



CENTRE FOR VOTERS INITIATIVE & ACTION

Mexico

NGO Submission to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, & Cultural Rights

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Introduction

1. The Centre for Voters Initiative & Action Presents this report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Ahead of the 80th session for the review of Mexico. The Centre is a non-governmental organisation based in the Americas with an international focus. The Centre acknowledges there can be no secure tomorrow without ensuring civil societies have knowledge to vote, participate, and engage with democratic processes.
2. The Centre works with multiple international mechanisms to convey dialogue, conduct research, and bring awareness to the thematic issues of electoral engagement around the world. We closely follow and participate in the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and abroad, including the Human Rights Committee, to promote civil society participation in the public affairs process.
3. Considering the complex political and economic fabric of Mexico, and notwithstanding more recent planned initiatives, programs and policies that potentially concern the following issues, the Centre aims to provide a supporting and nuanced view to how ESC-rights are either at risk of or actively being undermined within the scope of public/political participation.
4. The Centre has submitted this report to the Committee to focus on three specific issues: (1) the role of organised crime; impact of informal employment on enjoyment of ESC-rights; and (3) addressing issues within the national education system.

The role of organised crime

Impact of cartel concerning state institutions

5. The contemporary evolution of cartels not only in Mexico, but throughout Latin America, has shown increasing diversification and expansion, particularly in the types of industries and sectors they are involved in.¹ As per a 2024 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GIATC), Cartel activity in Mexico has diversified through infiltration into the 'regular'/legal economy through the avocado industry in Michoacán state, primarily utilising violence as a tool to enable economic and industrial expansion.²
6. According to the aforementioned report, 80% of avocado orchards Michoacán state were established illegally by cartel/organised crime elements, wherein the use of corruption of public authorities was essential in facilitating the legalisation of such

¹ INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, « The Expansion and Diversification of Mexican Cartels: Dynamic New Actors and Markets », *Armed Conflict Survey 2024*, (12 December 2024). Accéder [en ligne](#).

² LE COUR GRANDMAISON Romain and FRISSARD MARTINEZ Paul, « Violent and Vibrant: Mexico's Avocado Boom and Organized Crime », *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, (January 2024). Accéder [en ligne](#).

orchards.³ The report further details various human rights issues surrounding these avocado orchards, including the appropriation of protected areas into land for agriculture, contamination of drinking water, and the use of violence to coerce.

7. The environmental impacts constitute a direct impact on the enjoyment of Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) due to the health risks outlined in the reports and the consequent threat to physical health.⁴ Crucially, the significant use of violence by such cartel elements constitutes not only violations and risks to the aforementioned article, due to the impact of violence on both physical and mental health, but also to Article 6 of the ICESCR, as the incessant use of violent practices poses a grave risk to guaranteeing “conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms to the individual”, as quoted from sub-article 6.2.⁵
8. The evident risks to the freedoms of workers within avocado orchards in Michoacán, and likely any other cartel-operated companies within the ‘regular’ economy, which could likely include the cartel infested illegal mercury and gold mining industry,⁶ consequently entails a repression of the right to participate in the public life within the context of dissenting action against labour conditions. There also is the risk that this condition is exacerbated by the effective severance of the relationship between local state authorities and the workers, due to the use of corruption in the legalisation process outlined in the GIATC report,⁷ which also risks the ability to participate politically and within the public life through cooperation between the aforementioned parties.

Impact of cartels concerning trade unions

9. Cartel interference evidently extends to trade unions and their operations as well, revealing disturbing issues that risk undermining ESC-rights through repressing the effectiveness. In December 2025, a Sinaloa Cartel Los Cabrera operative Edgar Rodriguez, also known as ‘El Limones’, who infiltrated the Autonomous Confederation of Employees and Workers of Mexico (CATEM) through the position of organising secretary, using his internal power to carry out cartel-affiliated fraudulent and illicit financial activities such as extortion of workers within CATEM, was arrested in the La Laguna region.⁸

³ See *supra*, note 2.

⁴ UNITED NATIONS, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, U.N. Doc. A/RES/2200A(XXI), (16 December 1966). Accéder [en ligne](#).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ HANLEY Kate, « Connecting the Dots: Illicit Mercury, Illegal Gold Mining, and Transnational Cartels », *The Sabin Center for Environment and Sustainability*, (6 March 2026). Accéder [en ligne](#).

