
SUBMISSION TO THE
UN COMMITTEE ON MIGRANT WORKERS
REGARDING
MEXICO'S SECOND PERIODIC REVIEW

1. Global Workers Justice Alliance, in conjunction with the Immigrant Justice Clinic at American University Washington College of Law, respectfully submits the following report for consideration by the U.N. Committee on Migrant Workers (the "Committee") with respect to the Mexico's Second Periodic Review. This report is submitted under Article 74, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (the "Convention").
2. We respectfully request that the Committee evaluate Mexico's compliance vis-à-vis the following issues: portable justice, and the rights of Mexican laborers who participate in the H-2 visa program in the U.S.

**ABOUT GLOBAL WORKERS JUSTICE ALLIANCE & THE
IMMIGRANT JUSTICE CLINIC**

Global Workers Justice Alliance

3. Global Workers Justice Alliance (GWJA) is a non-for-profit organization created to challenge the increasing and unaddressed denial of justice to legally wronged migrant workers who return home to their families. GWJA's works to combat worker exploitation by promoting portable justice for transnational migrants through a cross-border network of worker advocates and resources." Global Workers coined the term "portable justice" to describe the right and ability of transnational migrant workers to access justice in the countries of employment even after they have departed for their home countries.
4. To meet these objectives, GWJA created the Global Workers Defender Network, (Defender Network) a coalition of human rights organizations and individual advocates in migrant-sending states. These advocates facilitate employment law cases for migrant workers so that they might have an opportunity of redress for the employment abuses they suffered while abroad. The Defender Network also works to identify cases of migrant workers who have suffered labor exploitation, as well as, educate migrant workers on workplace and other legal rights. GWJA currently works in Mexico and Guatemala, as sending countries; the US and Canada as destination countries; and continues to work on expanding its

operations to other countries. More information on GWJA's Global Workers Defender Network is available online at <http://www.globalworkers.org/GWDN.html>.

Immigrant Justice Clinic

5. The Immigrant Justice Clinic (IJC) at American University Washington College of Law provides representation on a broad range of cases involving individual immigrants, migrants, and their communities in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and internationally. These include cases of exploited low-wage immigrant workers, including trafficked individuals, asylum and non-asylum immigration cases, and language rights cases.
6. With respect to migrant workers, the IJC has represented workers on wage and hour claims, compensation claims, and has engaged in education and outreach to workers on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Student attorneys from the IJC have also performed advocacy work, and co-authored a recent report on the experiences of female Mexican migrant workers in the Maryland crab industry.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

7. Global Workers Justice Alliance and the Immigrant Justice Clinic wish to highlight two issues for the Committee's consideration: (1) the consequences of the lack of portable justice for Mexican migrant workers; and (2) the concerns surrounding the H-2 Visa Program administered by the U.S. government.

Portable Justice

8. In preparation for its second review before the Committee, Mexico has released its Second Periodic Report. While Mexico has implemented many commendable programs asserting and recognizing the rights of workers who have migrated *to* Mexico, the Report fails to mention efforts to assist its nationals legally wronged in another state by their employer. There is a clear disparity in the Second Periodic Report between provisions guaranteeing portable justice for migrant workers in Mexico and provisions addressing the availability of portable justice for Mexican nationals who have returned after being employed abroad.

Mexico's Obligation to Promote Portable Justice

9. As a ratifying member of the Convention, Mexico has obligations to protect the rights of its nationals who seek employment in other states. While the

