, and related actors to participate in semi-structured interviews (SSIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture the most significant changes in these domains. NORC designed a survey to gather these contacts in a secure manner and also received personal contacts of potential respondents in encrypted files from some EAC members.

Table 19. Composition of MSC Sample (contacts)

Domain of Change (D)	Contacts	N by Source		Sex	
		ILAB / IPs	Snow-balling	Female	Male
D1. Worker advocacy for labor rights	99	68	31	45	54
D2. Private sector labor practices	52	42	10	19	33
D3. Strengthening and professionalization of labor justice and conciliation systems	44	32	12	21	23
D4. Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace	29	19	10	24	5
D5. Labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor standards, dissemination & coordination	46	34	12	25	21
Total	270	195 (72%)	75 (28%)	134 (50%)	136 (50%)

Note: The number of contacts is not illustrative of the sample of respondents for fieldwork because in several cases, one contact led to more than one SSI respondent and FGD participants.

³⁶ Data Mexico is accessible through: <https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/en>.

³⁷ For access to the data, please visit <https://www.stps.gob.mx/gobmx/estadisticas/>.

³⁸ The web access is available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/our-work/trade/labor-rights-usmca-cases>.

Across the five domains of change, NORC received 195 contacts from ILAB and its IPs and through snowballing technique, it increased the sample in 75 more contacts to register a total of 270 (see Table 19). The representation was even between female and male respondents.

A.4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

As described in the evaluation's Terms of Reference (ToRs), the MSC strategy was the main driver to select the data collection methods in this evaluation to address evaluation questions 1, 2, 3, and 6. With the purpose of collecting information about the most significant changes for sample respondents within each domain of change, NORC designed four data collection instruments: a semi-structured interview guide (see Annex B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide), a focus group discussion guide (see Annex C. Focus Group Discussion Guide), a validation and ranking form (see Annex D. Validation and Ranking Form (online and in-person)) to capture the valuing of the documented outcomes across relevant actors, and a verification form (see Annex E. Verification Form) to conduct third-party verification about the internal validity of any of the outcomes captured in the CS story, per recommendation of any of the EAC members. ILAB approved these instruments as part of the ToRs in July 2024 and prior to the Validation Workshop in October 2024.

In addition, NORC included during the Validation Workshop (see agenda in Annex F. Validation Workshop Agenda) collective discussions to address those evaluation questions that dealt with adaptative management strategies, including adjustments to the current portfolio strategies and partnerships with in-country actors – evaluation questions 4, 5, and 6. As follows a summary of each exercise.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS (SSI)

After obtaining a positive response from the sample respondents, NORC interviewers scheduled each appointment as a one-on-one or a collective interview of no more than three respondents. The team conducted these 60-to-75-minute conversations in-person or remotely, using MS Teams. For SSIs in person, interviewers recorded the conversations upon respondent's approval after being read the informed consent; if respondent refused to be recorded, the interviewer took notes. In remote mode, interviewers sent respondents a MS Teams invitation via email and submitted the informed consent in advance for the respondents' acknowledgement of their rights during SSI and use of their information. In the case of the federal STPS officials, NORC worked with the Direction of Labor Policy and Inter-Institutional Relations to request access to federal labor officials. Annex B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide includes the guide the interviewers used. Depending on the number of significant changes a respondent identified, the interviewer administered the instrument more than once to examine each change.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGD)

While less numerous, FGDs were an important strategy to obtain MSC information, especially from teams of implementing actors, such as federal and state-level labor inspectors, and court staff. NORC moderators were also able to elicit information from female agricultural workers remotely. Moderators conducted most of these 75-to-90-minute conversations in-person and two of them remotely, using MS Teams. For FGDs in person, moderators recorded the conversations upon all participants' approval after being read the informed consent; if one respondent refused to be recorded, the moderator would kindly request this participant to leave the conversation. However, if two or more participants refused, the protocol indicated that the moderator would have to take notes as efficiently as possible. In remote

mode, interviewers sent a focal person – usually a local operator from Solidarity Center or a worker leader – a MS Teams invitation via email and submit the informed consent in advance for the respondents’ acknowledgement of her rights during FGD and use of her information. The informed consent was read before starting the conversation in all cases. In neither mode FGD respondents reported concerns about being recorded. Annex C. Focus Group Discussion Guide includes the FGD guide; depending on the number of significant changes participants identified and agreed upon, the moderator examined each significant change by asking the relevant topic items to the group.

Moderators scheduled the group conversations with the main contact that IPs provided or those who were obtained through the snowball sampling technique. In the case of federal labor inspectors, dependent of STPS, NORC worked with the Direction of Labor Policy and Inter-Institutional Relations to request access to them. When FGDs took place during fieldwork missions outside of Mexico City, moderators provided refreshments.

MSC SURVEY INTERVIEWS WITH UNAFFILIATED WORKERS

In August 2024, ILAB requested that the evaluation team include the perspectives of unaffiliated workers (see “Perspectives of unaffiliated workers employed in the exporting sector” above) in the MSC approach. For that purpose, NORC hired an expert researcher in the field of labor policy and workers’ rights in the automotive industry associated to El Colegio de Sonora (COLSON) to conduct fieldwork in six industrial clusters. The evaluation team adapted and simplified the SSI (Annex B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide) and FGD protocol (Annex C. Focus Group Discussion Guide) to elicit the most significant using a mix of close- and open-ended questions to help respondents answer with less difficulty. The exercise of structured interviews was thus designed to last about 45 minutes in a one-time-only format with no follow up. For example, the interviewer and moderator provided a pre-loaded long list of potential significant changes in the workplace found in the labor rights academic literature (e.g., better job stability, job training, more growth paths, salary increase, adherence to OSH protocols, permitted worker meetings to discuss labor rights, RRLM, etc.). Respondents could draw multiple answers on which the interviewer probed to collect information about the significant change, the contributions to it, significance, impact on groups more at risk of exploitation, and sustainability. The instrument also asked for one to three relevant actors in the change and months and years to determine the period of change. As to the FGD protocol (Annex C. Focus Group Discussion Guide), the evaluation team also simplified the wording to make it easier for respondents to follow. NORC also included a similar list of potential significant changes for the group of respondents to choose from; the FGD protocol still required consensus to proceed.

Following the elicitation of significant changes, either individually or collectively, the interviewer proceeded, with the same SSI or FGD instrument, to implement an adapted version of the ranking form (Annex D. Validation and Ranking Form (online and in-person)) to assess and rank only four significant changes that the data collection team had already been identifying from the original sample³⁹:

- 1d - Since 2022, four new independent unions in the mining and automotive sectors have adopted transparent practices regarding the use of union fees, breaking with old unions’

³⁹ These four significant changes evolved as the evaluation team continued fieldwork and refining the definition of changes. The final summary statements for changes 1d, 1e, 1f, and 2d can be found in Anex G.

corrupt' corrupt practices such as diverting union funds to leadership and thereby improving relationships with union members.

- 1e - Since 2022, four independent unions in San Luis Potosí, Morelos and Coahuila received representativeness certificates and two of them became exclusive bargaining agents of their collective contracts, which workers legitimized before the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registry. Under Mexican law, a union must legitimize its collective contract to maintain legal authority to represent workers before an employer.
- 1f - Between May 2021 and July 2023, three unions and a labor organization gained employer recognition and respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in a range of one to nine months, influenced by the intervention of the UMSCA's Rapid Response Labor Mechanism.
- 4d - Since 2021, more female workers in a national union and three independent unions in Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos have gained positions as delegates in union leadership bodies.

The purpose of collecting these rankings from unaffiliated workers was to include them in the overall ranking of the significant changes in Domain 1 and compare their valuing with the other actors (i.e., independent union workers, implementing partners, donor). The unaffiliated workers did not have access to the full CS stories – these drafts were distributed for validation and ranking in November 2024 and NORC had no effective means to track respondents at the industrial clusters and conduct an onsite follow up. However, the validated changes are similar in essence to significant changes 1d, 1e, 1f, and 4d.

VALIDATION AND RANKING PROCEDURES

After finalizing the CS stories, NORC translated these materials into Spanish and generated PDF versions. Randomly, the evaluation team selected a subsample of eight to twelve SSI or FGD respondents who participated in fieldwork to administer to them the Validation and Ranking form (see Annex D. Validation and Ranking Form (online and in-person)). NORC programmed this instrument in a web survey separately for each domain of change, as the names and the change summary statements varied across domains. In November 2024, the evaluation team sent the survey to each respondent via email and NORC's fieldwork supervisor followed up with respondents via email and over the telephone, either via voice call or WhatsApp. In the case of staff at the FCCLR and federal labor inspectors, both dependent of STPS, NORC worked with the Ministry's Direction General of Labor Policy and Inter-Institutional Relations in November and December 2024 to request access to them.

In parallel, during the Validation Workshop in December 2024, NORC administered the Validation and Ranking form (Annex D. Validation and Ranking Form (online and in-person)) in person to three participants from OCFT, five from OTLA, and 18 implementing partner representatives, dividing them by domain.

FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

As part of the Validation Workshop, NORC incorporated time for collective conversations about the strengths and challenges of the current portfolio strategies, as well as potential interventions that could be replicated, adapted, or scaled up, in breakout rooms by domain of change. In plenary format, a facilitator from the evaluation team identified the outcomes that the portfolio collectively contributed

to by domain of change and moderated a discussion to identify shifting strategies to deepen and improve impact in those areas, examine the sustainability of such changes, and propose adjustments to the current strategies to promote conditions to sustain the outcomes. For further reference, see the Validation Workshop Agenda in Annex F. Validation Workshop Agenda.

A.5. FIELDWORK RESULTS

NORC conducted two fieldwork exercises to satisfy the MSC-based design of the evaluation. Data collection started with a strategy of SSIs, FGDs and structured interviews with the sample respondents to collect MSC information and draft the CS stories. Once the team drafted the CS stories and included the quantitative information, NORC validated and ranked the significant changes portrayed in the stories with a subsample of respondents, implementing partners, and ILAB staff members.

A.5.1. MSC DATA COLLECTION

Between July and November 2024, the NORC Lead Evaluator supervised an in-country team of three evaluators, a subject-matter expert (SME) on labor rights in the automotive industry, and a fieldwork coordinator to conduct data collection. While the fieldwork period in the ToRs was estimated to last 12 weeks, delays in official approval to conduct data collection with federal government staff delayed the calendar. NORC finalized fieldwork in 18 weeks to collect information on MSC through interviews and FGDs, and re-contacted respondents to inquire from them additional, more granular information about the significant changes identified.

As displayed in Table 20, this team engaged with 312 respondents in 19 states across the five domains of change. Interviewers led 192 SSIs, most of them in one-on-one format but some with two, three or even four respondents. Moderators facilitated 13 focus groups, including the following types of respondents: female agricultural workers and workers affiliated to independent unions (Domain 1); sugar production committee members, including sugar cane producers and sugar mill staff (Domain 2); state-level court staff (Domain 3); federal and state-level labor inspectors (Domain 5); and unaffiliated workers. As discussed above, the SME administered a revised version of the MSC interview guide and the validation and ranking form to engage with 52 unaffiliated workers in one-time-only 45-to-60-minute structured interviews.

Table 20. Distribution of Participants in Interviews and FGDs

Domain of Change (D)	N	Method			Mode		Sex	
		SSI	FGD	Survey Interv.	Remote	In person	F	M
D1. Worker advocacy for labor rights	82	65 (79%)	17 (21%)		44 (54%)	38 (46%)	33 (40%)	49 (60%)
D2. Private sector labor practices	27	22 (81%)	5 (19%)		24 (89%)	3 (11%)	7 (26%)	20 (74%)
D3. Strengthening and professionalizing the new labor justice and conciliation systems	48	44 (92%)	4 (8%)		16 (33%)	32 (67%)	21 (44%)	27 (56%)
D4. Eliminating discrimination & promoting equality of women and men in the workplace	24	24 (100%)	0 (0%)		24 (100%)	0 (0%)	22 (92%)	2 (8%)
D5. Labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor	71	37 (52%)	34 (48%)		31 (44%)	40 (56%)	30 (42%)	41 (58%)

Domain of Change (D)	N	Method			Mode		Sex	
		SSI	FGD	Survey Interv.	Remote	In person	F	M
standards, diss. & coord								
D1, D4. Unaffiliated workers*	60	-	8 (13%)	52 (87%)	0 (0%)	60 (100%)	27 (45%)	33 (55%)
Total Respondents	312	192 (62%)	68 (22%)	52 (16%)	135 (43%)	177 (57%)	139 (45%)	173 (55%)
Sessions		159	13	52				

Notes: (*) The 60 unaffiliated workers interviewed in-person onsite through a MSC survey represented 19 percent of respondents.

While most of the data collection with members of worker organizations, federal and state officials, labor inspectors, private companies, consultants, implementing partners, and academics took place remotely, fieldwork with all 60 unaffiliated workers was administered in-person. Consequently, the overall distribution by mode suggests a majority of in-person meetings.

Aside from the remote fieldwork conducted from their home offices and the in-person SSIs and FGD in Mexico City, all three evaluators and the SME travelled domestically to meet with respondents to the following states: Baja California, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Nuevo León, Puebla, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Sonora, State of Mexico, and Veracruz. ILAB authorized all domestic and international travel for this evaluation. They collected qualitative information through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as appropriate. The evaluation team also collected quantitative data regarding PIUs rankings of significant change stories.

While the representation of female participants is slightly smaller than males, the balance is uneven across domains of change. While female participants constitute a larger proportion of respondents in Domain 4, they are underrepresented in the rest of domains, particularly Domains 1 and 2.

Table 21 provides a detailed breakdown of MSC respondents by category and domain. Overall, the fieldwork team was able to engage with state-level officials (23 percent), including LCC and court staff, as well as labor inspectors and officials at State Human Rights Commissions. Respondents from federal agencies, mainly STPS and FCCLR, comprised 10 percent of the sample. Members of non-profits working to promote labor rights, equality between women and men and protection to female workers, and enforcement of OSH and labor standards represented a 19 percent of the sample. Workers and leaders of independent unions and workers organizations who responded to our recruitment shared 12 of the sample; NORC worked exclusively through the Solidarity Center team and had access to a restricted pool of target organizations. Altogether, the representatives of the large and small private sector represented only 10 percent of the sample; the American and Canadian Chambers of Commerce in Mexico registered very limited or null interest in participating. NORC was also able to engage with external consultants working with some of the portfolio projects, labor law advisors of workers and the private sector, as well as academics and influencers.

Table 21. Respondent by Type

Category of Respondent	Domain of Change (D)					Total
	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	
Federal government (any institution)	2	1	18	0	10	31 (10%)
State government (any state and institution)	4	1	23	2	43	73 (23%)
Independent unions/ worker organizations	35	0	0	3	0	38 (12%)
Private sector chambers / associations	0	4	0	1	1	6 (2%)
Private sector companies (industrial and agricultural)	2	12	0	0	4	18 (6%)
Small producers	0	0	0	7	0	7 (2%)
Nonprofits (sub-grantees and others)	29	1	7	10	13	60 (19%)
Consultants and academics (e.g., influencers, lawyers, academics)	10	8	0	1	0	19 (6%)
Non-affiliated workers (D1 and D4)	60	0	0	0	0	60 (19%)
Total	142	27	48	24	71	312

Note: Percentages may not sum up 100 due to rounding.

A.5.2. VALIDATION AND RANKING

In addition to the validation and ranking pursued by ILAB staff and implementation partners of the associated 19 technical assistance projects in December 2024 (see Annex F. Validation Workshop Agenda with the Workshop Agenda), NORC collected validation and ranking responses on of the CS stories from actors involved in such changes. From the original sample, the evaluation team randomly selected 70 participants, grouped by domain of change, to administer the Validation and Ranking instrument (see Annex D. Validation and Ranking Form (online and in-person)). Between November 15 and December 23, 2024, NORC distributed an online survey supplemented with WhatsApp and telephone outreach, to obtain validation of the outcomes indicated in Tables 4, 7, 9, 11 and 13 (Section 3), and rankings according to the outcome significance to participants, by domain. Between November 2024 and early January 2025 and after distributing the survey via email and WhatsApp and sending also the draft stories by domain, for reference, NORC followed up with respondents and requested authorization to STPS to collect feedback from FCCLR and STPS-UDT respondents. NORC obtained focal person's authorization on Friday, December 20, 2024, and released the survey to these officials – for Domains 3 and 5 – immediately after receiving approval. Specifically referring to federal authorities, NORC received validation responses from FCCLR staff ($n=3$), the Council of the Federal Judicature ($n=3$) and STPS ($n=2$), related to Domains of Change 3 and 5.

Table 22 presents the fieldwork results of the validation and ranking exercises. Overall, lack of access to Internet and unreliable phone lines were important limitations to obtain the validation from respondent female workers in Domain 4. As to Domain 5, the holiday season hindered their response, despite multiple attempts via email and by requesting NORC's focal contact to remind officials about the validation and ranking exercise.

Table 22. Validation and Ranking Response (No Implementation Partners)

Domain of Change (D)	Subsample size	Observations collected (%)	Mode		
			Web survey	Telephone	In person
D1 – Workers' advocacy of labor rights	14	9 (64%)	7	2	-
D2 – Private sector's labor practices	12	4 (33%)	4	-	-
D3 – Strengthening the new labor justice and conciliations systems	17	9 (53%)	8	1	-
D4 – Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace	11	4 (36%)	2	2	-
D5 - Labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination	16	5 (31%)	4	1	-
Total (from SSI & FGDs respondents)	70	31 (44%)	25	6	-
Unaffiliated workers (CS changes 1d, 1e, 1f, and 4d only)	60	60 (100%)	-	-	60

As indicated above, NORC's SME inquired from 60 unaffiliated workers their ranking on some outcomes that NORC had gathered during fieldwork from unionized workers by late August 2024. These outcomes were the focus of CS stories 1d, 1e, 1f, and 4d. The validation and ranking exercise was the second part of the structured interview instrument administered to unaffiliated workers in six industrial areas in Mexico linked to the automotive and textile exporting sectors in Mexico.

A.6. ANALYSIS

A.6.1 DRAFTING THE MSC STORIES

After finalizing fieldwork activities of the first round of respondents provided by portfolio actors, the evaluation team mapped the most significant changes and assessed convergences across respondents within each domain. The team determined the main changes to pursue and those that required a few more SSIs or FGDs to determine enough respondents reported them to draft a story about them (usually, the team considered a minimum of four or five independent observations to consider minimum saturation). The evaluators used an analytical template to structure their drafts and the evaluation team at NORC, comprised of an Evaluation Lead and a CAMEL Specialist, supervised each story through multiple rounds on revisions using a SharePoint platform.

Once each significant change had been determined and the sections structured, a Quantitative Analyst at NORC's home office worked in coordination with the Evaluation Lead to identify PMP data from the projects or secondary sources of statistical data to strengthen the MSC stories. NORC crafted each change story based on data from multiple respondents (an additional triangulation step). Each change story was checked against data from the Grantee DRF provided by ILAB for the technical assistance projects and the project TPRs, as well as official secondary sources (e.g. the government of Mexico or USDOL/ILAB). This also expanded the explanation of contributing factors and trends in the context and sustainability outlook. Each story went through a careful quality assurance process, checking facts and causal logic. Due to the complex aspects of the technical assistance and its context, the evaluation results are not necessarily generalizable to all groups of workers, labor authorities, exporting companies, and labor rights interventions in Mexico. However, the utilization-focused approach

ensures that findings are relevant to PIUs and the use of triangulation and evaluation logic strengthens the credibility and validity of the evidence.

Additionally, two senior advisors were involved in the review process of the MSC stories; the CAMEL Expert provided formative feedback on a sample of stories across all consultants and the Labor Evaluation Advisor provided a full review of the MSC stories to increase clarity, technical accuracy, and relevance.

A.6.2. ADDRESSING THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

NORC prepared a detailed Analysis Plan that identified the relevant sources of information to address each EQ and sub-EQ, pointed the writer to the relevant sources and instructed the process of combining the sources for reporting. In Table 23 below, the evaluation team summarizes the analytical approach to address each evaluation question (EQ) and sub-question, listed in the first column. The second column indicates the source of information used for each response. The sources described above were a desk review, which includes all project documents, document provided by SSI/FGD respondents, monitoring data, and secondary data sources; the CS stories that capture the information obtained from SSIs, FGDs, and structured survey interviews about MSC with the full sample of respondents; the ranking of the CS stories or change summary statements, as well as the criteria for ranking; and Adaptive Management content provided by portfolio actors). To facilitate their analysis, the CS stories were broken down into a database per section, in which the material of all CS stories can be reviewed on a cross-sectional basis (i.e., contributions, change descriptions, significance, impact on groups most at-risk of labor exploitation, and sustainability).

According to the fourth column, the analysis of the full body of CS stories and the desk review, along with the significant change ranking results provided evidence to address EQs and sub-questions 1, 2, 3 and 6. For EQs and sub-questions 4, 5, and 6, the evaluation team relied mainly on the categories prepared based on the outcomes identified in the CS stories, and the Adaptive Management content provided by portfolio actors. For the analysis of Adaptive Management content, please see “A.6.3. Coding and Qualitative Analysis” section below.

Table 23. Evaluation Questions - Data Sources and Analytical Approach

Evaluation Question	Sources / Data Collection	Respondents	Analytical Strategy
1. What collective results (intended or unintended) have ILAB's projects and engagements contributed to in the last four years?	MSC SSIs and FGDs, desk review (TPR-PMP data)	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Analysis of CS story database (summary statements) and project monitoring information.
a) What factors positively or negatively affected progress towards key outputs and intended/unintended outcomes?	MSC SSIs and FGDs	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Analysis of CS stories (contribution sections).
b) How do ILAB, its implementing partners in Mexico, and other local system actors value the results?	MSC SSIs, FGDs and surveys, CS story ranking	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Ranking of CS stories and comments on validation.
2. Whether and how have ILAB's projects in Mexico been able to address, and collectively contribute to, the labor rights priorities set forth in Chapter 23 of the USMCA?	MSC SSIs and FGDs, desk review (TPR-PMP data)	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Analysis of change descriptions in CS stories to link them according to the priorities in Chapter 23 of the USMCA, triangulated with project monitoring information.
3. Whether and how have ILAB projects collectively contributed to implementation of the labor law reform/new labor justice institutions and improved respect for labor rights in Mexico?	MSC SSIs and FGDs, desk review (TPR-PMP data)	Domain 3 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Analysis of change descriptions in CS stories to link them according to the STPS priorities (May 1, 2019 Decree) in the Labor Reform, triangulated with project monitoring information.
a) What project strategies or components were most/least effective in making progress in the identified domains of change? Why?	MSC SSIs and FGDs	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Analysis of contributions in CS stories to link them according to the Labor Reform priorities, with rubric to make evaluative judgement.
b) Were project strategies or components effective in addressing the needs of populations in Mexico that are most at-risk of labor exploitation? Why?	MSC SSIs, FGDs and surveys, desk review, secondary data	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Identification of "at-risk groups" from sections in CS stories and secondary data to link them according to the Labor Reform priorities, with rubric to make evaluative judgement.
c) What project strategies or interventions should ILAB scale up or replicated? What project strategies or interventions should ILAB curtail?	MSC SSIs and FGDs	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC provide main list and NORC complements	Identification of strategies in EQ3a, contrasted with content analysis of Adaptive Management material from Validation Workshop.
d. What actors could scale up or replicate these strategies or interventions either	MSC SSIs and FGDs	Domains 1-5 respondents; ILAB/EAC	Identification of strategies in EQ3a, contrasted with content analysis of Adaptive Management

Evaluation Question	Sources / Data Collection	Respondents	Analytical Strategy
with or without ILAB's support?		provide main list and NORC complements	material from Validation Workshop.
4. Given the changing political context, and if deemed appropriate and/or necessary, how should (or could) the existing implementing projects shift project strategies (including activities) to further advance labor law reform/ labor rights in Mexico?	Adaptive management content (portfolio actors)	Implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Content analysis of Adaptive Management materials from Validation Workshop. Analysis by domain, if possible.
5. Given the changing political context, what government institutions and non-government actors can ILAB and its grantees better leverage to improve realization of labor rights in Mexico? How?	Adaptive management content (portfolio actors)	Implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Content analysis of Adaptive Management materials from Validation Workshop. Analysis by domain, if possible.
a) From a local systems approach, are there any Mexican structures/systems that ILAB and grantees can better coordinate with or support in making progress in the desired domains of change?	MSC KIIs and FGDs, adaptive mgmt. content (portfolio actors)	Domains 1-5 respondents; implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Content analysis of Adaptive Management materials from Validation Workshop. Analysis by domain, if possible.
b) How can ILAB and its grantees adjust their strategies/interventions to better respond to the needs/priorities of populations most at-risk of labor exploitation?	MSC KIIs and FGDs, adaptive mgmt. content (portfolio actors)	Domains 1-5 respondents; implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Identification of groups in EQ3b to classify the content analysis of Adaptive Management materials from Validation Workshop. Analysis by domain, if possible.
c) What are opportunities for future programming in Mexico relevant to the USMCA?	MSC KIIs and FGDs. Not collected from portfolio actors.	Domains 1-5 respondents; implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Analysis of MSC stories; content analysis of Adaptive Management material, if any. This question was not asked in the Validation Workshop per ILAB's request.
6. What portfolio results and outcomes have the greatest likelihood of being sustained?	MSC KIIs, FGDs, TPR-PMP data, and secondary data	Domains 1-5 respondents; implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Analysis of CS stories (Sustainability sections), project monitoring data and secondary sources to identify the outcomes with better sustainability conditions.
a) From the perspective of national (federal) and sub-national partners (state and local level), what are the key strategies to sustain the outcomes	MSC KIIs, FGDs, adaptive mgmt. content (portfolio actors)	Domains 1-5 respondents; implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB,	Content analysis of Adaptive Management materials from Validation Workshop. Analysis by domain, if possible.

Evaluation Question	Sources / Data Collection	Respondents	Analytical Strategy
achieved?		Mexico team)	
b) What are the main enabling and resisting factors of the desired changes within the labor rights landscape in Mexico?	MSC KIIs, FGDs; adaptive mgmt. content (portfolio actors)	Domains 1-5 respondents; implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Content analysis of Adaptive Management materials from Validation Workshop. Analysis by domain, if possible.
c) Are portfolio contributions to change able to receive and adapt to new feedback and shifting contexts over time? What inhibits or facilitates this adaptability?	MSC KIIs, FGDs; adaptive mgmt. content (portfolio actors)	Implementing partners, ILAB staff (OCFT, ILAB, Mexico team)	Content analysis of Adaptive Management materials from Validation Workshop. Analysis by domain, if possible.

A.6.3. CODING AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A qualitative coder analyzed all transcripts and notes taken during the Validation Workshop in December 2024. NORC prepared a pre-determined code frame based on the EQs and sub-questions, as well as the five domains of change, the labor rights priorities identified through literature review, and the local systems actors identified in the CS stories. The technical lead supervised the process and provided iterative revisions of the coded segments. After uploading the code frame onto MAXQDA, the coder conducted two rounds of coding on all materials based on the supervisor's revisions. After finalizing the coding process, the analyst extracted the coded segments according to the Analysis Plan.

A.6.4. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

As part of the information analyzed to address the evaluation questions of this study, NORC incorporated descriptive statistics to triangulate these data with the evidence from qualitative research – mainly the significant change narratives and desk review. In addition to using of quantitative data to triangulate MSC findings on the stories, as described in Section A.6.1 above, NORC incorporated some of the visualizations used in the CS stories to: i) refer specific examples of technical assistance contributions when documenting effectiveness of such interventions; ii) provide thorough context when describing replicability and scaling up opportunities for replication; and iii) document assertions of short- and long-term sustainability by triangulating user experience data into the results.

Additionally, the evaluation team consulted the Grantee DRF indicators and TPR information to provide a more complete portrayal of the geographic coverage and thematic scope of some technical assistance interventions. Aside from the PMP data, these quantitative materials included user STPS statistical data on unionization, union fee accountability, and labor conciliation rates; survey data from SGGLE and ENLACE on user experience; and Mexico Census data on demographic characteristics of agricultural workers in target states, to provide a deeper understanding on the agricultural laborer (see Table 18 for more details).

A.7. LIMITATIONS

This MSC evaluation faced three main methodological limitations related to the configuration of the sample of respondents, validation and ranking, and the time required to analyze the various sources of information. As follows, we describe the details of each and the mitigation strategies NORC administered within the scope of the current contract.

A.7.1. SAMPLE FRAME

According to standard MSC protocols, NORC created a sample frame using two sources of contacts, the PIUs of the evaluation, represented at the EAC, and a snowball strategy in which the data collection team obtained additional contacts. NORC's access to the sample of independent unions and private sector companies was limited due to a couple of factors. First, ILAB's COR and A/COR requested NORC to work only through The Solidarity Center to approach the independent unions from which the implementing partner considered it was safe to request a SSI or a FGD. While NORC approached non-targeted unions as well, the significant changes captured in Domain of Change 1 remained considerably centered only on five target unions.

Second, U.S. and Canada-based multinational companies showed no interest in participating in this study. NORC insisted several times and at different stages through different channels inviting leaders

at the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CANCHAM) in Mexico. However, only one respondent from AMCHAM's Labor Relations Committee accepted meeting with one of our evaluators and another one cancelled last minute. The timeline of data collection overlapped with the vote of Mexico's labor reform, which inhibited multinational companies to provide further information on their labor relations. CANCHAM indicated they were not authorized to disclose any information from their members and in exchange, its director distributed a call for KIIs for this evaluation. NORC received no responses. Our team contacted the Canadian Embassy's Labor Attaché, who provided NORC with the contact of a few of their implementing partners, included in the sample.

