



ACCELERATING PROGRESS

INSIGHTS, LESSONS LEARNED, AND EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES ON PROMOTING COMPLIANCE WITH LABOR LAWS AND LABOR RIGHTS IN MEXICO

The Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) is dedicated to enhancing compliance with labor laws and upholding workers' rights within Mexico's automotive sector. To achieve this objective and to prevent and address labor law violations, ILAB focuses on systematic changes through a variety of initiatives. Specifically, ILAB aims to establish mechanisms that safeguard labor rights, raise awareness, and enhance capacities to proactively ensure industry-wide compliance with labor laws.

ILAB's approach encompasses interventions from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The Government of Mexico holds the primary responsibility for ensuring employers comply with established labor laws applicable to the country's automotive sector. Conversely, employers, along with labor unions, worker organizations, confederations, and workers themselves, play a complementary role in ensuring adherence to established labor laws and respect for labor rights. Compliance, embodying a bottom-up approach, amplifies the voices of both employers and workers in adhering to labor laws and upholding labor rights, regardless of whether enforcement mechanisms are actively applied.

A key aspect of ILAB's strategy is facilitating binational collaboration, notably through the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), between workers in the United States and Mexico. The RRM is a pioneering tool in cross-border labor rights advocacy within the automotive industry. This collaboration fosters the exchange of insights and practices, empowering workers on both sides to strengthen collective advocacy and emphasize the importance of horizontal linkages in upholding labor standards. Central to ILAB's efforts is the drive to enhance transparency and navigate corporate influence in labor relations despite challenges in accessing critical company information. To address these obstacles, ILAB advocates for cultural shifts within the corporate sector and traditional unions: promoting informed dialogue, improving information accessibility through worker centers, and advocating for digital platforms for transparency. Overall, ILAB's approach to compliance emphasizes collaboration, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to fostering respect for workers' rights, aiming to create a more equitable and just labor landscape in Mexico and the rest of the world.

This learning brief captures key insights, lessons learned, and emerging good practices garnered during an evaluation conducted by DevTech Systems, Inc. in 2023 and 2024. ILAB commissioned the evaluation to enhance its own, as well as other key system actors', understanding of how its technical assistance is advancing Mexico's labor standards through a systems-based approach. Drawing upon the evaluation's mixed-methods approach, these key insights, lessons learned, and emerging good practices seek to amplify various system actors' voices and their contributions to Mexico's automotive sector, including ILAB's technical assistance.

Key Insight and Lesson Learned 1: Fostering binational collaboration helps enforce labor rights across borders, strengthening international labor practices and resulting in a more unified approach to defending labor rights.

Donor investment in cross-border initiatives and funding mechanisms, as demonstrated by ILAB's technical assistance, strengthens binational collaboration efforts, facilitating a joint defense of labor rights for workers in both the United States and Mexico. Projects leveraging diplomatic channels and international organizations enhance support for binational collaboration initiatives, fostering dialogue and cooperation on labor rights issues. When donors and implementing partners, together with local actors, implement joint training programs and knowledge-sharing platforms that promote mutual understanding and solidarity among workers across borders, sustainable improvements in the labor field and innovative models of cooperation are more likely to emerge.

Key Insight and Lesson Learned 2: Engaging with and facilitating dialogue between employers and unions encourages shared understanding and builds trust.

As demonstrated by its technical assistance, ILAB bolstered unions' capacity to adapt to changing labor dynamics through capacity-building programs and outreach initiatives, ensuring their continued effectiveness in upholding labor rights. By engaging industry associations and corporate leaders in dialogue and cooperation, donors and implementing partners alike fosters a more inclusive approach to labor reform implementation. Importantly, collaborative initiatives and partnerships between employers and unions build trust and understanding, leading to constructive engagement and positive outcomes for labor relations.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

A prime example of these efforts is the Engaging Mexico's Auto Sector Employers in Labor Law Reform Implementation project. This initiative specifically targets automotive sector employers, particularly small and medium-sized manufacturers, aiming to bring them into compliance with Mexico's labor laws and improve working conditions within the automotive supply chain.

