


# PROGRAM EVALUATION OF USDOL-ILAB TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE UNDER USMCA

 Task Order Number: 1605C2-24-F-00012 | May 2025




## BACKGROUND

Since 2019, ILAB 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 United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). ILAB implemented a multi-pronged strategy through 19 technical assistance projects\* that engaged with the public sector at the federal and state levels, the private sector, and unions and workers to eliminate child labor and forced labor; promote labor law enforcement; employers’ accountability; democratic unions; empowerment of workers, with emphasis on equality between women and men; and prevention and resolution of labor disputes.





The purpose of this evaluation was to identify and assess the contribution of ILAB’s technical assistance\* to any intended and unintended results in its engagement with the Government of Mexico and other tripartite partners in Mexico, and the sustainability of these results. NORC conducted the evaluation between April 2024 and May 2025, and collected data between July and November 2024.

## MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUTCOMES

The evaluation identified **concrete** and **visible** changes in behaviors and practices of individual and collective actors, as well as in the relationships between these actors and in the policies enacted by groups and institutions engaged with and affected by the ILAB-funded projects.

<div>1. Worker Advocacy of Labor Rights</div> 	1a. Children and adolescents stopped working or decreased the amount of time working in project target sugarcane fields and coffee plantations.	2022 - 2024	Veracruz - Oaxaca
	1b. Workers at five companies created independent unions and democratically elected their union representatives.	2020 - 2023	Coahuila, San Luis Potosi, Morelos
	1c. Agricultural workers began requiring their employers to adopt occupational health and safety measures, such as access to first aid kits, rest breaks, and hydration.	2023	Oaxaca and Veracruz
	1d. 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.	Since 2022	Coahuila, Morelos and San Luis Potosi
	1e. Five independent unions received representation certificates. Workers at two of them also approved their collective bargain agreements at the Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registry. These steps allowed unions to negotiate wage increases in a range of 7.1 to 30 percent in 2024.	Since 2022	San Luis Potosí, Morelos and Coahuila
	1f. 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.	2021 -2023	Coahuila, Guanajuato, Morelos, San Luis Potosi