- Convention does not explicitly require Mexico to obtain portable justice for its nationals, this obligation can be inferred from the Convention's provisions. Mexico has certainly taken steps to assist its nationals in their efforts to achieve portable justice, but the number of legally wronged Mexican migrant workers who are without any form of redress demonstrates the insufficiency of these measures. Thus, while many of the obligations discussed below are assumed to be obligations of the receiving state under the Convention, it is important for Mexico to ensure the implementation and enforcement of these obligations in order to protect Mexican migrant workers.
10. Under Article 22.6 of the Convention, Mexico has an obligation to protect the right of its nationals to wages after rightfully earned in the employer state. Article 22.6 states that "In case of expulsion, the person concerned shall have a reasonable opportunity before or after departure to settle any claims for wages and other entitlements due to him or her and any pending liabilities."
 11. To assist its nationals in collecting wages after they have left their employer state, Mexico created the Institute for Mexicans Abroad. Paragraph 314 of the U.N. Consideration of Reports describes that the program "was set up to promote strategies, put together programs and gather proposals and recommendations from organizations and advisory bodies for strengthening Mexican communities abroad." Mexico has also created a number of agreements with the governments of the U.S. and Canada to help ensure greater protection for Mexican migrant workers.
 12. While these programs and agreements are important and commendable, they are insufficient to secure the availability of portable justice for Mexican migrant workers. A high percentage of Mexican migrant workers still return to Mexico without the wages they rightfully earned during their employment. To comply with its duties under the Convention, Mexico must take further action to ensure that its nationals return home with the wages they were promised.
 13. Articles 25, 54, and 55 of the Convention obligate Mexico to ensure that its nationals are treated on an equal basis with nationals of the state where Mexican migrant workers are employed, particularly in front of the employer state's courts. Article 25 of the Convention states that "[m]igrant workers shall enjoy treatment not less favorable than that which applies to nationals of the State of employment in respect of remuneration...." Article 54 expands on this ideal:

Without prejudice to the terms of their authorization of residence or their permission to work and the rights provided for in articles

25 and 27 of the present Convention, migrant workers shall enjoy equality of treatment with nationals of the State of employment in respect of: (a) Protection against dismissal; (b) Unemployment benefits; (c) Access to public work schemes intended to combat unemployment; (d) Access to alternative employment in the event of loss of work or termination...

Finally, Article 55 notes that “[m]igrant workers who have been granted permission to engage in a remunerated activity, subject to the conditions attached to such permission, shall be entitled to equality of treatment with nationals of the State of employment in the exercise of that remunerated activity.”

14. Mexico also has an obligation to help its nationals address their workers’ rights violation before competent authorities in employer states by Articles 54.2 and 61.2 of the Convention. Article 54.2 explains that “[i]f a migrant worker claims that the terms of his or her work contract have been violated by his or her employer, he or she shall have the right to address his or her case to the competent authorities of the State of employment, on terms provided for in article 18, paragraph 1, of the present Convention.”
15. Likewise, Article 61.2 declares that “[i]f a project-tied worker claims that the terms of his or her work contract have been violated by his or her employer, he or she shall have the right to address his or her case to the competent authorities of the State which has jurisdiction over that employer...” Mexico must therefore implement programs to assist its nationals in seeking redress for legal wrongs before competent authorities in employer states. Mexico’s efforts to fulfill this obligation will be crucial for bringing about portable justice for its nationals.
16. Finally, Articles 33, 37, and 65.1 of the Convention obligate Mexico to ensure access of pre-departure information to its nationals prior to migrating to another state for employment. As Article 37 explains,

“Before their departure, or at the latest at the time of their admission to the State of employment, migrant workers and members of their families shall have the right to be fully informed by the State of origin or the State of employment, as appropriate, of all conditions applicable to their admission and particularly those concerning their stay and the remunerated activities in which they may engage as well as of the requirements they must satisfy in the State of employment and the authority to which they must address themselves for any modification of those conditions.”

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- Article 65.1 reiterates this obligation with its statement that “States Parties shall maintain appropriate services to deal with questions concerning international migration of workers and members of their families.”
17. While Articles 33, 37, and 65.1 of the Convention provide protections to workers, many Mexican nationals remain uneducated about their rights. Global Workers recently learned of about 25 Mexican nationals in the state of Guanajuato who had been promised visas and six months of work by a “recruiter.” The “recruiter” charged each of the workers 2000 pesos to “process the visa application.” Unaware of their rights, the 25 Mexicans sent the money and their passports to the address the “recruiter” provided. After several weeks of no response, the workers began to inquire at the address given, only to be told by the person living there that the recruiter had “died.” The workers were not reimbursed or given back their passports. Had they been provided with the pre-departure information required by Article 37, they would have known that these types of costs are to be borne by the employer and not by the employees.
 18. Mexico has taken steps to fulfill its obligations of ensuring that its nationals are treated as equals in employer states and particularly before the employer states’ courts; helping its nationals address labor rights violations before a competent authority in the state of their employment; and providing pre-departure information to its nationals prior to migrant to another state for employment. These steps are described in paragraphs 367-369 of the U.N. Consideration of Reports.
 19. First, the Mexican government distributes information outlining the rights of Mexican migrant workers in the U.S. and Canada. In addition, Mexican consulates in the U.S. have signed agreements with the U.S. government concerning safety and equality in workplaces and the protection and promotion of the labor rights of Mexican migrant workers. As a final measure, Mexican consulates and preventive protection programs in the U.S. are distributing information to help make Mexican migrant workers aware of their labor and civil rights and encourage them to report any violations of these rights.
 20. Mexico should continue with and expand these agreements and programs to encourage portable justice for its nationals whose labor rights have been violated in the U.S. or Canada. Steps should also be taken to implement some of these measures in other states employing Mexican migrant workers as these programs and agreements certainly assist Mexican migrant workers in seeking redress for labor violations. In their current form, however, these programs and agreements

