

**Mexico informal worker organizing inventory-Summary (English)**  
**Dr. Enrique de la Garza and team, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa**  
**Summarized and updated by Hugo Sarmiento, UCLA**  
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The growth of the Mexican economy from the early eighties to the present has been unsatisfactory. Growth instability has meant two recessions (1987 and 2001) and two major crises (1995 and 2009) with some cyclical peaks of growth. But the growth of GDP per capita in real terms did not exceed an average of 1.2 % annually, a figure clearly insufficient to generate enough decent jobs. This slow growth of the economy and slow creation of new sources of employment corresponds with an increase in the size of the informal sector. In Mexico, historically, unemployment rates have been very low because immigration to the United States and the informal sector act as exhaust valves for the unemployed. We will take two of the most used definitions of informality: first, the informal sector encompasses the range of businesses that cannot be differentiated from the household economy and those which are not registered as economic units and do not pay taxes. In 2011, 33.22% of the population of Mexican workers could be found in the informal sector. However, if we add informal workers employed in economic units that are registered and pay taxes (formal sector) but which do not meet their obligation to laws protecting employees, in particular the right to healthcare, then the percentage of workers in informal conditions rises to 60.78 %.

Regarding the informal sector in Mexico, and Mexico City in particular, data from the second quarter of 2012 shows that nationally 28% of the employed population is working in this sector, while the percentage in Mexico City is the same. At the national level, the economic activity of informal workers is concentrated in trade and services (65 %); in Mexico City there is an even higher level of concentration of informal workers in these industries (82 %). Nationally, 20% of all informal workers are employed in the construction industry compared to 11% in Mexico City. Finally in manufacturing there is little participation by informal workers, both at the national level (15 %) and in Mexico City which is substantially lower than 11%. Regarding the income levels of these workers, measured using the federal minimum wage (the minimum wage in Mexico in 2012 is equivalent to \$ 140 per month), at the national level, 45% earn between 1 and 3 minimum wages and only 4 % earn more than 5 minimum wages in Mexico City. Regarding the work week, nationally 62 %, and 67% in Mexico City, work more than 35 hours. In terms of gender distribution, nationally 60%, 63% in Mexico City, are men. Only 1.3 % of all informal workers, nationally, and 0.53 % in Mexico City, have access to healthcare through their employment. In Mexico, self-employed workers make up half all workers in the informal sector while subordinate workers (those employed by others) account for 43.0 %. In Mexico City 53 % are self-employed and 42 % are subordinate. That is, the number of workers who do not own their own business is very high. Those who do own their own business *and employ others* make up only 5% in Mexico City, and 7% nationally, of all informal workers.

With respect to the population of informal workers within the formal sector, a 2011 estimate showed nationally most work in services (42.80 %) and trade (27.29 %). These workers average earnings of 3000 pesos a month, slightly more than informal workers in the informal sector. They average working 40 hours per week. And, the most common level of educational attainment is a secondary education (the US equivalent is junior high school) followed by a secondary and higher (high school) level of education. There is also a clear predominance of men. There are almost no unions. Finally, most are subordinate workers (50.42 %) followed closely by the self-employed (43.42 %).

Although in the informal sector almost half of all workers are subordinate workers, while 75 % of all informal workers within the formal sector are subordinates, the Federal Labor Law does not specify the possibilities and conditions of their union rights, including the right to form unions. As a result only a small proportion of informal workers are unionized and equally only a small proportion can access health-care through their work.

Unionization is almost nonexistent among these workers. Nationally only 0.1% of these workers (0.22% in Mexico City) are in unions. Not having unions does not mean not being organized. In fact the most common form of organization among informal workers is the Civil Association. These organizations are registered under civil not labor codes. They are also very easy to register them with a notary with the only requirements being an assembly, statutes and a board of directors. However, the code does not specify any labor function in terms of rights and obligations. So that as a civil association there is no possibility of any legal claim to employment law. The Mexican labor law states that unions are formed to defend the rights of workers ( employers can also form unions) and often the interpretation of the judges is that this refers to the rights of employees, so that non-employees could not form unions and claim these rights. However, as a result of the local influence of trade union confederations the registration of some of these organizations as trade unions has been made possible. But the number of informal workers in unions is still very small.