A.7.2. VALIDATION AND RANKING RESPONSE

NORC purposefully included federal officials from STPS and FCCLR the validation and ranking sample to engage with them to the fullest extent possible, per ILAB'S request. Engaging these officials in the said exercises involved obtaining authorizations from both institutions to administer the Qualtrics surveys. Such authorizations took over a month from STPS, which led the timeline to the end of 2024 and overlapped with the end-of-the-year holidays. NORC sent weekly reminders to respondents and obtained support from the focal officials at both institutions to remind them as well. However, the response rate, especially for validating the outcomes in Domain of Change 5, was low (see Table 22 above).

A.7.3. ITERATION AND ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION THROUGH A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

As a participatory approach, MSC involves close contact with respondents, which can translate into several instances of contact to refine and clarify details of the collected information. In this evaluation, NORC reallocated resources from the original scope of work to include a sample of workers non-affiliated to unions in Guanajuato, Morelos, Puebla, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi and Sonora. Due to their unaffiliated status, the PIUs had no contact information with these workers and NORC approached them independently, as explained in section A.4. The reallocation shortened the time available from in-country evaluators to conduct further engagement with their sources, adding pressure to the data collection deployment and the editing process of the CS stories. NORC added labor from its home-office staff to supplement for the time of the consultants, where needed, both on the refining of the inquiry by recontacting some respondents, and on finalizing the CS stories.

The participatory approach also imposes a wide spectrum of information sources to control quality for and analyze. While NORC used all sources with rigor, future participatory approaches will benefit from clarifying expectations of extension of outcomes and coverage of sources at early stages of the evaluation, to allocate the necessary resources.

ANNEX B. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

MSC Semi-Structured Interview

I. INTRODUCTION

[Read informed consent]

III. Most Significant Change

Thank you. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this interview is to collect information from people with knowledge of the most significant changes in the area of [insert CHANGE DOMAIN] since 2019. I would like you to tell me about observable changes that you consider significant in the actions, behavior, relationships, activities, policies, or practices of individuals, groups, communities, organizations, or institutions such as [yours/you] that have occurred in the framework of the Labor Reform.

2. In one or two sentences, please tell me about the biggest or most important change(s) in [SELECTED DOMAIN]. [INTERVIEWER: We recommend noting down and probing on up to three changes]

Probes:

- a. [INTERVIEWER: Do not ask for a description of the project's role here, but the significant change(s). Make a list of the significant changes and probe for each change using questions 3-16 in this guide:]

3. Who or what organization experienced the [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]? Please, be specific about the individual, group, community, organization, or institution that changed.
4. What was the observable change?

Probes:

- a. [INTERVIEWER: Do not ask for changes in knowledge, attitudes or capacity only. If respondent is describing unobservable changes (knowledge, skills, etc.), try to steer them towards observable changes in actions, behavior, relationships, activities, policies, or practices.]
5. To understand the timeline of this change, please tell me when it occurred. Tell me specific dates to the best of your recollection.
6. We are also interested in where exactly this [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE] took place. Please, tell me where specifically the change occurred. If the change occurred in multiple areas, please tell me all the localities, cities or regions where the change happened.
7. In one or two sentences, can you tell me why this [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE] is important?

Probes:

- a. To whom is this change important? [INTERVIEWER: explore individuals, organizations or communities who value this outcome]

- b. Why do they value it or how do they benefit from it? [INTERVIEWER: Explore their reasons for valuing the identified outcome]
8. Has this change affected vulnerable or underserved populations in Mexico in the same way? Which ones, and how?

Probes:

- a. Has this change impacted any of these groups differently? How?
- b. [INTERVIEWER: probe on different populations – migrant workers, indigenous workers, older workers, women workers, workers with disabilities, LGB workers. Try to get information that is as specific as possible about which group(s) has been impacted and how.]
9. Was there anything about this change that was unexpected or that fell short of your expectations? [INTERVIEWER: If respondent reports a new significant change in this question, record it in question 2 and investigate this change through the rest of the interview items starting with question 3.]

IV. Project or USMCA Contributions

We are now going to talk a bit about who contributed to this [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]. [INTERVIEWER: Be sure to clearly get roles and actions of actors that contributed (subject + indicative verb + complement)]

10. Please describe what actors or organizations have contributed to [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]? *Probe: first local actors; external actors, if there were any; ILAB project(s) that referred this informant.*

Probes:

- a. [INTERVIEWER: probe on different actors – other funders, national government agencies, state or local governments, civil society organizations, private sector, citizens, etc.]
11. How did these actors or organizations contribute to [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE], if at all? [INTERVIEWER: Inquire about the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, the ILAB project or other agents contributed.]
 - a. How did the actor's [project only if respondent mentioned it] activities, capacity-building, support, processes, products, or services affect or influence the [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]?
 - b. And then, what happened?
 - c. And then, what else happened? [INTERVIEWER: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
12. [INTERVIEWER: If the respondent has not mentioned the project(s) financed by ILAB] Did [name of project(s)] implemented by [implementer] contribute at all to [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]?

Probe:

- a. How did the [project]'s activities, capacity-building, support, processes, products, or services affect or influence the [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]?
 - What was the nature of this contribution?

- And then, what happened? [INTERVIEWER: Inquire about the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, the ILAB project contributed.]
- And then, what else happened? [INTERVIEWER: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
- b. Has the project's cultural sensitivity and community engagement strategies impacted its contribution to this change for vulnerable or underserved populations? Could you explain how? Could you give me an example?

VI. Sustainability

We are close to the end of this interview. Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts so far. In this last section, I want to talk about the future of these changes we just talked about.

13. What is the current condition of this [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]? Is the change still in force, has it taken hold, has it regressed?
14. Are there conditions for the sustainability of this [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]? What would be necessary for it to continue into the future? Please, explain why you think that.

Probes:

- By sustainability, we mean continuing into the future, including after ending of the financing of projects that have contributed (if they have contributed).
- Are there any different conditions that would affect the sustainability of this change for vulnerable or underserved populations? Which groups, and how?
- a. [If not]: What policies, resources or capacities would need to be in place for the observed [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE] to continue?

Probes:

[INTERVIEWER: Probe on different factors – Policies, legal frameworks or safeguards, funding, capacity of people or institutions, etc.]

15. Is [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE] contributing to any ripple effects? Is there any evidence of changes beyond the [actor described in the change description]?

Probe:

- By “ripple effects,” I mean changes in other institutions or actors beyond the [name actor where change occurred]? In other words, changes in actors that [project(s)] did not directly support.
 - What other areas of society and actors have been impacted by this change? How were they impacted? What are the concrete changes?
16. [INTERVIEWER: Only if a single significant change was identified in the interview]: Are there any other important or significant changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN]?
 17. In closing, could you give me the contact of other people who are aware of this significant change and who you think could add their perspectives to this research?

VI. Closing

Let me finish by learning a bit more about you and your relationship with [the Department of Labor-ILAB project(s)].

18. What is the role that you perform in your organization, and how long have you been in that role? What is your relationship to the [USDOL-ILAB PROJECT]?

I appreciate your thoughts and insights on these significant changes. I don't have any more questions. Before closing the interview, is there anything else you would like to talk about that we have not mentioned in the interview?

Have a nice rest of your day.

ANNEX C. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

I. INTRODUCTION

[Interviewer: Evaluators should review the informed consent in detail with all the informants before the interview and ensure that they understand clearly before obtaining their consent. If the informant verbally consents to continue with the conversation, the evaluator can document that they received verbal consent. And if the group agrees to the recording, ask for the consent of each participant in the recording.]

II. START

Thank you. Let me start with a few rules of the game. I will be mentioning topics and asking questions to the group. While I may call each of you to react at the beginning, please do not wait for me to do so. Just raise your hand when you want to speak, and I'll be moderating so that everybody has a chance to chime in. Everybody's perspectives are important and valuable. If you disagree with somebody else's opinion, please express your disagreement respectfully. This is also a chance for all of us to learn about each other. While we, as researchers, will not reveal anyone's opinions outside this group, we cannot control what anyone says after the conversation has ended. For that reason, please be mindful of what you feel comfortable sharing with the group.

Are there any questions? [Answer questions.]

1. First, I want to learn about you. Please, tell me your first name, the organization where you work, and how long you have worked there. Let's start with the person to my right and continue around the circle.

II. Most Significant Change (by domain)

Thank you. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this conversation is to collect perspectives and experiences with the most significant changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN X].

2. Who can tell me, in one or two sentences, the most significant change(s) in [SELECTED DOMAIN X]?

Probes:

- Any concrete and observable changes in how affected actors behaved?
 - [MODERATOR: Do not ask for a description of the project's role here, but the most significant change(s).]
 - 3. What do the others think about these changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN X]? Do you agree? Does anyone have a different significant change to share?
 - 4. [MODERATOR: Make a list of the most significant changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN X] and probe for each change. **Assign the available time to the changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN], according to what respondents indicated in item #2**: Who or what organization experienced or has knowledge of the [SIGNIFICANT CHANGE]? Can you share what individuals, groups, communities, organizations, or institutions that changed?
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5. [MODERATOR: Keep track of the most significant changes mentioned in SELECTED DOMAIN X and probe for each change]: Thank you. To understand when and where these changes happened, please tell specific dates when these occurred. Also, tell me specific places, such as neighborhoods, cities, or towns. In all cases, remind us of the most significant change and tell us the date and places.
6. Thank you for sharing these details with me. Before talking about the next area of changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN], can you tell me why these changes are significant? For whom is this change important? Please, remember the changes you just described and tell me who values the change or changes you identified; why do you think those actors value the change or changes; and how do they benefit from the change or changes? Probe:
 - [MODERATOR: probe on individuals, organizations or communities who value this outcome and their reasons for being interested in it.]
7. Thank you. Do you think that these changes were different for any vulnerable or underserved populations? Which populations, and how?
 - [MODERATOR: Inquire about each group identified by the informants.]

III. Project Contributions

[MODERATOR]: Repeat this section (Section III) for each identified change in Section II. If you need to narrow down, choose the three ones that a) seem most easily observable and b) are more clearly categorized as outcomes.

For us, it is central to understand the contributions of actors or organizations to these significant changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN]. [MODERATOR(A): Make sure you get clear roles and actions about the actors who contributed (subject + indicative verb + complement).]

8. So, I would like to know who contributed to the most significant changes in [SELECTED DOMAIN]. Let's go step by step. What contributions did local actors have to [SELECTED CHANGE 1]? [If none, go to next question.]

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on coalitions, local organizations, citizens, local governments, etc.]
 - And then what happened? [MODERATOR: Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, local actors contributed]
 - And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place]
9. Now I would like to know if there were external actors that contributed to [SELECTED CHANGE 1]? What contributions did these actors have to [SELECTED CHANGE 1]? [If not, move on to next change]

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on project [PROJECT NAME, ILAB OR OTHER], other funders, national government agencies, others.]
 - And then, what happened? [MODERATOR(A): Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, other agents contributed.]
 - And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
10. [If ILAB PROJECT contributed] In your experience with [project(s)], how did the project activities contribute to [SELECTED CHANGE 1]?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on capacity-building, support, processes, products, and services that supported (each) change.]
 - And then, what happened? [MODERATOR(A): Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, the ILAB project contributed.]
 - And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
 - How did your relationships or those of your organization changes after being involved in [project(s)]? Did you or your organization change the activities performed?
11. Thank you. Let's now talk about [SELECTED CHANGE 2]? What contributions did local actors have to [SELECTED CHANGE 2]?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on coalitions, local organizations, citizens, local governments, etc.]
 - And then what happened? [MODERATOR: Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, local actors contributed.]
 - And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
12. Now I would like to know if there were external actors that contributed to [SELECTED CHANGE 2]? What contributions did these actors have to [SELECTED CHANGE 2]?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on project [PROJECT NAME, ILAB OR OTHER], other funders, national government agencies, others.]
- And then, what happened? [MODERATOR(A): Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, other agents contributed.]

- And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
13. [If ILAB PROJECT contributed] In your experience with [project(s)], how did the project activities contribute to [SELECTED CHANGE 2]?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on capacity-building, support, processes, products, and services that supported (each) change.]
 - And then what happened? [MODERATOR: Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, the ILAB project contributed.]
 - And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
 - How did your relationships or those of your organization changes after being involved in [project(s)]? Did you or your organization change the activities performed?
14. Thank you. Let's now talk about [SELECTED CHANGE 3]? What contributions did local actors have to [SELECTED CHANGE 3]?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on coalitions, local organizations, citizens, local governments, etc.]
 - And then what happened? [MODERATOR: Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, local actors contributed.]
 - And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]
15. Now I would like to know if there were external actors that contributed to [SELECTED CHANGE 3]? Were there contributions from other actors to [SELECTED CHANGE 3]?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on project [PROJECT NAME, ILAB OR OTHER], other funders, national government agencies, others.]
- And then, what happened? [MODERATOR(A): Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, other agents contributed.]

And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]

16. [If ILAB PROJECT contributed] In your experience with [project(s)], how did the project activities contribute to [SELECTED CHANGE 3]?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on capacity-building, support, processes, products, and services that supported (each) change.]

- And then what happened? [MODERATOR: Inquire into the causal chain or mechanism in which the process that the change has followed is described and how, if at all, the ILAB project contributed.]
- And then, what else happened? [MODERATOR: Investigate the causal chain or mechanism as far as possible, so that the narrative can reach the present time and place.]

IV. Sustainable Changes

We are close to the end of this conversation. Thank you so much for sharing your comments so far. I want to end by talking about the perspectives for the future of these significant changes we just talked about. I would also like us to discuss separately for each significant change we have discussed in [SELECTED DOMAIN].

17. Do the right conditions exist to maintain [SELECTED CHANGE 1] in the future? [If there was contribution from (ILAB project)]: This means, after [project(s)] has ended. Why do you think that? Probes:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on policies, legal frameworks or safeguards, behaviors, relationships, etc. instituted in organizations.]
- Do you all agree? Does anyone think differently?
- Do these conditions exist for vulnerable and underserved populations? What are the conditions, and for which populations?
- a. [If not]: What policies, resources or capacities would need to be in place for [SELECTED CHANGE 1] to continue?

Probe:

- What conditions would need to exist for vulnerable and underserved populations? For which populations?
- b. [If yes]: Is [SELECTED CHANGE 1] contributing to other changes beyond the institutions or social actors that experienced the change? Which ones are and which ones are not?

Probes:

- [MODERATOR: Probe other actors beyond [project(s)]'s direct intervention, and concrete changes in behavior, behavior, relationships, activities, policies, or practices.]

18. Do the right conditions exist to maintain [SELECTED CHANGE 2] in the future? [If there was contribution from (ILAB project)]: This means, after [project(s)] has ended. Why do you think that?

Probes:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on policies, legal frameworks or safeguards, behaviors, relationships, etc. instituted in organizations.]
- Do you all agree? Does anyone think differently?
- Do these conditions exist for vulnerable and underserved populations? What are the conditions, and for which populations?

- a. [If not]: What policies, resources or capacities would need to be in place for [SELECTED CHANGE 2] to continue?

Probe:

- What conditions would need to exist for vulnerable and underserved populations? For which populations?
- b. [If yes]: Is [SELECTED CHANGE 2] contributing to other changes beyond the institutions or social actors that experienced the change? Which ones are and which ones are not?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe other actors beyond [project(s)]'s direct intervention, and concrete changes in behavior, behavior, relationships, activities, policies, or practices.]
19. Do the right conditions exist to maintain [SELECTED CHANGE 3] in the future? [If there was contribution from (ILAB project)]: This means, after [project] has ended. Why do you think that?

Probes:

- [MODERATOR: Probe on policies, legal frameworks or safeguards, behaviors, relationships, etc. instituted in organizations.]
 - Do you all agree? Does anyone think differently?
 - Do these conditions exist for vulnerable and underserved populations? What are the conditions, and for which populations?
- a. [If not]: What policies, resources or capacities would need to be in place for [SELECTED CHANGE 3] to continue?

Probes:

- What conditions would need to exist for vulnerable and underserved populations? For which populations?
- b. [If yes]: Is [SELECTED CHANGE 3] contributing to other changes beyond the institutions or social actors that experienced the change? Which ones are and which ones are not?

Probe:

- [MODERATOR: Probe other actors beyond [project(s)]'s direct intervention, and concrete changes in behavior, behavior, relationships, activities, policies, or practices.]
20. In closing, could you give me the contact of other people who are aware of this significant change(s) and who could add their perspectives to this research? [MODERATOR: Collect this data after closing the conversation.]

V. Closing

I appreciate your contributions to this conversation about significant changes. I don't have any more topics. Before concluding, is there anything else you'd like to discuss about these changes that we have not mentioned?

Have a nice rest of your day.

ANNEX D. VALIDATION AND RANKING FORM (ONLINE AND IN-PERSON)

These are useful for a participatory ranking exercise. Step 1 ensures that those taking part in the ranking do not see any glaring errors or omissions in the stories they are about to rank. If they have detailed input to provide, please offer to collect that information from them at a different time. Any stories that cannot be validated (and will thus need third-party verification) should be removed from the ranking process.

Stage 1: Validating Change Stories for Domain [ADD #] [ADD NAME]

Instructions: Write your name on a sticky note and place it in the appropriate column. If not using printed materials, read each change story and individually ask each respondent to indicate A, B, or C for the given story.

Change Story # and Summary Statement	A “I agree with this change story as drafted and am ready to proceed with ranking.”	B “I am a willing to proceed with ranking and would like to suggest additions/revisions to the story at a later time.”	C “This story contains errors or omissions that must be addressed before ranking.”
#1.			
#2.			
#3.			
#4.			
#5.			

[Go to next summary statement]

Stage 2: Ranking Change Stories for Domain [ADD #] [ADD NAME]

[Facilitator]: If in person, do it collaboratively. Read aloud the summary statements, ask for the ranking and reasons why ranking that way.

[Note taker]: Document the reasons for ranking each story.

[Ask only if Stage-1 = A or B]

Change Story Summary Statement	Discussion Points (if = B)	Ranking	Ranking Explanation
#1.			
#2.			
#3.			
#4.			
#5.			

[Display only if Stage-1 = C]

Please, write your comments to the story “#” in the box below:

ANNEX E. VERIFICATION FORM

Instructions for Data Collector

Preparing for data collection: Prior to collecting data from the verifier, 1) prepare the change story for their review and 2) tailor the questionnaire to each verifier.

During data collection: Using change story and tailored questionnaire:

Step 1: Provide the verifier with the change story, in either written or oral format. Send it along with the survey if self-assisted verification.

Step 2: Ask the verifier the following questions, in either written or oral format. The questions cover 1) the change story overall, 2) contribution to the change, and 3) the dimensions of significance, sustainability, and vulnerable groups' experience with the change as described by original respondents.

Questionnaire Template

SC Story #: ____

SC Story summary statement:

Question 1: To what degree are you in agreement with the description of the [change]?

☐ Fully agree

☐ Partially agree

☐ Disagree

Q 1A. Please provide comments, if you like:

Question 2: How much do you agree with the description of who contributed to the change(s) and how?

☐ Fully agree

☐ Partially agree

☐ Disagree

Q 2A. Please provide comments, if you like:

Question 3: How much do you agree with the description of the vulnerable or underrepresented groups' experience with the change(s)?

☐ Fully agree

☐ Partially agree

☐ Disagree

Q 3A. Please provide comments, if you like:

Question 4: How much do you agree with the description of the significance of this(ese) change(s)?

☐ Fully agree

☐ Partially agree

☐ Disagree

Q 4A. Please provide comments, if you like:

Question 5: How much do you agree with the description of the sustainability of this(ese) change(s)?

☐ Fully agree

☐ Partially agree

☐ Disagree

Q 5A. Please provide comments, if you like:

ANNEX F. VALIDATION WORKSHOP AGENDA

Time	Activity
Day 1 – December 5, 2024	
8–9 am	Breakfast
9–9:35 am	Welcome, introductions, background, reporting (Domains 1, 4, and 5) and instructions (ILAB/NORC) – <i>Plenary</i>
9:35–9:45 am	Break out into 3 groups and set up remote users <i>Break</i>
9:45 – 10:15 am	<p>Validation and ranking of CS stories – <i>Breakout rooms</i></p> <p><i>MS Teams chats for remote participants to come</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room A – Domain 5 – Labor Inspection / Standards Enforcement & Coordination (<i>AIR-CALLE & CAMINOS, SAI-Sustentar</i>) Room B – Domain 1 – Worker Advocacy of Labor Rights (<i>SC3 project, PoA-MAP, WVI-Fields of Hope</i>) Room C – Domain 4 – Eliminating discrimination in employment and occupation and promoting equality of women and men in the workplace (<i>ILO-VZF, PoA-MAP, SAI-, SC1 project, WVI & Verité-EQUAL</i>)
10:15 – 10:20 am	Show external actor rankings & criteria – <i>Breakout rooms</i>
10:20 – 11:30 am	<p>Learning questions discussion by domain – <i>Breakout rooms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessons learned from CS stories suggested by NORC (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) ILAB and IP participants discuss. NORC facilitates and takes notes.
11:30 – 11:45 am	Coming back together <i>Break</i>
11:45 am – 12 pm	Sharing back – <i>Plenary</i>
12 – 1:30 pm	<p>Learning questions discussion (1/2) – <i>Plenary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portfolio-level outcomes Main enabling factors / resistances or obstacles to outcomes Strategies to sustain outcomes

Time	Activity
Day 2 – December 6, 2024	
8–9 am	Breakfast
9 – 9:15 am	Message from ILO Instructions for Day-2 domains (NORC) – <i>Plenary</i>
9:15 – 9:25 am	Break out into two groups and set up remote users <i>Break</i>
9:25 – 10:15 am	Validation and ranking of CS stories – <i>Breakout rooms</i> *Remote participants will receive a MS Teams invite. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room A – Domain 2 – Private sector’s labor practices (AIR-Senderos, PADF, SAI, Verité, WVI, OCFT, OTLA, PoA) Room B – Domain 3 – Strengthening the labor conciliation & conciliation system (AIR, The Ergo Group, ILO-OBSERVAR, OTLA, PoA, C-230)
10:15 – 11:30 am	Learning questions discussion by domain – <i>Breakout rooms</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessons learned suggested by NORC ILAB and IP participants discuss and brainstorm.
11:30 – 11:45am	Coming back together <i>Break</i>
11:45 – 12:00 pm	Contributions to Outcomes – <i>Plenary</i>
12:00 – 1:15 pm	Learning questions discussion (domain) – <i>Plenary</i>
1:15 – 1:30 pm	Conclusions and portfolio-level reflections

ANNEX G. SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES

In this section, NORC includes the 11 most significant change stories (CSs) that validation respondents of this evaluation ranked at the top in each domain of change, according to their significance to them. When reading them, please consider each CS is independent and that table and figure captions do not follow the overall report's numbering sequence.

Table 24. Identified Significant Changes

#	Change Statement	Contributing Projects
1a*	In 2022 and 2023, children and adolescents stopped working or decreased the amount of time working in the sugarcane fields and coffee plantations in the states of Veracruz and Oaxaca.	FOH
1b*	Between 2020 and 2023, workers at five companies in Frontera, Coahuila, the city of San Luis Potosí, and Cuautla, Morelos created independent unions and democratically elected their union representatives.	SC2 project; MAP
1c	In 2023, agricultural workers in Oaxaca and Veracruz began requiring their employers to adopt occupational health and safety measures, such as access to first aid kits, rest breaks, and hydration.	FOH
1d	Since 2022, four new independent unions in the mining and automotive sectors have adopted transparent practices regarding the use of union fees, breaking with old unions' corrupt practices such as diverting union funds to leadership and thereby improving relationships with union members.	SC2 project
1e	Since 2022, four independent unions in San Luis Potosí, Morelos and Coahuila received representativeness certificates and two of them became exclusive bargaining agents of their collective contracts, which workers legitimized before the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registry. Under Mexican law, a union must legitimize its collective contract to maintain legal authority to represent workers before an employer.	SC2 project; SC3 project; MAP
1f	Between May 2021 and July 2023, three unions and a labor organization gained employer recognition and respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in a range of one to nine months, influenced by the intervention of the USMCA's Rapid Response Labor Mechanism.	ILAB's staff operating RRLM
2a*	In 2024, a sugar refinery in central Veracruz created a corporate social responsibility unit, which has put into effect procedures to prevent child labor and protect cane cutters.	FOH
2b	In 2023 and 2024, sugarcane refineries in Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Nayarit invested in better health and safety measures at work, reducing workplace accidents.	FOH; Senderos
2c*	In 2023, an automotive company in San Luis Potosí created and began to implement a long-term program to support the prevention of violence against women.	<i>Mexico Auto Employers</i>

#	Change Statement	Contributing Projects
2d	Since 2019, and with greater intensity since 2023, dozens of large companies located primarily in Central and Northern states which export products to the United States and Canada have modified their relations with unions to comply with the 2019 Labor Reform as specified by the USMCA Agreement.	ILAB's staff operating RRLM
3a*	In 2023, the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration launched the Labor Registry Information Repository (RIRL), a repository of digital labor documents available to the public.	SGLLE
3b*	From October 2022 to July 2024, the Labor Conciliation Center of Nuevo León has conciliated 81 percent of its cases using the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms.	ENLACE
3c	Since 2020, the labor courts of the State of Mexico have resolved most (52 percent) of their jurisdictional cases in an average of seven months or less rather than in one or more years.	TECLAB
3d	From October 2022 to September 2024, the Chihuahua Labor Conciliation Center (LCC), through its conciliation process, has resolved 88% of labor cases in 45 days or less.	ENLACE
4a	In 2023 and 2024, women in communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz increased their household income by starting or expanding their businesses.	EQUAL
4b	In 2023 and 2024, women coffee producers in communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz expanded their participation in the coffee production process.	EQUAL
4c*	In 2024, female workers at a maquila company in Nazareno, Durango elected a union league to represent them as an independent union, successfully renegotiating their collective labor agreement, and securing better benefits for the workers.	MAP
4d*	Since 2021, more female workers in a national union and three independent unions in Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos have gained positions as delegates in union leadership bodies.	SC1 project; ILO's VZF
5a*	From 2019 to 2024, the Federal Inspectorate at the Ministry of Labor increased its collaboration with the General Direction of Statistics to promote inspection visits efficiency through technological development (AI tools).	CALLE
5b	Since 2023, labor inspectors in Querétaro have made their inspections of workplaces more efficient and collaborative, improving relationships with employers.	CAMINOS
5c*	Since 2022, labor inspection authorities in Baja California have not monitored the labor conditions at agricultural facilities in the San Quintín Valley. Former workers and community leaders denounced two exporting agricultural companies in the tomato and berry chains violated OSH standards in a region where agricultural child labor persists, and most agricultural workers ignore the rights enshrined in the 2019 labor reform.	CAMINOS, <i>Sustentar</i> , UCJ

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 1A – REDUCTION IN CHILD LABOR

Domain 1: Workers' advocacy of labor rights

Location(s): Oaxaca and Veracruz, Mexico

From 2022 to 2024, children and adolescents stopped working or decreased the amount of time working in target sugarcane fields and coffee plantations in the states of Veracruz and Oaxaca.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

Varied factors, such as World Vision International's (WVI) *Fields of Hope* project⁴⁰, increased monitoring by sugarcane refineries, stricter supervision from coffee producers, and shifts in community values have all influenced the decreasing child labor trends in recent years.

Especially during harvest seasons, many children from rural communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz leave school to accompany their parents to the sugarcane fields and coffee plantations. This causes them to miss classes, fall behind in their schoolwork, and eventually drop out of school to work. These children and their families trade short-term economic gains for longer-term job prospects that an education can promote.

According to target agricultural workers in Oaxaca and Veracruz, child labor is seen as a traditional practice in communities. Parents are motivated by the custom of bringing their children to work. Parents and community members want to teach their children productive activities that their families have carried out for decades. These productive activities are seen as a way for them not to "fall into bad steps" or remain under supervision, since by not accompanying their parents to the fields, they would spend a great deal of time alone at home. Additionally, some parents are motivated by economic need to bring their children so they can work and earn income for their families.

However, according to these agricultural workers, the exposure to different ideas and lifestyles through domestic migration has impacted the mindsets of members of the target agricultural communities regarding bringing children to work. As a result, more and more community members have come to value child education over work, since young people have more access to diverse work opportunities if they complete certain levels of schooling (i.e., a high school diploma).

Due to the fact that WVI has been working in the sugarcane and coffee sectors in Oaxaca and Veracruz for at least a decade, it has gained field experience, which served as an entry point to the target communities. WVI, through the *Fields of Hope* (FOH) project, implemented different interventions in communities in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, including community awareness of the dangers of child labor, the creation of Child Welfare Committees, the opening of community libraries and the implementation of educational activities for children and adolescents in target communities.

At the beginning of the FOH project, members of rural coffee and/or sugarcane growing communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz rejected the idea of completely banning child labor because they considered it to be a foreign idea brought by an organization that did not know the dynamics of the community. However, through awareness raising activities, the FOH project gradually gained people's trust and responded to parents' concerns. For example, the project staff explained to parents during awareness

⁴⁰ Between 2017 and 2024, World Vision International implemented the Fields of Hope (Campos de Esperanza) project, focused on preventing and reducing child labor in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, particularly in the sugarcane and coffee sectors. For more information about the project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/campos-de-esperanza-fields-hope>.

events that they could still teach their children the value of working in the fields, but that it should only be for short periods of time and should not interfere with the children's schooling.