Key Insight and Lesson Learned 3: Broadening and deepening system actors' knowledge of labor rights encourages compliance.

Donors invest in targeted campaigns and outreach programs for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in efforts to address the knowledge gap in labor rights. This approach promotes compliance and responsible business practices. When implementing partners engage with business chambers to design, deliver, and monitor these campaigns and programs, the SMEs are better positioned to leverage existing networks and resources to disseminate information and best practices in labor relations. Taken together, SMEs then receive tailored support, empowering them to navigate labor regulations effectively, fostering a culture of compliance and accountability.

Key Insight and Lesson Learned 4: Promoting transparency limits corporate control over information.

When donors strategically allocate resources to establish independent monitoring and oversight mechanisms, they enhance the system's transparency and accountability in corporate information disclosure practices, ultimately promoting greater access to information for workers. In addition, by collaborating with civil society organizations and legal experts, donors and implementing partners strengthen advocacy efforts and support initiatives to promote transparency and corporate accountability. In addition, regulations and standards for corporate transparency and information disclosure establish clear guidelines for companies, ensuring equitable access to information and protecting workers' rights.

Key Insight and Lesson Learned 5: Strengthening the capacity of key actors enables decision-makers to embrace a culture of human rights and accountability more effectively.

When government actors, donors, and implementing partners invest in capacity-building programs for employers, unions, and local authorities, they enhance their effectiveness in promoting labor rights and enforcing labor laws. This is most notably when international donors and development agencies leverage one another's financial and technical assistance to support capacity-building initiatives and institutional reforms. ILAB, as an example, implemented targeted training and mentoring programs in collaboration with local entities (ranging from government agencies to CSOs) to empower key actors such as inspectors and independent unions to fulfill their roles effectively, fostering a culture of collaboration and accountability in labor governance.

EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE 1: Facilitate Worker Collaboration Across United States, Mexico, and Canada

The Solidarity Center has successfully implemented a practice that fosters practical exchanges between workers and unions in the U.S. and Mexico. This initiative enhances labor rights advocacy by allowing workers to share experiences and strategies across borders. Such collaboration has proven effective in developing a unified approach to defending labor rights. The research team recommends scaling up this practice to involve more Mexican workers and potentially expanded to include Canadian workers in the exchanges as well.

EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE 2: Awarding Companies that Adhere to Human Rights Standards

PADF, in collaboration with the state of Chihuahua, introduced the "Distinctive" certification to assess and recognize companies that adhere to high human rights standards in their operations and workplaces. This certification serves as a tool to incentivize companies to strengthen their practices and organizational commitment to human rights. Companies that receive the Distinctive can use the "Empresa Comprometida con los Derechos Humanos®" logo on their documentation and publicity and will be featured in local publications and media, enhancing their reputation as champions of human rights.

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EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE 3: Strengthen Information Access through Worker Centers

Promoted by the Solidarity Center, “Casas Obreras” or worker centers in San Luis Potosí play a crucial role in empowering laborers within the Mexican automotive sector. These centers are vital for educating workers about their rights and providing legal guidance. As accessible public hubs, they enable workers to organize effectively and navigate legal challenges, facilitating the formation of independent unions. The success of these centers in fostering worker trust and advocacy demonstrates their potential for replication in other regions to further strengthen labor rights education and efforts to organize in support of labor rights.

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EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE 4: Implement Digital Platforms for Transparency

The Strengthening Government Labor Law Enforcement (SGLLE) Mexico project, in collaboration with the FCCLR and Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS), has significantly advanced labor justice reform through the development and support of a public union democracy database that organizes, stores, preserves, and makes available historical, revised, and new union democracy-related files for public consultation through user-friendly search mechanisms. By making this data readily accessible, it enables workers to make more informed decisions and engage more effectively in negotiations.



Please refer to the [evaluation report](#) for additional information and insights on how ILAB’s technical assistance is supporting sustainable change in Mexico’s automotive sector’s labor relations system.