The role of the Mexican state must be considered in any discussion related to the organization and unionization of informal workers. The state was formed in the Mexican Revolution on the basis of a corporatist model. This resulted in the state's promotion of a pact with labor organizations, entrepreneurs and farmers to ensure good governance and growth of the economy. The state assured the worker organizations participating in the pact a near monopoly of representation of employees through legal resources - registration of associations, the closed shop, not allowing secret ballots to elect union leaders and societal support for unions through labor social and economic policy. Moreover, these representation monopolies were reinforced by involvement in the party system, specifically with the PRI, establishing relationships between state representatives, senators, governors, etc. and union leaders. This system lasted 70 years until it was disarticulated by the economic crisis. The great crisis of the second half of the seventies and early eighties occurred taking the form of an external debt crisis but with deeper economic roots. The result was a replacement of the old ruling elite in the state by neoliberal technocrats in 1980s and 1990s.

As for the unions, they resisted for a part of the eighties but eventually accepted the reforms instituted in the nineties and to a lesser extent the first decade of the century, ostensibly to fight inflation, but which led to a brutal decline in wages (a -68.4 % change in the minimum wage and a -68.3% change in the contractual wage that is contracts for workers covered by federal collective bargaining agreements). These years saw increased flexibility of collective labor contracts with big business and social spending cuts negotiated with unions. The PRI's reduced influence also resulted in a loss of positions as senators, congressmen and governors. However, this does not mean the dismantling of the corporatist system, but less influence in the design of national policies for maintaining industrial peace at the enterprise level. To date, informal networks of influence, and agreements between corrupt union leaders, businessmen and government officials have continued to operate. The end of the PRI's control over government in 2000 did not alter this micro-corporatism. Labor peace and the acceptance of wage austerity in order to sustain economic growth, the economic and employment policies now implemented by several successive governments, have been supported by union leaders. That is, the classic corporatist deal involving benefits for workers at the higher levels of economic strata is now a deal for the informalization of employment.

At the end of 2012, Mexico modified the country's Federal Labor Law, over the opposition of many unions and the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution, with the stated goals of promoting competitiveness and increasing flexibility in employment relationships. The reform of labor law which dates back to the 1970s enables outsourcing and part-time employment, but does not include clauses intended to democratize authoritarian labor unions. Specifically, clauses proposed by the political opposition which would have required unions to submit proposed contracts to union members for approval and to elect their leaders by secret ballots were not included in the new labor law. Other clauses to included limited provisions for certain social protections such as maternity leave, severance pay in case of death and a streamlined process for conflict resolution with respect to the granting of social benefits.

Among other reforms the most significant changes to the Mexican Federal Labor Law include:

- Employment probationary periods
- Training contracts
- Seasonal and discontinued contracts
- A regulatory framework for outsourcing
- Hour-based salaries
- New grounds of termination without liability by an employer

Sources: LA Times November 13, 2012 Richard Fausset and Mark Stevenson; Secretaria del trabajo y prevision social (STPS) <http://www.stps.gob.mx>: Retrieved October 7, 2013.

### **Taxi Drivers**

In 2012, over 130,000 licensed taxis operated in Mexico City, along with irregular "pirate" cars and cars known as "executive taxis" that offer the same service but without licenses and without using the meter to calculate the fare. Around 1,943 registered sites and bases exist (Ministry of Transportation and Highways SETRAVI, 2010) along with others which are unregistered. These sites and bases are administered by more than 300 taxi driver organizations, mostly civil associations (the Mexican term for nonprofits), with a membership of about 30% of city taxi drivers. That is, about 70 % operators work freely and have no affiliation to any grouping of the taxi drivers. On average, taxi drivers work 6 days a week and 15 hours a day. The level of income earned depends on the number of hours worked, the location of the base or site and the condition of the vehicle. On average, however, it is normal for them to earn roughly between \$200 and \$300 per day.

Regarding labor protections, taxi operators do not have any associated with their work, since they are technically self-employed. Others have some kind of insurance, such as Seguro Popular, or are listed as a dependent on the insurance of a family member (Mexican Institute of Social Security or the Security and Social Services for State Workers). The National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE) notes in 2012 98.5 % of taxi drivers were male. According to a report by the SETRAVI in 2009, 72 % of concession owners (concession owners hold the right to operate taxis on certain routes) were male and 28 % were female.

In general, taxi driver organizations are born from the need to consolidate work space or to manage rights to operate certain routes granted to drivers by larger organizations. Other taxis are born as informal groups for shelter and to be able to work because they either are not licensed or because third parties or even SETRAVI provided them with fake licenses or fraudulent license plates. As a result, these workers need organized support in order to work without having trouble from the authorities. Taxi drivers are assigned to an affiliated individual base and, with the exception of some "corridos" - no site can be changed at will, even when the sites belong to the same organization.

