

Unique Vulnerabilities of Agricultural and Migrant Workers in the COVID-19 pandemic

Presidential Advisory Council on Combating
Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria (PACCARB) Virtual
Public Meeting

January 25, 2023



**Salud a
Nuestro
Alcance**



**CENTRO DE LOS
DERECHOS DEL
MIGRANTE, INC.**



Photo © 2020 by David Bacon From *In The Fields of the North*
<https://cdmigrante.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Ripe-for-Reform.pdf>


About CDM

Founded in 2005, **Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc.** (*The Center for Migrant's Rights*, CDM) works across borders in Mexico and in the U.S. to accompany migrant workers in improving working conditions, including occupational health and safety, through **outreach and education, legal support and direct representation, and policy advocacy.**

Since 2020, CDM's **Health Initiatives** has addressed health disparities impacting immigrant, migrant, and limited English proficient (LEP) workers and communities through targeted COVID-19 outreach and language access campaigns with support from CDC, HRSA and OMH.



CDM works with networks of community partners, health departments, and worker leaders **bridge gaps between public health agencies and immigrant and migrant workers** employed in "essential" food systems industries like protein processing and agriculture.



Working and immigration conditions have made immigrant and migrant workers disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19 and contributed to community spread.

Food systems industries disproportionately employ workers from immigrant and migrant backgrounds

Frontline food systems workers employed in animal and seafood processing, dairy, and agriculture are predominantly foreign-born.

- Industries increasingly rely on foreign workers, i.e. via H2A, H2B, and TN "nonimmigrant" visas.
- Meat and poultry processing industries heavily recruit from undocumented immigrant and refugee communities and represent one of the among the most linguistically and culturally diverse workforces in the U.S.
- An estimated 25% of meat and poultry processing workers and 70% of farm laborers are limited English proficient (LEP).

Animal processing workers: ± 500,000
40-50% born outside of the U.S.
TN visa-holders: #N/A

Seafood processing workers: ± 200,000
62% born outside of the U.S.

H-2B visa-holders in processing industries: ± 3,000

Farm laborers: ± 2.6 million
70% born outside of the U.S.
50% undocumented
370,000 H-2A visa-holders certified FY22
(includes aquaculture)

Dairy workers: ± 160,000
50% born outside of the U.S.
TN visa-holders: #N/A

Food systems industries employ the most linguistically and culturally diverse workforces in the U.S.

Characteristics of all U.S. workers and of animal slaughtering and processing workers in the U.S.

	All U.S. workers	Animal slaughtering and processing workers	
Top countries of origin among foreign-born workers			
Mexico	27.6%	<i>Mexico</i>	46.9%
India	5.9%	<i>El Salvador</i>	6.4%
Philippines	4.6%	<i>Guatemala</i>	5.6%
China	4.2%	<i>Burma (Myanmar)</i>	5.2%
El Salvador	3.6%	<i>Cuba</i>	3.1%
Other*	54.1%	<i>Other**</i>	32.9%

Characteristics of all U.S. workers and of animal slaughtering and processing workers in the U.S.

	All U.S. workers	Animal slaughtering and processing workers	
Top languages among foreign-born workers			
Spanish	45.2%	<i>Spanish</i>	65.2%
English	15.5%	<i>English</i>	5.1%
Chinese	3.6%	<i>Vietnamese</i>	2.4%
Filipino, Tagalog	3.6%	<i>Karen languages</i>	2.3%
Vietnamese	2.7%	<i>Cushitic languages</i>	2.2%
Other	29.5%	<i>Other</i>	22.8%

“3D” food systems industries put immigrant and migrant workers at disproportionate risk for COVID-19

Demanding: Workers are often subject to high-pressured environments and held to rigorous production standards, e.g.:

- Meat, poultry, pork line speeds
- Piece rate compensation in agriculture, seafood processing
- Vaccination quotas for TN veterinarians

Dirty: Workplace infrastructure and policies prioritize production standards at the expense of workers' health, safety, and hygiene, e.g.:

- Inadequate health and safety training
- Impossibility or impracticality of social distancing (*including in housing, transportation for some*)
- Bare-minimum safety equipment and sanitation measures; at odds with production

Dangerous: Even given likely underreporting, industries are source of disproportionately high accident, injury, and illness rates - including COVID-19.

