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## FEATURED Q&A

# What Benefits Will Mexico's Labor Program Bring?



Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador last month proposed a temporary work visa program for Central Americans. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

**Q** The Mexican government is planning a new program to attract labor from Central America, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said on May 21. The program will offer Central Americans temporary visas to work on public infrastructure projects. What kind of workers will the program target, and how expansive will it be? How might it influence regional migration flows, and how will the program advance the president's development plan for the country's southern region?

**A** Zoila Ponce de León, assistant professor of politics at Washington and Lee University: "In his announcement, the president made multiple references to 'skilled workers' to help build government-funded infrastructure, highlighting the need for engineers as well as welders and blacksmiths. Migrant workers would be sought out only for public works projects, not private endeavors. However, the government works with private construction companies on several infrastructure projects. Per the Federal Labor Law, as revised in 2015, Mexican companies are prohibited from having a work force that is more than 10 percent foreign; they can employ migrant workers only if there is a shortage of Mexican workers. A second important point is that these would be only temporary visas for a one-year period, which is similar to other efforts in Latin America, particularly targeting Venezuelan migrants, as well as in the United States. Therefore, the program is not likely to be very expansive as it faces federal restrictions, and the short-term nature of the visas would mean constant labor rotation. Immigrants

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## Four Children Found Alive in Colombian Jungle After 40 Days

Four Indigenous children who had been missing for 40 days after their plane crashed in the Colombian jungle were found alive on Friday, authorities announced.

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## Canada Joining U.S. in Dispute With Mexico Over Corn Imports

Canada announced Friday that it will join a trade dispute that the United States sought over limits that Mexico proposed on imports of genetically modified corn.

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### POLITICAL

## Colombian Gov't, ELN Agree to Six-Month Cease-Fire

Colombia and the ELN rebels on Friday agreed to a six-month cease-fire. President Gustavo Petro expressed hopes that the development would bring "an era of peace" to the country.

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Petro // File Photo: Colombian Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Colombian Gov't, ELN Agree to Six-Month Cease-Fire

Colombia's government and the National Liberation Army, or ELN, rebels on Friday agreed to a six-month cease-fire, the Associated Press reported. The agreement was reached during the latest round of negotiations between the two sides, which was launched last month in Havana. The government and the rebels announced the cease-fire in a ceremony attended by Colombian President Gustavo Petro, top ELN commander Antonio García and Cuban government official, the wire service reported. The cease-fire will be implemented in phases and is to fully take effect in August. It would then be in place for six months. "This effort to look for peace is a beacon of hope that conflicts can be resolved politically and diplomatically," the ELN's top negotiator, Pablo Beltrán, said during the ceremony, the AP reported. Petro said the agreement could help bring "an era of peace" to Colombia. The negotiations between the government and the rebels had originally been scheduled to conclude last Thursday, but both sides sought more time to work on some details. The agreement that was reached on Friday also called for establishing a national committee with broad representation by late

July to discuss a a lasting peace deal. "You have here proposed a bilateral agreement, and I agree with that, but Colombian society has to be able debate it, and to participate," said Petro, the AP reported. The ELN's García said the guerrilla group was "very confident" in the agreement, but he also described it as "procedural" and not yet "substantial" enough "for Colombia to change," the wire service reported. In a [Q&A](#) published May 15, Oliver Kaplan, associate professor at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver, told the Advisor that "it would help to have a 'win' [in the talks] to maintain support. "But will the Cuba round of talks with the ELN will be 'successful'? Success is likely if the goal is to sustain and stabilize the process and make incremental progress—both sides have reason to benefit from an eventual deal," he added.

## Four Children Found Alive in Colombian Jungle After 40 Days

Four Indigenous children who were missing for 40 days following a plane crash in the Colombian jungle were found alive on Friday, Colombian authorities announced, the Associated Press reported. The siblings, aged 1 to 13, were alone when they were rescued, and are now receiving medical treatment, Presi-

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Sixteen Mexican Soldiers to Be Tried in Killing of Five Men in Nuevo Laredo

Mexico's Defense Department said Saturday that 16 soldiers will be tried in a case involving the killing of five men in the Mexican border city of Nuevo Laredo last month, the Associated Press reported. The soldiers were arrested on Thursday and charged with violating "military discipline." They will be held in a prison in Mexico City as they await trial before a military tribunal. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador described the murder as an apparent "execution," after seeing security camera footage.