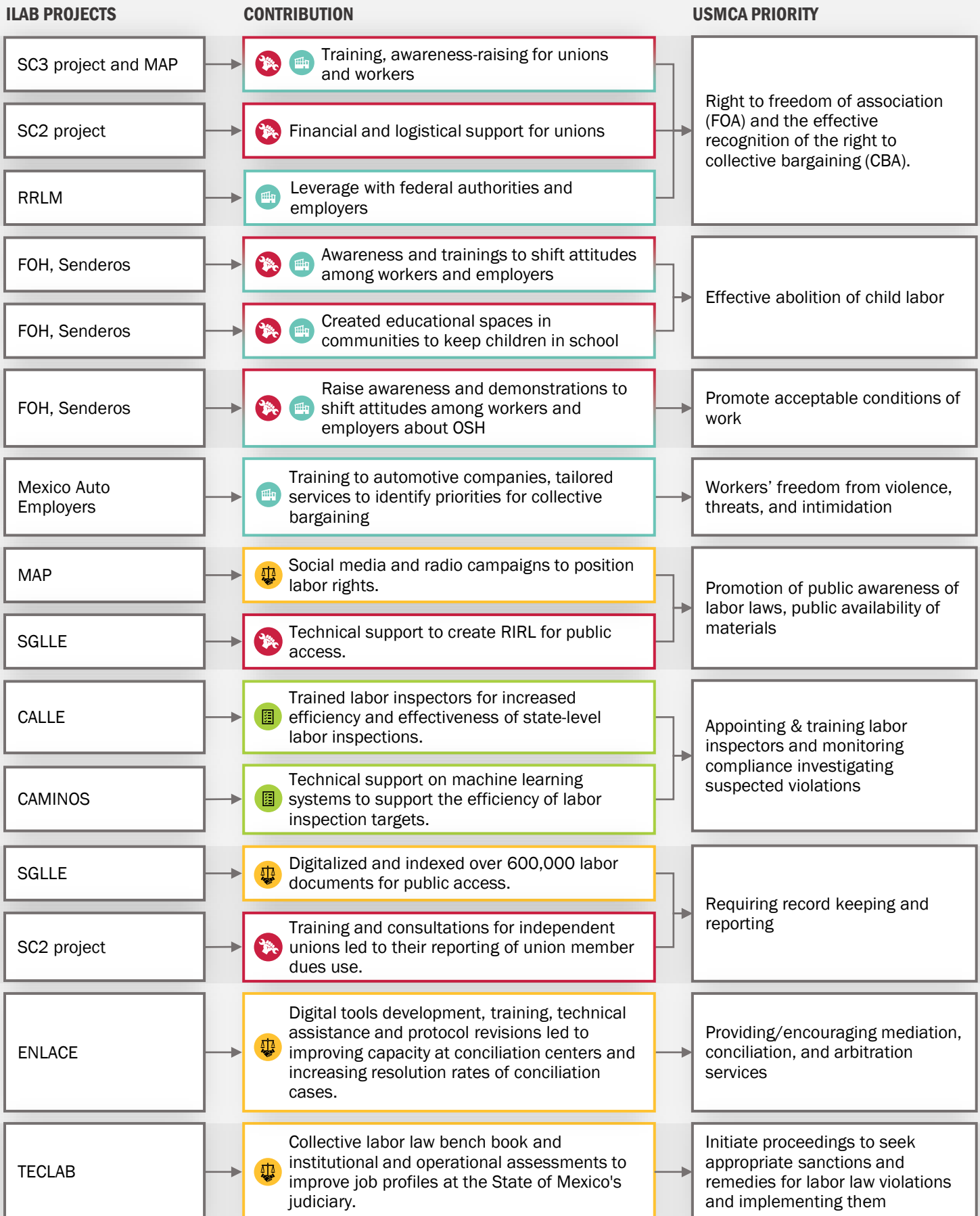
\*The evaluation covered 19 projects: Una Cosecha Justa; Project to Build and Strengthen Sustainability Systems in the Tomato and Chile Sectors in Mexico (Sustentar); Building a Comprehensive Government of Mexico Approach to Combating Child Labor and Forced Labor in Mexico (AccioNNar); Improving Workers’ Occupational Safety and Health in Selected Supply Chains in Mexico: A Vision Zero Fund (VZF); Equal Access to Quality Jobs for Women and Girls in Mexico (EQUAL); Senderos; Fields of Hope (FOH); Towards Effective Courts and Coordinated Labor Justice, (TECLAB); Strengthening Mexican Inspectorate for Labor Enforcement, (CAMINOS); Enhancing Labor Conciliation in Mexico (ENLACE); Gender Equity in the Mexican Workplace (GEM); Mexico Awareness Raising Project (MAP); Engaging Mexico's Auto Sector...

<b>2. Private Sector Labor Practices</b> 	<b>2a.</b> A sugar refinery group created a corporate social responsibility (CSR) unit, which has put into effect procedures to prevent child labor and protect cane cutters. Four more sugar mills planned to incorporate CSR policies in 2025.	2024	Central Veracruz
	<b>2b.</b> Sugarcane refineries invested in better health and safety measures at work, reducing workplace accidents.	2023 – 2024	Oaxaca, Veracruz, Jalisco, Nayarit
	<b>2c.</b> An automotive company created and began implementing a long-term program to prevent domestic and workplace sexual violence.	2023	San Luis Potosí
	<b>2d.</b> Dozens of large companies 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.	Since 2019, with greater intensity since 2023	Primarily central and northern states
<b>3. Strengthening Labor Conciliation and Justice Systems</b> 	<b>3a.</b> The Federal Center for Conciliation and Labor Registration launched the Labor Registry Information Repository (RIRL) with access to 600,000 digital labor documents, visited by an average of 4,500 users per month since 2024.	2023	National
	<b>3b.</b> The Labor Conciliation Center of Nuevo León conciliated 81 percent of its cases using the SINACOL and SIGNO platforms.	2022 - 2024	Nuevo León
	<b>3c.</b> Labor courts have shortened the time in which they solve 52 percent of their jurisdictional cases to seven months or less.	Since 2020	State of Mexico
	<b>3d.</b> The Chihuahua Labor Conciliation Center (LCC), through its conciliation process, has resolved 88% of labor cases in 45 days or less.	2022 – 2024	Chihuahua
<b>4. Workplace Equality Between Men and Women</b> 	<b>4a.</b> Women increased their household income by starting or expanding their businesses.	2023 - 2024	Oaxaca, Veracruz
	<b>4b.</b> Women coffee producers in communities expanded their participation in the coffee production process.	2023 - 2024	Oaxaca, Veracruz
	<b>4c.</b> Female maquila workers elected a union league to represent them as an independent union and renegotiated their collective labor agreement increasing worker benefits.	2024	Nazareno, Durango
	<b>4d.</b> More female workers in a state-wide union and three independent unions have gained positions as delegates in union leadership bodies.	Since 2021	Jalisco, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí and Morelos
<b>5. Labor Inspection and Coordination</b> 	<b>5a.</b> The Federal Labor Inspectorate increased its collaboration with its Research and Statistics Directorate at Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Mexico's Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare) to use machine learning as a tool to increase labor inspections efficiency.	2019 - 2024	National
	<b>5b.</b> Labor inspectors have made their inspections of workplaces more efficient and collaborative, improving relationships with employers.	Since 2023	Querétaro
	<b>5c.</b> Labor inspectors have not monitored the labor conditions at agricultural workplaces in this region. Former workers and community leaders stated that exporting companies in the tomato and berry chains violated occupational safety and health standards, in communities where agricultural child labor persists. Project implementation reached early stages and the region presents remaining work opportunities to advance labor rights.	Since 2022	San Quintín Valley, Baja California