are insufficient. The large number of Mexican migrant workers who do not receive any form of justice for the labor violations they suffer in an employer state is clear evidence of the need to offer enhanced protections to Mexican nationals.

The Consequences of No Portable Justice

21. Mexican migrant workers face many challenges in obtaining portable justice for the legal wrongs they have suffered while abroad. First, migrant workers are often unaware of their legal rights in the workplace, and do not know where to obtain assistance for rights violations. Workers who *do* know their legal rights are often fearful to file claims against their employers due to concerns of retaliatory firing, harassment, or deportation. Thus, many Mexican migrant workers do not even attempt to vindicate the legal wrongs they have endured in workplaces overseas.
21. Mexican migrant workers who do file claims while in the employer state are often forced to abandon their legal claims when they return to Mexico. Migrant workers are often compelled to return to Mexico before their legal claims against their employer have been concluded because of family concerns, or because of the lack of legal status in the state of employment; indeed, in many states, a migrant worker's legal status is tied to their length of authorized employment. This is particularly problematic since, to be successful in their legal claims against employers in the U.S., workers must potentially be available for three phases of civil litigation: the initial case development phase; the pre-trial discovery phase involving depositions, interrogatories, and similar requests for information; and the trial phase, including worker testimony. The inability of workers to be available for the entire duration of the civil litigation process forces many workers to abandon their claims against an employer and return to Mexico without the opportunity for redress.
22. As an illustration of this problem, Global Workers' consultation was requested for a worker who was part of a group of ten restaurant workers filing suit for having been cheated out of months' worth of wages in Arizona. This particular worker had returned home to rural Guanajuato to assist with a sick family member. Months into the litigation, the defense counsel challenged this worker's participation in the litigation because he was not present to testify.
23. In another case, a member of a group of workers filing suit against a large grocery store chain in Washington for nonpayment of wages was deported to his home state of Veracruz. During the litigation phase of the suit, the defense counsel

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- argued that this worker should be left out of the case because his absence prevented him from signing and notarizing certain forms in a timely fashion.
24. A class action suit of over 1800 workers, 200 of which were Mexican nationals, granted them a major award for back wages as well as other labor violations. By the time the award was granted, however, many of the workers had already returned to Mexico. To complicate matters, the Mexican banking industry had recently implemented complex procedures for cashing U.S. checks which many migrant workers were unable to navigate. This left the attorneys for the workers without a reliable and effective way to send the workers the award they were owed.
 25. As suggested by these cases, once migrant workers return to Mexico, many have difficulty vindicating their rights in the state of employment. Mexican lawyers generally cannot bring suits in the state of employment; typically, only attorneys licensed in the state where the violation occurred can file suit. Some organizations in states of employment have dedicated their mission to assisting Mexican migrant workers, but the difficulties they face are two-fold. First, while Mexico has made commendable efforts in this area, its efforts cannot meet the tremendous need of educating all legally wronged Mexican migrant workers about their right to assert legal claims against their employers. Second, the human and financial costs make effective and efficient representation of Mexican migrant workers in Mexico unsustainable for most attorneys in the employer state. Thus, Mexican migrant workers are often left without redress for the legal wrongs they have suffered while their employers feel free to continue their patterns of violating migrant workers' rights.
 26. Even when Mexican migrant workers have potential remedies, recruiters in Mexico have created an atmosphere of intimidation that prevents workers from pursuing these potential remedies. In one instance, a Global Workers associate in the state of Guerrero was approached by a group of ten migrant workers who had worked in the lettuce harvest in Yuma, Arizona, in the summer of 2010. The employer had promised the workers six months of work, but, after only three weeks, fired the workers with the excuse that the harvest was bad. Global Workers explained to the workers that they had a contractual right to three-fourths of the promised contract term and there were potential remedies. After hearing about what the litigation process entails, however, all ten workers decided that they did not want to file any claims against the employer because they were afraid of being blacklisted and not being employed as a temporary worker in the near future.