## Guatemalan Court Disregards IACHR Ruling in Freeing Ex-Officers

An appeals court in Guatemala on Friday disregarded a ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights by releasing from prison three former military officers who had been convicted of crimes against humanity in a case dating from 1981, the Associated Press reported. Francisco Luis Gordillo Martínez, Manuel Antonio Callejas y Callejas and Manuel Benedicto Lucas García have not yet been freed because they await rulings in two other cases involving genocide and forced disappearance.

## Glencore, Automakers to Back \$1 Billion Deal for Purchase of Brazil Mines

Global mining company Glencore, Chrysler parent Stellantis and Volkswagen's battery unit PowerCo agreed to back a \$1 billion deal by ACG Acquisition Company to purchase two mines in Brazil, ACG said on Monday, Reuters reported. The deal comes as investors are increasingly betting on the metals needed for the global green energy transition. ACG will become ACG Electric Metals in the process, issuing new shares.

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from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua make up most of the international migration flow to Mexico. Providing channels for these migrants to obtain or maintain legal migratory status in the country is important. It is, however, unlikely that this very targeted policy will have a further impact on increasing migration flows. This policy is one of the many actions the Mexican and U.S. governments are devising to respond to the void left by the end of Title 42. Yet, this minor incentive is unlikely to deter Central American immigrants whose final goal is

to reach U.S. soil. Important projects in the Mexican South such as the Mayan Train in the Yucatán Peninsula and the Interoceanic Corridor in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec have experienced several delays as well as harsh criticism regarding their environmental impact. A shortage of labor has been one of the problems these ambitious projects have faced. This new program could potentially aid in this regard, but it will depend on the government's and the infrastructure companies' ability to create an attractive work environment for migrant laborers."

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dent Gustavo Petro told reporters. When news about their survival broke on Friday, the country erupted in celebration, The New York Times reported. The children, members of the Huitoto Indigenous community, had been traveling with their mother and an Indigenous leader from the Amazon community of Aracua, Colombia, to San José del Guaviare, a small city in central Colombia. When the aircraft crashed last month due to an engine failure, rescuers found the bodies of the adults, but there was no sign of the children. Colombia's army deployed 150 soldiers with dogs into the area, and dozens of members from Indigenous tribes volunteered to help with the search, the AP reported. Throughout the search, soldiers on helicopters dropped boxes of food into the jungle, hoping they would sustain the children. "The union of our efforts made this possible" Colombia's military command wrote in a posting on Twitter. Carlos Rincón, the military doctor who evaluated the children, said they only had mild cuts and scrapes.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

### Canada Joining U.S. in Dispute With Mexico Over Corn

Canada's Ministry of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced Friday that it will join a trade dispute settlement process that the United States sought over limits that Mexico proposed on imports of genetically modified corn. The U.S. government requested the settlement process on June 2 after talks with the Mexican government over the proposed limits produced no results, the Associated Press reported. Currently, Mexico is the leading importer of U.S. yellow corn, the majority of which is genetically modified. Canada will join as a third party. The panel will be comprised of experts who will have six months to study the complaint and release its findings, the AP reported. "Canada shares the concerns of the U.S. that Mexico's measures are not scientifically supported and have the potential to unnecessarily disrupt trade in the North American market," Canadian

## THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

### Why Are Candidates Being Struck From Guatemala's Ballot?

**Q** Barely a month before Guatemala's June 25 presidential election, a judge on May 19 suspended the candidacy of front-runner Carlos Pineda. The judge ruled that Pineda, of the conservative Prosperidad Ciudadana party, failed to adhere to nomination process rules, but Pineda accused the court of suspending his candidacy because of his refusal to be an "ally of corruption." Guatemala's Constitutional Court later upheld Pineda's removal from the ballot. What will result from the removal of the race's front-runner? Who is best positioned to succeed incumbent President Alejandro Giammattei, who is constitutionally prohibited from re-election? What issues are shaping up to be the most important in the race?