Organizations differ in their structures and legal forms. These organizational forms include: corporations, cooperatives, trade unions, associations or civil societies. Although each form has unique features, generally they represent the drivers under the premise they are self-employed workers who carry out their work relatively autonomously and whose relationship with the organization is as such. In the case of companies the relationship is not employment in the traditional sense and unions do not represent their members against an employer.

The size of the organizations, based on the number of members, varies. They range from small organizations that bring together between 40 and 60 drivers, to others composed by over 1000 drivers. We should note that the numbers vary according to the SETRAVI report or the organization itself.

Organizations that adopt the form of an association or civil society, which constitute the majority, have a governing body composed of a President, a Secretary and a Treasurer, and other offices depending on the specific organization. In most cases, the officers are elected through regular elections and while some may assume their office via elections they may stay for prolonged periods without having been officially re-elected. Leaders of organizations often take positions as presidents or secretaries. The organization is represented among taxi drivers in the figure of the leader.

Taxi driver associations hold annual assemblies to discuss general issues and everyday problems at work usually centering on controversy over rate changes. In some cases, assemblies or meetings take place weekly, at which, besides being the time when weekly quota payment is made, leaders provide information and/or discuss issues raised by the drivers. However, the fact that the vast majority of drivers belong to civil associations where all the members have equal rights to participate in them does not necessarily mean this always happens.

Some organizations work under umbrella organizations like the Congress of Transport or affiliate with larger organizations and/or broader social movements, such as the Francisco Villa Popular Front or the Confederation of Workers of Mexico.

On the other hand, some organizations are affiliated with political parties and in some leaders belong to a party, but as individuals and not as representatives of the organization. Others are declared nonpartisan, but sometimes engage in political activity outside of the group. Still others manifest independence without any involvement or political relationship - although some self-proclaimed independent organizations declare support for a candidate as a "friend ".

The main activities of the organizations are enabling and maintaining bases and sites, that is: maintaining relationships with SETRAVI and/or local authorities, advising drivers on paperwork issues related to taxis (vehicle replacements, magazines, license IDs, and vehicle titles), and checking drivers carry driver's licenses, insurance and sometimes the appropriate attire.

In addition to paying a membership fee, drivers in some groups consider it an obligation to participate in meetings, rallies, and in some cases, direct action. Very few consider it a duty to elect officers. However, in general, it is uncommon for drivers to regularly attend meetings or to participate in decision-making or in direct action.

In 2009 a new group of taxis was formed intended for use by women and driven exclusively by women. These were formed in order to reduce the attacks on women who are subject of abuse suffered in public transport. Such taxis are popularly called "Angel Taxis". The particularity of this organization is that it was not made up of existing taxi associations but by trade associations from the Historic Center such as the Alternative Trade Association for a Decent Life and the Legitimate Association of Civic Commerce.

### **Microbus Drivers in Mexico City**

In the second quarter of 2012 there were 301,013 microbus drivers nationally, and 26,975 in Mexico City. Of these, nationally 84.48 %, and 94.39 % in Mexico City, were salaried employees. Self-employed microbus drivers totaled only 13.17 % nationally and 5.61 % in Mexico City. That is, this is very much an activity of employees, with an income average of 4,860 pesos monthly nationally and 4,860 pesos monthly in Mexico City. The weekly average of hours worked is very high: in our study microbus drivers averaged 60.7 hours per week nationally and 63.4 hours per week in Mexico City. That is the vast majority work more than 48 hours per week to earn higher incomes. Both nationally and in Mexico City educated workers having completed some form of secondary

education (again, junior high school is the US equivalent) constitute a majority; nationally 50.1 %, and 65.9 % in Mexico City, of all drivers. This occupation is almost 100% male dominated. Nationally 71.8 %, and in Mexico City 74.13 %, have no access to healthcare. The self-employed are a minority making up 13.17 % nationally, and 5.61 % in Mexico City, of all drivers.

Usually employers make deals with political parties, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party, which dominated Mexico for over 70 years until 2000) traditionally, but more recently with the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution, which has governed Mexico City since 1997), to support candidates or provide buses to carry people to political rallies. In return employers hope to gain approval or endorsement for certain routes, support with license plates, and traffic fines.