H-2 Visa Program

27. A second issue is that the Committee should consider is how Mexico protects the rights of its citizens that participate in the H-2 visa program in the U.S. The H-2 Visa Program allows U.S. employers to hire foreign workers for temporary work in the U.S. There are two types of H-2 visas that are issued by the U.S.: H-2A visas are issued to temporary agricultural workers, while H-2B visas are issued for workers engaged in non-agricultural seasonal or temporary work.
28. There are several concerns regarding the H-2 visa program. Mexican workers who participate in the program are at the mercy of powerful recruiters in Mexico who facilitate the employment contract between the laborers and the U.S. employers. Little oversight by the Mexican government allows these recruiters to charge expensive recruitment fees. H-2 workers often have to provide for pre-employment costs such as visa application fees and transportation to the U.S. as well. Once in the U.S., many laborers in the H-2 program work long hours and receive little pay. They are also subjected to hazardous and unhealthy working and living conditions. These concerns will be discussed in more detail below.

Mexico's Obligations Under the H-2 Visa Program

29. Under both the Convention and Mexican law, Mexico has an obligation to its citizens who migrate and engage in such temporary work. For example, under the Article 36 of the Convention, Mexico has an obligation to provide workers who are migrating to other countries with information regarding the “conditions applicable to their admission and particularly to those concerning their stay” Also, Article 25(1)(a) provides a list of conditions such as overtime, hours of work, safety, and the like, which migrant workers shall enjoy similar treatment as nationals of the employment state; Article 25(1)(b) further provides that private employment contracts shall not derogate from that principal of equality.
30. In reality, many Mexican migrant workers have not received the information contemplated by Article 36 of the Convention. Global Workers was contacted by a social services provider in Upstate New York regarding ten H-2A workers who had walked into this social service agency for serious wage violations, horrific housing and labor conditions, and possible cases of human trafficking. The social services provider said the workers had no idea where to turn or what to do. These workers were completely void of any information about their rights.
31. Since employment contracts are executed in Mexico, it is the responsibility of the Mexican government to ensure that those employment contracts provide fair labor

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- conditions for their citizens who will engage in migrant work. Indeed, Article 28(III) of Mexico’s Labor Law requires employers to submit the employment contracts to the Conciliation and Arbitration Board for its approval.
32. Article 28 of the Federal Labor Law of Mexico provides further rules that apply to Mexican workers who work “outside the Republic.” Article 28(I) provides that such workers will not have to bear transportation costs, costs for meals, and will have the right to hygienic housing.
33. Article 28 of the Federal Labor Law reflects international legal norms. The International Labor Organization’s Multilateral Framework on Migrant Labor prescribes in Guideline 13.7 that the migrant workers shall not bear the costs of recruitment or placement either directly or indirectly. This principle has also been recognized by courts in the U.S. in two cases that dealt with American employers and migrant workers. In both *Rivera v. Brickman Group, Ltd.* and *Arriaga v. Florida Pacific Farms, L.L.C.*, the Court held that where employers are the primary beneficiaries of pre-employment expenses such as transportation costs and visa application fees, the employer must bear those costs.
34. However, despite these international legal norms, which are reflected in the domestic laws of Mexico and the U.S., many H-2 workers have had transportation costs deducted from their wages and have had to live in substandard housing.
35. Since Mexico already has adopted laws and ratified the Convention, it has an obligation to protect the rights of its citizens who participate in the H-2 visa program. Mexico must fully comply with domestic and international norms, so that its citizens who participate in migrant work are treated fairly and not taken advantage of.