The FOH project carried out child labor awareness-raising activities in all target communities; it created Child Welfare committees made up of community members that were trained on how to sensitize parents about child labor; and conducted workshops on different topics including promotion of health services for children and adolescents, and prevention of alcoholism and drug addiction. At the same time, the project organized free reading and learning activities in community libraries moderated by members of the Child Welfare Committees with the aim of preventing children from dropping out of school. An important success factor was that the FOH project worked directly in schools and with families. This direct relationship between project staff and community residents helped WVI further understand community norms and practices, and foster confidence among families that the project staff understood the context and community realities.

In addition, the FOH project worked with the sugar refineries and coffee producers to both sensitize them on the issue of child labor and implement preventive measures such as formally requesting workers to not bring small children to work in coffee plantations and to continuously monitor the presence of children in the case of sugar refineries.

Change Description

Between 2022 and 2023, compared to the period before 2017, community members reported a decline in child labor on sugarcane fields and coffee plantations across 24 target communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz. Additionally, school attendance improved as fewer children were absent from classes. Monitoring data collected by the FOH project suggests a reduction in the percentage of households with at least one child engaged in child labor, from 43.6 percent in 2020 to 15 percent in 2024, and a decrease in the percentage of beneficiary children engaged in child labor, from 64 percent in 2019 to 6.6 percent in 2024. However, the denominators of these estimates change in every semi-annual cycle, which prevents stakeholders from identifying change within the same households and children over time.

Impact on Groups Most At-Risk of Labor Exploitation

According to Mexico's National System of Statistical and Geographical Information (INEGI), sugarcane and coffee workers earn incomes below the average in their states. In Oaxaca, where the mean monthly salary in the second quarter of 2024 was \$4,200 pesos (\$206 USD), coffee and cacao workers made almost a quarter of that number (\$54.20 USD) and sugarcane cutters and other agricultural workers⁴¹ made \$125 USD on average. In Veracruz, the mean monthly salary was \$5,870 pesos (\$286 USD) in the same period and while coffee workers made \$51 USD monthly, sugarcane and other agricultural workers made \$247 USD on average.⁴² Thus, a decrease in children working in sugarcane fields and coffee plantations primarily affects families with lower incomes, as they are the ones who need to take their children to the fields to increase household income. Child labor has an especially negative impact on children. Working in the sugarcane and coffee plantations entails many risks due to the tools and materials used and the weather conditions. Naturally, children are not exposed to these risks if they do not work on the plantations. Likewise, children can dedicate

⁴¹ INEGI (2023). National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE): Classifications. Available at; https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/enoe/15ymas/doc/clasificaciones_enoe_123.pdf. According to the classification made by ENOE, sugar cane workers are classified under "workers under other agricultural workers" that exclude corn, beans, vegetables, coffee, cacao, tobacco and flowers.

⁴² Mexico's Ministry of Economy (2024). Data Mexico. Accessible at: <https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/>

themselves to their studies if they do not have to accompany their parents to the sugarcane and coffee plantations to work. The fact that they can go to school helps them not fall behind in their classes and, at the same time, motivates the children to continue their studies and not drop out of school.

Significance

This decrease in children working in sugarcane fields and coffee plantations in 24 target communities of Oaxaca and Veracruz is particularly important for the daughters and sons of sugarcane and coffee workers in communities, as they are now spending more time in school, which has the potential to help them have better job opportunities in the future. Overall, multi-country evidence from the OECD shows that more time spent in school and attaining higher educational levels is associated with greater earnings.⁴³

Sustainability

Ongoing monitoring by the sugar refineries that engaged with FOH disincentivizes parents from bringing children to the sugarcane fields to work. In coffee plantations, employers now request that their workers not bring their children, and they monitor the workers to make sure children are not working on the plantations. However, the decrease in child labor in coffee plantations and sugarcane fields is sustainable only as long as the companies inspect and monitor. If companies do not inspect and monitor, then child labor in these sectors will likely increase in times of high demand or need.

Some members of the community are motivated to continue implementing the activities started by the Child Welfare Committees and educational activities in the community library. When WVI activities stop, certain community members will likely continue the activities, often voluntarily, and with their own resources. However, some community members are concerned that this will be difficult for communities to continue to implement without the help of WVI and the support it provides such as educational materials. Without WVI support and materials, there may not be as much incentive or motivation for children to continue attending the activities, which they see as key to motivating them to continue in school and not integrate into the labor market.

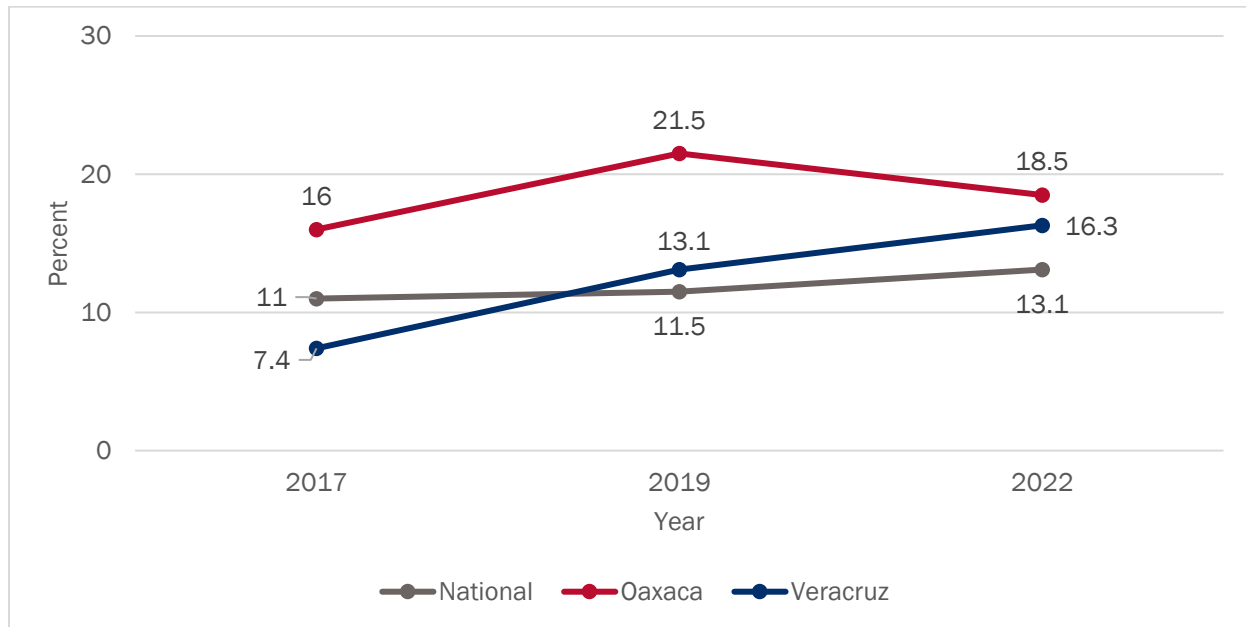
Community members and workers report that the perception that child labor exposes children to great risks has taken hold in their communities. As this awareness spreads, parents are feeling social pressure from employers, colleagues, and neighbors to prevent their children from entering into child labor, which reinforces the importance of protecting their children from the dangers associated with child labor. These social pressures should help ensure sustainability.

Regardless, any continued activities would be implemented in a larger context of difficult regional trends. As Figure 1 below shows, child labor rates have been increasing in recent years in Veracruz and increasing and then decreasing in Oaxaca, while remaining relatively flat nationally. According to data from the National Survey on Child Labor (ENTI), 16 percent of children in Oaxaca were engaged in child labor in 2017, rising to 21.5 percent in 2019 before falling slightly to 18.5 percent in 2022. In Veracruz, 7.4 percent of children were engaged in child labor in 2017, rising to 13.1 percent in 2019 and 16.3 percent in 2022. The impact of COVID-19 also contributed to this complex landscape; as indicated by the International Labor Organization (ILO), low-income households were more likely to rely on child labor when an adult member lost work and when children were not attending school, due to the economic shock and closure of schools that derived from the social distancing measures

⁴³ OECD (2024). Education at a Glance 2024. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/education-at-a-glance-2024_c00cad36-en.html.

authorities imposed. Data from INEGI's Survey to Measure COVID-19 Impact on Education (ECOVIED-ED)⁴⁴ suggests that about 1.1 percent or 146,100 students did not complete the school year at elementary in 2019-2020. From all students who did not conclude school year 2019-2020, 22.4 percent reported it was due to the loss of work by someone in their households, and 6.7 percent because the child or adolescent had to work. These trends suggest the relevance of technical assistance approaches similar to the ILAB-funded FOH remains in both states, and its potential replication in other agricultural communities alike may contribute to further reduce child labor rates.

Figure 1. Child Labor Rate (National, Oaxaca and Veracruz)



Source: INEGI-ENTI 2017-2022

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Alejandra Martínez

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara, Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: July 31, 2024

⁴⁴ Between November 23 and December 18, 2020, the ECOVID-ED collected data from 5,472 households, covering 11,080 individuals between three and 29 years old, which statistically represent 54.3 million individuals. A summary of results is available at: https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/investigacion/ecovieded/2020/doc/ecovid_ed_2020_presentacion_resultados.pdf

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 1B – ELECTION AND REGISTRATION OF DEMOCRATIC UNIONS

Domain 1. Workers' Advocacy of Labor Rights

Location(s): City of San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí; Cuautla, Morelos; Frontera, Coahuila

Between 2020 and 2023, workers at five companies in Frontera, Coahuila, the city of San Luis Potosí, and Cuautla, Morelos created independent unions and democratically elected their union representatives.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

Labor rights violations, initial worker efforts to organize collective action, strengthened leadership from independent workers organizations, guidance and support from the Solidarity Center, collective bargaining by workers, and information on labor rights disseminated by content creators on social media and Partners of the Americas (PoA) contributed to the creation of independent unions in companies in several states.

Prior to 2018, workers in five companies located in Frontera, Coahuila, the city of San Luis Potosí and Cuautla, Morelos were represented by a traditional employer-controlled multi-sector labor confederation. This organization provides union coverage across the country. Because the confederation is often not physically present in workplaces, as in the cases of the five companies mentioned above, workers often do not know who represented them. This specific labor organization has a reputation of inadequately representing workers' interests and has been known to negotiate contracts with employers without their knowledge, use union dues for the personal benefits of union leaders, and intimidate workers who opposed the union by threatening them with serious retaliatory actions. For several decades, this multi-sector labor confederation's behavior responded to a legal and policy framework that did not support labor groups that advocated for genuine union democracy and the rights of collective bargaining. Several employers were complicit in maintaining this framework because it was a tool to avoid genuine collective bargaining, which resulted in lower salaries and strike avoidance for companies.

Over time, some workers at these companies became impatient with low wages that have not kept pace with inflation and the lack of representation of workers in unions. In response, workers started the process of establishing independent unions in 2016.

Within the framework created by the landmark Labor Reform enacted in 2019, advisors from the Solidarity Center's "Building an Independent and Democratic Labor Movement to Protect Worker Rights in Mexico" project⁴⁵ contacted these emerging organizations and started to engage with them about the newly established protections for freedom of association (FOA) and collective bargaining (CB) in the 2019 Labor Reform. The Solidarity Center supported these unions by providing them with advice, training on CB and union representation and FOA. This included providing financial support for worker organization leaders to travel to Mexico City to attend other trainings or negotiations with employers. These activities allowed worker organization leaders to learn about their labor rights and how to exercise them, specifically in the context of democratic union governance. Examples of this

⁴⁵ Since 2022, the Solidarity Center has implemented the ILAB-funded project "Building an Independent & Democratic Labor Movement to Protect Worker Rights in Mexico" to strengthen the capacity of unions to organize by legitimizing collective bargaining agreements, supporting internal leadership elections, building partnerships, and providing independent unions with legal support and training for lawyers. More information about the project available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/building-independent-democratic-labor-movement-protect-worker-rights-mexico>.

include free, inclusive and secret voting to approve CBAs and transparency in the use of union membership dues to workers.

Social media has also been an important factor contributing to the development of independent and democratically elected unions. For the Mexico Awareness Raising Project (MAP)⁴⁶, Partners of the Americas and its subgrantees worked with pedagogy experts, other ILAB-funded labor reform projects and a media company on a mass media campaign with experience in developing civil society or rights-based media campaigns. The MAP campaign engaged with creators of social media content – for X, Instagram and TikTok – by providing them with guidance on messaging and encouraging them to publish information about labor rights and to share this information with unions and worker organizations. MAP’s social media campaign was instrumental in developing and disseminating information about labor rights and abuses, as well as serving as resources for workers, mainly in the context of the 2019 Labor Reform.

Several content creators for social media and radio communicators who broadcast to workers focused their communication messaging on educating workers about the minimum wage, maximum work hours, and overtime. They also informed workers about accessing the USMCA Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM) and hotline. In some cases, workers connected with civil society organizations that provided them with consultation and legal support to remediate alleged labor violations. Other workers received guidance on how to reach out to a local labor conciliation center (LCC).

Employers have also used these platforms, and one of them, after inquiring about minimum wage retroactive payment, ended up working with an organization referred by a content creator to generate internal rules for paying overtime and a protocol to protect workers from harassment based on sex. Content creators also reported that the constant exposure to content on labor rights has increased the number of worker users attending Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Relations (FCCLR) webinars supported by PoA about union registration. In the case of the union at Company A, the disseminated messages suggesting advantages of an alternative union, including wage increases, longer paid time off, protection against layoffs and union democracy contributed to a successful union campaign that resulted in electing a new union, as indicated in the next section.

Change Description

Between 2020 and 2024, workers established independent unions in a mining business, an automotive supplier, a multisector multinational enterprise, and in two rubber companies.⁴⁷ Workers elected their union representatives through a personal, free, direct, and anonymous voting process. The democratic way the union representatives were elected represents a significant change. For example, the union representatives of the previous employer-supporting union were appointed by the union and approved by the employers instead of being democratically elected by workers.⁴⁸

Impact on Groups Most At-Risk of Labor Exploitation

⁴⁶ Since 2021, Partners of the Americas has implemented the Mexico Awareness Raising Project (MAP) in Mexico to increase the understanding of workers, employers, and union leaders on how to utilize Mexico’s new labor systems to protect labor rights and effectively address labor disputes. By implementing these strategic outcomes, Partners and their collaborating institutions hope to equip Mexican laborers with information regarding their new legal protections so they may promote their rights in the workplace. For more details about MAP, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/mexico-awareness-raising>.

⁴⁷ The companies are located in Frontera, Coahuila (mining); Cuautla, Morelos (automotive and rubber), and San Luis Potosi (multi-sector U.S.-based multinational company). The company names have been replaced with letters to maintain their confidentiality.

⁴⁸ Please, see Significant Change Story 1e of this series to learn about significant changes emerging later after these independent unions were elected and registered.

The training and information dissemination have helped raise awareness on issues affecting women, such as pay equity. Within the context of the new union, women and men are afforded the same opportunity to participate – women act as union delegates in at least three of the unions.

Significance

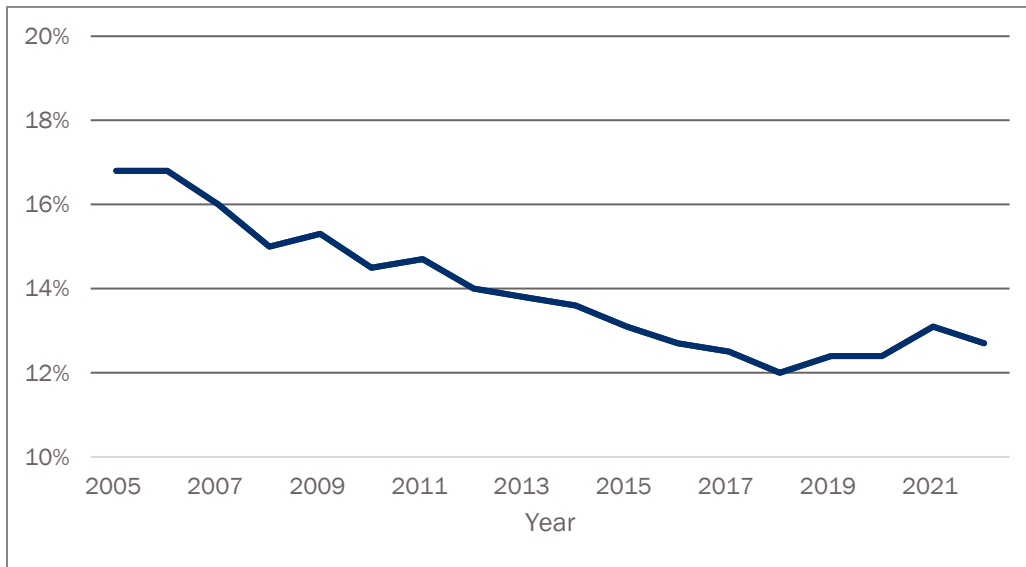
The establishment of independent unions with democratically elected representatives serves as a precedent and an example of moving away from employers' unions, which have historically advocated more for the benefits of the employer than the rights of the workers. These democratic unions are intended to more effectively represent workers and ease fears of retaliation and other threats by employer unions. The independent unions have empowered workers to exercise the right to elect their union representatives.

A high percentage of workers, especially women, reside in low-income and underserved areas. A strong union representation can advocate for higher salaries and worker protections. Such benefits, while not specifically targeting vulnerable groups of workers, would benefit all workers at these companies. Democratic unions open the gate to advocating for company concessions that could benefit single mother workers, older workers or workers with disabilities, including daycare services, occupational health and safety standards, and accessibility adjustments at the workplace.

Sustainability

The unions at Company A and Company B collected union dues, ensuring the union is self-sufficient and independent of external support. The other independent unions at companies C, D and E still rely on resources provided by Solidarity Center, which poses a challenge to sustainability. These resources include educational courses to increase their knowledge about labor rights, the labor reform and CBA negotiation; and expenses to travel to Mexico City to attend other trainings and negotiations with employers.

There is also a strong belief among surveyed workers that the sustainability of democratic, independent trade unions depends on the constant training of new generations of workers. A member of a union supported by an ILO project (AccioNNar, implemented by Vizion Zero Fund) echoed this sentiment.

Figure 1. Federal Unionization Rate of Workers

Note: Calculated as the percentage of subordinate and salaried workers.

Source: Calculations by CONASAMI, with data from the ENOE expanded questionnaire.

While the establishment of independent and democratic unions represents success in the five companies located in Coahuila, Morelos, and San Luis Potosí, knowledge and training about the Labor Reform including the right to organize and collectively bargain with employers still needs to be provided to workers in all states in Mexico. As shown in Figure 1 above, the unionization rate in Mexico decreased from 17 to 12 percent between 2005 and 2018. Since 2019, the unionization rate in Mexico has remained mostly stagnant, a probable sign of the impact of the labor reform and its associated efforts to promote union democracy and registration and prevent further decline. According to the STPS, as of 2017, there were 3,347 worker organizations registered by STPS in Mexico, out of which 47 were confederations, 532 were federations, and 2,768 were trade unions. As to the registered unions specifically, 1,024 (37 percent) were independent, 775 (approximately 28 percent) belonged to a traditional confederation, and 764 (about 28 percent) belonged to democratic confederations and federations.⁴⁹

Overall, content creators have perceived more active users on social media platforms and a change in the level of information reflected on their comments and questions about labor rights and resources to advocate for them, at least individually. They also assessed the contribution of social media exposure of messages related to labor rights, the role of FCCLR and the USMCA's RRLM to a more responsive attitude of the labor authorities toward workers. However, despite some cases of success, content creators and communicators concluded that workers' trust in labor authorities is still limited and slowly changing. They highlight resistance to overcoming traditional preconceptions about employer impunity and collusion with labor authorities to maintain status quo of impunity in cases of worker labor rights violations. This dovetails with a remaining information gap among a large proportion of unionized and non-unionized workers, about their labor rights, despite the valuable outcomes described below.

⁴⁹ STPS (2017). STPS has registered 3,347 worker organizations under federal jurisdiction. Accessible at: <https://www.gob.mx/stps/prensa/tiene-stp-registradas-a-3-mil-347-agrupaciones-sindicales-del-fuero-federal>

Finally, traditional employer-backed unions have also changed their approach to labor rights and have started discussing them openly with workers. Content creators and labor lawyers explained these unions generate misinformation about the RRLM messaging and create a threat about the United States government intervening in employer-employee relations. They threaten them with losing their jobs if the workplace facility was shut down. Respondents and the evaluation team agreed workers would benefit from a more simplified strategy to disseminate the purpose of the U.S. Government to implement the RRLM and workers' successful experiences filing a RRLM claim.

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Gabriel Orlando Velázquez Chávez

Editor: Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date drafted: 09/07/2024

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 1E – UNION CERTIFICATION AND CBA RATIFICATION

Domain 1. Workers' Advocacy of Labor Rights

Location(s): City of San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí; Cuautla, Morelos; Frontera, Coahuila, and Silao, Guanajuato.

Since 2022, five independent unions at five facilities in San Luis Potosí, Morelos and Coahuila, four of which were supported by ILAB's technical assistance, received representation certificates.⁵⁰ Workers at two of them also approved their collective bargain agreements (CBA) at the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registry.⁵¹ These steps allowed unions to negotiate wage increases in a range of 7.1 to 30 percent in 2024. A registered union had to legitimize their CBA if signed prior to May 2023 and obtain worker approval of CBAs since then to maintain legal authority so it can continue representing workers in union-employer negotiations. Contract legitimation gives workers the ability to know the content of collective contracts.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

After long efforts, workers at five companies – one in the mining sector, another one multisector, and three in the automotive industry – participated in free and democratic elections to select democratic independent unions. At two facilities, two new unions had workers approve of their collective bargaining agreements (CBA), becoming exclusive bargaining agents in negotiations with employers. This was possible because of the ability of worker organizations to convince workers that they had negotiated a CBA worthy of their support and obtain their votes and follow the legal requirements with the support of the Solidarity Center, Partners of the Americas (PoA), as well as social content creators. The 2019 Labor Reform, which includes enhanced protection for freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, provided the legal framework that allowed workers to freely choose their union representatives and to approve their CBAs.

Before the 2019 Labor Reform, it was common practice for large traditional employer-backed unions and employers throughout Mexico to agree upon collective contracts without the knowledge and participation of workers. The Labor Reform of 2019 changed this situation by introducing more democratic processes for unions to be established as exclusive bargaining agents. Becoming an exclusive bargaining agent is a legal disposition in the Reform that allows a union that receives at least 30 percent of workers' votes to be the only entity with legitimate power to bargain on behalf of the workers and, thus, negotiate the collective bargaining agreement with the employer. For that purpose,

⁵⁰ According to Article 390 Bis of the Federal Labor Law, a worker organization must obtain a certificate of representativeness from the FCCLR to be able to bargain exclusively with an employer after providing evidence of support from at least 30 percent of the workers. If no other unions seek a certificate, the FCCLR will grant the certificate, but if another also seeks a certificate, the certificate will be granted to the union that receives most worker votes in an election held by the labor authority at the workplace.

⁵¹ In case of a CBA being reviewed by workers mandated in the law, the 11th Transitory Article of the Federal Labor Law mandates that all workers must be cognizant of their collective bargaining agreement so that, if such agreement is approved or "legitimized" by them, the union that supports such agreement can continue being the exclusive bargaining agents to negotiate on their behalf. On May 1, 2019, the labor reform mandated that all collective bargaining agreement in existence at the time should be reviewed and legitimized by workers during the next four years after the adoption of the labor reform; the period ended May 1, 2023. Employers with a valid collective bargaining agreement had to provide a copy to all workers to review prior to the vote. Each union had to convene a vote for workers to cast a vote about their acceptance of the contract. Voting was to be a free, secret and direct voting process authorized by the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registry (FCCLR) and supervised either by a FCCLR verifier or a public notary. After counting the ballots, the results must be submitted to the FCCLR. If the union's collective bargaining agreement is approved by most workers, the agreement was legitimized, in case there are no issues reported with the consultation results. If the union's agreement receives no support from most workers, the CBA was nullified, but employers still had to pay the benefits under the CBA that were higher than those provided by the law. In the absence of a CBA, workers were free to form or join other unions or to existing union could attempt to negotiate a new CBA.

the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration (FCCLR) must validate the election results and issue the elected union a representativeness certificate.⁵²

Since 2022, the Solidarity Center, through the Strengthening Workers' Ability to Exercise their Labor Rights in Mexico⁵³ (SC3 project) and the Building an Independent & Democratic Labor Movement to Protect Worker Rights in Mexico⁵⁴ (SC2 project) projects, as well as Partners of the Americas – through the Mexico Awareness Raising Project (MAP) project⁵⁵, provided technical assistance and resources to the independent unions at Company A (Coahuila), Company B (Morelos), Company C, and Company D (both in San Luis Potosi).⁵⁶ These projects have provided remote and in-person advice to union leaders, as well as workshops and training events, which allowed workers to learn about and make informed decisions regarding their labor rights, particularly on becoming exclusive bargaining agents at their workplaces. In addition, the projects developed printed information such as flyers and infographics to be distributed to workers and, to a lesser extent, to union leaders and employers. The Strengthening Workers' Ability to Exercise their Labor Rights in Mexico project financed trips for union leaders to travel to Mexico City to participate in collective bargaining agreements and negotiate wage increases in 2023.

With support from the MAP project, social media influencers and content creators also played a role in supporting these independent unions' efforts to represent workers. The social media influencers and content creators that collaborated with MAP generated content on labor rights and facilitated the dissemination of the content under a contract with the MAP project. For example, staff at the radio station "Radio Voz Minera" reported that the MAP project helped them enhance their message and update their technology, helping to better disseminate messages about labor rights to a large audience.

Change Description

Following the reform and support from the three previously mentioned projects, workers formed independent unions at Company A, Company B, Company C, and Company D. In Company A, after eight years of trying, workers finally established a union in 2022. Also in 2022, workers successfully established a union in Company B despite violence and harassment perpetrated by agents associated with the old employer-backed union. Workers at these companies also successfully obtained the representativeness certificate from the FCCLR, according to Article 390-Bis of the Federal Labor Law.

In 2023, workers at Company C fought to gain their representativeness certification to bargain with the employer as an independent union. Interestingly, this union was established by workers who previously belonged to the employer-supported union, but parted ways to establish an independent union. The new union at Company C legitimized a collective legal contract, the so-called "*Contrato Ley*",

⁵² For details on this process, please see the "Change Description" section and Articles 388 and 390bis in the Federal Labor Reform, available at: <https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LFT.pdf>

⁵³ With this ILAB-funded project, the Solidarity Center aims to build the capacity of workers, support worker engagement and organizing, and strengthen democratic worker organizations in the aerospace, mining, and call center industries. For more information, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/strengthening-workers-ability-exercise-their-labor-rights-mexico>.

⁵⁴ This Solidarity Center project's purpose is to strengthen the capacity of unions to organize by legitimizing collective bargaining agreements, supporting internal leadership elections, building partnerships, and providing independent unions with legal support and training for lawyers. More details available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/building-independent-democratic-labor-movement-protect-worker-rights-mexico>.

⁵⁵ For more information about the Mexico Awareness Raising Project, please visit: <https://www.partners.net/program/mexico-awareness-raising-project/>.

⁵⁶ To maintain the confidentiality of respondents, the evaluation team removed the names of the four companies whose union members gain worker representation an exclusive bargaining agency in the study. Company A belongs to the mining sector in Frontera, Coahuila; Companies B and C belong to the automotive sector and are located in Cuautla, Morelos and San Luis Potosí, respectively. Company D is a multisector multinational located in San Luis Potosí.

through the legitimization process to become an exclusive bargaining agent, according to the 11th Transitory Article of the Federal Labor Law (see footnote 1 above for further details).

According to the labor reform, if both an employer and a union agree to the terms in the CBA, the union must submit the negotiated terms to workers for their approval. To be an approved collective contract, 50-percent-plus-one workers should approve it via a free, secret, and direct vote. In these consultations, employers should hand a copy of the CBA to workers for their knowledge and participation. CBA approval voting should be regulated by FCCLR and validated by a public notary or a FCCLR verifier. Upon legitimization of a collective contract, the FCCLR uploads the ratified contracts to its public information platform, so neither employers nor unions can change the terms of the contracts without further negotiation.

In the case of Company A, the worker movement began in 2014 when the company fired hundreds of workers for trying to organize for collective bargaining. After a four-year struggle, Union A⁵⁷ won the election by competing against the employer-backed union, but it was not until 2021 that the Federal Supreme Court of Justice recognized their victory. However, Company A did not recognize Union A until after the CBA was legitimized in 2021. Between 2022 and 2023, the FCCLR certified the new independent unions as exclusive bargaining agents at their facilities in Companies B, C and D.

According to the April 2024 Strengthening Workers' Ability to Exercise their Labor Rights in Mexico project's performance monitoring data, since the beginning of the project, three organizations had increased their capacity as democratic and independent unions, which is below the final target of all four worker organizations. The project was able to help democratic and independent unions affiliate 26,040 workers as members, slightly below the final target of 27,000 workers.

Impact on Groups Most At-Risk of Labor Exploitation

A collective contract benefits all workers in a company, not just those who are members of the independent union. This extends to any workers that are members of groups most at-risk of labor exploitation, such as indigenous peoples, LGB workers, migrants, workers of different ethnicities and ages, etc.