Occupational categories associated with this type of transport are: el checador, who at fixed points of the routes check each step of the minibus, and who have some power over the drivers because the owners of the buses delegate control over bus routes to them. Conversely, sometimes they may represent the drivers before the owners. El chalan, usually young, is in charge of collecting fees and cleaning the bus. El griton, the messenger of the driver and usually a family member, is an apprentice in training to be a driver. El postirero is a driver who eventually will eventually replace the main driver, el chofer de planta. Last there is el chofer-dueno – a self-employed driver when this is the case.

The main form of organization of microbus drivers are civil associations, which are organizations of route concessionaries, registered in the land registry. In terms of the structure of these organizations, they tend to have minimal staffing organized hierarchically. That is, presidents or general secretaries concentrate much of the power over decision-making, with managers directly below them, followed by accountants and secretaries.

These organizations hold assemblies for bus owners to support each other and among other items discuss maintenance fees. In these assemblies only bus owners participate in decision-making. There are virtually no organizations which represent only drivers (although drivers recently attempted to form a labor union but labor authorities denied them registration). Among owners, and their organizations, paternalistic relations predominate, with family and personal relationships dictating how agreements and disagreements among owners and drivers are resolved. These types of relationships mean that punishment is almost nonexistent. And while drivers are allowed to break the rules to make more money these relationships also obscure the precariousness of the driver's employment which does not provide benefits and consists of long working hours. Organizations also build systems of patronage with governments involving electoral political support in exchange for special allowances such as elevated rates for the public or the granting of new routes, and minimizing the cost and frequency of traffic violations. Corruption pervades these relationships. This arrangement results in drivers frequently violating traffic regulations designed to prevent bus intrusion into certain traffic routes.

Important causes of conflict between these organizations with governmental authorities have been minibus drivers invading metro bus routes and negotiations over obtaining government credits to replace old buses with new ones.

### **Freight Transportation Workers**

At the national level there are 411, 784 freight truck drivers. Their income is the highest of the occupations analyzed; 5,892 pesos a month. Of these drivers, 30.01 % earn between 3 and 5 minimum wages. The average hours worked is high compared to the microbus drivers, 49.1 hours per week, that is, 52.86 % work more than 52.86 hours. The educational level which predominates is completion of a secondary education, 52.14 %. Almost

100% of drivers are men; 99.76 % of the cases. Those who do not have access to health care are relatively few, 53.52 %, indicating informality in only half of this occupation. Instead the vast majority (84 %) are employees. Those who work on their own (owner-operators) constitute only 11.11 % of all freight truck drivers.

In the case of freight transportation, the work is usually between 10 and 20 days per month on an ongoing basis and the worker is paid according to the trips made, although these rates change depending on the length of travel or if hazardous substances are being transported. The vast majority of drivers are not the owners of the units but instead hold an obscure employment relationship. There is little unionization and those that are members of organizations belong to civil associations of truck owners. In Mexico City the truck driver unions which do exist belong mainly to the CTM. Truck driver cooperatives do exist but these are a small minority.

Unlike taxi drivers these drivers are not paid on a monthly basis but instead are paid piecework per delivery. So that in this case the wage relationship is clearer than in the previous transportation occupations. However there are few unions among these drivers. So that the only organizations found here are those which represent truck owners. These unions offer political support for candidates during elections, particularly for the PRI, looking not for improved working conditions but for improved business conditions. For example, civil associations negotiate for benefits with respect to special fees paid on highways, the raising of load limits that each truck can carry, and control of the police which extort truck drivers.

### **Construction Workers**

The construction industry is one of the largest employers in the Mexican economy. In the 2000s construction workers constituted 8.6 % of the total Mexican workforce. In recent years the employment participation trend has been steady growth, albeit with a slight drop in 2009, as a result of the economic crisis.

The construction industry is male-dominated, 96 % of the workers are men, and the age range of the majority (7 out of 10 workers) is concentrated between 20 and 39 years. In contrast workers who are between 50-59 years old represent one-tenth of the total.

Data regarding work conditions reflect the precariousness of employment in the sector. A sample shows in 2009 two-thirds of employees did not have any employment-based benefits, only five of every one hundred workers had social security and less than a quarter had social security and other benefits. Regarding work hours, in 2009, 44 % of workers had a work week which did not exceed what the law allows, working for 35-48 hours a week. However, 40 percent had a work week of over 48 hours.