⁷ See *supra*, note 2.

⁸ FERRI Pablo, « El ‘Señor Limones’ y el creciente disfraz sindical del crimen mexicano », *El País México*, (14 December 2025). Accéder [en ligne](#).

10. Of concern is that despite Pedro Haces Barba, the national leader of CATEM, and Federal Security Secretary Omar Garcia Harfuch, moving to deny relations with El Limones, claiming that he used the image and brand CATEM to impersonate one of its members, El Limones was reportedly known to be close with local labour federation leader Nassael Armando Cobian.⁹
11. While recognising the impacts such an arrest has on the immediate ability of cartels to interfere in trade unions,¹⁰ which entails that the undermining of ICESCR Article 8 rights relating to trade union activity had been alleviated,¹¹ certain questions arise that illuminate other potential risks to the enjoyment of Article 8.
12. On one hand, consistent with the previous GIATC reporting of Cartel infiltration into the regular economy, there is a high risk of other instances of cartel infiltration into unions to try and disrupt them, effectively undermining the ability for public and political participation through union mechanisms.
13. On the other hand, the denial by CATEM officials of El Limones' position despite evidence indicating that, at the very least, he held an important role in CATEM, raises potential concerns in regard to both mismanagement when handling an internal issue of this scale or potential complicity with cartel elements.

The Centre recognises more contemporary policy changes and advances in relation to cartel activity. However, the Centre believes that – for both of the aforementioned sub-issues – it is also effective to focus on monitoring and acting upon issues of structural integrity within both local institutions and trade unions to ensure a faster restoration of the aforementioned ICESCR articles.

In regard to local authorities, the Centre recommends increasing the flow of information between security/central governmental authorities and local authorities to mitigate and pose obstacles in the way of corruption as a tool for cartels to conduct economic infiltration.

For trade unions – and based on Mexico's interpretive statement of Article 8 of the ICESCR – the Centre recommends the State party take measures to cooperate with trade unions to minimise cartel infiltration while preserving trade union autonomy under Mexican Legislation, the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, and sub-article 8.2 of the ICESCR.

⁹ See *supra*, note 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See *supra*, note 4.

Impacts of Extortion and Fear

14. Extortion remains as one of the main mechanisms used by cartels not only for revenue gain but to subdue populations under cartel operated territories in a way that consequently suppresses public participation. According to the Global Organised Crime Index (GOCI), Mexico is regarded as a 'high scoring country' in the category of extortion and protection racketeering, with a score of 9/10 entailing that Mexico is among the countries experiencing the highest issues with extortion.¹² 30 out of 32 of Mexican states are affected by extortion, where the GOCI reports that the primary sector is heavily impacted.¹³
15. The economic impacts of extortion on local businesses in particular entail risks to the enjoyment of Articles 6 and 7 of the ICESCR,¹⁴ given the fact that extortion arbitrarily affects the finances of small businesses in a way that may limit economic freedoms of business owners, while also potentially undermining working conditions due to financial constraints. Crucially, the use of threat and violence to coerce and impose the extortion relationship leads to the underreporting of the crime. This is due to the fact that cartel elements and irregular criminals engaging in such practices threaten not only the lives of those shop owners but their relatives as well, while recurring visits perpetuate such threats.¹⁵
16. This not only presents risks to mental health through the traumatic events entailed by cartel encounters, which fundamentally undermines Article 12 of the ICESCR,¹⁶ but also creates a perception of distrust among victims of extortion towards local authorities, according to a Los Angeles times investigation, due to mixed perceptions about either negligence or complicity of authorities.¹⁷ This undermines the ability for the victims to engage with public affairs as cartel elements present a constant threat to dissidents and those who may refuse extortion, while fractured trust undermines public participation through official channels (such as extortion hotlines or other state-sanctioned forms of participation).

The Centre recognises recent governmental initiatives to combat extortion, however also the barriers to success of such initiatives, primarily concerning the lack of trust among victims and fears of retaliation against those who communicate with the state. The Centre thus recommends the Committee to urge the State party to focus on building trust with potential victims while also maintaining and expanding more covert forms of communication between proper authorities and victims.

¹² GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX, « Extortion and Protection Racketeering », *Global Organized Crime Index 2025*. Accéder [en ligne](#).

¹³ GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX, « Criminality in Mexico », *Global Organized Crime Index 2025*. Accéder [en ligne](#).