- Meatpacking plants cited as source of early COVID-19 outbreak, community spread
- Insufficient oversight by responsible authorities
- Housing + transportation can be added risk factors for some

***Isolated:** *workers face additional barriers to transportation, services, employment alternatives.*

Immigration status generates further vulnerabilities for workers in “3D” industries

Fear of retaliation from employers and/or government authorities may discourage immigrant and migrant workers from reporting unsafe conditions (whistleblowing) or taking time off for personal or family illness.

Mistrust in government agencies and authorities, including health institutions, may make immigrant and migrant workers less likely to seek support from or have confidence in government-provided resources and information.

Barriers to accessing healthcare coverage, especially for undocumented and nonimmigrant workers, may prevent individuals and families from seeking preventative care or obtaining treatment.



The image shows a screenshot of an AP News article. The article title is "EEUU: despiden por ir al hospital a mexicanas con COVID-19" (USA: fired for going to the hospital for COVID-19 Mexican women). The author is GISELA SALOMON, dated June 23, 2020. The article text, highlighted in yellow, states: "In 2020, Reyna Álvarez and Maribel Hernández were working at a crawfish plant in Louisiana as part of the H-2B visa program. When they became ill from COVID-19 and sought medical care, their employer retaliated, costing them their jobs, housing, and immigration status." To the right of the text is a photograph of two women, Reyna Álvarez and Maribel Hernández, smiling for the camera.

AP

Top Stories Topics Video

EEUU: despiden por ir al hospital a mexicanas con COVID-19

Por GISELA SALOMON June 23, 2020

In 2020, Reyna Álvarez and Maribel Hernández were working at a crawfish plant in Louisiana as part of the H-2B visa program. When they became ill from COVID-19 and sought medical care, their employer retaliated, costing them their jobs, housing, and immigration status.

<https://apnews.com/article/fcf5df96c8040c1cdd175e796ae061c0>

What we've learned: Immigrant, migrant and LEP workers have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that speak to broader occupational health and safety risks and barriers to healthcare access.

Roughly

3/4

of workers faced barriers to or concerns about accessing healthcare, and nearly

1/3

of these faced multiple barriers or concerns.*

LEP workers were

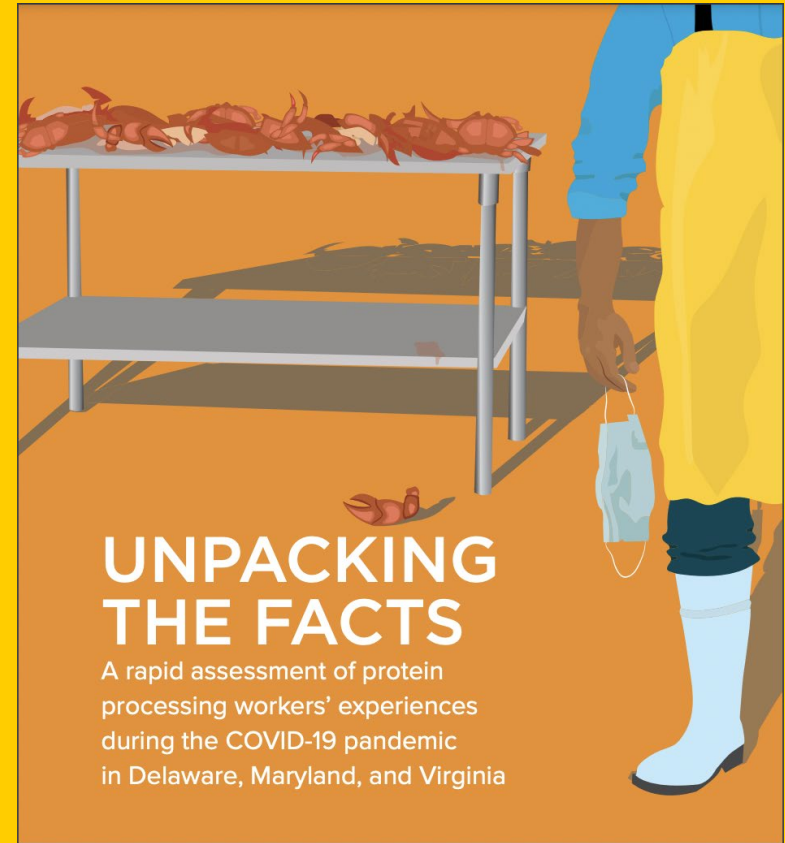
10 times

more likely to report having insufficient PPE at work and

11 times

more likely to report having suffered workers' rights violations at work than workers whose preferred language was English.*


<https://cdmigrante.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Unpacking-the-Facts-Survey-Report-Final.pdf>



UNPACKING THE FACTS

A rapid assessment of protein processing workers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia

DECEMBER 2021



Health Within Our Reach

Institutions responsible for workers' wellbeing have struggled to provide adequate language access

Public health institutions and occupational health and safety agencies responsible for workers' - and the general public's - well-being are ill-equipped to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse immigrant and migrant food systems workers and their communities.