On the other hand, one of the indicators that can demonstrate the level of formality of employment is the existence of a written contract, as it should reflect the length of employment and work conditions. In 2009, eight out of ten employees had no contract in this sector, reflecting the instability characteristic of this sector and revealing one of the basic features of precarious employment: job uncertainty regarding continued employment.

Another feature of the construction is that employment is concentrated in small enterprises. More than half of workers are employed in units of 2-5 people and one in ten workers in small establishments with 6-15 workers. The concentration of labor in these companies is a problem since it is difficult for them to be inspected for labor violations and they are virtually impossible to punish. In contrast, only one in ten workers is employed in what are considered large companies (251 or more employees).

Regarding unions, the unionization level is virtually zero in the construction sector. Only 1% of workers are unionized and if you consider the type of unionism that characterizes this sector you could say that the few workers who do form part of a union also are unprotected.

The probability of having an employment contract also increases as firms get larger: while virtually all workers of small companies do not have any contract, only a third (on average) do not have contracts in larger companies. Regarding the profile of workers, small firms are more likely to hire young workers with lower educational levels. In terms of job characteristics, it is also smaller enterprises which to a greater extent tend to violate labor rights, provide fewer benefits, less labor contracts and much lower income levels. Despite these important differences between smaller and larger companies, unionization levels are similar as are the work hours.

The relative protection of labor rights observed in large companies can be explained partly by their involvement in public works-related construction, making them more "visible" and thus having to meet a number of permits and requirements that require various levels of state intervention. State agencies which regulate this industry include the Mexican Institute of Social Security, the Labor Inspector, and the Ministry of Finance. In contrast, housing construction is done mostly by small businesses. Only when it comes to the construction of large social housing projects are large companies involved, however, even in these cases outsourcing to small and medium enterprises is a common practice.

In general terms we can say that the features that distinguish the employment in the construction sector are instability, lack of employment contracts, a breach of employment benefits and no union representation. Job insecurity and the vulnerability of construction workers is heightened when considering the majority of workers are concentrated in small enterprises, which, as mentioned, account for 70 % of workers.

Besides low unionization rates (only 1.1 % in 2009), an even deeper problem is the authenticity of unions in this sector. The unions in this sector are characterized by their role in protecting the employer (Aragon, 2012). Such unions are those that are formed behind the workers' backs and whose main aim is to protect the employer in exchange for a monetary fee. The only actor that is part of the negotiation is the union "leader," and in many cases union workers do not even know of the existence of the union. One of the main features of these unions is that while they may have a collective bargaining agreement that establishes labor standards, in practice there is no review process to ensure compliance.

In terms of their organizational structure, unions in this sector share similar characteristics. They have an umbrella organization in the National Convention, a National Executive Committee and their respective delegations or Sections - in the case of the largest unions. The union statutes lay out the aims and objectives of the union, the rights and obligations of the members, the powers and functions of the members of the structure, among other specifications.

However, these unions do protect construction workers from labor rights violations to which they are exposed. Instead unions contribute to this situation since they do not actively monitor compliance with labor standards and there is no genuine collective bargaining or genuine unions behind the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Such unions contribute to the violation of rights because they provide assurance to the employer that he will not be monitored by the unions.

The prevalence of these types of unions has its origin in Mexican labor legislation. According to the law, the union can force the employer to sign a collective agreement when two or more workers are employed. If the employer refuses, the union has the power to call for a strike and therefore stop the construction project (Art. 387 and 450 of the LFT). This power granted to unions has generated a perversion in collective bargaining since it can be used as a means of extortion to the employer in exchange for "labor peace" and also serves as a protective mechanism for the employer against a real union. The purpose of collective bargaining is distorted since workers do not have a stake in this negotiation and ultimately do not achieve the benefits of collective bargaining.

On the other hand, the existence of unions has also a contextual explanation related to the wider trade union system. Most construction unions belong to the CTM which traditionally has been a part of the corporatist state and the system of patronage defined by the corrupt relationship between political actors and union leaders.

Finally, the proliferation of such unions is a result of legislation which also prevents the creation of independent and autonomous trade unions. Unions must register with the Board of Conciliation which represents the interests of government and business. In this regard, the government has the administrative control of union registration and labor disputes. So, contrary to what is commonly held, labor law in Mexico has, since its inception, a high degree of flexibility/discretion that has allowed it to operate without major formal adjustments under contrasting models of economic and political regimes (Bensusan, 2000). Also if corruption in individual judgments is a common practice, when it comes to collective labor disputes corruption reaches levels of a different dimension.