...in Labor Reform Implementation (Mexico Auto Employers); Improving Working Conditions in the Mexican Automotive Supply Chain (CALLE); Strengthening Government Labor Law Enforcement (SGLLE); Engaging Workers and Civil Society to Strengthen Labor Law Enforcement (SC1); Building an Independent & Democratic Labor Movement to Protect Worker Rights in Mexico (SC2); Strengthening Workers' Ability to Exercise their Labor Rights in Mexico (SC3); Observation and Engagement for Rights Verification and Realization Initiative (OBSERVAR).

## ILAB'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACHIEVING USMCA LABOR CHAPTER PRIORITIES

Most ILAB-funded projects contributed to the USMCA labor priorities and the RRLM complemented ILAB's technical assistance in promoting the FOA and CBA rights in several cases. The diagram below identifies the contributions into each USMCA priority by project:



## LESSONS LEARNED SUMMARY

- 1. Remaining Challenges in Meeting USMCA Labor Commitments:** Mexico's federal and state labor authorities face ongoing challenges in preventing FOA and CB rights violations and enforcing OSH standards in supply chains, including budget cuts, remaining retaliation and threatening practices against freedom of association, and contentious relations among private sector, labor inspectors and workers in some states and sectors. However, the labor conciliation and justice systems have built considerable capacity and sustainability since the labor reform.
- 2. Increased Demand for Labor Services:** ILAB's technical assistance has promoted the registration and strengthening of new democratic unions. These new organizations may drive an increase in demand for state and federal labor conciliation and justice services. Therefore, consolidating the labor conciliation and justice system's capacity to face demand will require future efforts of monitoring, analysis and learning on service quality, satisfaction, and impact.
- 3. Sustainability of Democratic Union Gains:** Legal protections and labor reform institutions do not guarantee the sustainability of democratic union governance and female representation in unions. Continuous training, awareness campaigns, and reminders are needed to combat anti-democratic practices.
- 4. Correlation of Outcomes with Resources:** The scale, significance and sustainability of outcomes from ILAB-funded technical assistance are correlated with the maturity level of program implementation and available resources. Under ILAB's guidance, the projects with the most experience in the field and longer implementation registered the most sustainable conditions by transferring efforts and technical resources to local actors. The conditions for sustainability of these efforts constitute valuable knowledge for future interventions to further promote fair conditions for U.S. workers in North America and elsewhere.
- 5. Non-Affiliated Workers' Concerns:** Workers not affiliated with unions prioritize transparency in union dues management and eliminating employment discrimination. They also highlight the impact of poor social services (e.g., infrastructure, safety, transportation) on their lives, which are not addressed by employers or authorities.

## METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

The evaluation design combined the Most Significant Change (MSC) method with triangulation of project monitoring data and official secondary sources. Through robust narratives, the evaluation detailed who changed, how, when and where, as well as the significance of the change. The SC 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.



**192**

MSC semi-structured interviews



**13**

MSC focus group discussions



**52**

Onsite MSC survey interviews



**121**

Validation & ranking of MSC stories



**26**

Facilitated discussions



**10+**

Official secondary sources



**19**

Projects' monitoring data

For access to the Evaluation Report and a selection of SC stories, visit [NORC's evaluation website](#).