Significance

Before the change, traditional confederations were the only preponderant players on the labor side in collective bargaining, negotiating without worker participation. The establishment of new independent unions, with a new requirement to show sufficient worker support before they could be authorized to negotiate a CBA, in addition to the requirement that workers approve the CBA, has been significant a significant contribution to creating greater union democracy, transparency and worker accountability. These conditions have made it more difficult for unions at target facilities to collude with employers to suppress wages. In the past, the multi-sector employer-supported unions asked workers to sign declarations stating that workers were aware of the collective contract without providing details about the contract terms. Recently, the collective bargaining and CBA approval processes that these democratic independent unions conducted were a fundamental change to leverage the ability of workers to improve their labor conditions. This represents a shift in the Mexican work culture because it aims to make workers more responsible for their working conditions and gives them more say in these conditions.

⁵⁷ To maintain the confidentiality of respondents, the evaluation team removed the names of the unions at Companies A, B, C, and D and replaced with the references "Union A", "Union B", "Union C", and "Union D".

Official union representation and CBA approval at these five facilities led to concrete benefits for their workers. In 2024, a year after four of the independent unions became exclusive bargaining agents, they negotiated CBAs that included salary increases above the 2023 inflation rate of 5.09 percent.⁵⁸ Specifically, Company A, Company B, and Company C workers received increases of 14.8, 30, and 7.1 percent, respectively. Company D workers obtained an increase of 7.6 percent in a second increase in two years. These salary increases were possible due to the workers legitimization of the collective contracts and its filing before the FCCLR.

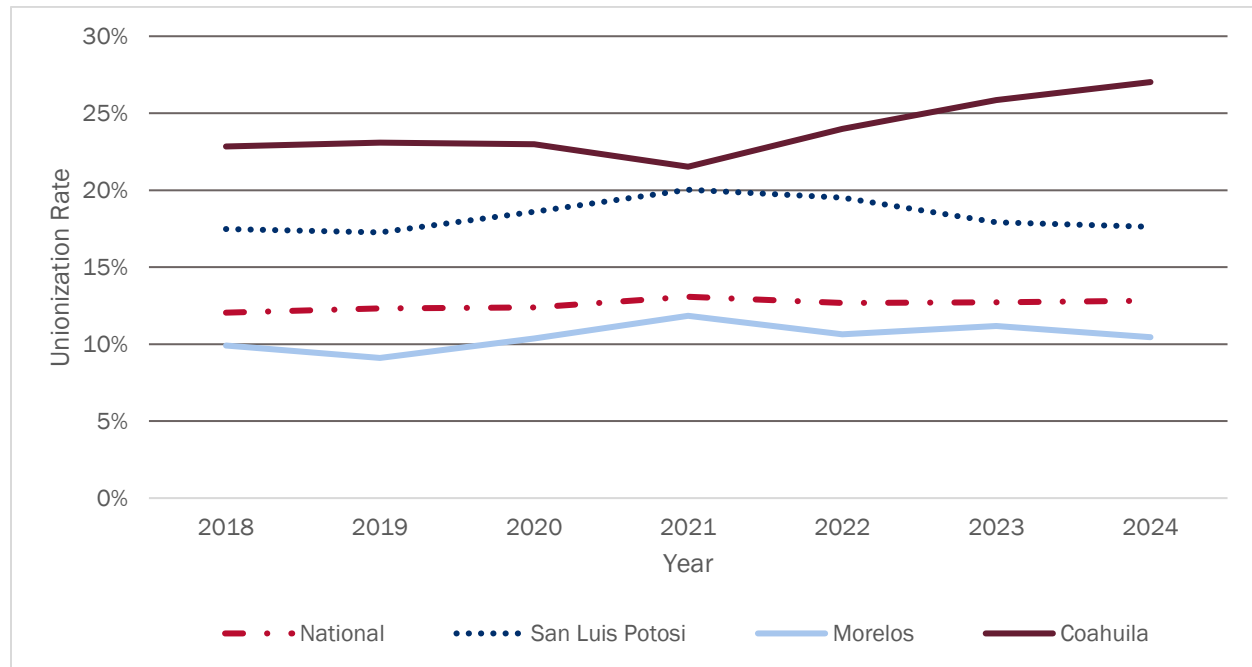
However, more research is required on the actual workers' understanding about the CBAs negotiated on their behalf. A 2024 independent study⁵⁹ that interviewed 130 automotive workers at seven supplier facilities (auto plants facilities and logistics facilities) and five assembly plants in Tamaulipas, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Sonora, San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, Estado de México, and Morelos suggests knowledge gaps among workers and a remaining path towards worker empowerment. First, the study revealed that 55 percent of the unionized workers interviewed reported a contract legitimization vote at their facility and were asked to vote. However, 40 percent of those unionized worker respondents showed lack of understanding what the legitimization process was about and later responses from additional study respondents revealed some confusion on what "legitimization" actually meant in terms of confirming or rejecting a CBA.

In this sample, three facilities had faced a Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM) enforcement review. In all these three facilities, while most workers actually voted to reject preexistent CBAs, 75 percent of them incorrectly reported that workers approved such contracts. This also suggests limited understanding of the outcomes from the legitimization vote. While the sample is small, facilities that have had RRLM reviews faced potential sanctions that incentivized them to promote workers' rights of FOA and CBA, including employers' obligation to furnish workers with a copy of their CBA at least three days before the legitimization vote. These findings highlight concerns about the empowerment of workers and suggest independent unions need to further work to educate workers about the content of CBAs, including the ones they have negotiated. Thus, future research and evaluation should explore worker awareness of their CBAs to examine the labor reform's assumptions that protecting CBA and FOA rights empowers workers.

To provide context to the establishment of independent unions in Mexico, the national unionization rate in Mexico has remained mostly flat between 2018 (12 percent) and 2014 (13 percent), according to data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS) presented in Figure 1 below. Similarly, the percentage of unionized workers in the states of San Luis Potosi (18 percent) and Morelos (10 percent) have remained mostly unchanged during this same time period, both showing a very slight increase between 2019 and 2021, before returning to the 2018 levels.

⁵⁸ INEGI (2024). National Index of Consumer Prices (INPC). January 9, 2024. More details available at: https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2024/inpc_2q/inpc_2q2024_01.pdf.

⁵⁹ LeClercq, Desiree and Covarrubias-V, Alex and Quintero Ramírez, Cirila, Enforcement of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement ("USMCA") Rapid Response Mechanism: Views from Mexican Auto Sector Workers (November 07, 2024). Research Report, Cornell University School of Industrial Labor Relations Center of Applied Research on Work (CAROW) Report. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5013741> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5013741>.

Figure 1. Percentage of Unionized Workers (2018 – 2024)

Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (2024), Indicadores y Estadística de la Reforma Laboral (INDERLAB).

On the other hand, the unionization rate in Coahuila has shown a small increase over this period, particularly between 2021 and 2024 when the rate increased from 22 percent to 27 percent of workers. Figure 1 also shows that the rates in San Luis Potosi and Coahuila are notably higher than the national average. The unionization rate in Coahuila in particular is approximately double the rate for all of Mexico. The rate for Morelos, at 10 percent of workers in 2024, is just slightly below the rate for all of Mexico (13 percent). These results suggest that the contributions of projects designed to increase membership to independent unions continue being highly relevant at the national context and also in the states in which Solidarity Center and Partners of the Americas are working.

Sustainability

By becoming exclusive bargaining agents, this legal authority allows the unions to advocate for better working conditions and worker benefits. One of them has been and will continue being salary increases mentioned above, a benefit that was possible due to the workers legitimization of the collective contracts and its filing before the FCCLR. This process ensures the continuity and sustainability of the terms for the established contract period, which, according to Article 324 of the Federal Labor Law, should be at a minimum two and at a maximum three years. However, it is the responsibility of the next generation of unionized workers to maintain exclusive bargaining rights and the resulting improvements in working conditions, such as increased wages. The surveyed unions pointed out the need for ongoing leadership training for young union members provided by older leaders, to ensure a generational shift that facilitates the continuity of exclusive bargaining agency, negotiating wages above inflation, and other actions to advocate for labor rights. Being able to negotiate their contracts allows the next generation of workers to evolve into increasingly empowered actors with increased agency and a louder voice. Such an evolved role would contribute to obliterate the stereotype of unionized workers as deserving low salaries for their work.

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Gabriel Orlando Velázquez Chávez

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara and Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: 10/03/2024

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 2A – PREVENTION OF CHILD LABOR AND IMPLEMENTATION OF OSH STANDARDS IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY

Domain 2: Private Sector Labor Practices

Location(s): Veracruz, Mexico

In 2024, a sugar refinery group in Veracruz created a corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit, working in central Veracruz, which has put into effect procedures to prevent child labor and protect cane cutters. The target corporate group comprises four sugar mills that planned to incorporate CSR policies in 2025.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

World Vision International's (WVI) *Fields of Hope* (FOH) project and an interest in obtaining the Bonsucro certification⁶⁰ contributed to the creation of a corporate social responsibility unit at a sugar refining company in 2024.

Since its inception in 2016, WVI's FOH project⁶¹ (Proyecto Campos de Esperanza) has worked with sugar mills, sugarcane producer associations and local sugarcane production and quality committees (*Comités de Producción y Calidad Cañera*, CPCC)⁶² in Oaxaca and Veracruz, to train sugarcane cutters on occupational safety and hygiene (OSH), reducing child labor, and the advantages of wearing protective equipment to prevent risk factors related to working conditions (heat, stress and poor hydration). By September 2024, 3,823 producers in Veracruz had completed training on implementing protocols on acceptable working conditions and child labor.

In 2018, the FOH project began working with a sugar mill company in Central Veracruz⁶³, to decrease child labor and improve the working conditions of domestic migrant workers. This included holding conversations with the sugar mill company's staff and management on these issues, providing protective equipment to sugarcane producers for sugarcane cutters to use it, and increasing the awareness of producers and sugarcane cutters⁶⁴ about safe cutting practices, the importance of hydration, rest and shade, labor rights and child labor. Gradually, the *Fields of Hope* project developed a close and trusting relationship with many producers and the sugar mill company's directors. Each year, the project led more conversations about these topics with the target population of cutters – adding new themes, such as the proper use of agrochemical management in 2021 – and with the sugar refining company staff and its management. During the 2022-2023 harvest (November 2022 to April 2023), the FOH project also provided protective equipment and first aid kits to four groups of cutters (120 people total). The protective equipment consisted of gloves, long-sleeved shirts, hats, and protective glasses. The project's awareness-raising about child labor and support for the sugar mill company to address unsafe working conditions for cutters influenced the company's directors to deepen their commitment to eradicating child labor and protecting workers by creating a corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit with explicit goals and commitments.

⁶⁰ Bonsucro is a global sustainability platform that aims to promote sustainable practices in sugarcane crops. For more details on Bonsucro certification, please visit: <https://bonsucro.com/what-is-bonsucro/>

⁶¹ For more information about WVI's *Fields of Hope* project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/campos-de-esperanza-fields-hope>.

⁶² Local CPCCs report their programs and decisions on sugar production and labor practices to the National Committee for Sugarcane Sustainable Development (CONADESUCA), a federal policymaking body that regulates the sugar industry in Mexico. For more information, please visit: <https://www.gob.mx/conadesuca/que-hacemos>.

⁶³ To maintain respondent confidentiality, we have removed the sugar refinery company's name and replaced it with "a sugar mill company".

⁶⁴ The refining company sources sugarcane from producers, who own the plots. These plot owners in turn hire local sugarcane cutters and sugarcane cutters from other regions of the country, especially from the Zongolica municipality, in the same state of Veracruz.

Another key factor that contributed to the creation of a CSR unit at the sugar mill company was the directors' interest in obtaining the Bonsucro certification. Bonsucro offers two certifications – one on the production end of the supply chain and one on the trading side of the supply chain – that motivates producers to improve corporate image, achieve sustainable procurement goals and build partnerships to tackle sustainability issues together. Respondents from the sugar refining company indicated they pursued the certification – which can only be granted via an audit by a Bonsucro Licensed Certification Body – because it would increase their possibilities to export and sell sugar at a better price. Implementation of the goals of a CSR unit would assist the company in achieving several of Bonsucro's production standards, such as no child labor and indicators related to occupational health and safety.

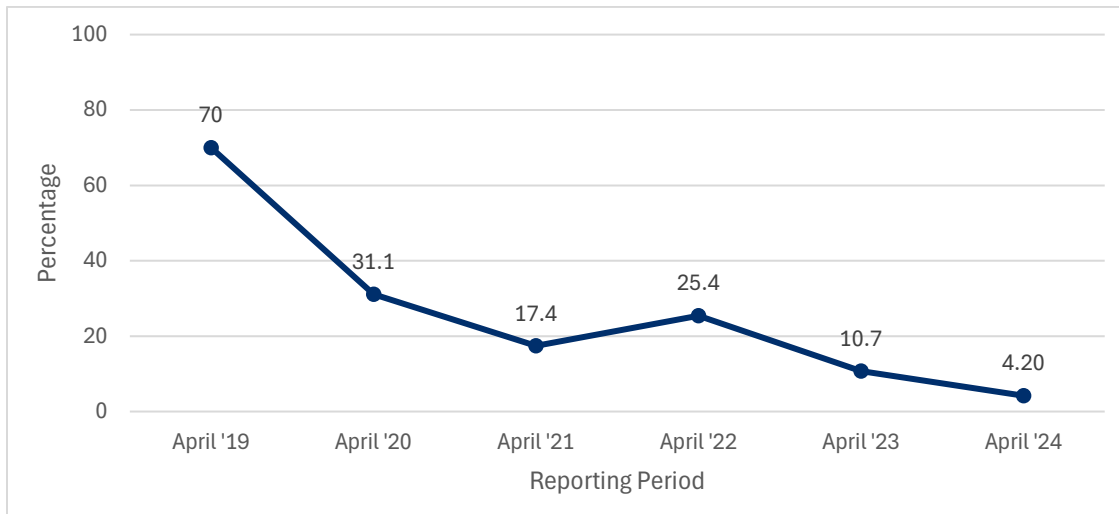
Change description

In June 2024, the sugar mill company established a CSR unit in Central Veracruz to oversee actions to prevent child labor among sugarcane cutters and improve workers' conditions. The company hired a former WVI project manager who had worked in Veracruz at earlier stages of the grant to support the CSR unit's work. This appointment provided some continuity to the efforts that the FOH project had started when engaging with the sugar refining company and cutters.

Regarding the protection of sugarcane cutters, the sugar mill company's CSR unit will oversee the delivery of protective equipment for sugarcane cutters. The sugar refining company approved a budget of 3.5 million pesos for the purchase of equipment such as boots, shirts, gloves and protective glasses for 750 sugarcane cutters, which represents about 50 percent of all sugarcane cutters that work for the producers that supply the sugar refining company. Through its CSR unit, the company now requires sugarcane suppliers to improve the sugarcane cutters' safety at work, including the implementation of measures to prevent accidents and heat stroke.

In terms of child labor, the sugar mill company established goals that: a) by the end of 2024, no child under 15 years of age would work for any of the sugar cane producers that supplied the company for any reason, and b) by 2029, no one under 18 years of age would work for the sugarcane producers that supply the company. Of course, sugar mills supply themselves through sugarcane producers, and sugarcane cutters work as day laborers for these producers. However, the sugar mill company has power, as the main client locally, to demand that sugarcane producers administer OSH measures that protect day laborers' health and safety and hiring practices that prevent child labor. The CSR unit's actions to date for reaching these goals include having each sugarcane producer sign a letter of commitment to avoid using children as sugarcane cutters, encouraging children to attend classes at local schools and effectively preventing the hire of children under the age of 15 years as sugarcane cutters. Representatives from the sugar mill company and sugar producer associations that participate in the local CPCCs monitor the adherence to these agreements through field visits and reports to the CPCC.

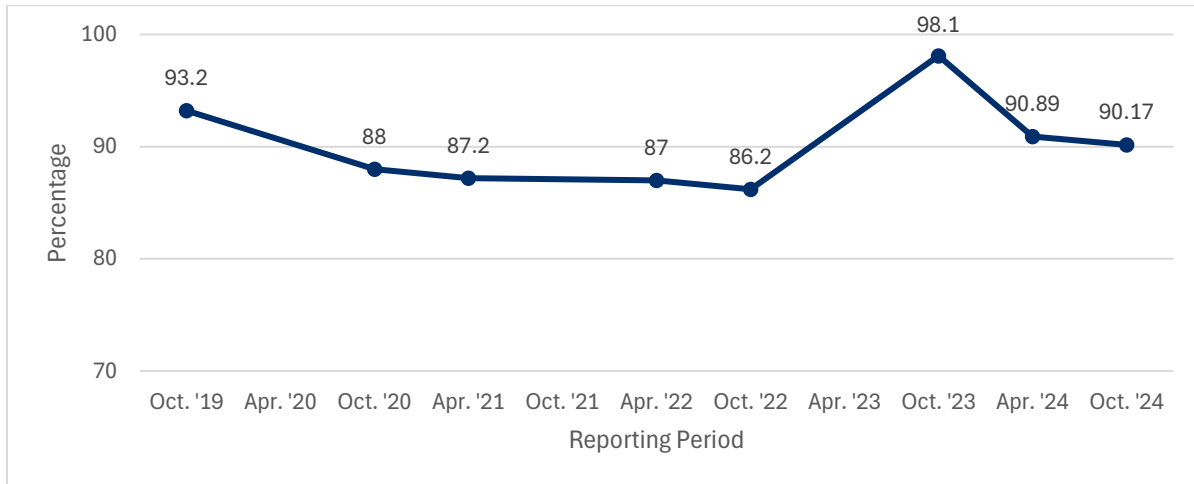
Some indicators in the FOH's performance monitoring data suggest a decreasing trend in child labor that matches the intended direction of this and other similar efforts related to participant children at the state level. FOH targeted 5-to-17-year-old children and adolescents in migrant agricultural communities. According to Figure 1, the child labor rate among project participant children in 12 agricultural communities in Veracruz saw a sharp decline between April 2019 and October 2024, from 70 percent to just 4.2 percent.

Figure 1. Rate of Beneficiary Children Engaged in Child Labor (12 target communities, Veracruz)

Source: World Vision International (WVI) 2024. Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP)

However, performance data on the rate of participant children in Veracruz who regularly attended any form of education in target agricultural communities shows a more mixed picture (Figure 2). Between October 2019 and October 2020, the rate of participant children attending any form of education decreased by about five percentage points. This decrease is not surprising, given the impact of COVID 19 on education and schooling. The negative trend, which overlaps with the height of the pandemic, continued through October 2022. However, between October 2022 and October 2023, the rate of beneficiary children who regularly attended any form of education increased by approximately 12 percentage points, surpassing the rate from October 2019 and reaching 98.1 percent of children by October 2023. In 2024, the rate reduced to slightly above 90 percent. A caveat in both charts is the changing denominators in each measurement, making the groups for which rates are captured incomparable across reporting periods.

While respondents associated the sugar mill company's CSR efforts with this reduction in the child labor rate, the performance monitoring data are not disaggregated at the municipality level to be able to corroborate this interpretation at the local level. However, this change suggests the same direction of progress towards project intended outcome at the local and the state levels.

Figure 2. Rate of Beneficiary Children Who Regularly Attended Any Form of Education (12 target communities, Veracruz)

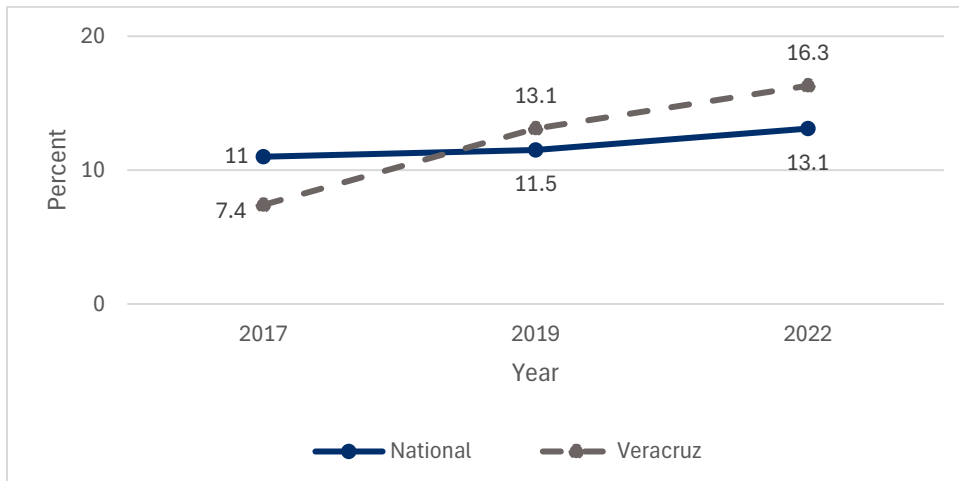
Source: World Vision International (WVI) 2024. Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP).

Impact on Groups Most At-Risk of Labor Exploitation

The creation of the CSR unit and the sugar mill's commitment to reducing child labor and protecting its sugarcane cutters represent an important step towards ensuring the safety of children and sugar cane cutters who are most at-risk of exploitation. Many of the sugar cane cutters in Veracruz are domestic migrant workers who have migrated from some of the poorest localities of Puebla, Chiapas, and Tabasco. Some of the cutters are intra-state migrants that come from Zongolica – the poorest municipality in the state of Veracruz. They identify as Nahuas and are Nahuatl native speakers, a traditional indigenous language; indigenous communities have been historically discriminated and workers who do not speak Spanish fluently face additional barriers to advocate for safer occupational conditions.

Significance

The creation of a CSR unit at the sugar mill company and its efforts to improve working conditions – through a budget for protective equipment and requirements for suppliers to implement better practices – is important for the sugarcane cutters that supply the sugar mill company, as it helps ensure safer and healthier workplaces.

Figure 3. Child Labor Rate, National and Veracruz (2017-2022)

Source: National Child Labor Survey (ENTI). INEGI.

Additionally, the CSR unit's goals and efforts to reduce child labor at the sugar mill company are important for the wellbeing of children. This change is particularly important in the context of rising child labor rates in the state of Veracruz. Figure 3 (above) compares the child labor rate nationally and in Veracruz. The rate of child labor in Veracruz has more than doubled between 2017 and 2022, while rising only slightly nationally. As of the first quarter of 2022, the child labor rate was about four percentage points higher in Veracruz than the national average.

Sustainability

It is likely that the sugar mill company will maintain its CSR unit to continue implementing protection and safety measures for sugarcane cutters and reduce the use of child labor. Although ILAB funding of WVI's FOH project has ended, the sugar refining company's CSR unit continues operating with company funds. As mentioned above, the sugar mill company approved a 3.5-million-peso (about \$175,000 USD) budget to purchase safety equipment for about half of the cutters that supply its sugarcane, which it will provide by November 2024. In 2025, the sugar refining company plans to provide protective equipment to the remaining sugarcane cutters. The directors also indicated they will extend the CSR work and related labor practices to the other sugar mills from the same corporate group to which this sugar mill belongs in Chiapas and Michoacán.

There are economic incentives for the sugar mill company to keep the CSR unit in operation, which will help ensure its sustainability. This unit aims to eliminate child labor and improve occupational safety, which are indicators the company needs to obtain the Bonsucro certification and eventually gain other certifications/awards that could enable access to new markets and have similar requirements. The company's directors expressed their commitment to obtaining the BONSUCRO certification in the medium term and thus achieving a better price for their sugar. Furthermore, promoting sugarcane producers to adopt OSH measures creates more stable agricultural labor environments. Safer and more convenient occupational conditions in the fields are more attractive conditions for sugarcane cutters, promoting their seasonal return to work at those locations. Such labor attraction and return thereby reduces time spent on training new cutters and increasing productivity.

An additional factor of sustainability that FOH in Veracruz and Oaxaca and other ILAB-funded projects, such as *Senderos*⁶⁵ in Jalisco and Nayarit, have established is the close collaboration with local CPCCs in target communities. Each local CPCC is comprised of representatives from a sugar mill company and the associations of sugarcane producers that supply the company. CPCCs have different subcommittees, including those focused on OSH practices. FOH has worked with the CPCCs in which the target sugar mills are represented to promote that these practices become a part of the normal work CPCCs do. This collaboration has aimed to promote that CPCCs continued training sugarcane producers and cutters on OSH measures and illness prevention awareness and on using evidence about the advantages of wearing protective equipment, hydration, rest and shade to maintain those standards harvesting practices among sugarcane producers. ILAB-funded projects also supported CPCCs to become an outreach platform to sugarcane producers and cutters. The CPCCs have become mechanisms that are well positioned to continue promoting awareness about labor rights and the reduction of child labor through the transference and reproduction of training materials, continuous conversations between CPCC members about these topics, and monitoring of compliance of OSH and hiring standards agreed by each CPCC during site visits.

Although the sustainability of the sugar mill company's CSR practices seems to have the support of its management, and local CPCCs have received substantial support from ILAB-funded projects, there are still obstacles and socioeconomic conditions worth noting to continue making progress towards eliminating child labor in target states. Respondents from the sugar mill company's CSR unit work faced some obstacles in the communities in central Veracruz, where child labor is traditionally seen as a source of additional income for households. According to company respondents, these traditional values have hindered the efforts to eradicate child labor among all sugarcane producers and cutters.

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Antonio de Haro Mejía

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara and Carlos Echeverria

Date of writing: September 23, 2024

⁶⁵ For more information about the *Senderos* project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/senderos-sembrando-derechos-cosechando-mejores-futuros>.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 2C – AUTOMOTIVE COMPANY IMPLEMENTS LONG-TERM PROGRAM TO PREVENT DOMESTIC AND WORKPLACE SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Domain 2: Private Sector Labor Practices

Location(s): San Luis Potosi, Mexico

In 2023, an automotive company in San Luis Potosí created and began to implement a long-term program to support the prevention of domestic and workplace sexual violence.

Contribution: What Contributed to the Change?

Between 2021 and 2023, the *Mexico Auto Employers* project, implemented by the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) contributed to generate a Support Program for the Prevention of Domestic and Workplace Violence at an automotive plant in San Luis Potosi. This contribution worked in tandem with instructions from the participating company's headquarters to comply with its institutional values of human rights and the interest of the company's management staff in Mexico. The automotive company participated in a certificate course designed by PADF and Universidad Iberoamericana (UIA) and received PADF tailored technical assistance, which guided the design of the Support Program against violence.

In September 2021, PADF created the certificate course "Labor Justice System in the USMCA for the Automotive Industry" in coordination with the UIA. PADF sponsored this academic program as part of the project "Engaging Mexico's Auto Sector in Labor Reform Implementation" (*Mexico Auto Employers*), funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB).⁶⁶ The cost of the course was sponsored through the project. The National Network of Automotive Industry Clusters (REDCAM, by its acronym in Spanish) collaborated with PADF by inviting human resource and legal representatives from automotive companies to participate in the course. An automotive company⁶⁷ located in San Luis Potosí participated in the second cohort of the certificate course in 2022.

The certificate course lasts 100 hours and includes 5 modules: 1) Labor Law, 2) Labor Reform in the Right to Organize, 3) The Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration, 4) International Doctrine and Jurisprudence, the International Labor Organization and 5) Trade Agreements and their Control Mechanisms, the USMCA Rapid Response Mechanism. The course aims to provide technical and legal knowledge about labor reform and the justice system and to improve awareness about ethical hiring practices and negotiating with unions.

As part of the *Mexico Auto Employers* project, PADF also offers tailored technical assistance to companies in the automotive sector so that they can comply with the labor reform. The automotive company learned about the offer of tailored technical assistance from one of its staff members who had taken the certificate course. Then, the automotive company requested assistance from PADF with collective bargaining, which, in turn, provided a consultant to help the company negotiate and sign a new collective bargaining agreement with its trade union.

For the new collective bargaining agreement to comply with the labor reform, company workers needed to vote to approve or not to approve the agreement. A PADF consultant organized 30 workshops that had 20 workers in each, including 10 men and 10 women. The workshops focused on providing

⁶⁶ For more information about the *Mexico Auto Employers* project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/mexico-auto-employers>.

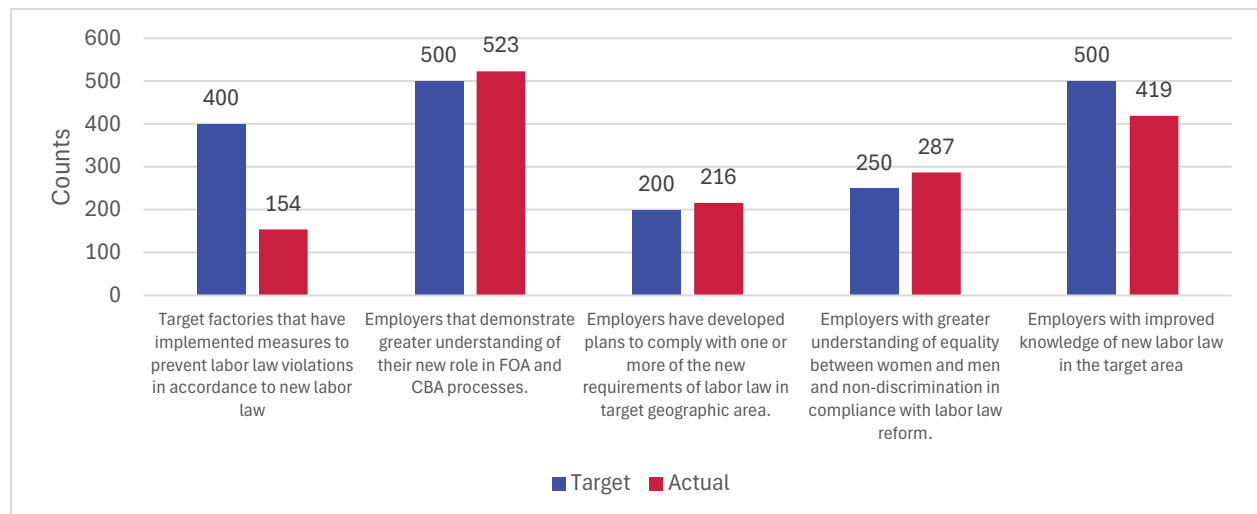
⁶⁷ To maintain the confidentiality of respondents, the company at the center of this story has been anonymized and is referred to as "an automotive company". In the context of USMCA, this is a "Tier 1" automotive company works directly with the car manufacturers as a direct supplier to the original equipment manufacturer (OEM), providing major components or systems. In contrast, Tier 2 companies supply parts or materials to those Tier 1 suppliers, essentially acting as a secondary supplier further down the supply chain.

information to participants about the collective bargaining agreement and soliciting their input on improving the working conditions of employees. This process resulted in two important changes: first, it created a collective bargaining agreement that called for improvements to working conditions, such as establishing mealtimes and improving workspaces. Second, and perhaps the most significant change, was the creation of a corporate Violence Prevention Support Program. A key factor in this second change was the commitment of the automotive company's senior management team. For example, the automotive company's vice president promoted a policy of "zero violence" in the workplace. Another important factor was the expectation of the automotive company's global headquarters that its Mexico operations would comply with the national legal framework, especially with laws related to human rights and the environment.