### **Street Vendors**

According to INEGI, in 2003, the country had 1,635,843 street vendors, almost 53 % more than in 1995. In subsequent years the phenomenal growth in the number of street vendors has maintained its upward trend. Currently, according to data from the ENOE in the second quarter of 2012 the total population of national vendors was 2,197,414 which accounts for 4.54 % of the entire working population. In Mexico City alone the number of vendors is 226,666.

Most of these workers have a monthly income of one to two minimum wages. Regarding social security, the vast majority of street vendors, over 99 %, have no public medical service. Within this set of vendors, although most (77.83 %) are self-employed a significant number are also either employees or business owners who employ workers.

Nationally the educational level vendors have on average a secondary education. Most vendors are female, so that 62% are female compared to 38% who are male. In Mexico City most workers engaged in street trading (37.93 %) have a secondary education level and 23.88 % have a secondary or higher level of education. With regard to gender, most of the vendors (65%) in Mexico City are also female.

However, nationally, male street vendors earn profits between 29% and 35 % higher than those of women engaged in the same activity. The lower profits female vendors earn relative to men can be attributed to a number of factors including: more responsibilities at home, less access to credit and capital, differences between the types and scale of commercial businesses, as well as the types of goods traded and the amount of investment required.

Women who engage in street vending also risk sexual assault at work and merchandise losses due to persecution, police extortion or raids by local law enforcement agencies.

Still, women have built and consolidated networks important for both the process of migration and settling in the city. They have developed an extensive network of mutual support to cope with adversity, to get a stall, to sell and to support each other when working in the streets or in the Metro Collective Transport System. They also use their networks to combat abuse by the police, road inspectors and other authorities and vendors. Organizations are based on kinship relationships, shared neighborhoods and unions, and have become well experienced in negotiating with city authorities and federal government agencies. These organizations are led by women (Oehmichen, 1999).

According to the information provided above regarding the job characteristics, economic and social rights of street vendors, it can be argued they experience a high degree of precariousness at work and in life. Female

workers, or those others who are migrants and are part of an ethnic group, are especially socially vulnerable. In fact, in this occupation, studies show a significant trend towards social exclusion defined as "a condition of unemployment, lack of adequate housing, lack of basic services and medical care" (Hasemann, 2010).

Local authorities are responsible for finding solutions to problems associated with street vendors' use of public roads and public areas. However, in Mexico City there is no law regulating commercial activity in public space, as it relates to the use and disposal of public property, land use, the type of activities permitted. Additionally, there are no regulations which dictate what actions should be taken in case of failure to comply laws.

All these regulatory provisions have implicated a specific relationship between the government, political parties and vendor organizations, which has been characterized by conflict and negotiation processes conditioned by corporatism and political relations based on cooptation and patronage. Traditionally, street vending in Mexico City is linked to the PRI as a form of patronage in which vendor organizations were permitted to form markets in exchange for their support and advocacy on behalf of officials and politicians of that party. In general, street vendors, although organized, belong to civil associations as opposed to labor unions.

According to Gisela Zaremborg (2005 ) after coming to power in Mexico City in 1997 the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD ) stimulated a growing fragmentation of large monopolistic leadership regimes among street vendors (who were members of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI )), increasing the competitiveness among the leaders , causing them to promote different forms of legitimizing their positions, which ranged from social protection to cultural activities. The new situation led to the creation of a large number of small, formally constituted civil associations. Fragmentation which in turn increased competitive pressures in the organizational setting of groups has prompted the leaders to mitigate their instrumentalist and despotic practices. Instead, now leaders have adopted a protective leadership attitude, distributing social and cultural benefits to vendors in addition to the mere guarantee of a space to sell. Also relevant is the fact that as a result of the government crackdown on street vendors and tianguistas (vendors selling in weekly markets in varied locations around the city), leaders have chosen to expand their ties with other organizations that also represent 'informal' workers such as taxi drivers and microbus drivers.

Of the organizations representing street vendors in Mexico City the National Front of Informal Trade (FNCI) and Force of Commerce (FC) distinguish themselves for their degree of political activism. The FNCI is part of the PRI and has conducted several demonstrations in response to the arrival of the PRD city government. Both organizations have carried out the greatest amount of public actions during the tenure of PRD governments in Mexico City, either collectively or through public acts of its leaders.

Another significant case corresponds to the organization of street vendors from the Alameda Central (Mexico City's central park). It was established in 1995 and its membership is 80 % indigenous. The main demands this organization raises includes preservation of their cultural tradition of selling in public space and the right to have a source of employment.