¹⁴ See *supra*, note 4.

¹⁵ MCDONNELL Patrick J. and SÁNCHEZ VIDAL Cecilia, « The Crime That Haunts Mexico, Sowing Fear, Disrupting Life: Extortion », *Los Angeles Times*, (16 December 2025). Accéder [en ligne](#).

¹⁶ See *supra*, note 4.

¹⁷ See *supra*, note 15.

Effects of informal employment on the enjoyment of ESC-rights

Political participation within the informal sector regarding well-being

- 17.** According to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), 56.2% of the labour force this July in Mexico is in the informal sector,¹⁸ with some of the highest rates in comparison to other major economies. Within the Mexican political and economic system, this entails almost complete exclusion from welfare institutions and other services that only workers in the formal sector are entitled to, including no social security access through the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), exclusion from insurance and pension funds, and more.¹⁹
- 18.** The fabric of public participation within the informal sector is evidently unconventional. Due to poor economic and social conditions within the informal sector, public and political participation at a grassroots level is common through the use of irregular forms of organisation such as brokerage to lobby municipal governments in the interests of informal sector workers.²⁰
- 19.** However, despite many successes achieved by the aforementioned initiatives, they fall short of addressing real structural barriers to sustainably securing rights. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 34% of Mexicans have no access to health services.²¹ Within this respect, such conditions clearly undermine and/or risk undermining Articles 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12, which is further exacerbated by the effective political marginalisation of informal workers in public dialogue at the state and legislative level.²²

Informal economy and trade unions

- 20.** Mexican labour law, according to the Ley Federal Del Trabajo, does not legally recognise informal employees as workers,²³ which poses many legal challenges to the full realisation of labour-related rights. As priorly outlined, although grassroots public participation within the informal sector is high,²⁴ the aforementioned legal barriers fundamentally undermine Article 8 of the ICESCR.

¹⁸ INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA Y GEOGRAFÍA (INEGI), *Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo (ENOE): Indicadores de ocupación y empleo*, Boletín de Indicador No. 570/26, (27 August 2026). Accéder [en ligne](#).

¹⁹ PENSION POLICY INTERNATIONAL, « Mexico's Informal Employment Crisis Deepens as 850,000 New Jobs Lack Contracts », (30 July 2025). Accéder [en ligne](#).

²⁰ FARAH Irene, *The Scramble for the City: Street Vending, Politics, and the Governance of Public Space in Mexico City and San Francisco*, University of California, Berkeley, (2024). Accéder [en ligne](#).

²¹ ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD), *Expanding Social Protection and Addressing Informality in Latin America*, OECD Publishing, Paris, (2025). Accéder [en ligne](#).

²² CERVANTES ARENILLAS David, « Mexico: Informality, the Great Absentee in Public Policy », *BBVA Research*, (12 July 2024). Accéder [en ligne](#).

²³ MEXICO, *Ley Federal del Trabajo*, Título Primero – Principios Generales, art. 8. Accéder [en ligne](#).

²⁴ TILLY Chris and ROJAS-GARCÍA Georgina, « Shifting Tides of Informal Worker Resistance in Mexico: A Domestic Work-Construction Contrast », *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 352-368, (2021). Accéder [en ligne](#).

21. Crucially, given that 56.2% of the labour force consists of informal sector workers,²⁵ this entails that a large portion of the population lack the ability to advocate within the bounds of the system for improved working conditions, presenting serious risks of undermining Articles 7, and 12. The inequality between the ability to participate politically through the trade unions between formal and informal sectors presents concerns for the ability to work in a safe environment.

The Centre asks the Committee to seek further information from the State party regarding protecting the rights enshrined under Article 8 of the ICESCR, keeping in mind Mexico's submitted interpretive statement on the article. It is the belief of the Centre that the State, alongside formalisation initiatives that it has enacted, should ensure remaining informal sector workers have a more recognised form of organisation to ensure the protection of their rights.