Change Description

In 2023, the automotive company began implementing the Violence Prevention Support Program to reduce both workplace and domestic violence that its workers sometimes face - the company had in fact received complaints of sexual harassment previously. As part of the program, the company conducted training for all supervisors and directors on gender equity and violence prevention. To address domestic violence, the automotive company hired an outside company to provide a hotline service with free legal and psychological help to workers. Through the program, the company also now gives two days of paid leave to women who have experienced domestic violence.

Figure 1. PADF Auto Sector Program, Target vs. Actual Outcome (2021- 2024)



Source: Pan-American Development Foundation (PADF). October 2024 Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) data.

Figure 1 shows the *Mexico Auto Employers* project's performance monitoring data for automotive employer outcomes related to: (1) factories in the ten target states that have implemented measures to prevent labor law violations in accordance to the requirements of the new labor law; (2) employers' increased understanding of freedom of association (FOA) and collective bargaining agreement processes (CBA) among employers; (3) employers' increased knowledge of labor reform among automotive employers; (4) employers' increased understanding of equality between women and men and non-discrimination in compliance with labor law reform; and (5) employers' increased knowledge of industrial relations and social dialogue. As of October 2024, the program had surpassed three of its targets - employers demonstrating greater understanding of FOA and CBA and equality and non-discrimination between women and men, as well as employers with a plan to comply with new labor

law requirements. However, it had only met around 39 percent of its target for factories preventing labor law violations according to the labor reform. PMP information suggests the project has experienced limited progress in 2024 because the indicator's activities were restructured to include certifications and the collaborative design of preventive measures for the automotive sector. These actions elevated the quality criteria for employer training and their impact diminished due to the more demanding pedagogical and methodological framework necessary to achieve their objectives. Figure 1 also shows that the project reached approximately 84 percent of its target for employees with improved knowledge of the new labor law.

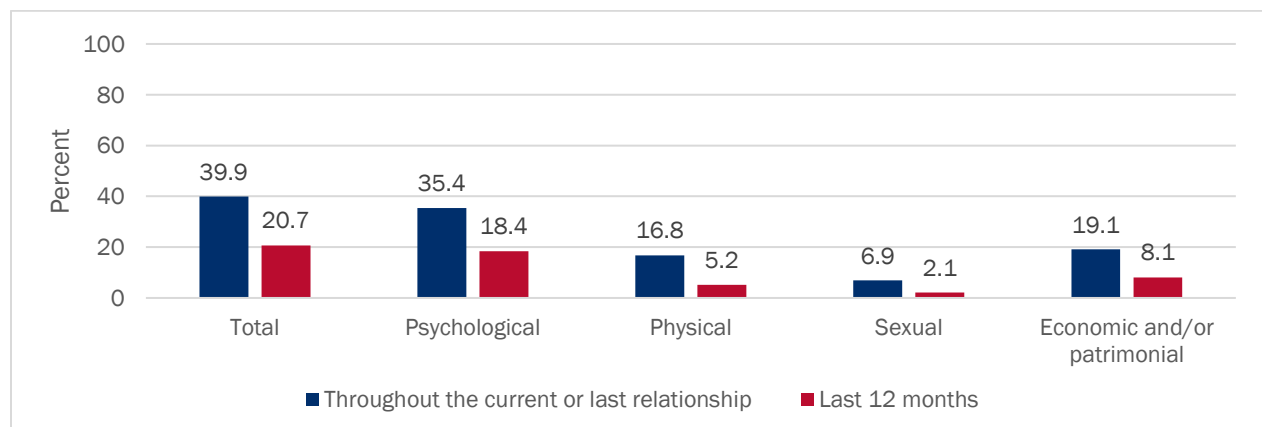
Impact on Groups Most At-Risk of Labor Exploitation

The Violence Prevention Support Program has had a positive impact on women. According to interviews with PADF consultants, work environment surveys have reported that there is less violence against women in the workplace. A delicate aspect, according to a PADF consultant, is that the company recognizes that there is domestic violence in the homes of its workers. In those cases, a way to help domestic violence victims is to give them an opportunity to be absent at work so they can seek medical or psychological support or file a complaint at the Public Prosecutor's Office. However, it is worth mentioning that this program requires workers to tell managers that they have suffered domestic violence. Because it is a delicate matter, some women may choose not to divulge this information.

Significance

This Violence Prevention Support Program and its positive impact to provide women with avenues for a safer workplace are important as an instrument to improve worker conditions overall, particularly for women. The change is also important as an example for the automotive industry of San Luis Potosí to take measures to prevent and punish gender-based violence and harassment at the workplace. An additional aspect of the ILAB-funded "Labor Justice System in the USMCA for the Automotive Industry" certificate course is that managers and human resources personnel in automotive companies are becoming increasingly familiar with each other, which facilitates companies sharing good practices amongst themselves.

Figure 2. Current or last intimate partner violence against women 15 years and older, by type of violence (National)



Source: INEGI. National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships 2021. SNIEG. National Relevance Information

The high rates of violence experienced by women in this context, and the low rates who seek help when they are affected, further highlights the importance of this work with women. According to the

2021 National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships, 42.8 percent of women in Mexico aged 15 years and over reported experiencing violence in the last 12 months (October 2020-October 2021). Among women 15 years and over living in San Luis Potosi, 41.7 percent reported experiencing violence in the same period. At the workplace, 20.8 percent of female employees 15 years and older nationwide and in San Luis Potosi reported being victims of violence in the last 12 months and 25.4 percent of them anytime in their lives (27.9 percent throughout the country). Furthermore, only 20.5 percent of these women sought support or filed a report after experiencing physical or sexual intimate partner violence, and only 8.8 percent of women sought support or filed a report after experiencing physical or sexual violence in the workplace. Figure 2 above shows that the most common type of intimate partner violence reported by women 15 years and older was psychological. About 35 percent of women reported experiencing this type of violence throughout their current or last relationship and about 18 percent reported experiencing that type of violence in the last twelve months.

Sustainability

The implementation of the Violence Prevention Support Program at the automotive company is sustainable because the company's directors have managed to move from awareness and knowledge to action. The union and the company agreed to include the Violence Prevention Support Program as part of the collective bargaining agreement, which was approved by the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration. In addition, the program is compatible with the policies that are being promoted by European companies that promote the compliance with the domestic legal framework in Mexico. Complying with the principles enshrined in the 2019 Labor Reform is a safe strategy to remain able to export automotive parts to the United States and Canada. While the enforcing mechanism that the United States-Canada-Mexico Free Trade Agreement has to promote workers' rights in Mexico – the Rapid Response Labor Mechanism – focuses on addressing violations to freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, combatting worker discrimination and harassment of any type improves workplace relations and prevents conflicts between worker collectives and the companies.

Data Collection Information⁶⁸

Interviewer: Antonio de Haro Mejía

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara and Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: October 4, 2024.

⁶⁸ A short overview of the story can also be seen on page 3 of a Labor Reform in the Auto Industry newsletter at: <https://reformalaboral-automotriz.mx/historias-de-exito/>.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 3A – FCCLR LAUNCHED THE LABOR REGISTRY INFORMATION REPOSITORY (RIRL)

Domain 3: Strengthening and Professionalization of the Federal Justice and Conciliation Systems

Location(s): Mexico City, impacts at the national level

In 2023, the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration launched the Labor Registry Information Repository (RIRL), a repository of over 600,000 digital labor documents available to the public, accessed by an average of 4,500 users per month since 2024.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare's creation of operational units and provision of resources; oversight and management by the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration (FCCLR); and training, programming, and technical support by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) contributed to the public announcement and beginning of operations of the RIRL platform.

In May 2019, Mexico adopted a sweeping labor reform which mandated the creation of the FCCLR and 32 labor conciliation centers (LCCs) (one in each state), which are responsible for carrying out conciliation services in labor conflicts. While FCCLR holds the authority to facilitate the conciliation process in the industries mandated in Article 123 of the Constitution, it also has the exclusive authority to certify new unions and register collective bargaining agreements (CBAs). Those bodies replaced the federal and local conciliation and arbitration boards (CABs)⁶⁹, as well as the federal registry of trade union associations in the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS). In the 4th Transitory Article of the 2019 Labor Reform, the Mexican Congress established that the CAB or the STPS had to electronically transfer all the registration documents, including trade union associations, CBAs, internal labor regulations, and administrative procedures, to the new FCCLR.

STPS was the agency in charge of creating the FCCLR. To do so, the STPS created the Liaison Unit for the Reform of the Labor Justice System (UERSJL, per its acronym in Spanish). In late 2019, STPS prepared for the installation of the FCCLR by contracting personnel, setting up the physical space, and purchasing furniture and equipment. AIR, through the Strengthening Government Labor Law Enforcement (SGLLE) project⁷⁰, supported this process in 2020 by developing the software programming of three main platforms: the Union Associations Registration Platform, the Collective Bargaining Agreements Registration Platform⁷¹, and the Labor Registry Information Repository (RIRL). To create and handle the new platforms, STPS created a general directorate of institutional development and a directorate of information technologies (DTI) at FCCLR, employing programming technicians. In addition to programming the software of all platforms, AIR trained all FCCLR staff to use the platforms, including RIRL, in October and November 2020. Since then, AIR has worked with DTI's technicians to improve the platforms. DTI staff have been open and willing to receive this training.

In October 2020, the FCCLR issued guidelines for the delivery of electronic documents, stipulating that the CABs in first stage states⁷² should upload the documents by November 2020 and those in the

⁶⁹ Also known as "Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje" (JACAs).

⁷⁰ Since 2019, AIR has implemented the SGLLE project to support effective implementation of Mexico's labor justice reforms at the FCCLR and STPS. For more information about the SGLLE project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/strengthening-labor-law-enforcement>.

⁷¹ The original names in Spanish are Plataforma de Registro de Asociaciones de Trabajadores and Plataforma de Registro de Contratos Colectivos, respectively. These two platforms served as entry points to feed the databases of registered unions and CBAs.

⁷² According to STPS, the Labor Reform would be implemented across state governments in three stages. States in the first stage, started in 2020, include: Campeche, Chiapas, Durango, San Luis Potosi, State of Mexico, Tabasco, and Zacatecas. More details available at <https://reforma laboral.stps.gob.mx/>

second and third stage states by April 2021.⁷³ FCCLR indicated it would finish reviewing and categorizing the documentation in February 2022. In November 2020, the FCCLR started operations. All new registries of CBAs and union association registration that the center approved since that date were automatically incorporated into the RIRL.

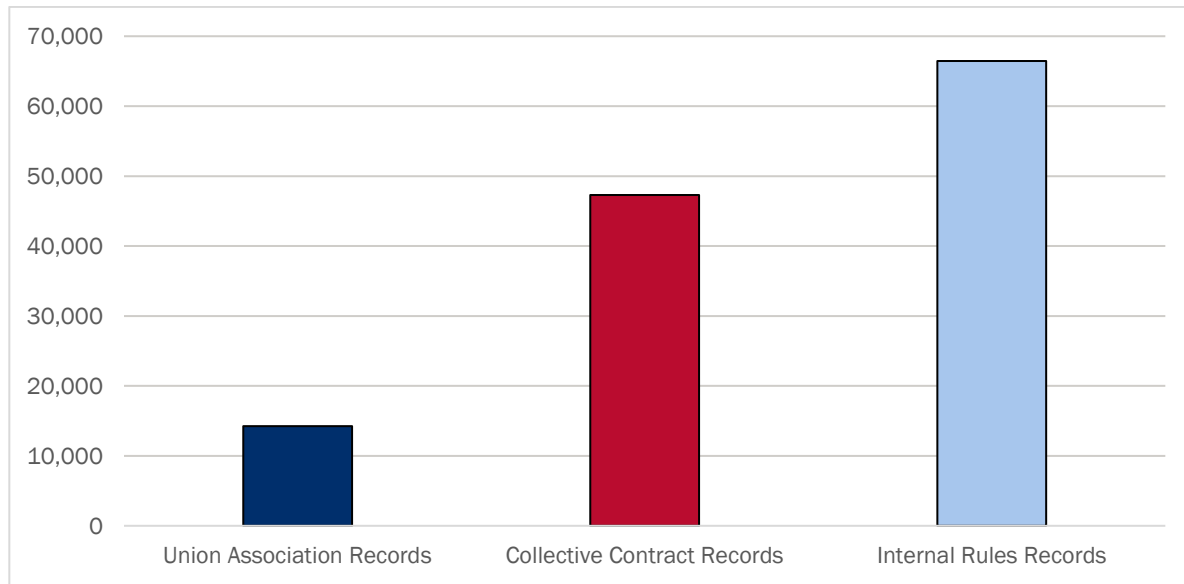
By November 2020, the RIRL only housed the new registries. CBAs were unable to fulfill the legal obligation to electronically transfer all documents by then due to the high volume of files and the lack of human and technological resources, including computers and scanners. So, the STPS asked the U.S. Department of Labor to help with this issue. Between 2020 and 2021, the ILAB-funded SGLLE project supported the digitalization (scanning and uploading) of the documents of 38 of the 58 CBAs, amounting to 138,000 documents. Additionally, due to resource limitations within the FCCLR, the project supported the review and categorization/indexing process, wherein it cataloged and indexed the relevant information of each file for easy searching, such as date, name of the union, name of the company, and type of registration, among others. The indexation process continued through most of 2022. In December 2022, AIR's SGLLE project also helped to index additional historical files that the additional 20 CBAs had scanned but not categorized. From then on, the RIRL contained both the old and new documents.

Description of the change

On September 20, 2023, the Federal Center of Labor Conciliation and Registry officially made the RIRL available to the public. The RIRL is found at <https://repositorio.centrolaboral.gob.mx/> and has more than 600,000 documents, such as registrations of trade union associations, CBAs, and internal labor regulations, among others. Between September 2023 and June 2024, users have visited the repository nearly 2.4 million times (over 130,000 unique users). Workers consult the RIRL, for example, to know who their union leadership is (this was previously unknown). Labor courts can download all the unions' documents from the RIRL without the need for a formal request. Currently, the RIRL allows intelligent searches of records, so that users can know, for example, all the procedures related to a union or a company. The RIRL contains both the documents issued by the CFCRL and those historical documents that were digitized.

Figure 1 below shows the number of documents in the RIRL as of September 30, 2024. Accordingly, the registry contained 14,264 Union Association Records, 47,296 CBA Records, and 66,455 in Internal Rules Records. In addition, there were 539,000 documents in the CBA Historical Archives (not shown in graph).

⁷³ States in the Labor Reform's stage 2 were Aguascalientes, Baja California Norte, Baja California, Colima, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz. In stage 3, STPS included in the Labor Reform the following states: Chihuahua, Coahuila, Jalisco, Mexico City, Michoacan, Nayarit, Nuevo Leon, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Yucatan.

Figure 1. Documents Registered at RIRL (September 2024)

Source: Centro Federal de Conciliación y Registro Laboral, Repositorio de Información del Registro Laboral. September 30, 2024.

Impact on Groups Most At-Risk of Labor Exploitation

The RIRL is publicly accessible via the internet. Before, in the CABs, workers had little or practically no chance of knowing their unions' CBAs. Now, workers can easily search for these agreements and other documents of their unions online. Additionally, workers with physical disabilities often faced difficulties accessing CBA information through the JCAs, as interested individuals had to visit CAB premises and request the information in person. Currently, the procedures are online, which helps them access information on any individual conciliation or to organize in the fight for their collective rights. However, these benefits are limited to those with access to a computer and internet connectivity, which imposes a disadvantage to those without such access. In 2023, 85.5 and 66 percent of urban and rural people (six years or older), respectively, had access to internet, and 43.8 percent of all households in Mexico had a computer (laptop, tablet or desktop).⁷⁴ This high availability enables workers' ability to gain access to the RIRL. However, current and future workers' rights interventions should enable workers to become knowledgeable and realize the advantages of making time to access resources such as the RIRL and use the information in it.

Significance

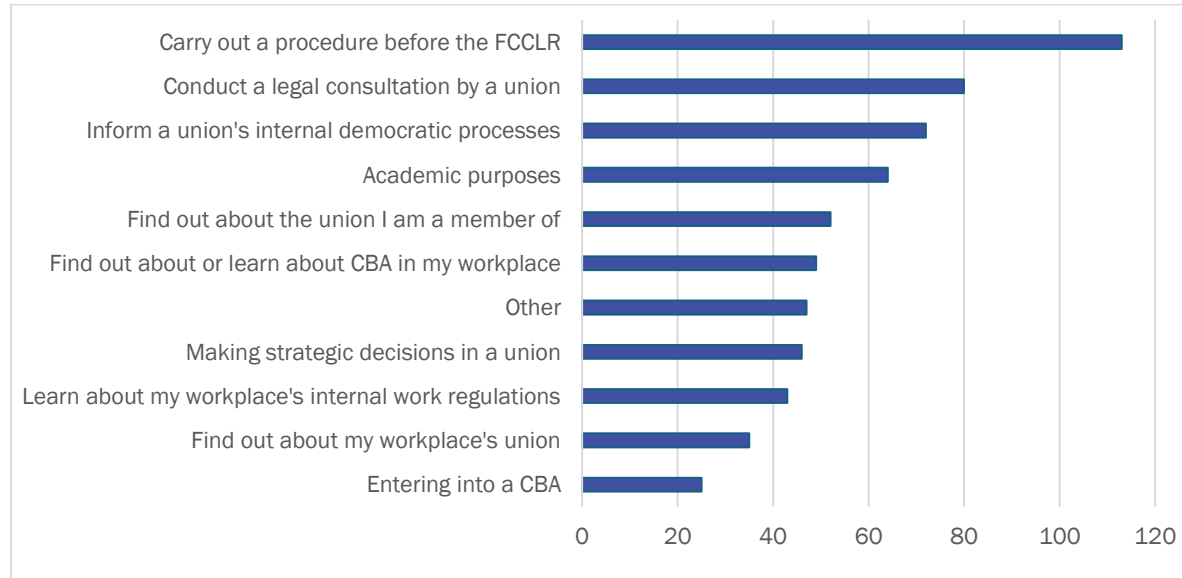
RIRL is a very valuable tool for the defense of individual and collective labor rights. Workers can easily access information about the wages and benefits in their CBAs. Previously, company and union leaders were the only ones who had access to union contracts. Now, the CBA negotiation process and negotiated outcomes between union leaders and company representatives are transparent. The new and improved transparent negotiation process can lead to salary increases and improved working conditions because workers gain access to past negotiation outcomes and compare what other companies and unions have agreed upon. Negotiations are no longer opaque processes between union and company leaders and may result in changes in their relationships, including greater salary increases and improved working conditions. Examples of the use of such documents and other data

⁷⁴ INEGI (2024). Encuesta Nacional sobre Disponibilidad y Uso de Tecnologías de la Información en los Hogares (ENDUTIH) 2023. More details available at: https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/boletines/2024/ENDUTIH/ENDUTIH_23.pdf.

on salaries and benefits include the collective bargaining pursued by the group of independent democratic unions that have received the support from ILAB through the Solidarity Center.

While the number of users surpassed 43,000 in October 2023, the number of monthly users continued to diminish through February 2024, when users stabilized to an average of 4,500 per month. Based on a web survey collected by the implementing partner from 309 respondents⁷⁵, the most frequent purposes reported for accessing the RIRL were to conduct a procedure before the FCCLR (113 users), make a legal consultation by a union (80), and inform a union's internal democratic processes (72 users).

Figure 2. Purpose of Using the RIRL (December 2024)



Source: AIR web exit survey.

Sustainability

The RIRL is considered institutionalized because it has a legal basis in the Federal Labor Law, the Organic Law of the FCCLR, and the Organic Statute of the FCCLR. Funding for the RIRL is included in FCCLR's budget. The FCCLR continues uploading all new CBAs and documents to the system. At the time of the project's termination, the SGLLE project was working on the software programming for version 2.0 of the RIRL platform, which included significant improvements to the database structures and interfaces. While FCCLR's DTI manages the RIRL's computing code and the SGLLE project trained FCCLR in making minor improvements to the RIRL, a major sustainability challenge is that FCCLR lacks the capacity to make large-scale improvements to the system such as developing the 2.0 version that SGLLE has been tasked to develop.

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Antonio de Haro Mejía

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara and Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: September 9, 2024.

⁷⁵ Respondents (n=309) included union lawyers (18 percent), union secretary generals/board members (17 percent), unionized workers (16 percent), unaffiliated workers (9 percent), employers/power of attorneys (9 percent), civil society members (8 percent), students (8 percent), public servants/authorities (6 percent), academics (3 percent), and other individuals (6 percent).

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 3B – ADAPTATIONS TO SINACOL AND SIGNO PLATFORMS SUPPORT LABOR CONCILIATION CENTERS' LEGAL MANDATE

Domain 3: Strengthening and Professionalization of Justice and Conciliation Systems

Location(s): Nuevo León

From October 2022 to July 2024, the Labor Conciliation Center of Nuevo León has increased the proportion of labor conciliation cases completed within 45 days up to 81 percent, relying on the use of the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

The Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) development of the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms, technical support from American Institute for Research's (AIR) funded ENLACE⁷⁶ project to strengthen the platforms, and the creation of the National Commission of Labor Conciliation Centers (CONACENTROS) have all contributed to the Nuevo León Conciliation Center resolving 81 percent of its cases through conciliation within 45 days.

In 2019 and 2020, the IDB developed the National Labor Conciliation System (SINACOL) and Notification Management System (SIGNO) platforms for the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration (FCCLR). SINACOL is a management platform for conciliators to carry out the conciliation procedure in accordance with the rules of the Federal Labor Law and allows them to keep track of work shifts, dates and times, and the personnel assigned to conciliation appointments. SIGNO is a platform that allows for managing the process by which actuaries notify employers to attend conciliation hearings.

Through the Enhancing Labor Conciliation (ENLACE) project, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) made the final adjustments to both SINACOL and SIGNO in 2022 and installed the platforms in the labor conciliation centers (LCCs) of 11 states in Mexico, including the state of Nuevo León, which was a part of the third stage⁷⁷ of implementation of the labor reform in October 2022. This story elaborates on the change that transpired in the Nuevo León LCC.

Through the ENLACE project, AIR supported the installation of platforms on Nuevo León LCC servers, and trained conciliation and information technology personnel. AIR trained the conciliators online, and has trained them on the labor reform, the conciliation procedure, as well as in the use of the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms. Training has been an important element in enabling state LCC staff to quickly initiate reconciliations. AIR has provided technical support through a support desk that assists with service tickets (reported technical issues). The support desk receives and resolves tickets through Telegram chat and videoconference technical support.

In addition, AIR updated the two platforms to increase their effectiveness and meet the needs of the LCCs in each state. In 2023, AIR modified SINACOL in Nuevo León to assign conciliators different courtrooms, according to a request from the state's LCC. In the same year, AIR also made improvements to the SIGNO platform in Nuevo León to assign predetermined zones rather than random addresses to each LCC notification agent. Thus, the notification agents could notify companies

⁷⁶ Since 2022, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its partner, the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM), implementing the ILAB-funded Enhancing Labor Conciliation (ENLACE) project to increase the effectiveness of the new labor conciliation centers at the federal level and in 16 states. For more information about the ENLACE project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/enhancing-labor-conciliation-mexico-enlace>.

⁷⁷ According to Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS), the Labor Reform would be implemented across state governments in three stages. More details available at <https://reforma laboral.stps.gob.mx/>

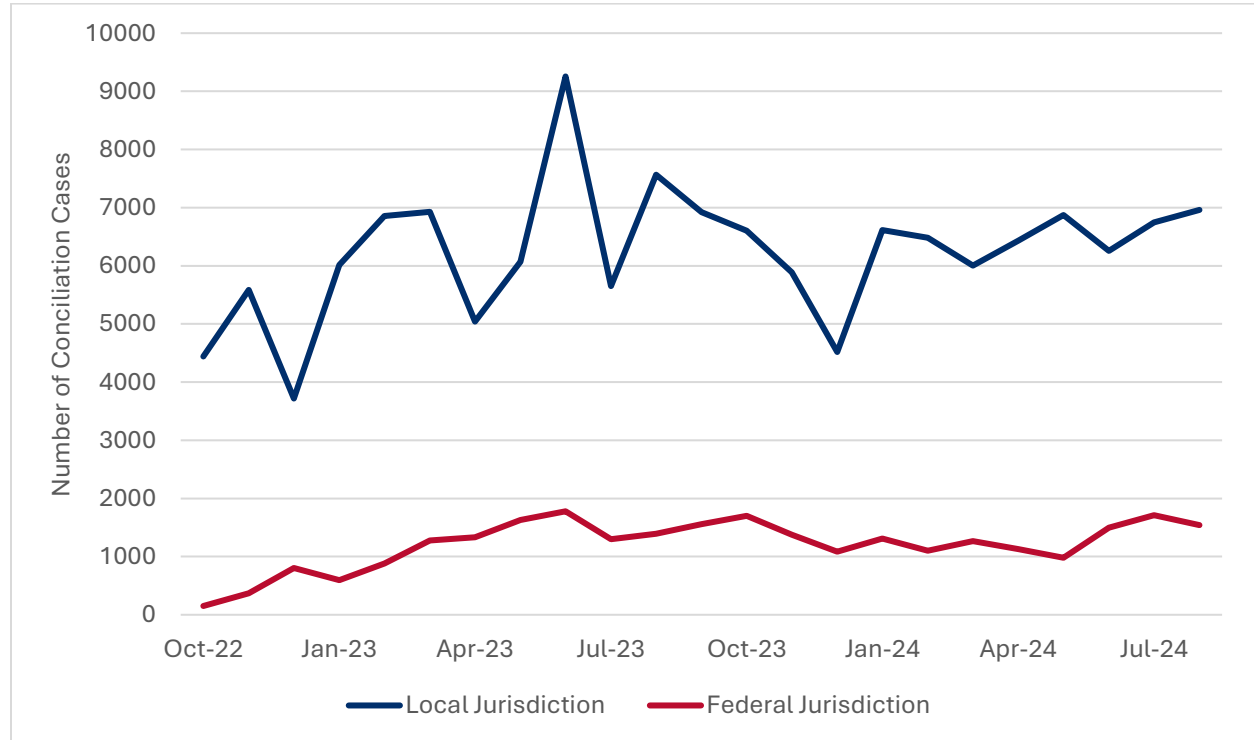
about new conciliation cases that involved them, as employers, more efficiently by completing more visits per day and reducing transportation time and costs.

Another factor that has leveraged the results from using SINACOL and SIGNO, including in Nuevo León, is the creation of the National Commission of Labor Conciliation Centers (CONACENTROS) in 2024. This body brings together the directors of all the state LCCs and the FCCLR. Working groups have been created at CONACENTROS, one of which is on information technologies. The LCC information system directors meet there to exchange experiences and to propose coordinated improvements to the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms, ensuring that major differences exist neither in their operations nor in the definition and calculation of FCCLR and LLC performance indicators, including received conciliation requests, resulting cases, length of processes, etc.

Description of the Change

From October 2022 to July 2024, the LCC of Nuevo León has resolved 81 percent of its conciliation cases between workers and employers within 45 days per legal requirement, through a clear and orderly process. This is possible thanks to the training of personnel and the use of the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms. These platforms allow the staff to carry out each of the steps – conciliation request, request confirmation and notification, hearing schedule, conciliation hearing, agreement preparation – according to the law. The platforms generate the stenographic versions from the hearings, and the agreements are reflected in documents that are digitally filed with SINACOL. The platforms improve the efficiency and transparency of the conciliation work; in Nuevo León, 34 conciliators carry out almost 300 conciliations daily.

