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## DOL renews immigrant worker protection partnership with Central American countries

The main focus of the signing ceremony was to continue to improve outreach efforts to make sure that workers who immigrate to the U.S. know their rights.

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From left to right: Acting Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division Jessica Looman, Honduran Chargé d’Affaires Javier Bú, El Salvadoran Ambassador Milena Mayorga, Labor Department Deputy Secretary Julie Su, Guatemalan Ambassador Alfonso Quiñónez, National Labor Relations Board General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Chair Charlotte Burrows, and Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Douglas Parker at the Department of Labor signing ceremony on May 10, 2022 in Washington D.C. | Shayna Greene/Politico

The Labor Department, along with several agencies, renewed partnerships with officials from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras to continue to help workers from those countries understand their rights while in the U.S.

Labor Department Deputy Secretary Julie Su joined El Salvadoran Ambassador Milena Mayorga, Guatemalan Ambassador Alfonso Quiñónez and Honduran Chargé d’Affaires Javier Bú at the signing ceremony at the Labor Department’s headquarters in Washington.

“Workers from other countries are particularly likely to be exposed to unsafe working conditions, to be cheated out of wages that they lawfully earned and to be told that they don't have any labor rights at all,” Su said at the event. “We want to say very clearly that no worker checks their rights at the border.”

The main focus of the signing ceremony was to continue to improve outreach efforts to make sure that workers who immigrate to the U.S. know what resources are available and where they can turn to if they’re facing unfair labor practices — regardless of immigration status.

“In order to fully protect and enforce the rights of workers in this country, we need to do so without considering immigration or work authorization status,” said National Labor Relations Board General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo.

She added that the NLRB has recognized that threats regarding workers’ immigration status are “among the most likely to instill fear among employees.”

The three Central American countries’ representatives also signed agreements with DOL’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Wage and Hour Division, along with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and NLRB.

The NLRB signed a [similar letter of agreement](#) with the Mexican government in 2013 and again in September.

“What's important to understand is that the laws only protect if people know about them,” EEOC Chair Charlotte Burrows told POLITICO. “So our experience has been that these partnerships are enormously helpful in getting the word out.”

Burrows said workers coming from other countries may not know about agencies like the EEOC but they know their embassies and consulates so it’s important for those points of contact to know where to turn to in order for workers to receive help as quickly as possible under U.S. labor law.

In 2019, 1.41 million immigrants from El Salvador, 1.1 million from Guatemala and 746,000 from Honduras [were living in the United States](#). Immigrants from Central

America are overrepresented in service, construction, production and other frontline industries — jobs with high exposure to Covid-19. Last summer, POLITICO reported on [the harsh conditions](#) and lack of protections that agricultural workers face while working in extreme heat that's become more common each year.

“Behind every majestic building, behind the most solid and durable bridges and roads, behind the most beautiful gardens we have the good fortune to appreciate, behind the freshest fruits and vegetables we find in supermarkets and the meals we enjoy in restaurants are the hardworking and noble hands of the migrant worker,” said Honduras’ Bú, in remarks translated into English.

The current labor shortage has increased the need for foreign workers.

The Biden administration recently [enacted a Temporary Final Rule](#) that extended working permits about 18 months after expiration for hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers.

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