- Insufficient or absent language access policies, inadequate resources
- One-size-fits-all approaches in lieu of adequate and a culturally-competent communications, services.
- Weak community relationships; affected communities disregarded in planning and implementation
- Unsustainable public-private partnerships, e.g. with community-based organizations

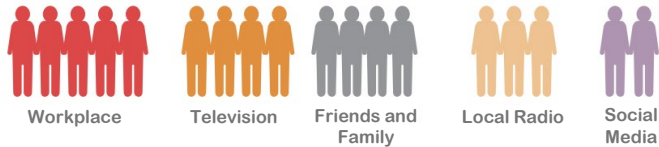


Trusted information sources among processing workers*

PRIMARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION VS. TRUSTED SOURCES

8 out of 10 workers reported receiving some form of COVID-19 training from their employers. However, of those workers who reported receiving COVID-19 training from their employers, only one quarter reported their employers as a trusted source of information about COVID-19.

Workers recalled receiving COVID-19 information from the following top 5 sources: *Data presented proportionally out of 10*

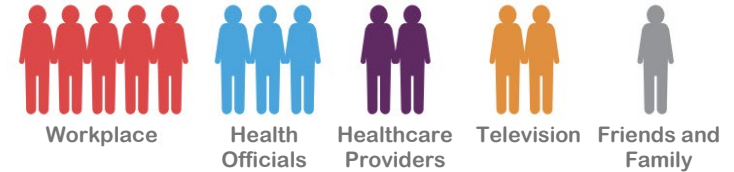


However, when workers were asked about COVID-19 information sources they trust, workers reported the following as their top 5 most-trusted sources: *Data presented proportionally out of 10*

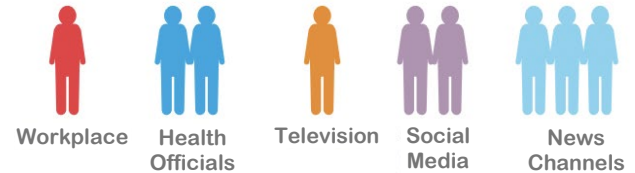


TRUSTED INFORMATION SOURCES AMONG ENGLISH, SPANISH, AND HAITIAN CREOLE SPEAKERS

Workers whose preferred language was **English** reported their top 5 most trusted sources of COVID-19 information to be: *Data presented proportionally out of 10*



Workers whose preferred language was **Spanish** reported their top 5 most trusted sources of COVID-19 information to be: *Data presented proportionally out of 10*



Workers whose preferred language was **Haitian Creole** reported their top 5 most trusted sources of COVID-19 information to be: *Data presented proportionally out of 10*



What's needed to reduce vulnerabilities of immigrant and migrant workers in food systems industries

To better protect this population and society at large, future pandemics and preparedness planning should take into account that **working and immigration conditions have made immigrant and migrant workers disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19 and contributed to community spread.** Food systems industries in particular rely on an increasingly culturally linguistic and diverse immigrant and migrant workforce caught at the nexus of secondary infection between humans and animals - and in contact with antimicrobial agents - with significantly limited protections and recourse to action.

Taking lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic on promising opportunities and outstanding challenges, public health authorities and other government agencies should consider the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- Prioritize the **participation of immigrant and migrant workers** at all levels of the policy/intervention design and implementation process.
- Through inter-agency coordination, ensure swift and strong **anti-retaliation protections for whistleblowers**, including immigration relief.
 - e.g. dissemination of and training on DHS's deferred action guidance for processing workers (released 1/13/22)
 - e.g. relief for animal workers



Worker members of CDM's Protein Processing Worker Project Worker Advisory Committee, 2020-2021

Recommendations

- Ensure that federal, state and local agencies equipped with **adequate language access plans** and implementation resources (*as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*)
- Support **sustainable, public-private partnerships** between gov't and community-based organizations and worker groups to close gaps and build trust with communities
- Expand access to **paid sick leave** and **free and low-cost healthcare services and treatments** - including primary health and health literacy education - for immigrant and migrant workers regardless of status.



In early 2021, community partners hold one of Delaware's first community-based vaccine clinics at the headquarters of UFCW Local 27 for poultry processing workers and community members.

Contact

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