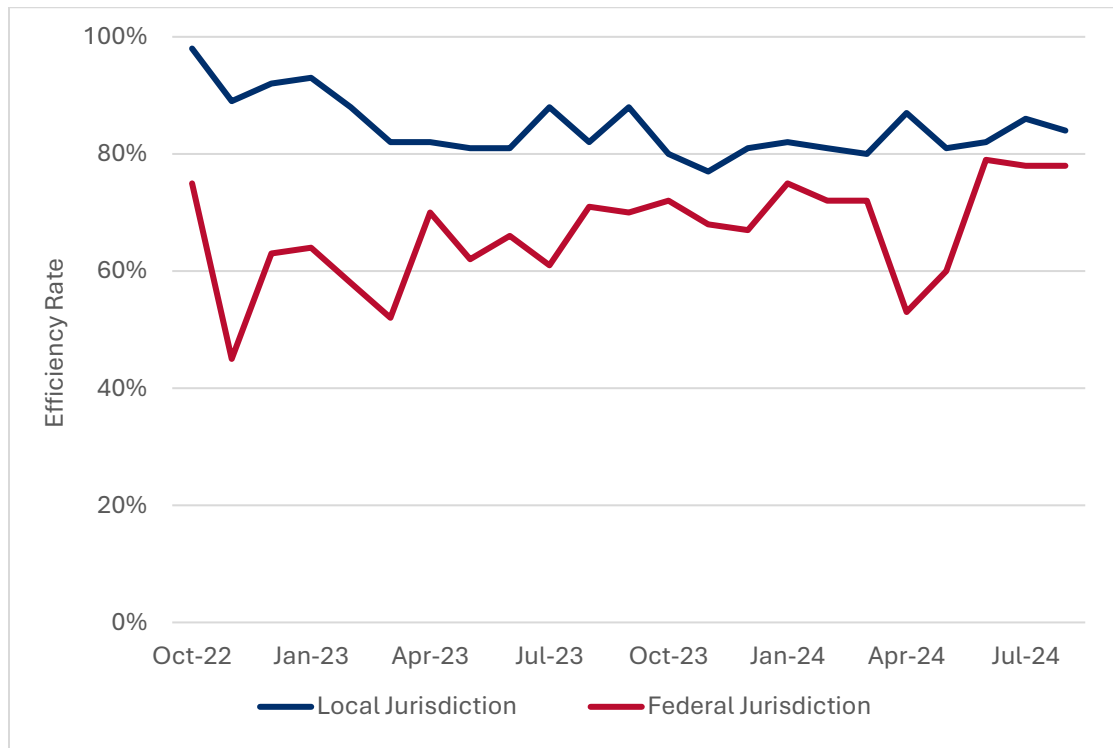
Figure 1. Individual Labor Mediation Cases in Nuevo León



Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS), Indicators and Statistics of the Labor Reform.

This is shown in Figure 1, which presents the number of monthly individual labor conciliation cases in Nuevo León between October 2022 and July 2024, disaggregated by local and federal jurisdiction, the former managed by Nuevo León's LCC and the latter managed by the FCCLR's state delegation. While there is variation in the number of monthly cases over the period, particularly for local jurisdiction, the overall trends for both local and federal cases show a gradual increase over the period, with local cases rising from 4,440 in October 2022 to 6,960 by July 2024, and federal jurisdiction cases rising from 151 to 1,249 over the same period. One of the reasons for this substantial surge in conciliation cases is the time and capacity generated through the efficiencies the LCC staff gained by using the adjusted platforms since 2023. The adjustments to SINACOL and SIGNO help staff streamline and organize the conciliation cases at all stages of the process. In terms of the number of conciliators (not shown), Nuevo León began the period with 27 local conciliators and 18 federal conciliators; this jumped to 34 local conciliators and fell to 7 federal conciliators in December 2022 and those numbers have remained mostly unchanged to the present day.

Figure 2. Individual Labor Dispute Conciliation Efficiency Rate in Nuevo León



Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS), Indicators and Statistics of the Labor Reform

Figure 2 (above) shows the efficiency rate for individual labor dispute cases in the local and federal conciliation platforms for Nuevo León. The rate is calculated as the percentage of all filed cases that have reached a conciliation or ratified agreement within 45 days. While the rate for local cases began near 100 percent at the start of the period, it fell to close to 80 percent by March 2023; since then, it has remained in a relatively stable range between 77 and 88 percent through July 2024. Federal cases saw a sharp decline between the first two months of the period, falling from 75 to 45 percent between October and November 2022; since then, the federal case efficiency rate has shown a gradual upward trend despite some sharp variations, reaching nearly 80 percent in the final three months of the observation period.

Impact on Groups Most At-Risk of Labor Exploitation

Conciliations allow people of all socioeconomic classes to bring their complaints of unjustified dismissal or non-payment of benefits or any other complaint to the Nuevo León Conciliation Center in an expeditious and clear manner. The procedures are free, and people do not need a lawyer to handle their case. There are still lawyers who try to charge workers to handle cases, but that is decreasing because people realize that the procedures are clear and transparent, which is largely due to the use of the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms.

Significance

Before the labor reform, the Conciliation and Arbitration Boards (*Juntas de Conciliación y Arbitraje* - JCAs) – which were replaced by the LCCs in the labor reform – conducted all operations on paper, whose filing and revisions led to delays of several months or even years in the procedures. The management staff of the boards had no control over the conciliators and that inhibited conciliation, also causing procedures to last several months or even years. The old board's presidents were appointed by the federal or state-level executive branches, a policy that generated incentives for the board presidents to block, prolong, or expedite the arbitration of cases according to the case subject. Companies with strong connections to the federal and state administrations were able to exert influence in the processes; as arbitrations were prolonged, workers continued neither earning an income nor being able to strike. This dynamic was usually effective to constrain workers who would frequently withdraw from the arbitration process. Currently with the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms, the LCCs control the platforms' procedures, and their staff follow pre-established routines and formats. Using both platforms helps conciliators complete case procedures within the 45-day legal requirement, and the Nuevo León LCC has been able to resolve 81 percent of its conciliation cases within that timeframe.

In 2024, the implementing partner AIR conducted two surveys with users of SINACOL and SIGNO in all 16 target LCCs in the first and fourth quarters of 2024. The first survey included 530 internal LCC users and the second one, 160. Regarding the experience with SINACOL, the level of user satisfaction increased from 80 to 92 percent in 2024. SIGNO users' satisfaction fluctuated less between the two surveys, from 90 to 86 percent. When asked the implications of not having these tools available at their LCCs, SINACOL users mentioned processes would take longer and milestones would be delayed (41-54 percent) and their work would become more difficult (36-24 percent). SIGNO users also thought delays and waiting times in conciliation processes would increase in the absence of the tool (42 percent) and their amount of work would increase (22 percent).

Sustainability

The SINACOL and SIGNO platforms operate effectively in the LCC of Nuevo León, as well as in 28 of the 32 states of the country and at the FCCLR. Although each LCC has its adaptations, the programming principles of the platforms are the same. Each of the LCC information technology offices have the software codes for programming both platforms and are able to adjust it to their own institutional needs and preferences. In the case of the Nuevo León LCC, the information technology directorate has trained and experienced technical personnel who can maintain the platforms and make small improvements without external support. However, the director of information systems of the Nuevo León LCC mentioned that it is important that the CONACENTROS information technology working group take control of the development of the platforms in case AIR could no longer support them. While Nuevo León's case resolution rate is likely to be sustained – in large part thanks to

SINACOL and SIGNO – it is worth noting that not all LCCs have sufficient personnel or technical skills to make improvements to the platforms and address possible failures, and the LCCs that are working with ENLACE still depend on the project’s technical support.

While most IT staff at the LCCs assisted by AIR expressed high comfort in administering, adapting and providing technical support on both platforms, not all IT technicians expressed the same. In a similar survey conducted in the third quarter of 2024 with 36 IT staff at target LCCs, ENLACE’s implementing partner found that 76 percent of IT staff members were either satisfied or very satisfied with SINACOL and SIGNO. More importantly, the survey suggests some IT staff members still do not feel highly confident to continue administering and adapting these platforms without AIR support. Using a scale from “0” to “10”, 23 percent of respondents entered a “7” or less for their comfort level administering SINACOL, and 17 percent did the same when asked if they could adapt or modify the platform. As to SIGNO, 25 percent of IT staff respondents entered “7” or less for their comfort level administering that platform, and 15 percent of them did the same to express their ability to adapt SIGNO and to provide technical support to users on their own.

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Antonio de Haro Mejía

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara and Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: October 4, 2024

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 4C – FEMALE WORKERS IN MAQUILA COMPANY ELECT UNION LEAGUE AS AN INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATIC UNION

Domain 4: Eliminating Workplace Discrimination and Promoting Equality Between Women and Men Workers

Location(s): Nazareno, Durango

In 2024, female workers at a maquila company in Nazareno, Durango elected a union league to represent them as an independent union, successfully renegotiating their collective labor agreement and securing better benefits for the workers.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

Poor working conditions, the restoration of four workers unjustifiably dismissed for seeking to join an independent union, the lack of alternative employment opportunities in the community, the training and support provided by unions and workers' activist organizations and ILAB projects all contributed to the renegotiation of the collective agreement at the maquila company in Nazareno, Durango.

A maquila company⁷⁸ in Nazareno, Durango is made up of 65 percent women, many of whom come from at least 29 ranches near the company. The company manufactures 1.5 million pairs of jeans annually for brands such as Levi's, GAP, and Old Navy and is one of the only sources of formal employment in the area. As such, workers find themselves in a position to either work under current conditions or negotiate for better ones. For years, workers reported experiences of abuses of their labor rights, including unjustified dismissals, abuses by staff, and the lack of union assistance or support. Until 2022, the maquila company had a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) signed by a large employer-supported union, which had been accused of misrepresenting workers' interest for several decades.

As a partner in the Partners of the Americas (PoA) and Social Accountability International's (SAI) Mexico Awareness Raising Project⁷⁹, the Border Workers Committee (CFO) began to carry out activities with workers of the maquila company in Nazareno in early 2022 to raise awareness and provide training on labor, gender, and union rights issues. Due to the difficulty in organizing awareness-raising events in workplaces, the CFO team carried out home visits where women workers reported situations of labor rights violations. CFO also trained the leaders of Union A, an independent union in Nazareno, on collective bargaining.

In August 2022, the company discovered that four workers were organizing themselves and colleagues to join an independent union league, for which they were dismissed from their duties and paid severance. CFO took up the workers' case and contacted the brands that purchase from the factory to inform them of the situation and that CFO would then carry out an investigation into the situation. At the same time, CFO began investigating whether this would be an appropriate case for the USMCA's Rapid Response Labor Mechanism (RRLM). After having been made aware of CFO's concerns, the brands did their own research. This investigation found the dismissal to be unjustified, leading the company to reinstate the workers by the end of the year, at which point CFO dropped its case in the

⁷⁸ Names of companies and unions have been removed to protect respondent confidentiality.

⁷⁹ Partners of the Americas partnered with Social Accountability International (SAI) to implement the Mexico Awareness Raising Project (MAP). The project's purpose is to increase the understanding of workers, employers, and union leaders on how to utilize Mexico's new labor systems to protect labor rights and effectively address labor disputes. By implementing these strategic outcomes, Partners and their collaborating institutions hope to equip Mexican laborers with information regarding their new legal protections so they may promote their rights in the workplace. For more details about MAP, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/mexico-awareness-raising>.

RRM. The workers considered this event a turning point and became less fearful of participating in a new union. Thus, on July 20, 2023, a vote was held against the legitimization of the old collective agreement negotiated by the employer-supported union.

Change description

On January 23, 2024, the union league won the accreditation to represent the maquila company workers, defeating the employer-supported union. On August 14, 2024, with 78 percent of worker participation, workers approved the new collective agreement. The agreement resulted in 2.5 million pesos (\$125,000 USD) in benefits and included a new salary scale that recognized the different jobs of the company, a 30 percent vacation bonus, new transportation routes, a savings fund, and the proper recognition of wages before the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS) (as those had been previously under-declared), among other benefits.

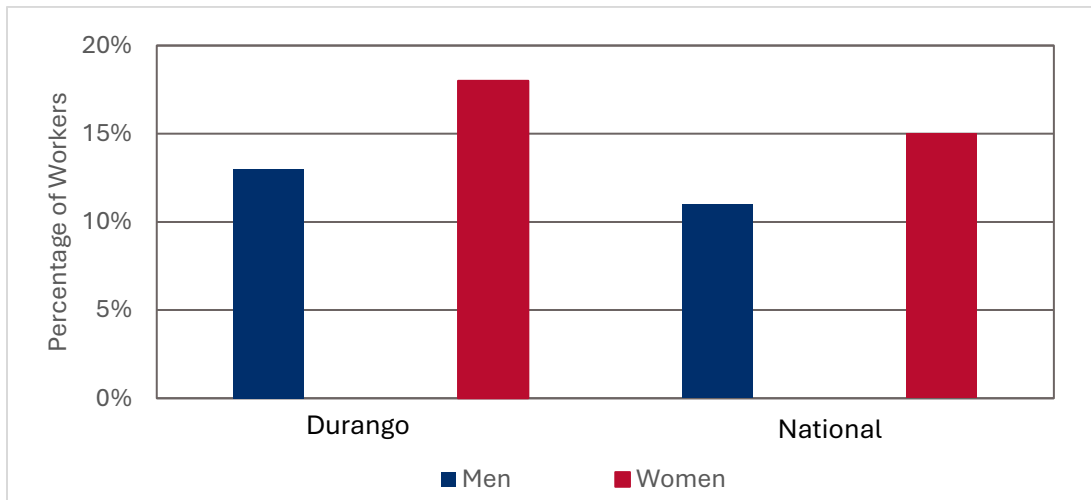
Impact on demographic groups most-at-risk of labor exploitation

This change is especially important for female workers, who make up the majority of the company's workforce, as well as the leadership that carried out the change process.

Significance

The change is important for the workers because they gained a better understanding of their labor rights and the new collective agreement ensured better benefits, such as vacation bonuses and savings funds. Additionally, the change is significant because it represents one of the first instances of independent union representation being achieved in northern Mexico, potentially laying the groundwork for other workers to see that such changes are possible. However, it should be noted that the workers reported that the changes were minimal and just enough to comply with the law.

The change is also important given recent trends in Mexico's unionization rates. Nationally, unionization rates fell from 17 percent of all workers in 2005 to 12 percent in 2018; since 2018, the rate has remained mostly stagnant and sat at 13 percent in 2024. The graph above shows the unionization rate in Durango and nationally for the first quarter of 2024, calculated from the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE). The share of male and female workers in Durango who are unionized is slightly above the rate for all of Mexico, with 13 and 18 percent of male and female workers, respectively, in Durango belonging to a union, compared to 11 and 15 percent for all of Mexico.

Figure 1. Unionization Rates in Mexico (National) and Durango in 2024

Source: INEGI. National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE) 2024, Quarter 1.

Sustainability

The change at the Nazareno plant has been maintained, though it has been slow to spread to other companies in the north of the country. For example, although CFO followed the same process at the Torreón, Coahuila plant in that city, they found greater apathy on the part of the workers and greater harassment by the employer-supported union, which prevented them from approaching the workers.

In the case of Nazareno, the union delegates' limited experience was perceived as a barrier because it led to cumbersome negotiations with the company. Thus, respondents expressed concern that in the absence of continued external support, such as the one from CFOs, company-ally unions can regain their influence. Employers that have not changed their practices towards unions according to the labor reform have incentives to support the employer-supported return of unions that do not advocate for workers' rights in the absence of strong worker awareness about their labor rights.

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Alejandra Martínez

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara and Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: September 30, 2024.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 4D – A LARGER PROPORTION OF FEMALE WORKERS OCCUPY UNION POSITIONS TO INFLUENCE DECISION MAKING.

Domain 4: Eliminating Workplace Discrimination and Promoting Equality Between Women and Men Workers

Locations: Jojotepec, Jalisco; Frontera, Coahuila; San Luis Potosí; and Cuautla, Morelos.

Since 2021, more female workers in a state-wide union and three independent unions in Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos have gained positions as delegates in union leadership bodies. Female leaders at these unions recruited, trained, and inspired other women to participate in union life, contributing to a generational shift in the gender composition of leadership bodies.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

The 2019 Labor Reform, the creation of three independent unions with women’s participation, buy-in from union leadership, and technical assistance from the International Labor Organization and Solidarity Center have contributed to an increased participation of women in leadership structures in several unions.

In 2019, the Labor Reform mandated proportional gender representation within union leadership.⁸⁰ Before the labor reform, women’s membership in unions and their participation in union leadership were neither protected nor promoted in labor law. Thus, during the decades prior to the reform, union leadership bodies were mostly comprised of men and largely excluded female workers from decision-making processes, failing to consider their specific needs and perspectives. This was the case for independent unions, old employer-supported unions, and the statewide Union A⁸¹, based in Jalisco.

With this change in the law, four unions began to push for greater participation of women in leadership. In 2021, at state-wide Union A, leaders supported these changes. For example, at a Union A meeting in the state of Jalisco, the union’s representative pointed out the low participation of women within union sections at the individual companies and highlighted the importance of including more of them in these bodies.

Three independent unions (Union 1, Union 2 and Union 3) increased female representation in their boards during their recent processes of creation and registration. In 2018, workers at Company 1 voted for an independent union to represent them; in October 2020, the company recognized the union after the 2019 Labor Reform. In 2022, organized workers at Company 2 and Company 3 created independent unions, won their elections, and became exclusive bargaining agents. In all three of these cases, female workers participated in the unionization efforts since the beginning; as a result of their record supporting their worker organizations and union strategy in close collaboration with their male co-workers, women gained leadership positions in these unionization movements. Leaders from these unions agreed that creating these independent unions influenced members to be more aware about the importance of workplace safety and non-discrimination for female workers in strategic and leadership frameworks, as they have incorporated these mandatory provisions of the Labor Reform.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Solidarity Center (SC) have supported these four unions’ endeavors to improve women’s participation in leadership bodies and address female workers’

⁸⁰ Article 371, fraction IX Bis of the Federal Labor Act of 2019 establishes as obligatory for formal unions to accommodate proportional female representation in union boards. Source: <https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/LFT.pdf>

⁸¹ Companies and union names have been removed from this story to grant confidentiality. The letter and numbers indicate correspondence between companies and their unions. Union A covers several facilities in Jalisco, including the facility of Company A. Independent unions 1, 2 and 3 represent workers at companies 1, 2 and 3 in this story.

needs. Since 2020, SC has worked with the independent unions of Company 1, Company 2 and Company 3. The SC project “Engaging Workers and Civil Society to Strengthen Labor Law Enforcement”⁸² has supported unions’ knowledge of and compliance with the Labor Reform provisions and rights – including proportional female representation in unions – through training sessions for union leaders. And since 2023, ILO’s Vision Zero Fund (VZF)⁸³ worked with the statewide Union A’s General Secretary and its OSH Committee to train union leaders and workers on foundational OSH topics.

As ILO’s collaboration with the statewide Union A progressed, other committees within Union A expressed interest in the VZF activities, particularly from the Union A’s Committee to Promote Female Workers’ Interests. In conversations with project staff, the President of the Committee to Promote Female Workers’ Interests and other workers expressed interest in content and materials that overlapped OSH standards and measures to address the needs of female workers at the workplace. Accordingly, in 2024 the VZF project facilitated the participation of the President of the Committee to Promote Female Workers’ Interests at Union A in a training for trainers on Participatory Gender Audits, offered by ILO’s International Training Centre in Turin, Italy. This training course built the participants’ capacity on applying an equality perspective between women and men into analytical work, identify workplace discrimination on the basis of sex, build communication competence and organizational capacity to prevent discrimination, and identify progress. In addition, VZF provided Union A’s leadership and Union A workers on the content and use of ILO’s “Toolbox to Identify, Analyze, Prevent Psychosocial Risks and Hazards in the Workplace”. While the toolbox content is applicable to all workers, the president of the Committee to Promote Female Workers’ Interests at Union A and other female workers have embraced its content with an angle towards addressing the needs of women workers and incorporating measures to combat discrimination between women and men in the chili pepper and tomato industries. The president of this committee at Union A has replicated both trainings to build the capacity of other workers to promote female participation in union decisions and further awareness of anti-discrimination and psychosocial risk at the workplace. This internal work seems to have promoted a larger proportion of female workers in the statewide Union A’s committees.

It is important to note a key difference between the statewide Union A and the three independent unions at Companies 1, 2 and 3. The statewide Union A is a pre-existing union in Jalisco state that transformed its practices after the 2019 labor reform. In contrast, the other three are independent unions that won worker representation through democratic elections and the removal of the old employer-supported union from their workplaces. In the case of the three independent unions, the integration of women in leadership roles occurred alongside the genesis of these unions as workers fought to exercise their right of association.

Change description

⁸² For more information about the Solidarity Center’s Engaging Workers and Civil Society to Strengthen Labor Law Enforcement project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/engaging-workers-and-civil-society-strengthen-labor-law-enforcement>.

⁸³ VZF’s “Toolbox to Identify, Analyze, Prevent Psychosocial Risks and Hazards in the Workplace” highlights the commitments that employers and worker organizations in Mexico have to preventing and eliminating violence and harassment against women in the workplace through an inclusive and egalitarian approach, per ILO’s Violence and Harassment Convention (C-190). Several risks to agricultural workers, especially those related to violence and harassment against female workers, are important factors of psychosocial hazard that may affect tomato and chili production.

Since 2021, female members at the statewide Union A have held a significant number of leadership positions in Jalisco. In 2024, 25 of the 46 delegates⁸⁴ (54 percent) across all union sections⁸⁵ are women. The evaluation was unable to obtain precise data on the number of women in leadership positions for comparison. However, statewide Union A leaders have changed certain statutes to institutionalize the integration of women in leadership positions.

In the three independent unions, women are also serving as delegates. Since its founding in 2022, Union 2 has had one female delegate, among whose tasks has been to motivate other female workers to become union delegates. This delegate and her male union peers have been making important decisions, including the negotiation of the collective contract. There have been two female delegates in Union 1 since its recognition in 2020 whose main role is to advise other delegates who participate in union commissions, both female and male delegates. Since 2022, one woman has served as a delegate in Union 3, and she is also the President of the Union's Honor and Justice Commission.

Impact on at-risk populations

Overall, female union representation is key to addressing female workers' needs in the workplace and has allowed female workers to feel more confident in revealing their problems to female union delegates, especially in cases of workplace violence and harassment based on sex. With more women at statewide Union A actively participating in union sections, this union has been able to incorporate a more balanced perspective in negotiations and effect changes in the workplace for the benefit of female workers. For example, women's participation in a National Union A section in Company A in Jojotepec, Jalisco led to tangible changes in female workers' lives. Union delegates in the section presented proposals that were implemented both within the work area – such as installing exclusive toilets for women – and actions outside the work area – such as installing lights in the streets surrounding the company, as women reported that the absence of these measures made them feel unsafe daily when arriving at or leaving the premises.

As for the unions at Company 1, Company 2, and Company 3, making initial steps to have women at the forefront of key decisions is opening the way to build mechanisms to address other issues affecting female workers, such as cases of sexual harassment and abuse, as well as wage inequality; some of these efforts are described in more detail in other change stories.

Significance

A larger proportion of female leadership in unions has the potential to influence decision-making within the unions and to coordinate with the employers, which has in turn improved working conditions for female workers. While the progress in female representation among union delegates is still modest, it has opened the gate for a larger number of female workers to engage in leadership in coming years. On the one hand, incorporating more female leadership in union sections is important for women. Their participation allows them to make the specific challenges they face more visible and advocate for their perspectives and needs in union decision-making processes. On the other hand, this change

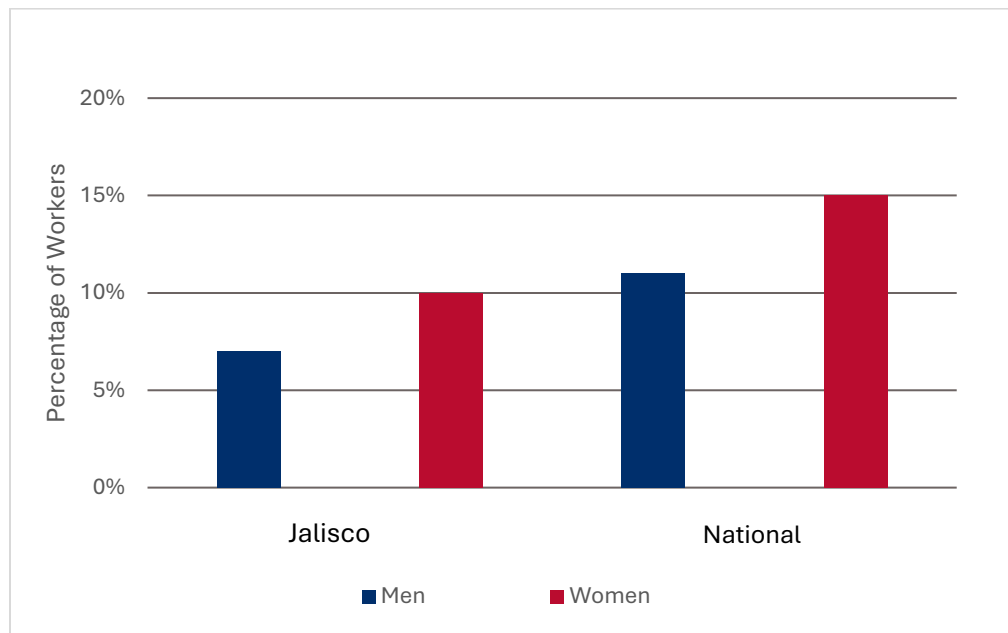
⁸⁴ Union delegates are workers who represent a union section and are elected by the workers from the same section to represent their interests in decisions made through specific union commissions. Their main responsibilities are to coordinate and connect the union section to the union at large; represent its workers' interests, negotiate agreements, salaries and working conditions; advise workers on their rights; and monitor compliance with labor regulations and the collective agreement.

⁸⁵ Union sections are entities that represent worker interests in the workplace of a specific company or facility within a large union that represents workers at different companies. Their responsibilities include negotiating with the companies to obtain better working conditions, such as payment for extra time worked, vacations, sick days, bonuses, and safety conditions. For more information about the Vision Zero Fund in Mexico, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/improving-workers-occupational-safety-and-health-selected-supply-chains-mexico-vision>.

is also positive for male workers and company staff, as it raises their awareness of female workers' experiences and needs, and they also benefit from having safer workspaces.

The change is also important given recent trends in Mexico's unionization rates. Nationally, as shown in Figure 1 (below), unionization rates fell from 17 percent of all workers in 2005 to 12 percent in 2018; since 2018, the rate has remained mostly stagnant and sat at 13 percent in 2024. The graph above shows the unionization rate in Jalisco and nationally for the first quarter of 2024, calculated from the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE). The share of female and male workers in Jalisco who were unionized was slightly below the rate for all of Mexico, with 7 and 10 percent of male and female workers, respectively, in Jalisco belonging to a union, compared to 11 and 15 percent at the national level. At both the national and state levels, female workers are proportionately more unionized than their male peers. Such differences further emphasize the importance of increasing female leadership to address their needs and interests in the decision-making process, according to the democratic principles of freedom of association enshrined in the 2019 Labor Reform and ILO's Convention 190.⁸⁶

Figure 1. Unionization Rate, National and Jalisco State (2024)



Source: INEGI. National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE) 2024, Quarter 1.

Sustainability

At statewide Union A, this change is being sustained as more women are applying for union leadership positions, which will likely increase the inclusion of female workers in union decision-making processes and incorporate women's voices and addressing their needs. In fact, a woman is currently in charge of training leadership cadres among young workers who are members of statewide Union A, who will likely contribute to maintaining sustained change across the next generation of workers. Likewise, at Union 1, Union 2 and Union 3, female union leaders have recruited and inspired other female workers

⁸⁶ ILO's C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) commits signatories, including Mexico, to guarantee the right to work free from violence and harassment; prohibit and prevent violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment; and enforce laws and regulations regarding violence and harassment in the world of work. Details are available at: https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190

to participate, contributing to a possible generational shift in the gender composition of leadership bodies. However, the most credible threat to sustaining these efforts is relying on union leadership's willingness and direct decisions from them rather than deep and lasting institutional changes. Therefore, a switch in leadership composition with more traditional perspectives on unions could counteract this change.

This evaluation collected evidence that suggests that female workers are gaining leadership roles in other unions. While not in the core of the significant change in this story, subject to the influence of the ILAB-funded project Building an Independent and Democratic Labor Movement to Protect Worker Rights in Mexico (SC1), the independent union at an automaker facility in Guanajuato elected a female Union Secretary General twice, first in February 2022, and for the second time in August 2023.

Data Collection Information

Interviewers: Alejandra Martínez and Gabriel Velázquez

Editors: Hannah LaPalombara and Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: July - October 24.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 5A – TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SUPPORTS INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY OF FEDERAL LABOR INSPECTIONS

Domain 5: Strengthening labor inspection systems and labor standards enforcement

Location(s): Mexico, national level

From 2019 to 2024, the Federal Inspectorate at the Ministry of Labor increased its collaboration with its Research and Statistics Directorate in the use of machine learning as a tool to increase labor inspection efficiency.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

Different factors, such as a labor inspection strategy by the Ministry of Labor (STPS) based on evidence, the support from STPS's Research and Statistics Directorate, legal reforms promoted by the federal government to eliminate gaps and ambiguities, as well as the piloting of the Labor Inspections Information System by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) have promoted collaboration at STPS to increase the efficiency of federal labor inspections.