**A** Stephen McFarland, former U.S. ambassador to Guatemala: "The most important issue in the 2023 Guatemalan presidential and general elections is the legitimacy of the electoral process itself and thus the credibility of the next government. The recent removal by electoral authorities of front-runner Carlos Pineda, which the politicized Constitutional Court upheld, follows the invalidation of the candidacy of Thelma Cabrera of the leftist MLP (she had attained a surprising fourth place in the 2019 election), and that of the populist anti-system candidate Roberto Arzú. One of the remaining leading presidential candidates, Edmond Mulet, reportedly also faces a challenge to remain on the ballot. Guatemala has an excellent system for counting ballots, but it is subject to the decisions of Guatemala-

lan magistrates and prosecutors who in turn are under the control of politicians whose futures are at stake. The post-International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala move to undermine judicial independence and transparency has also undermined the legitimacy of the democratic electoral system. The byzantine requirements for the registration of parties and for the selection of candidates, and the restrictions on campaigning before the official start of campaigns, allow authorities to apply the law selectively to steer the election to certain candidates. In 2019, electoral authorities prohibited former Attorney General Thelma Aldana from running for president, citing baseless allegations of mishandling official funds; this was a major factor in President Alejandro Giammattei's subsequent victory. The challenge that the Giammattei government and other political elites face is that their control of the judicial system, their dominance of the traditional media and their alliances with the economic elites are not matched by the level of citizen support for their presidential candidates. The exclusion of rival candidates is a logical next step by a corrupt political system to remain in control. It is also a bet that Guatemalan citizens will remain largely indifferent to undemocratic electoral machinations and to the governments that emerge from them. But as boxer Mike Tyson said, 'everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.' "

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in the June 8 issue of the Advisor.

Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau and International Trade Minister Mary Ng said in a joint statement. The statement also said that Canada will continue to work with both

countries toward "an outcome that preserves trade predictability and market access for our farmers and exporters." [Editor's note: See related Q&A in the Nov. 21, 2022 Advisor.]

## FEATURED Q&amp;A / Continued from page 2

**A** **Ana Lorena Delgadillo, founder and executive director of Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado Democrático de Derecho:** "In the context of the controversial construction of the Mayan Train, which specialists say will destroy parts of the ecosystems of five Mexican states, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador again promised to create work opportunities for Central Americans to help in the construction of the project, granting visas valid for one year. The construction of the Mayan Train needs iron workers, welders and professional engineers, he said. This is not new. In his National Development Plan, AMLO made the same commitments. In the Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, governments promised assistance to communities of origin, transit and destination as one of the pillars in the final declaration. Mexico took on the responsibility of coordinating the working group on labor mobility, including starting a program with Guatemala that would incorporate between 10,000 and 20,000 migrants per year, with a view to extending it to Honduras and El Salvador. The plan also aims to expand the Cross-Border Working Visitor Card (WVC) program from 10,000 to 20,000 visas for migrant workers (these numbers were exceeded in 2011 and 2012). As the Institute for Women in Migration nongovernmental organization rightly points out, it is difficult to know what is new about these proposals, and above all, how they will integrate women, as this has been one of the main challenges of the WVC. Despite bilateral meetings between Mexico and Guatemala, it is unclear what concrete actions are being taken, how these differ from the WVC, how many people will be covered and what the strategy for implementation will be. Finally, in the context of increased militarization of migration in Mexico, protecting Central American workers from extortion and other abuses would be a challenge as they would be operating in geographic areas highly monitored by the National Migration Institute and the National Guard."

**A** **Annie Isabel Fukushima, associate dean of undergraduate studies and associate professor of ethnic studies at The University of Utah:** "As governments such as Mexico consider opportunities to incorporate migrant laborers into their work forces, lessons should be gleaned from the limitations of the U.S. temporary visa system. The demand for transnational migrant laborers to fulfill labor demands on a temporary status is unsustainable in the long-term. While temporary visas may avail short-term immigration opportunities, it is the 'short-term' that should be contended with when temporary workers have reduced worker protections. Take for example the U.S. guest worker programs, which recruit international laborers to work in the United States on a temporary basis. The heritage of the guest workers, or contract laborers, emerged after the abolition of slavery in the United States. Contract laborers, such as the coolie laborer, were indentured laborers who worked on U.S. plantations under the guise of legality, what Lisa Yun refers to as 'mobile slaves'—workers who were contracted but whose contract could be sold to other employers. A later version of the guest worker program was the bracero program, which existed from the 1940s until the 1960s. Braceros were Mexican workers who were recruited to fulfill labor shortages in the U.S. agricultural industry during World War II. Since these early temporary worker visa programs, other programs have emerged and with them, human trafficking. Therefore, as Mexico considers its temporary worker visa programs the vulnerabilities that are tethered to contingent work and noncitizens must be contended with. It is not the skill of the laborer that leads to human trafficking conditions, but rather the conditions that fail to protect workers."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.*

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