Addressing issues within the national electoral system

Barriers to effective civic education

22. Mexico has underwent reforms to its educational system under the “Nueva Escuela Mexicana” in 2019, which focuses more on inclusion, diversity and project based learning.²⁶ However, such reforms have caused issues for teachers in regards to pedagogy, such as burnout and confusion, as the system adopts an open curricula method that offers autonomy to teachers.²⁷
23. Despite the nominal changes to the overall educational system, there have been evident issues to civic literacy in Mexico among young adults. According to the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE), young adults aged 20-29 constituted the lowest demographic of active voters in the 2024 elections.²⁸
24. While the NEM reforms and aforementioned evidence of low voter turnout are necessarily correlated, what is of importance is that the NEM reforms have seemingly undermined the effectiveness of the educational system, which not only interferes with the right to quality education enshrined by Article 14 of the ICESCR, but also may affect the ability for masses to participate in the political and public life.

The Centre urges the Committee to enquire about issues surrounding voter turnout and other potential issues relating to civic literacy. More specifically, it is the belief of the Centre that the Committee should focus on how the State party plans on mitigating the pedagogical issues in relation to NEM, which may disproportionately affect underprivileged regions the most.

²⁵ See *supra*, note 19.

²⁶ MORENO Aura, « New Education Model Falls Short of Its Goals: Mexicanos Primero », *Mexico Business News*, (25 August 2025). Accéder [en ligne](#).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ REDACCIÓN ANIMAL POLÍTICO, « La de 2024 fue la elección con menos participación en 18 años; jóvenes de 20 a 29 votaron menos », *Grupo Animal*, (26 March 2025). Accéder [en ligne](#).

Barriers to effective education digitisation

25. Mexico has put forward progress in terms of digitising education to make it more accessible, especially focusing on programmes that range from remedial content to vocational training that can benefit labour market outcomes and potentially combat informality.²⁹ A UNICEF report had shown that students using the platforms exhibited higher learning gains, which highlights the benefit such platforms may have in preparing high school students to be informed citizens, thus emboldening quality public participation. However, according to INEGI, less than half of Mexican households have a desktop, laptop or tablet at 44.7%.³⁰
26. While digital educational trials within Mexico are ostensibly effective in increasing learning outcomes, it is evident that a large structural issue, being the majority of households lacking access to a computer, will likely inhibit the success of digitalisation in education as a large portion of the population would likely not be able to easily access material and/or services. Not only does risk undermining Article 14 of the ICESCR but also potentially further risks the ability for large portions of Mexican society in the future to participate effectively in the public.

The Centre urges the Committee to enquire about future plans relating to further digitisation efforts. Particularly, the Centre recommends the Committee to focus on digitisation of material for high school students, and the potential effects on regions with lower computer access rates per household.

The Centre believes that even with increasing digitisation efforts, ensuring adequate access to material through different channels at least tentatively would ensure there is a smaller disparity between regions with and without accessible technology.

Conclusion

27. In conclusion, while evidence suggests that the Mexican government has taken initiatives and enacted policies that either has (to some extent) or seemingly will enhance the enjoyment of ESC-rights, many issues still persist that inhibit the progression to a better human rights situation in Mexico within the context of public/political participation. The Centre hopes the Committee has found this information useful and will incorporate these findings into its concluding observations.
28. It is suggested that the Committee maintain focus on urging the State party to, generally, incorporate more institutional methods to solving issues related to cartel activity, while keeping a strict consideration for victims of extortion and in other

²⁹ MORENO Aura, « Mexico Faces Digital Gap in Education Despite Technology Advances », *Mexico Business News*, (2 December 2025). Accéder [en ligne](#).

³⁰ INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADÍSTICA Y GEOGRAFÍA (INEGI), *Encuesta Nacional sobre Disponibilidad y Uso de Tecnologías de la Información en los Hogares (ENDUTIH) 2025*, Comunicado de Prensa No. 32/26, (16 June 2026). Accéder [en ligne](#).

situations where workers and citizens may be a target. For the issues relating to informal employment, the Centre believes an approach in line with Mexico's interpretive statement of Article 8 is paramount to ensure a legitimate approach to State party dialogue, and thus proposes a focus on alternative solutions closer to the state institutions.

- 29.** In regard to education, the Centre believes a focus on information flow between the Committee and the State party is more beneficial at this stage given the lack of overt Article 14 violations or inhibitions. As Mexico holds a unique and complex economic dynamic, from cartel interference to the large informal sector, it is becoming increasingly important to realise that public participation is a vital part of creating an inclusive economic space that guarantees and furthers human rights for all.
- 30.** This submission may be published on the OHCHR website or any other places necessary. For any enquiries regarding this submission, please contact:

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