In 2019, the STPS's Unit of Safe and Decent Work (UTD) implemented a policy to reduce the number of government personnel, including a decrease of nearly 50 percent of the number of federal labor inspectors. As a response to this, the STPS also implemented a new labor inspection policy based on prioritizing the quality of inspections rather than their quantity. The UTD developed a strategy that consisted of focusing labor inspections on companies with the highest probability of non-compliance with labor standards, using criteria such as the company's sector; violations of legal provisions, such as outsourcing labor and irregular payments to workers; and higher accident rates. Respondents mentioned that companies that provided banking and cleaning services were more likely to subcontract staff and exempt themselves from complying with occupational standards of safety and health (OSH). According to STPS data from 2023, both construction and food preparation services were sectors with some of the highest accident rates in the Mexican economy.⁸⁷

Starting in 2019, with the purpose of focusing on companies with the highest probability of non-compliance with labor standards and higher risk of occupational accidents, injuries, and illness, the UTD improved the quality of the information and the staff's capacity for execution, monitoring and control of inspections through the creation of an Inspection Process Support System (SIAPI).⁸⁸ UTD improved SIAPI by cross-referencing information from different internal systems and creating new functionalities, such as a dashboard to track individual inspection processes. Also in 2019, the STPS signed collaboration agreements with the Social Security National Institute (IMSS), the Institute of the National Fund for Workers Housing (INFONAVIT), and the Federal Tax Authority (SAT) for these institutions to share their databases. This was a leverage point because each institution collects separate relevant pieces of information about the employers. For instance, IMSS' database includes the number of registered workers, the classification of occupational risks, and the level of compliance in contribution payments. The INFONAVIT and SAT databases contain information about the companies' level of compliance with tax payment and housing contributions.

In addition to the policies and strategies noted above, the federal government reformed the Federal Labor Law and the Social Security Law in April 2022 and the General Regulations of Labor Inspection

⁸⁷ For more information, please visit the Labor Statistics Information System (SIEL) at <http://siel.stps.gob.mx:304/>.

⁸⁸ SIAPI is a password-protected support platform that federal labor inspectors use for the execution, monitoring and control of the sanctioning inspection process, which aims to contribute to improving the quality, coverage and transparency of the functions of monitoring compliance with labor regulations. Mor information is available at: <https://inspeccion.stps.gob.mx/Login/Login.aspx#b>.

and Application of Sanctions (RGITAS) in August 2022. Together, these reforms eliminated loopholes and ambiguities that allowed companies to avoid labor inspections and compliance with workers' social benefits, as well as to make excessive use of subcontracting. Subcontracting was used by companies to avoid signing labor contracts directly with workers and thus, avoid labor inspections. These companies claimed workers were not their direct employees and therefore they did not have to pay social benefits and the established minimum wage in the law. In the case of companies in the agricultural sector, loopholes and ambiguities allowed a part of the workers' income to be paid to intermediaries ("coyotes") who formally "hired" the workers on behalf of the companies.

The reforms led to the creation of the Registry of Specialized Service Providers or Specialized Works (REPSE), which aimed to ensure companies hire their own workers directly according to their specialized function, hire with the required minimum wage, and pay the social benefits established by law. The legal reforms also mandated that if companies provided inaccurate information that would prevent a labor inspection, the company would be liable for such omission and therefore would be considered non-compliant. According to the RGITAS, companies that were found non-compliant receive a formal request to take necessary measures to rectify practices, comply with standards, and generate documented evidence of such compliance in no more than 90 days after the agent identified the violation(s). Federal labor inspectors should determine the actual period for responding about a violation according to the company's sector, revenue scale, risk extent, and number of employees. For companies that do not provide evidence of compliance after the mandated period, labor inspectors should ask STPS authorities to start an administrative sanction process and notify the employer no later than 10 days after the process begins. If, during this administrative process, the employer is unable to provide evidence of compliance or lack of intention to comply, the labor authority may impose a fine proportional to the damage made to workers and request the tax authority to enforce the sanction payment.

In 2023, AIR, through the project "Compliance in Auto Parts through Labor Law Enforcement" (CALLE)⁸⁹, approached STPS to develop products to help them further increase federal labor inspectors' capacity to conduct their work adhering to the principles of the labor reform. These products included the design of the Data Intelligence System for Labor Inspections (SIDIL) and the gender-based labor inspection protocol.⁹⁰ At the time, STPS' General Direction of Research and Statistics (DGIET) was in the process of analyzing and combining information from STPS, IMSS, INFONAVIT, SAT and the Statistics, Geography and Data National Agency (INEGI) databases to empower SIAP so that it could help federal inspectors improve their efficiency rate. In 2023, AIR programmers provided technical support to DGIET to create SIDIL, a machine learning⁹¹ platform connected to the federal inspectors' electronic case management system that supports communication between the databases. Using SIDIL, labor inspectors can estimate the probabilities of employer non-compliance with labor regulations in selected industries and predict the risk of different types of labor violations in an ever-changing universe of work centers under the purview of STPS. Labor inspectors can segment the work center lists by state, city, or economic sector according

⁸⁹ Since 2019, AIR implements the Improving Working Conditions in the Mexican Automotive Supply Chain (CALLE) to improve the quality of inspections and inspection follow-ups conducted by labor inspectors; strengthen government administration and coordination of the labor inspectorate and other institutions involved in labor law enforcement; and strengthen the ability of labor courts and other institutions to effectively conciliate and adjudicate labor cases, including administration and coordination of union representation challenges. For more information about the project, please visit: <https://www.air.org/project/compliance-auto-parts-through-labor-law-enforcement-calle>.

⁹⁰ Access to the STPS' "Protocolo para la Inspeccion Laboral con Perspectiva" is available here: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/913717/PROTOCOLO_INSPECCION_LABORAL-16FEB.pdf.

⁹¹ Machine learning tools are software applications that allow computers to learn from data, build intelligent systems, and create models capable of performing actions, making decisions, and iterating based on training data.

to the needs and interests of UTD. In 2023, DGIET and AIR started piloting SIDIL, in close collaboration with UTD. The process to develop and pilot SIDIL promoted strong coordination between DGIET and UDT. Such intra-institutional coordination further increased as AIR conducted an extensive knowledge transfer process to DGIET and UDT as part of the process to close out CALLE in March 2024.

Description of the change

More comprehensive and reliable information systems and labor reforms, as well as the piloting of SIDIL, helped STPS promote intra-institutional coordination between DGIET and UDT. Such collaboration did not exist before the design and development of SIDIL. In early 2024, DGIET used SIDIL to do a preliminary risk analysis of work centers using the data available in the system by then and used the findings from the risk prediction matrix to provide UDT with a list of high-priority work centers to consider inspecting.

Impact on groups most-at-risk of labor exploitation

Stronger collaboration between DGIET and UDT has the potential to increase the efficiency of labor inspections by targeting those work centers most likely to violate labor standards. Domestic migrant agricultural workers in federally regulated industries and female workers in sectors with high risk of OSH violations are among the most vulnerable to labor exploitation and stand to benefit most from improved federal labor inspections. On the one hand, domestic migrant workers – among which many of them identify as members of an indigenous group – face linguistic barriers, information asymmetries, and historic discrimination to advocate for their labor rights and OSH standards, including to be hired by the agricultural producer directly.

On the other hand, female workers in urban contexts who provide cleaning and food preparation services would benefit from a better target of labor inspections. Historically, women have received lower salaries and benefits than men. In cleaning and food preparation, where female workers comprise most of their labor, the facilities' records of subcontracting practices place them in a position of non-compliance with the 2019 labor reform rules; more effective inspections will help the labor authority enforce standards to prevent this.

In both instances, more frequent and higher quality labor inspections at work facilities with higher likelihood of employing these workers in conditions that violate federal labor law would impact the ability of labor inspectors to document violations and impose sanctions accordingly. However, respondents and the evaluation team recognized that an evidence-based tool to improve the target of labor inspections is important but not enough to protect these groups from exploitation. A high-quality scrutiny of inspections, observance of labor reform protocols, transparent practices, and a collaborative approach to employers are also necessary to attain the aspirations of the labor reform in terms of enforcing labor rights and standards.

Significance

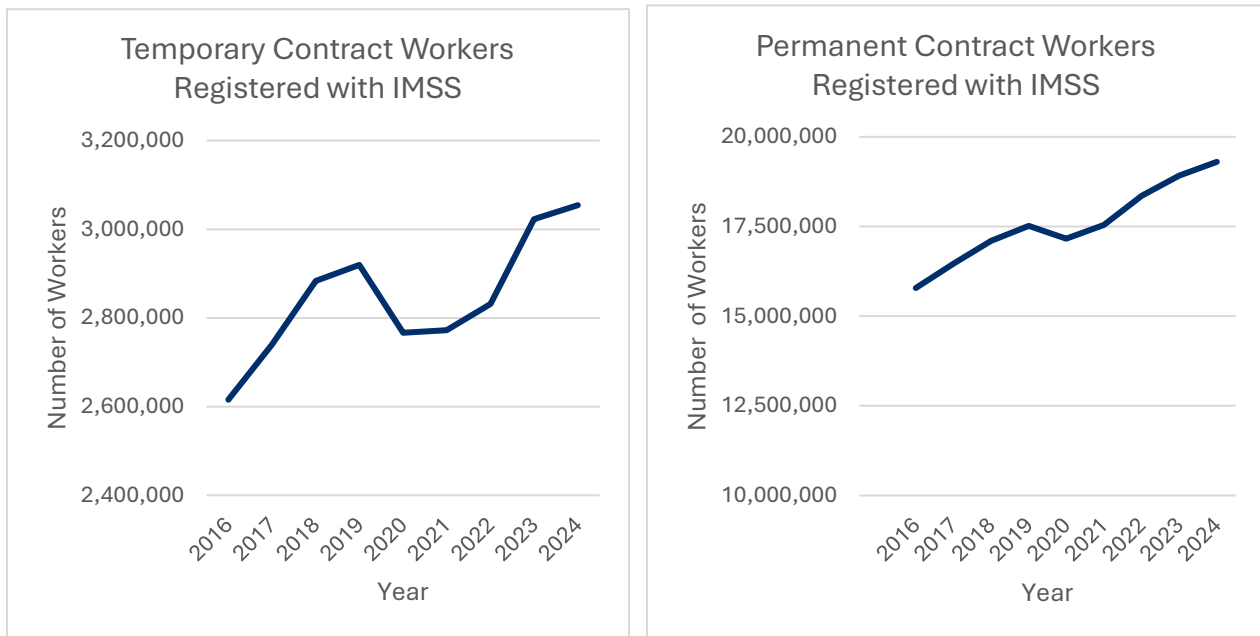
Before DGIET and UDT started their collaboration to develop and pilot SIDIL, the STPS discarded 40 percent of inspections due to lack of information or erroneous information about the companies to be inspected (e.g., a wrong address). STPS could also not carry out inspections in some companies due to the existence of gaps or ambiguities in labor legislation that limited labor inspections and favored labor subcontracting. This situation resulted in many companies paying lower wages than allowed by law, which led to making lower social security contributions, evading the payment of social benefits and profits to workers, and avoiding compliance with the regulatory provisions of safety and hygiene

in their facilities. The greater effectiveness of labor inspections that can be attained with the use of SIDIL may translate into the enforcement of laws and regulations that protect workers' labor rights, such as paying the minimum wage, access to social security benefits, participating in company profit-sharing schemes, and adherence to OSH standards. UDT reported plans to start adjusting labor inspections at companies specializing in cleaning services, security services, agricultural production, and banking services. According to surveyed labor officials, greater inspection effectiveness may translate into higher social security and tax contributions to the federal government and into improvements in OSH conditions at the workplace.

More effective inspections may be linked to continue enabling improvements in workers' labor rights between 2021 and 2024. For example, in 2023, the number of temporary⁹² workers registered with the IMSS exceeded three million for the first time. At the same time, both IMSS and INFONAVIT registered a significant increase in contributions. This is related to the fact that companies that are now registered in REPSE have the obligation to hire their own workers and not subcontract them, pay minimum wages, and make the required social security benefit payments to stay in business and prevent financial sanctions. UDT respondents expect further registering of agricultural and industrial workers as more employers gain incentives to comply.

The figures below show the number of temporary and permanent contract workers registered with IMSS per year for the period 2016-2024. The number of registered temporary workers rose from approximately 2.6 million to 2.9 million between 2016 and 2019, before falling to just under 2.8 million workers in 2020 and 2021 due to several companies suspending operations as a result of the distancing measures enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number then rose sharply between 2022 and 2023, surpassing 3 million workers registered with IMSS. The number of permanent contract workers registered with IMSS rose from approximately 15.8 million in 2016 to 19.3 million in 2024, representing an increase of approximately 400,000 to 800,000 registered workers per year except for 2020 where the number of registered workers fell by approximately 360,000. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the decrease of registered workers in 2020.

⁹² According to Article V of the Social Security Law, a permanent worker is one who has an employment relationship for an indefinite period; and a temporary worker is one who has an employment relationship for a specific work or for a specific period of time under the terms of the Federal Labor Law.

Figure 1. Temporary and Permanent Contract Workers Registered (IMSS)

Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.

Sustainability

The current labor inspection policy has a consolidated legal basis and has had significant effects on improving conditions of workers. However, there are still significant challenges to further increasing the effectiveness of labor inspections and the use of technology for decision-making. To achieve this, it is necessary that DGIET continues investing in improving the quality of information, building the capacity of STPS staff, and strengthening the practice of data use among UDT leaders to target inspections. In particular, STPS expects to increase the capacity of its own staff by recruiting and training staff in basic knowledge about indicators and statistics. The recently hired staff at DGIET have a deeper understanding of programming in R language⁹³ and advanced statistics, including machine learning. This seems to have allowed DGIET and UDT to continue collaborating to increase the efficiency rate of inspections after the closing out of CALLE. This intra-institutional collaboration is even more important in 2025, as the CAMINOS project⁹⁴ was terminated.

On the other hand, the biggest challenges to improving labor inspections are in state governments, because the states have specific labor inspection responsibilities in the law but lack sufficient human and financial resources, information systems, and strategies to carry out inspections effectively. While the federal implementation results of the CALLE project contain rich lessons to transfer to the state-level Ministries of Labor, most state labor inspectorates need greater human and financial resources to develop more effective labor inspection policies. Insufficient capacity to deploy inspectors, technology limitations, and low inspector salaries dampen the potential benefit from adopting

⁹³ R is a programming language for statistical computing and data visualization. It has been adopted in the fields of data mining, bioinformatics, and data analysis.

⁹⁴ The American Institute of Research (AIR) implemented the Compliance Through Mexican Labor Inspections (CAMINOS) project with funds from the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) to improve government systems for labor law enforcement through upgraded enforcement of labor laws by federal and state labor inspectorate, better administration of inspections, and enhanced engagement with supply chain actors in targeted USMCA sectors. For more information about CAMINOS, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/strengthening-mexican-inspectorate-labor-enforcement-caminos>.

principles of collaboration with employers and high-quality visits. This limits the labor inspectorates' ability to raise and sustain higher rates of labor inspection efficiency.

Data Collection Information

Interviewers: Domingo Hernández and Antonio de Haro

Editor: Carlos Echeverria-Estrada

Date of writing: November 6, 2024

SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY 5C – LABOR RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND CHILD LABOR REMAIN IN PRACTICE IN AN AGRICULTURAL AREA WHERE LABOR INSPECTIONS AND ENFORCEMENT HAVE BEEN ABSENT.

Domain 5: Labor rights enforcement, inspections of labor standards, dissemination, and coordination

Location: San Quintín, Baja California

Since 2022, labor inspection authorities in Baja California have not monitored the labor conditions at agricultural zones in the San Quintín Valley. Former workers and community leaders denounced two agro-export companies in the tomato and berry supply chains for violating occupational safety and health standards (OSH) in their operations, in a region where agricultural child labor persists and most agricultural workers lack knowledge about the rights enshrined in the 2019 labor reform.

Contribution: What contributed to the change?

Several factors have promoted the status quo of agricultural producers and suppliers violating occupational safety and health (OSH) standards in the agricultural region of San Quintín, BC. The state labor inspectorate is very small (10 inspectors) and its deployment limited. While labor inspections reported more activity in Tijuana and Mexicali, the central area of the state has not been prioritized. An ILAB-funded project that promotes compliance with labor standards through labor inspection started implementing capacity building activities in the state in late 2023 without concrete results in the inspectorate's operations yet. Two other ILAB-funded interventions focused on agricultural workers and producers had recently started outreach to agricultural communities and agro-export producers and companies about the labor reform and OSH standards. Interviewed workers and community leaders have no or limited knowledge of the extent of labor rights enshrined in the reformed Federal Labor Law.

By sharing a 120-mile border with the U.S. state of California and with a longitude of over 350 miles north to south, the Mexican state of Baja California concentrates its administrative resources in the northern area where Tijuana, its main economic powerhouse, and its capital Mexicali, are located. The absence of labor inspections for the last four years in the San Quintin Valley, in the central region of the state, is a result of these geoeconomic and political dynamics and exacerbates as the state labor authority limits resources to conduct labor inspection in the area. The Compliance Through Mexican Labor Inspections (CAMINOS)⁹⁵ project, implemented by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), found in 2023 that the State's Inspectorate had only 10 team members, and the leaders of the inspectorate had concerns about the poor technical resources and limited capacity to deploy operations throughout the state. Further, the share of labor force represented by agricultural labor in the in northern states, including Baja California, tends to be smaller than in central and southern Mexico. For instance, during the second quarter of 2024, only 2.9 percent of the active workforce cultivated crops in Baja California and 2.4 percent of it in Chihuahua. In contrast, nine and eight percent of the active workforce worked on crops in Michoacan and Veracruz, respectively. The relatively smaller proportion of the workforce engaged in agricultural activities in Baja California and the distance between the administrative capital are two important drivers of the status quo of violation of OSH standards in the San Quintin Valley.

⁹⁵ Between 2023 and early 2025, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) implemented the Compliance Through Mexican Labor Inspections (CAMINOS) project in Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and State of Mexico to strengthen the institutional capacity of federal and state labor inspectorates to improve labor inspections, labor law enforcement and compliance strategies, and labor inspector engagement with supply chain actors in USMCA priority sectors. For more information about the CAMINOS project, please visit: <https://www.air.org/project/compliance-through-mexican-labor-inspections-caminos>.

However, agricultural workers have organized in the past and their collective action yielded some results. In March 2015, a group of agricultural workers, also called *jornaleros*, mobilized and went on strike to demand wage increases from \$120 to \$200 pesos per day (from \$8 to \$13 USD in 2015). In June, after several days of protests before local authorities, labor and social security authorities met with the workers and local employers to agree on wage increases retroactively from May of that year, ranging from 25 to 50 percent, and an end-of-year bonus equivalent to a two-week wage. The agricultural companies were also incorporated into the National Institute of Social Security's (IMSS) directory to contribute to the workers' pensions and provide them with access to healthcare, although there was a limited supply of these services in the area. The agreement also included overtime payment and required authorities to improve infrastructure and conduct farm inspections.

Local leaders and former workers at two of the largest agricultural companies in the region – Companies A and B⁹⁶ – reflected on the 2015 movement. While both companies received great criticism and attention during the strike, respondents affirmed that a success of the movement was the eradication of child labor in the fields owned by these two companies. However, that did not mean the end of agricultural child labor in surrounding ranches that supply product to these companies.

The overlapping interests between agricultural companies and an external employer-supported national union also prolonged the situation. For several decades, a large employer-supported national union has dominated the labor relations in the region. This national union defends the employers' industries at the local level through local sections and affiliated unions. This union's preponderance has allowed it to impose retaliatory practices against independent labor movements in the region and thus maintain a stalemate in the violation of OSH standards and the rights to freedom of association (FOA) and collective bargaining (CB). According to Bensúsán and Cruz (2019)⁹⁷, employer-supported union strategies have historically imposed difficulties for agricultural workers to organize, including threats, blacklisting workers active in labor organization, and violence. These practices were a reason why the 2015 labor movement was so surprising and an important factor for the movement's dwindling since then. The principles upon which the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was negotiated and implemented were founded on a corporate-statist model that served as an instrument to block worker exercise of FOA and CB rights. Concretely, labor authorities have protected the employer-supported union so leaders could avoid accountable, transparent, and democratic practices, effectively capturing the relationship with the employer and authorities and preventing worker interests from being considered in contract negotiations.

After the eruption of an alliance representing the workers settlements in March, the 2015 movement in San Quintín started decaying due to the partial success in demands. While the federal and state government provided concessions – wage increases and a wider coverage of healthcare and employer contributions to worker pensions – the wage increases were linked to heavier workloads, layoffs to workers who participated in the labor organizations, blacklists, bribes to workers leaders, and blackmailing against workers. Only one independent union was able to officially register and remain functional as of 2025, the Independent National Democratic Union of Agricultural Laborers (SINDJA). However, SINDJA has not been able to gain enough members to win representation and negotiate a

⁹⁶ Company A is a large agricultural producer with over 5,000 employees that cultivates Roma tomatoes, round tomatoes, cucumbers, and brussels sprouts over more than 600 hectares. Company B is a binational producer of berries.

⁹⁷ Bensúsán Areous, Graciela and Jaloma Cruz, Elena (2019). Union representation and redistribution: The case of the valley of San Quintín's farmworkers. *Perfiles Latinoamericanos*, 27(53). DOI: 10.18504/pl2753-009-2019.

CBA with local companies. Employers have continued using threats and blacklisting to prevent workers from affiliating to SINDJA.

Ten years later, external actors, including the ILAB-funded technical assistance, played a role in the labor conditions too. The evaluation found their contributions were still in early stages of maturity, meaning intended changes in behaviors or relationships between inspection authorities, companies, and agricultural workers are not yet concrete. While the CAMINOS project has started training the state's labor inspectorate in Tijuana to improve their practices, the inspectors' enthusiasm and more collaborative approach to employers have not yet arrived in the San Quintín Valley. A former head of the state's inspectorate admitted the agency had scarce administrative resources to implement the lessons and skills acquired from the CAMINOS project training. On the employers' side, a respondent from Company A confirmed that state labor inspectors had not visited their fields since at least 2022. Local respondents, including former workers at Company A, affirmed this company did not protect its workers in case of accidents and had not improved the OSH standards of operation despite public relations efforts and self-assessments that suggest implementing responsible labor practices. Respondents also reported layoffs of workers who demanded compensation for work accidents.

ILAB-funded technical assistance also targets agricultural companies to promote their social responsibility and reduce child labor and other forms of exploitation in the chili and tomato industries in the San Quintín Valley. The staff of two projects – *Sustentar*⁹⁸ and *Una Cosecha Justa* (UCJ)⁹⁹ – have started engaging with multiple actors in the area. Engagement has included the possibility for companies to participate in baseline data collection and training for their management staff and agricultural workers. For instance, the *Sustentar* project provided training to a group of exporting companies, including Company A, on the principles of labor justice in the USMCA and their importance for complying with the workers' rights mandated in the 2019 labor reform.

Lack of Change Description

This story focuses on the non-existent monitoring of labor standards enforcement in the San Quintín Valley and the lack of concrete changes to this situation in at least the past two years. Although Baja California's Labor Inspectorate has conducted regular inspections in Tijuana, there is an absence of labor authorities in the San Quintín Valley. Should there be any work-related accidents, workers may face denial of responsibility from the employers, and injured workers who ask for compensation can be laid off without any recourse. Child labor is still present in ranches surrounding the largest agricultural companies. Despite the unprecedented concessions in wages and social benefits in 2015, informal "pay per day" practices continued being common across multiple companies and producers in the San Quintín Valley, enabled by the employer-supported practices described above. Additionally, agricultural workers' access to healthcare and decent housing continues to be precarious. IMSS, the healthcare network with the largest coverage in the municipality (51.3 percent) has only one clinic for over 60,000 registered users. The prevalence of dirt floors in 4.3 percent of households is the highest

⁹⁸ Between 2023 and early 2025, Social Accountability International (SAI) implemented the *Sustentar*: Project to Build and Strengthen Sustainability Systems in the Tomato and Chile Sectors in Mexico in Baja California, Baja California Sur, and Chihuahua to increase compliance with labor laws related to child labor, forced labor, and acceptable conditions of work by private sector stakeholders in the tomato and chili pepper supply chains. For more information about the *Sustentar* project, please visit: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/sustentar-project-build-and-strengthen-sustainability-systems-tomato-and-chile>.

⁹⁹ Between 2023 and early 2025, World Vision International (WVI) implemented *Una Cosecha Justa*: Project to Reduce Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Other Forms of Labor Exploitation in the Chile Pepper and Tomato Sectors in Mexico with ILAB funds, to increase protections for workers and reduce the risk of child labor, forced labor, and other labor rights violations among indigenous and migrant workers in the chili pepper and tomato sectors. More details about the project are available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/una-cosecha-justa-project-reduce-child-labor-forced-labor-and-other-forms-labor>.

among the seven municipalities of the state.¹⁰⁰ Overall, awareness about the 2019 labor reform and the new model of labor relations is relatively low in the area.

Impact on groups most-at-risk of labor exploitation

The absence of enforcement and the perpetuation of these labor conditions disproportionately affect four groups of vulnerable workers that commonly reside in the San Quintín Valley: female agricultural workers, domestic migrant workers, indigenous workers, and minors. SINDJA suggested that in 2022, half of the 70,000 agricultural workers in San Quintín were women. This group is even more affected when considering the scarcity of daycare services for workers, as San Quintín has a fertility rate of 1.5 children per woman. As of 2020, 62 percent of the 117,568 residents in the municipality were economic migrants who moved to San Quintín in the previous five years, a proportion almost 20 percentage points larger than the state's average. The ethnic and linguistic composition of San Quintín also makes it an outlier in the state, with 15.71 percent of its residents being speakers of an indigenous language and 3.9 percent of them not speaking Spanish, compared to the 1.36 percent of Baja California residents who speak an indigenous language. Migrating for economic reasons from indigenous communities is correlated with a higher likelihood of speaking an indigenous language and facing ethnic discrimination and language barriers when seeking information about labor rights and trying to advocate for them. Therefore, indigenous workers in the San Quintín Valley, most of them originally from Veracruz and Oaxaca, are at greater risk of employment discrimination, workplace exploitation, and violation of labor and human rights. These difficulties may extend to workers' access to educational, health, and social systems of support.

As previously mentioned, another group most at risk of labor exploitation are minors. Despite the eradication of child labor after the 2015 mobilization in some companies, the lack of labor inspections has allowed small agricultural facilities that supply the agro-exporting companies and their international brand clients to use child labor in their fields. While only 6.5 percent of children between ages 5 to 17 years work in Baja California¹⁰¹, local respondents and media outlets report that this practice is concentrated in San Quintín's agricultural industries.

Significance

The enforcement of the rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and occupational safety and security enshrined in the labor reform has not evenly permeated the federal system of labor inspections. One example is Baja California's agricultural sector as outlined above, whose exports to the United States concentrated 90 percent of all crops sold abroad in 2024, including berries, strawberries, tomatoes, and other crops.¹⁰² In 2022, the US imported \$18.7 billion in produce from Mexico, and in 2023, Mexico supplied 63 percent of US vegetable imports and 47 percent of US fruit and nut imports.¹⁰³ The partnership between the Ministry of Labor (STPS) and the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) represents a key opportunity to intervene in the protection of labor rights in the exporting agricultural sector and transform the labor relations into a more balanced and collaborative system in which workers empower their collective action to exercise their legal rights.

In the neighboring state of Baja California Sur, the evaluation team found similar violations and challenges to labor rights in El Vizcaino Valley. There, the lack of support to protect workers' rights is

¹⁰⁰ INEGI (2021). 2020 Decennial Population and Housing Census.

¹⁰¹ INEGI (2022). National Survey on Child Labor.

¹⁰² Baja California State's Committee of Statistical and Geographical Information (2022). Official Gazette, December 30, 2022. Available at: <https://www.ceieg.bajacalifornia.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/diag-Programa-Sectorial-Agropecuario.pdf>

¹⁰³ USDA (2024). Growth in Mexico's Horticultural Exports to the United States Continued Even as New U.S. Food Safety Laws Took Effect.

perpetuated by infrequent labor inspections, that, while more present than in San Quintín, local respondents reported they were still not sufficient. Housing conditions and educational services are also precarious. The role of CTM in the agricultural sector is also dominant in that region, where Company A has additional agricultural operations.

Sustainability

This unfavorable situation for agricultural workers could start improving with the state's labor inspectorate's contribution in two ways. First, by deploying inspectors regularly to the San Quintín Valley and building the inspectors' capacity to conduct thorough inspections to sanction violations of OSH standards, labor rights and discriminatory practices. The curriculum adopted by CAMINOS in Baja California and other target states is designed to promote inspectors' collaboration with employers and help them improve their practices. The evaluation team recognizes that more frequent, efficient, and skillful labor inspections would not be sufficient to trigger a change in the system of labor rights in the region, but these tactics would be an essential factor to promote sustained compliance with OSH standards and labor rights. Second, by incentivizing a strong and coordinated effort to reignite worker collective action through existing worker organizations and generate incentives for agricultural producers to adhere to OSH standards and reduce their reliance on informal labor may contribute. These consolidated efforts, in the medium-term, would lead to a systemic change in labor relations in this agro-export region.

As to the eradication of child labor, while it has taken place to some extent in San Quintín, it has brought unintended consequences. Lacking vocational options and support systems, many minors who no longer work in the fields have been recruited by local criminal groups to carry out burglary, drug peddling, or vandalism. The eradication of child labor in the region should be accompanied by a robust alternative for youth, providing incentives to complete their education. In many cases, poverty and a lack of opportunities leave low-income minors, often children of agricultural workers, susceptible to criminal groups, further exacerbating social issues in the San Quintín Valley. Adding to the description of factors that triggered the 2015 agricultural workers' movement, this region continues struggling with insufficient social services to provide vocational and productive paths to children and adolescents in the San Quintín Valley and similar areas where domestic migrant families reside in large proportions.

There is still a long way to go for a breakthrough in the respect of labor rights in this region. Agricultural workers' knowledge of the labor reform and the worker rights and OSH standards it enshrines is still limited in multiple communities around the country. In addition, employer-supported unions are still capable of co-opting efforts of agricultural workers to organize in the region. Without coordinated efforts to improve state labor inspections and engage producers and workers, labor rights reforms will remain ineffective, even if exporters act responsibly on OSH standards.