Specific Concerns About the H-2 Visa Program

36. When participating in the H-2 visa program, employers in the U.S. work with recruiters in Mexico to find laborers who are interested in performing temporary work in the U.S. Although Article 28(III) of Mexico’s Federal Labor Law requires employers to submit the employment contracts to the Conciliation and Arbitration Board for its approval, the recruiters operate with little oversight. The recruitment process is of particular concern, because Mexican laborers often pay hundreds of dollars in fees and expenses to the recruiters who facilitate the hiring process between the American employers and Mexican employees. While it is against Mexican law for recruiters to demand recruitment fees from the laborers,

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- the lack of enforcement of these laws has enabled recruiters to charge expensive fees with impunity.
37. Global Workers has been interviewing H-2A workers about the abuses they have incurred in order to obtain a visa to work in the U.S. A majority stated that they have to pay a fee, ranging from \$100 - \$1000 USD, under the guise of “processing and transportation fees” to participate in the H-2A program. They also stated that, typically, the recruiters threatened the workers that if they said anything about the fee, they would not be invited back to work the next year. The H-2A workers explained that they would much rather pay a recruiter and obtain legal documents to work in the U.S. than risk their lives crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. This mentality of succumbing to illegal fees, substandard labor and housing conditions, and nonpayment of wages fuels the recruitment market and the exploitation of H-2 workers.
 38. After dealing with powerful recruiters in Mexico, laborers must then make the difficult journey to the U.S. These journeys are often funded by the laborers themselves. After relocating, laborers often find themselves living in substandard housing and working in environments that can be hazardous to their health and/or safety. Mexican law provides that foreign employers have an obligation to provide temporary Mexican employees with appropriate housing, safe work places, and fair wages.
 39. The Conciliation and Arbitration Board of Mexico are charged with approving of employment contracts. These employment contracts are to include provisions regarding transportation, housing standards, occupational safety standards, compensation, type of work to be done, and hours to be worked. For example Article 28(I)(d) of Mexico’s Federal Labor Law requires that “[t]he worker shall have the right to enjoy decent and hygienic housing at a work center or a place located nearby.” However, because of a lack of oversight, the experience of many H-2 workers has been different. For example, some Mexican H-2B workers who work in the U.S. crab industry have reported poor housing conditions and challenging working conditions. Mexican law provides that its migrant workers should not have to endure such conditions. But since the recruitment process is not being regulated, the Mexican government has not been able to ensure its citizens that they will be treated fairly and justly when they participate in the H-2 visa program.
 40. Before the laborers even begin to work and receive compensation, they must pay for several expenses. These include the fees demanded by the recruiters, the fee associated with the visa application, and for transportation costs. In order to

cover these expenses, the laborers are often forced to obtain high-interest loans. Most workers, who work for low wages in the U.S., then have to deduct a significant amount of money from their paychecks in order to make their loan repayments. This creates a situation where the laborers are constantly in debt and the wage they are earning does little to improve their livelihoods.

41. The concerns about the H-2 visa program are rooted in Mexico's lack of oversight and regulation of the recruitment and hiring of Mexican laborers for temporary work in the U.S. While there are laws to protect Mexican laborers, the failure to vigorously enforce them has created a situation in which those who participate in the H-2 visa program are at the mercy of powerful recruiters and lenders. In 2009, the U.S. issued nearly 86,000 H-2 visas to Mexican laborers. With such a large number of its citizens a part of the H-2 visa program, it is imperative that Mexico applies its own laws and regulates the recruitment process with more scrutiny.

RECOMMENDATIONS

42. Mexican migrant workers are often uneducated about what their rights are. As a result, Mexican migrant workers are often taken advantage of by recruiters in Mexico and/or employers in the United States. The Mexican government should offer some sort of educational program, or work with NGO's such as Global Workers who provide this type of "know your rights" information, to Mexican laborers who migrate to other countries. Such a program would protect Mexican workers and insure that their rights are not infringed upon.
43. Under the status quo, recruiters in Mexico operate under minimal oversight from the Mexican government. The government should try to regulate these migrant workers to a greater degree. This would insure that Mexican migrant workers are not taken advantage of by recruiters.
44. Mexico and the United States should work cooperatively to allow a mechanism through which Mexican migrant workers can bring legal claims against American employers. Currently, when workers return to Mexico, jurisdictional issues prevent them from bringing claims against their American employers. Mexico and the United States should work together to allow an avenue for Mexican workers who have returned home to be able to bring claims against their American employers.



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