In general, the actions of these groups are a response to the measures implemented by the city government to confiscate the goods of vendors, evict or attempt to specify an ordering of public space while not taking into account claims made vendors on improved working conditions. That is, these actions are reactive in nature, seeking to exploit the situation created by government action itself to be noticed publicly and to display their relative strength and mobilization capacity. This dynamic, however, ceases if negotiations between the authorities and organizations materialize.

### **Wastepickers (garbage collectors and sorters)**

Wastepickers are informal workers who separate waste or waste products that have commercial value. They are not part of the municipal administration and should not be confused with city employees who pick up trash in the streets in large trucks and take it to landfills.

More specifically, wastepickers are individuals that separate recyclables in landfills. Among these there are those who are employees of a local leader, those who work on their own in municipal landfills or those who work as part of a union. Usually wastepickers include the elderly, children, landless peasants, ex-convicts and others. In addition there are intermediaries that establish a link between the different actors in the recycling industry. There are those who buy recyclables and sell them to recycling industries or sell it to collection centers, where recyclables undergo a second sorting and are organized into large quantities to make it profitable for buyers. Often the collection centers belong to the leaders of the pickers who demand pickers sell recyclables only to them under threat of removing them from landfills and/or paying them a lower price. ( Florisbela , dos Santos Anna and Gunther Wehenpohl. The informal sector in solid waste management. Ecological Gazette. No. 60, SEMARNAT.2001.).

In the second quarter of 2012 the number of pickers nationwide was 80,608, while in Mexico City it was 10,207. The average monthly income nationally is 2,838 pesos, while in Mexico City it is 2,426 pesos. The work week was 40.59 hours nationally and 40.2 in Mexico City. Nationally, 31.33 % have a primary level education and 35.7% have the same level of education in Mexico City. Men dominate this sector, constituting 85.9 % of wastepickers nationally and 72.7 % in Mexico City. Nationally 66.5 % had access to medical services compared to 91.36 % in Mexico City. As for their employment arrangement, most are employees, 69.86 % nationally and 72.7% in Mexico City, whereas the self-employed constitute 27.45 % nationally and 27.3 % in Mexico City.

Wastepickers can work independently from organizations or cooperatives, which in fact are legally civil associations of which wastepickers are not partners. By law these civil associations have a president, a secretary and a treasurer, and have personnel to weight, pack and ship materials.

Most wastepickers are men; however there is a significant presence of women. Work hours are flexible in terms of time of entry and exit and the work days can average 6 hours. In any given landfill only pickers who are members of the organization which organizes pickers in that specific landfill are allowed to work. In Mexico City pickers at the three main landfills are represented by the two main organizations of pickers, the Wastepickers Front and the Association of Solid Waste Pickers of the Metropolis. Formally these organizations are civil associations where wastepickers are not considered partners, in practice they are informal private companies masquerading as civil partnerships which do not pay taxes or pay for worker benefits. These organizations commonly are affiliated with the PRI and set exclusive agreements between managers and public officials on the exploitation of dumps in exchange for political support during elections, however, disputes between organizations also leads to clashes between them and government forces. The existence of informal relationships between politicians responsible for the collection and disposal of waste and the leaders of the wastepicker organizations results in a corrupt, inefficient system which is ultimately unfair to the pickers.

In the three major landfills of Mexico City influential wastepicker organizations include the union of wastepickers of Mexico City which was formed in the mid-seventies and continues with majority control of waste in the city. There are other organizations that this union shares power with such as: the United Front of Wastepickers of Santa Fe , CA and Solid Waste Distributor of Nezahualcoyotl, SA de CV.

Across the country there are various types of wastepicker organizations: larger and well-established wastepicker unions can be found in the cities of San Luis Rio Colorado, Sonora , Mexicali , BCN , San Luis Potosi and Tijuana, Baja California , cooperatives such as the Cooperative Society Material Pickers (SOCOSEMA) can be found in

Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and more informal groups without any registration in Reynosa and Matamoros , Tamaulipas.

### **Domestic Workers**

In Mexico domestic workers total 2,229.375 (4.60 %), 92% (2,049,937) are women and the average age is 33.7 years. Monthly income for domestic workers can be up to \$2,452.02 pesos and on average they work 30.75 hours per week. A significant portion of domestic workers do not work full time but instead on an hourly basis.