Data Collection Information

Interviewer: Domingo F. Hernández A.

Date of writing: 18/11/2024

Editor: Carlos A. Echeverria-Estrada

ANNEX H. RANKING OF MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE (MSC) OUTCOMES AMONG ACTORS

In this section, the evaluation team addresses ILAB's question about the values that the agency staff, its implementing partners in Mexico, workers, private sector, authorities and other actors held about the documented outcomes (EQ 1b). NORC addressed this question also by domain of change containing diverse perspectives about the interventions and the outcomes to which the projects and other actors contributed. The reader will find perspectives from implementing partners (IPs), target workers, authorities and project participants. In addition, NORC also deployed fieldwork resources to gather the perspectives from non-affiliated industrial workers unrelated to ILAB projects (in Domain of Change 1), local agricultural worker leaders, and former workers at target agricultural facilities (in Domain of Change 5).

For each domain of change, we asked a subsample of respondents to rank the most significant changes that the team documented according to the significance for their work lives, their careers or livelihoods. For the two top-ranked outcomes in each domain, NORC identified and tabulated the *criteria* why they ranked the outcomes the way they did (See Tables 23-27 below). The tables summarize diverse values across actors and do not capture frequency of mentioned ranking criteria. Section 2 and Annex A. Methodological Note-subsection A.5.2 provide details on the validation exercises and respondents.

H.1. RANKING FOR MSC OUTCOMES - DOMAIN 1 (WORKER ADVOCACY OF LABOR RIGHTS)

As indicated in Section 2, validators representing ILAB, IPs, consultants, small agricultural producers, nonprofits, and independent union leaders ranked six of the MSC-verified outcomes (see Table 4 in section 3.3.1) in terms of significance to their professional mission or their own working and life conditions. Overall, rankers considered CS 1a – decreased work by children and adolescents in the sugarcane fields and coffee plantations in Veracruz and Oaxaca – and CS 1b – workers at five companies in Frontera, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Cuautla, Morelos created independent unions and democratically elected their union representatives – the most significant. However, OTLA staff also assigned top rankings to CS 1e – independent union certification and CBA legitimization.

Surveyed workers who were not affiliated to a union or worker organization ($n=60$) ranked CS 1d – *union transparency and access to decide how to use member dues* – as the most significant among the CS stories they reviewed and the RRLM resolutions as the least significant, but 13 out of 60 respondents still ranked resolution of labor cases from the RRLM (CS 1f) as a top story in terms of significance. The criteria unaffiliated workers cited most frequently for their ranking were the importance of anti-corruption and transparent union practices, as well as the benefits from union democracy, including a change in union leadership. While also a frequent criterion, the consequential role of the RRLM obtained divided appreciation among this group of respondents. More than a third of all unaffiliated workers surveyed (i.e. nine out of 27 female unaffiliated workers and 13 out of 33 unaffiliated workers) do not think a foreign mechanism should intervene in their labor relations.

The criteria used for ranking the most significant outcomes is displayed in Table 25. At face value, we can appreciate that the *contributions to systemic change* in labor relations, the importance of *union leadership change* and the *direct impact on workers' lives* were widespread criteria to rank CS 1b. The *call for child protection as a principle* drove the significance of CS 1a among consultants, nonprofits,

and worker respondents. Unaffiliated workers also used the *need for transparency* and the *ability of workers to participate in union democracy* as criteria for ranking.

Table 25. Ranking Criteria Ordered by Frequency Among Groups (Domain 1)

Criteria	Consultants Academics	Community Groups	Funders	IPs	Nonprofit	Other TA	Small Producers	Unaffiliated Workers	Unionized Workers
Minors protection from child labor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Benefits from union democracy / Change in union leadership				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Contribution to systemic change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Direct impact on workers (industrial)			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Worker's awareness of labor rights / Right to OSH			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Anti-corruption / Transparency	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Community change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Consequential mechanism			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Advocacy for workers								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Certainty									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Compliance			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Ethically relevant								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Good practice			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Multisite impact			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Need								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Professional relevance				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Sustainability				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
TA contribution / Advanced project maturity			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
Worker participation in union democracy								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Notes: A total of 78 individuals provided rankings and criteria for Domain of Change 1. Unaffiliated workers (60) did not validate all six change stories (CSs) in Domain 1. By the time of fieldwork with this population, NORC had just gained saturation to document CSs 1d, 1e and 1f in Domain 1, as well as CS 4d in Domain 4. The rest of CSs in Domain 1 reached theme saturation after fieldwork. Unaffiliated workers were only available once for data collection.

H.2. RANKING FOR MSC OUTCOMES - DOMAIN 2 (PRIVATE SECTOR'S LABOR PRACTICES)

To learn the values that actors in the private sector and the ILAB-funded interventions targeting private companies held about the outcomes these projects contributed to, NORC requested a subsample of respondents, ILAB staff, and IPs to validate and rank the outcomes identified in Table 7 (see section 3.4.1). In this section, we indicate those outcomes that received the highest ranking in Domain 2 – Private Sector's Labor Practices. We also indicate what are the criteria each validator group used for ranking the outcomes.

NORC requested representatives from the automotive sector, sugarcane producers, academics, consultants, IPs and ILAB staff to rank four identified significant changes in the labor practices of companies in the sugar (OSH standards) and automotive (prevention of sexual harassment) industries, and the exporting sector (RRLM). Overall, rankers agreed to consider CS 2a – the creation of a sugar

mill's CSR unit in Central Veracruz to prevent child labor and protect sugarcane cutters – and CS 2c – the implementation of a long-term program to support the prevention of violence against women at an automotive company in San Luis Potosi – as the most significant outcomes in this domain. As displayed in Table 26, *compliance with OSH standards* and *prohibition of child labor* was the most widespread criteria to rank these outcomes. For ILAB and IPs, *sustainability*, *effective change in employer practices* and *technical assistance contribution* were criteria for top-ranking these significant changes.

Table 26. Ranking Criteria Ordered by Frequency Among Groups – Domain 2

Criteria	Consultants/ Academics	IPs	OCFT	OTLA	Private Sector
Compliance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Sustainability		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Consequential mechanism			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Employer change		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Equality of women and men / Prevention of violence against women		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Impact on at-risk groups / Child protection	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Scalability			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
TA contribution		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Workers' right to OSH		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Alignment with USMCA/labor reform priorities		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Employer/producer incentives		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Human rights					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nascent and not noticeable change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

Note: A total of 16 individuals provided rankings and criteria for Domain of Change 2.

H.3. RANKING FOR MSC OUTCOMES - DOMAIN 3 (STRENGTHENING LABOR CONCILIATION AND JUSTICE SYSTEM)

Consistently, NORC requested a subsample of Domain 3 respondents to validate and rank the four outcomes identified in Table 9 (see Section 3.5.1). Validating respondents included OTLA staff and IPs who participated in person during a Validation Workshop in December 2024. Additionally, federal and local judges, federal and state-level conciliation staff, and labor authorities ranked the four outcomes (see Table 9) via a web survey. Across groups, rankers assigned highest significance to CS 3a – the launching of the FCCLR's Labor Registry Information Repository (RIRL) – and CS 3b – Nuevo León LCC's rate of completed cases using the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms. Almost all rankers concurred except for two IPs and a judge, who considered CS 3d – Chihuahua LCC's rate of labor cases resolved in 45 days or less (88 percent) – as the most significant outcome.

According to Table 27 **Error! Reference source not found.**, *effectiveness* and the *building of transparent practices and trust in institutions* were widespread criteria used to rank. FCCLR respondents, federal judges, and IPs mentioned these outcomes were significant due to *their high impact* and the *professional relevance* to these respondents; the outcomes affect their institutional settings. OTLA and implementing partner rankers agreed on the importance of outcomes due to their contribution to

changing the system of labor justice, the potential for their *scalability*, and the importance of assessing the *quality* of labor conciliation outcomes.

Table 27. Ranking Criteria Ordered by Frequency Among Groups – Domain 3

Criteria	Federal Government	IPs	OTLA
Consequential mechanism / Effectiveness / High impact / Outcome size	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Quick response / Timeliness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Transparency / Trust	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Contribution to systemic change		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Professional relevance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Quality of outcomes		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Scalability		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Direct impact on workers (industrial)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Fairness		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Equality between women and men / Human rights			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Impact on at-risk groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Innovation		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Institutional positioning		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Professionalization		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
TA contribution		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Utilization	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		

Note: A total of 19 individuals provided rankings and criteria for Domain of Change 3.

H.4. RANKING FOR MSC OUTCOMES - DOMAIN 4 (PREVENTING OCCUPATIONAL DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITY OF WOMEN AND MEN AT THE WORKPLACE)

As indicated in Section 2, we requested a subsample of respondents, ILAB and IP staff to validate and rank the outcomes identified in Table 11 (see Section 3.6.1). Here below, we indicate those outcomes that received the highest ranking within Domain 4 – Elimination of Workplace Discrimination and Promoting Equality of Women and Men in the Workplace – and the criteria each validator group used for ranking the outcomes.

In this domain, project participants – consultants, state government officials, ILAB and IP staff – ranked four significant changes (see Table 11). In general, the top-ranked outcomes were CS 4c – the work to elect the Mexican Workers' Union League (Liga Sindical Obrera Mexicana) to represent maquiladora workers as an independent union in Durango – and CS 4d – an increase in female workers' representation at a national union and three independent unions in Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, and Morelos. However, state officials and female workers who ranked assigned more significance to CS 4a – women in communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz increased their household income by starting or expanding their businesses. It seems that the latter group of rankers considered the entrepreneurial experience more significant than the rest of respondents.

Table 28 presents the criteria used by rankers. Most rankers across groups emphasized the importance of *professionalization of unions and worker capacity building* in these outcomes, followed

by the importance of pursuing *equality between female and male workers* at the workplace and in decision-making. While CS 4a was not among the top 2 in ranking, almost all rankers expressed the significance of outcomes due to their contribution to change in community attitudes, *social cohesion* and potential to *prevent migration*.

Sixty unaffiliated workers ranked CS 4d separately and for 16 of them (27 percent), this was the most significant outcome. The main criteria unaffiliated workers expressed for their ranking were the importance of *equality between female and male workers* at the workplace, but some of them also highlighted the difference between women and men and how those differences matter to complete certain tasks successfully. Unaffiliated workers also expressed the significance of changes based on the *need for fair working conditions*.

Table 28. Ranking Criteria Ordered by Frequency Among Groups Domain 4

Criteria	Consultants / Academics	IPs	OCFT	Small Producers	State Government	Unaffiliated Workers	Unionized Workers
Community change / Social cohesion / migration prevention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Equality of women and men / differences between female and male workers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Professionalization / Cap. Bldg.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Better income	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Change in union leadership / Union democracy benefits					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Fairness	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Impact on at-risk groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Nascent and not noticeable change		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Need				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
TA contribution		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Workers' awareness of labor rights		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Chinese companies						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Collaboration						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
COVID-19 mitigation				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Direct impact on workers (industrial)		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Display agricultural workers' conditions				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
External intervention						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Inform decision-making					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Prevention of sexual violence						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Ripple effects							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Significant impact			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
USMCA priorities			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

Note: A total of 73 individuals provided rankings and criteria for Domain of Change 4. Unaffiliated workers (n=60) did not validate all four change stories (CSs) in Domain 4. By the time of fieldwork with this population, NORC had just gained saturation to document CS 4d, as well as CSs 1d, 1e and 1f in Domain 1. The rest of CSs in

Domain 4 reached theme saturation after fieldwork. Unaffiliated workers were only available once for data collection.

H.5. RANKING FOR MSC OUTCOMES - DOMAIN 5 (LABOR RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT AND INSPECTION OF LABOR STANDARDS)

NORC requested a subsample of respondents (federal inspectorate-UDT, state-level labor inspectorate in Queretaro, agricultural company staff), ILAB staff and IPs to validate and rank the outcomes documented in Domain 5 – Labor Rights Enforcement, Inspections of Labor Standards, Dissemination and Coordination (see Table 13 in Section 3.7.1). This domain of change was less extensive in the evaluation as NORC was able to document three significant change stories (see Annex G. Significant Change Stories). In total, ten respondents validated these three CSs, four of them through a web-based survey and six of them during the Validation Workshop. Overall, validation respondents ranked CS 5a – the Federal Inspectorate at STPS increased its collaboration with its Research and Statistics Directorate to increase labor inspection efficiency as the most significant change. In second place, validation respondents ranked both CS 5b – since 2023, labor inspectors in Querétaro made their workplace inspections more efficient and collaborative, improving relationships with employers and CS 5c – the absence of labor inspections in the San Quintin Valley since 2022.

Table 29~~Error! Reference source not found.~~ presents the criteria for these rankings. While ILAB staff, related IPs and private sector rankers agreed that CS 5a's *multisite impact* was an important criterion, OTLA and IPs also mentioned *innovation* and the *emphasis on agricultural workers' conditions and right to OSH* as reasons to rank both outcomes. Unfortunately, the evaluation was able to capture very few criteria from federal labor authorities, and one of them expressed *skepticism* about the presumptive violations of OSH standards, including child labor in supply chains, in the San Quintin Valley of Baja California.

Table 29. Ranking Criteria Ordered by Frequency Among Groups (Domain 5)

Criteria	IPs	OTLA	Private Sector	Fed. Gov.
Federal-local impact / Multisite impact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Display agricultural workers' conditions / Worker's right to OSH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Innovation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Anti-corruption	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Balance in labor relations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Certainty			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Collaboration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Compliance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Contribution to systemic change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
High Impact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Importance of state inspections	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Need	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Prevention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Ripple effects	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Utilization	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

Note: A total of 10 individuals provided rankings and criteria for Domain of Change 5.

ANNEX I. ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF GROUPS MOST-AT-RISK OF LABOR EXPLOITATION

In this annex, the evaluation team addresses two interrelated questions about the technical assistance's ability to address the needs of groups of workers considered most-at-risk of labor exploitation, and the extent to which this technical assistance can adjust its approach to better respond to the needs. As follows, we identify each at-risk population that the technical assistance has impacted in this domain of change, and lines of action to improve its service to address their needs.

I.1. CHILDREN IN AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

The FOH and *Senderos* projects have worked on child labor awareness-raising activities with 24 target communities in Oaxaca and Veracruz, and with three sugar mills in Jalisco and Nayarit respectively (CSs 1a). FOH also helped a sugar mill complex in Veracruz adopt measures to reduce and eventually abolish child labor (CS 2a). Furthermore, the FOH project promoted the creation of a CSR unit to guide these efforts at the sugar mill's corporate level with some concrete commitments in the company's policies.

According to project TPRs and respondents, the project created children protection committees made up of community members, and project staff trained these committees to sensitize parents about child labor. The project also conducted workshops on alcoholism, drug addiction, and teenage pregnancy. Free reading and learning activities in municipal libraries are led by community members with the aim of preventing children from dropping out of school. In addition, the project promoted the creation of a CSR unit to guide these efforts at the sugar mill's corporate level with some concrete commitments in the company's policies.

According to project monitoring data and respondents, the percentage of target households in Oaxaca and Veracruz with at least one child engaged in child labor reduced from 43.6 percent in 2020 to 15 percent in 2024, and the percentage of beneficiary children engaged in child labor decreased from 64 percent in 2019 to 6.6 percent in 2024. Project staff from FOH and *Senderos* explained that in most communities, it was difficult to influence community members and all agricultural producers to adopt practices to reduce child labor. The project had to adapt its approach to respect the values of the host communities of children learning to work in the fields, but to change this practice to avoid child labor and ensure children were engaged only in legal and safe work for short periods. While the approach had to be revisited, the projects were flexible and gained community members' trust and familiarity to promote their buy in of a more acceptable intervention. *Senderos*, for instance, worked closely with the local Committees of Sugarcane Production and Quality tied to each sugar mill, in which company management and local sugarcane producers participate. The project attended committee meetings to increase awareness among company staff and sugarcane producers about child labor and introduce strategies to prevent it. In three committees, *Senderos* successfully pushed to create social safety subcommittees that could adopt internal protocols to monitor and penalize child labor.

Adjustments for a Better Response

Coordinated actions in a geographic focus. The experience with sugarcane revealed positive practices and lessons that can be used in other contexts and crops. Evaluation respondents identified a concentration of agricultural child labor in the San Quintin Valley in Baja California (CS 5c). ILAB's or any other funder's future technical assistance could follow a coordinated approach to capitalize from the experience of its implementation partners in OSH training, corporate social responsibility, and labor

inspection training to promote the eradication of child labor in the area. By the beginning of 2025, both UCJ and *Sustentar* projects had established a network of partnerships with workers and agricultural companies to reduce child labor. The implementing partners have the capacity to partner with local inspectorates and support labor inspectors. In parallel, IPs could adapt and replicate the technical support and capacity building for agricultural producers, the awareness efforts about the importance of child education among agricultural workers, and the support to agricultural communities in transforming their approach to child labor, especially when the household income shrinks and puts pressure on parents to send their children to the fields. Communication materials should be translated into indigenous languages and projects should be able to communicate in participants' preferred languages to promote buy in and awareness.

Promote inter-governmental coordination. Child workers and children of domestic migrants in border states are exposed to particularly challenging conditions that increase their vulnerability. Due to the constant mobility, domestic migrant workers in the agricultural sector tend to have no inter-generational support on childcare from relatives in their host communities. Additionally, their children tend to face more multilingual and multi-cultural school spaces, teachers with lower skills in these communities, and in some instances, rejection for showing up late during the school year and lack of school attainment documents¹⁰⁴. These factors increase their children's risk of being victims of child labor, human trafficking, and forced labor. Continued work with local labor inspectors on labor law and standards is essential but not sufficient. Further training and support should include building a culture of public service that prioritizes the lawful enforcement of OSH standards and labor law and condemns any corruption practices in the interaction with employers and their labor lawyers. However, the inspectorate in Baja California also requires upgraded equipment to deploy across the state hiring additional inspectors and higher salaries to increase labor inspectors' incentives to engage in enforcing standards effectively.

Workers and implementing partners have reported some labor inspectors gave notice to employers believed to be liable for employing children prior to an inspection, giving employers time to remove child workers temporarily and thus avoiding sanctions. According to the RGITAS¹⁰⁵, labor inspectors must notify workplaces of any ordinary inspection at least 24 hours prior to the visit. However, labor inspectors pursuing extraordinary visits are allowed to carry those out without any prior notice, to satisfy their primary purpose of immediately detecting the situation prevailing in the inspected work facility. Extraordinary labor inspections should occur for labor inspectors to confirm any alleged occupational risks or danger, possible violations to the labor law, or falsehood in documents and statements provided by the employer in past visits. For these reasons, any future interventions to combat child labor should continue approaching state authorities by strengthening the collaboration from bodies that provide protection to unaccompanied minors and labor inspectorates, local enforcement authorities, and nonprofits that support victims of human trafficking and forced labor. The evaluation did not find any concrete positive results related to the coordination between agencies and across levels of government to combat trafficking and forced labor. No significant outcomes emerged in this area, although the results framework of some of the 19 ILAB-funded projects includes intended outcomes in this area.

¹⁰⁴ Vera Noriega, Jose Angel and Durazo Salas, Francisco Fernando (2020). The experience of child indigenous workers agricultural migrants in northwest México. *Trayectorias Humanas Transcontinentales*, Special numbers N° 6. <https://doi.org/10.25965/trahs.2458>.

¹⁰⁵ Mexico's Supreme Court of Justice (2022). General Regulations of Labor Inspection and Application of Sanctions (RGITAS). August 23, 2022. Available at: <https://legislacion.scjn.gob.mx/Buscador/Paginas/wfArticuladoFast.aspx?q=pwUhdNvCSySjs8D73SRJECyjevCf9DK7GiYVssujxpWk1DXuZSUWATbQk7qYua/D0oZBOX2yhfUCukA+dAZuSQ==>

Committees for Social Improvements. The experience of the FOH project suggests the importance for sustainability of replicating these committees, whose goals has been to serve as a reference for training, evaluating, and certifying community members and agricultural producers in managing sustainable social improvements in agricultural fields, specifically to prevent child labor, forced labor, and ensure labor rights in agricultural settings. IPs could adapt the training and monitoring plan, training course report, and follow up report based on their knowledge of other agricultural contexts and lessons learned.

I.2. DOMESTIC MIGRANT WORKERS

An important group of agricultural workers in the sugarcane, tobacco, chili and tomato sectors are workers migrating from other states in Mexico. Members of this particularly underserved group have migrated from some of the poorest localities of Puebla, Chiapas, Tabasco, and Veracruz to work in the technical assistance's target communities. Many of those from Veracruz have the indigenous Nahuatl language as their mother tongue and may not speak Spanish fluently. Overall, indigenous communities are historically at risk of labor exploitation and the workers who do not speak Spanish fluently face additional barriers to advocating for safer working conditions.

ILAB's technical assistance provided training to sugarcane cutters in target communities of Oaxaca and Veracruz on labor rights, including the importance of occupational safety and health (OSH) measures at work (CS 1a, 2a, 2b). Sugarcane producers in Veracruz received training on acceptable working conditions and reducing child labor and also provided safety equipment for workers. Attitudes related to OSH standards and the use of protective equipment have changed among target workers. However, compliance with OSH standards still depends on both the sugarcane producers' willingness to implement them and the sugar mills' ability to monitor the sugarcane producers' labor practices. Although target workers' awareness of labor rights and better working conditions has increased, agricultural workers think that sustaining the change in the demand for OSH standards requires more support for workers in terms of oversight and supervision from labor authorities in Oaxaca and Veracruz. If there is limited oversight, management of target sugar mills may decide to discontinue their recently established CSR policies to prevent child labor and promote OSH standards among their sugarcane producers (CS 2a). In turn, the evaluation team theorizes that seeing their employers discontinue CSR practices that have protected workers may discourage workers and decrease their own motivation to demand such measures in the future for fear that any positive changes will not last, and potential loss of work in the future.

Adjustments for a Better Response

Refine targets. IPs have mentioned that indigenous migrant workers and do not fully speak Spanish may not have access to information in their native language and therefore be not familiar with their labor rights. This lack of access to information sources about labor rights puts these workers at a disadvantage and exposes them to risks of labor exploitation. For instance, employers may take advantage of them by engaging them in informal work and lower pay instead of offering them formal remuneration, which may involve social security among other benefits. ILAB's technical assistance could refine interventions that target indigenous migrant workers to increase their awareness of labor rights and provide them with tools information to advocate for their rights in hiring processes.

Tailor-made communication and dissemination. Strategies to increase domestic migrant workers' awareness of labor rights and change behaviors regarding OSH would benefit from information sharing by other agricultural workers whose own awareness and behavior have changed through ILAB-funded

technical assistance. While some projects, including FOH, *Senderos* and VZF, have adapted and translated some training materials into relevant indigenous languages, all audiovisual and printed communication materials for domestic migrant workers should continue using indigenous languages and not only Spanish. Additionally, TPRs from 2024 for *Sustentar* and UCJ also indicated that the projects, respectively, a) worked with interpreters of indigenous languages and b) had plans to translate a radio campaign into indigenous languages. Based on these successful examples, the evaluation team suggests that all future materials be translated into indigenous languages spoken by target workers so that communities can maintain records and review them on their own time. While not all agricultural workers can read or write, some community members may be able to and could provide assistance to workers. Communications on WhatsApp, Facebook, and local media at destination/host communities should continue being prioritized as communication channels to disseminate awareness campaigns among these workers.

I.3. FEMALE UNIONIZED WORKERS IN EXPORTING INDUSTRIES

Several of ILAB's technical assistance interventions have contributed to affect the situation of female workers in exporting industries. For example, Solidarity Center campaigns helped create democratic unions in Coahuila and San Luis Potosi, which included female workers leaders. These campaigns helped advance female representation in new unions and in existing union sections in Jalisco in various sectors, such as mining, rubber, auto parts, and agriculture. For example, one female leader in a mining union noted that ILAB *"has helped us greatly as leaders [in terms of] our training."* MAP's support to raise awareness and provide training on labor rights, eliminating discrimination in employment, and union rights to female workers was complemented by CFO home visits carried out to help workers report situations of labor rights violations and support to prepare a RRLM claim in Durango. These interventions contributed to the reinstatement of workers and the creation of an independent union in a maquila company in 2023. Additionally, PADF provided consultancy services or tailored technical support to automotive sector companies across different industrial clusters. The evaluation's MSC approach documented that PADF's activities at an automotive multinational based in Central Mexico enabled the creation of a long-term program to support the prevention of and combat sexual violence in the workplace. State-level labor inspectorates have started implementing protocols that promote equality of women and men in the workplace. In the case of Jalisco, the state labor inspectorate was able to identify sexual harassment against female workers and sanction employers that repeatedly tolerated such practices. Overall, these contributions have been relevant to this category of workers as union's decision-making increasingly incorporate women workers' interests and produce results that impact their safety and labor stability – e.g., equal pay, bathrooms for women, lighting outside plants, policies against sexual harassment.

Adjustments for a Better Response

According to organized workers, the Solidarity Center did not include specific strategies to promote the participation of women in union democracy, which is a window of opportunity to expand the effects even further in current and future campaigns. At recently created independent unions, the areas of opportunity include promoting equality of women and men in the workplace and protections against violence towards women through additional training and consultations with union leaders. As these new union organizations are already familiar with ILAB-funded support, they are well-positioned to be potential champions for promoting equality between women and men in the workplace, if provided with appropriate training through EQUAL and GEM.

Extend consulting services/tailored technical support to other exporting companies. The evaluation team considers that expanding the reach of the consulting services or tailored technical support tasks that PADF currently implements in coordination with target automotive companies is an important opportunity to increase its benefits among employers and workers in the sector. The significant change story (see CS 2c in Annex G. Significant Change Stories) documented that PADF's consulting services (more details in Box 4) positively influenced anti-sexual harassment workplace policies at a plant in Central Mexico by facilitating the process of establishing a mechanism to prevent it. While the tailored technical support to the company was intended to promote the understanding and respect of CBA activities among staff, the technical assistance revealed the interest for a mechanism to prevent harassment and to include it as part of the union's collective bargaining with the employer, ILAB's experience with the company in SLP (CS 2c) suggests it should double down its approach to open avenues in associations and chambers in the automotive industry and other exporting sectors. The technical assistance can explore the role of the companies that have participated and other champions in anti-sexual violence efforts to help ILAB disseminate messages about incentives to create these types of mechanisms.

It is worth noting that some IPs cited difficulties engaging women to attend trainings on topics such as the labor reform or conflict resolution, given demanding work schedules. In some of these cases, it has also been difficult to convince employers to allow training during the workday with the excuse that such activities disrupt operations. In contrast, the MAP project seems to have opened avenues at companies and unions through dissemination. Therefore, coordinated work among IPs could open more spaces in the automotive, maquiladora and textile sector for human resources and worker training sessions on FOA, CBA, and OSH standards; such approaches will require adjustments depending on the industry and preferences of workers. The awareness and training exercises could use other fairs or social activities (e.g., health campaigns, exhibitions) well-known among workers to make them attractive outside of working hours.

I.4. FEMALE HOUSEHOLD HEADS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES.

Training activities in new trades and coffee production for women heads of household increased income for about a quarter of target households (CS 4a). Women invested earnings in businesses, homes, and personal needs. Home-based work improved childcare balance. However, seasonal income fluctuations and volatile coffee prices threaten business sustainability. While new skills in beauty salons, bakeries, and coffee production provided economic alternatives, some women lacked essential resources, like coffee solar dryers (EQUAL supplied this equipment to some producers), limiting their ability to compete in the coffee sector.

Adjustments for a Better Response

The approach of technical assistance to promote sustainability of these interventions require further work with female participants to generate competitive conditions for them in their markets. For trades learned, such as beauty salons and bakeries, interventions could increase the support to orient entrepreneurs on how to respond to market changes and survive through times of lower income in the communities. As to coffee producers, participants reported a positive experience with the marketing training component of the project led by a recognized coffee producer in Oaxaca. However, the potential income that some female coffee producers in these areas would receive from selling better quality coffee would not cover their initial investment costs and other opportunity costs, discouraging them from participating. The technical assistance could support participants to develop business plans

and create cooperatives in which more than one producer assumes the costs and risks from the enterprise.

I.5. WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES OR LIMITED MOBILITY

The ILAB-funded interventions that contributed to outcomes in Domain of Change 3 did not explicitly target any group most at-risk of labor exploitation. However, these four outcomes seemingly may enable some benefits for some groups of at-risk workers. On the one hand, the creation of the RIRL online (CS 3a) allows workers to easily search for the historical records of labor agreements from wherever they can connect to the Internet. Workers with disabilities often faced difficulties accessing CBA information through the old labor relations boards (JCAs) as users had to visit a boards premises and request the information in person.

On the other, the operational management model at the State of Mexico labor courts (CS 3c) has contributed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness in resolving labor cases. Therefore, a more efficient rate of judicial resolution may benefit workers, especially those most at-risk, such as with disabilities, and older workers, in obtaining a resolution in a shorter time. Shorter trials reduce the number of trips to court and the costs associated with following up a labor case.

I.6. LOW-INCOME WORKERS

The new labor conciliation process (CS 3b and 3d) may bring benefits to female workers and older workers, and those with limited financial means. The conciliators are trained on gender and human rights perspectives, and the conciliation guidelines are grounded on these principles too. This training allows conciliators to manage cases considering the situation of each conciliation party. In cases in which conciliators receive cases of women and elderly people who lose their jobs, they can use the regulation to make employers pay them fair compensation.