

Press Release

The Ambulantes Project alerts to the labor exploitation of internal agricultural migrants from Veracruz and Oaxaca in the ranches of national and international businesses.

- **Internal agricultural migrants do not have guaranteed employment, and 94% do not have a written contract.**
- **The internal migrant population has a high proportion of indigenous people, 24% speak an indigenous language, and are at a disadvantage because they do not fully understand the Spanish language.**
- **Nine out of 10 internal agricultural migrants do not have access to health care from their employer and do not have social security or receive employment benefits.**
- **In Oaxaca, almost 50% of migrant farm workers interviewed are hired at a wage of only 201 to 300 pesos per day. (10.69 - 15.95 USD)**
- **In Veracruz, more than 40% of people interviewed as part of the Ambulantes project stated that they receive their payment from regional contractors, not from the employer.**

In Mexico, an estimated 2.3 million people work as migrant agricultural laborers¹. These workers do not have guaranteed employment and 94% of them do not have a written contract. Nine out of ten agricultural day laborers do not have access to health care as part of their work, nor do they receive labor benefits². It is important to note that the day laborer population has a high proportion of indigenous people, 24% speak an indigenous language, which is three times higher than the national rate.

A large part of the migrant laborer population in Mexico are internal migrants. The factors that drive this mobility are diverse, but one major driving force is that small farms in migrant communities of origin in the center and south of the country are increasingly less economically viable. In addition, these rural indigenous communities of origin often face social deprivation, marginalization, insecurity, widespread violence and extreme poverty.

The growth of agro-industrial production in the north, northwest and center of the country has opened a labor market that makes possible the supply and demand of cheap labor for

¹ For more information, please see "In Mexico 2.3 million people are agricultural day laborers: Conasami. National Institute for Social Development | August 18, 2020 | Press Release: <https://www.gob.mx/indesol/prensa/en-mexico-2-3-millones-de-personas-son-jornaleras-agricolas-conasami>

² *abid*

various agricultural activities, feeding networks of illegal contracting that take advantage of the vulnerable situation of internal agricultural migrants and their families. Workers accept this type of temporary work because they have no other choice, facing other types of deprivations in addition to the constant violation of their human rights. There is no guarantee of fair and dignified work, or access to the working and living conditions that are established in the Federal Labor Law and in international human rights instruments and conventions.

The right to housing offered to agricultural migrant workers is not determined or guaranteed, nor are housing conditions, food quality, social security enrollment, minimum wage amounts or overtime pay. This is due to a lack of supervision and oversight by federal, state and municipal labor authorities at the destination sites.

The Ambulantes Project, formed by IREX, CAMINOS Centro de Acompañamiento a Migrantes, AC, Fomento Cultural y Educativo, AC, and the Centro de Estudios en Cooperación Internacional y Gestión Pública, AC, aims to promote safe migration and the protection of the labor rights of this population of indigenous and rural communities living in the Valles Centrales of Oaxaca, the Sierra Norte and Huasteca of Veracruz.

To achieve these objectives, Ambulantes concentrates its efforts on four major actions

- The public awareness campaign “A tu migración, ¡no te vayas sin información!” which includes printed and digital materials with information about labor rights and COVID-19 prevention, aimed specifically at migrant farmworkers, with some content in indigenous languages.
- Interviews with key migrant agricultural workers in their communities of origin, located in the Valles Centrales of Oaxaca and the Sierra Norte and Huasteca of Veracruz.
- The development of a digital platform with interactive tools that allow users to navigate and learn about the quantitative results of the interviews, an interactive map that reflects the communities of origin and destination identified during the interviews, as well as documents on migration routes with official sources.
- Strengthening of local organizations focused on improving community capacity to cope with their migrant situation, through coordination of strategies and joint learning among peers.

The research carried out by the Ambulantes project was based on in-depth interviews with 86 migrant day laborers in their communities of origin. This sample provides important details of a complex reality that explains the migration processes: it exposes the mechanisms that support and protect the recruitment and hiring processes carried out by agricultural companies, as well as the living and working conditions faced by agricultural migrants and their families from their communities of origin in the states to which they migrate. Among the most notable findings are:

- Farmworkers do not receive a contract prior to employment³. In fact, the recruiters verbally determine both the wage and the "enganche" amount. (meaning "hook," refers to the cash amount given to a worker upon making a verbal commitment)⁴
- When a contract is involved, many workers are not able to understand it due to illiteracy, lack of proficiency in Spanish, or inability to receive a clear explanation of the terms.
- Among the internal agricultural migrant population, there are adolescents who work on farms from as young as 13 years old. They are not offered a written contract because doing so would be outside the Federal Labor Law.
- In the face of the recent COVID-19 pandemic in Veracruz, workers had practically no protocol or strategy to contain the virus during their employment period.
- Most of the workers interviewed are not registered with the Mexican Social Security Institute.
- In more than half of the ranches where day laborers from Veracruz work, there is a high security risk due to the presence of organized crime groups, and a notorious promotion or access to the consumption of various drugs, especially "Cristal".
- In the case of Oaxaca, no one interviewed reported being a member of a union. The salary they receive varies, 50% receive between 201 and 300 pesos per day, 38% receive between 150 and 200 pesos, and the rest receive a salary of more than 300 pesos. (300 MXN is around 17 USD)
- The majority of workers interviewed were not registered with the Mexican Social Security Institute.

In general terms, the contexts and problems faced by internal agricultural migrants and their families in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz reflect the reality faced by the internal agricultural migrant population in Mexico, i.e., that agricultural workers, especially those coming from rural and indigenous regions, do not have labor benefits or fair wages and experience poor living and working conditions. Their experiences are evidence of the

³ The findings related to contracting are consistent with the main conclusions of the Wilson Center study. In this study, they comment that labor rights violations correspond mostly to companies that are eventually dedicated to exporting and do not belong to exporting associations. They also state that they increase for those who come from poorer states, with low educational levels and little command of Spanish. They recommend the use of a standard contract, distribution of information and complaint hotlines to reduce problems in contracting. Wilson Center, (2019). "Farm Labor and Mexico's Export Produce Industry," pp.13-15.

⁴ The amount of money given before leaving the community is understood as an advance payment on the salary. This money is given days or months before the work begins, assuring that the workers tolerate worse labor conditions [La Jornada del Campo](#).



exploitation and precariousness resulting from the lack of enforcement of labor laws in our country, which leads to other types of crimes such as human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation and forced labor.

This problem is structural in nature as there are currently millions of internal agricultural migrants and their numbers are increasing every year as industrial agriculture designed for intensive production expands in Mexico. The companies are not only local or national but also foreign, who buy or rent land and work with sophisticated systems designed to maximize production. Recruitment systems are being formed outside of the law, with de facto control based on the exploitation of labor that operates on the extreme poverty of agricultural workers and their families.

Faced with the problem detailed in this release, the organizations that collaborate in Ambulantes believe in the urgency and need to continue working with internal agricultural migrants. For this effort to be sustainable and lasting will require the action of various actors, and we are committed to collaborating to achieve dignified labor conditions for internal migrants.

Signing the press release

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