Regarding level of education for domestic workers, according to the ENOE (2012), 25.73 % have not completed a primary level education, 34.50 % have completed a primary level education, 32.82 % have completed a secondary level education, while only 6.93 % have completed a secondary or higher level education. Moreover, domestic workers with access to medical services through their employment total 3.64 % compared to 95.23 % who do not receive medical service. In Mexico City, none of those working as employees in private homes is part of a union.

Domestic work, particularly the work performed by women, is characterized by flexible work arrangements, irregular schedules, poor pay, insecurity, and lack of access to social security. Working relationships at home are often set through informal personal arrangements, establishing relations of inequality between the two actors (employer- employee), on the one hand , and an expectation of obedience and compliance to employers on the other, with workers seeking protection and access to certain welfare, especially a place to live and eat. The overlap between home and work space results in an employment relationship where domestic workers have little power especially if they belong to ethnic minorities (indigenous groups) and/or are undocumented workers (Central American migrants). The simultaneous isolation and integration of this work also results in psychological and social costs. In this sense, the personalized nature of the employment relationship gives the workspace a degree of ambiguity that allows the provision of time beyond that agreed to in contractual relations.

From the municipal to the federal level, there is absence of government actions and programs for labor protections for domestic workers. Moreover, current labor laws do not recognize domestic workers as an official occupation. This exposes domestic workers to arbitrary and unfair treatment by employers. The conditions underlying this occupation are generally: no employment contract, no social security, low wages, wage discrimination by gender, ethnicity and place of origin, unfair dismissal without compensation, lack of labor rights, including a prohibition of the establishment of trade unions, and finally unfixed and ambiguous work hours.

Additionally, from the 1970s onward, the number of Indigenous women who have entered domestic service in Mexico City has increased significantly. Most of the Indigenous women who work in domestic service are single women, and if married have no dependent children who live with them, or at least not all of them. Obtaining employment is based mainly on family or community networks. Many are placed in areas where they have previously worked for others in that community or with that family, sometimes with relatives or acquaintances of those who employed them. When living in the house where they work, they have a chance to improve their living conditions, but at the cost of being available all day, extending their working hours and tasks. (Thacker and Gómez Rivas , 1997)

Currently the struggle of several organizations of domestic workers is aimed at achieving recognition by the state and legal guarantees in national and international legislation. At least two decades ago, organizations fighting for the rights of domestic workers began to emerge. Also, support and training centers for this sector arose, under the guise of NGOs.

The National Network for Domestic Workers (founded in 2006), is one of the most representative efforts of organization and coordination for the protection of labor rights of domestic workers nationally. It consists of the Center for Domestic Salaried Worker Support (in Morelos), the Atabal Collective (in Distrito Federal), the Network of Women Domestic Workers of Guerrero, the Collective of Indigenous Women Domestic Workers, Domestic Workers Network of Morelos and Domestic Workers Collective of Chiapas Heights. Currently the network promotes dissemination activities and advocacy on behalf of domestic workers and training services to women who are employed in domestic work, mainly focused on labor rights.

The helplessness and labor vulnerability experienced by domestic workers is largely due to disorganization existing in the sector and, therefore, the lack of collective labor rights. Precisely, one of the main factors affecting this sector is the reluctance of public officials to address the problem and a lack of understanding the role gender plays in these employment arrangements. A study of the Domestic Workers Union of Mexico (Goldsmith, 1990) states that the lack of labor organization is due to many factors, among which are: the isolation of the worker, low education levels, lack of knowledge about their rights, and the fact that these workers often consider their jobs as transitory. Last Mexican labor laws limit the ability of domestic workers to organize themselves.

In the mid-twentieth century the country had about 30 unions that included domestic workers, but they gradually disappeared because some unions evolved to represent more specialized groups such as cooks, waiters or hotel employees. In addition, people who were part of a union were dismissed from their jobs and labor recruitment was very difficult. This combined with the idea imposed by employers and internalized by the workers that they were "part of the family" further undermined organizing. It was not until the early 70's when domestic worker organizations were formed, but these mainly focused on training, support and guidance, and did not act as labor unions.

It is in this context that in 2000 the Centre for Support and Training for Domestic Workers (CACEH) was formed. This is a civil association of female domestic workers which wages claims on unpaid work. It also promotes and defends human rights and the personal development of those who do domestic work, with a perspective of equity and social justice. The CACEH, affiliated to CONLACTRAHO, is also part of the International Domestic Workers Network. This organization has developed a relationship with other organizations and government institutions.