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MEXICO LAUNCHES THE “RED CARD AGAINST CHILD LABOR” CAMPAIGN FOR THE 2026 WORLD CUP

Insights
Jun 18, 2026

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Mexico is using the global stage of the 2026 World Cup to amplify its Red Card Against Child Labor initiative, an international effort aimed at raising public awareness and strengthening measures to prevent child labor exploitation throughout the country. The campaign started May 12 and will run through July 12, leveraging the social and media impact of soccer and the 2026 World Cup to deliver a clear message: there is no place for child labor in Mexico. Here’s what employers should know about the campaign, including ways to join the cause.

Business, Union, and Social Participation

The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS), the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) jointly launched the Red Card Against Child Labor campaign in Mexico last month, aiming to prevent and eradicate child labor exploitation.

At the launch event, STPS Secretary Marath Baruch Bolaños López emphasized that “the Government of Mexico maintains a firm commitment to eradicating child labor through public policies grounded in humanism and social welfare, in line with President Claudia Sheinbaum’s vision.” He further noted that “soccer and the 2026 World Cup represent a historic opportunity to raise awareness and send

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a clear message: in Mexico, there is zero tolerance for child labor.”

SECTUR Secretary Josefina Rodríguez Zamora stated that the tourism sector “is working alongside the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare to strengthen the protection of children and adolescents in tourism, through the updating and digitalization of the National Code of Conduct, which has expanded its reach to a broader range of service providers.” She also announced that a protocol is being developed to prevent, identify, and address potential cases of child exploitation at tourist destinations, particularly in preparation for the FIFA World Cup.

Pedro Américo Furtado de Oliveira, Director of the ILO Country Office for Mexico and Cuba, highlighted that “the red card represents a boundary and a collective decision to declare that certain realities can no longer be tolerated. From Mexico, we want to send a clear message: child labor has no place in the present or in the future we want to build.”

The initiative encompasses cultural, sporting, and institutional activities, and counts on the participation of trade unions, business organizations, and civil society.

Child Labor in Mexico: Key Facts

According to the 2022 National Survey on Child Labor (ENTI), Mexico’s population includes about 28.4 million children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 17. Of these, 3.7 million – representing 13.1% – were engaged in child labor. Among this population:

- 48.6% were engaged in prohibited occupations
- 42.9% performed domestic chores under inadequate conditions
- 8.5% were in both situations simultaneously

The survey also sheds light on the family context of children and adolescents in child labor situations:

- 53.5% lived in two-parent households with children
- 13.4% lived with a single parent
- 33.0% resided in households composed of both parents, siblings, and other individuals

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At the global level, the ILO and UNICEF estimate that 138 million children and adolescents are engaged in child labor worldwide, of whom 54 million are involved in hazardous work.

The Red Card Against Child Labor campaign invites the public to join the cause by sharing photographs holding a red card on social media using the hashtags #FinAlTrabajoInfantil and #EndChildLabour.

Employer Takeaway

The campaign aims to create public awareness, but it also serves as a compliance reminder for employers doing business in Mexico. Consider taking proactive steps now to review your child labor prevention practices, audit vendor and contractor relationships, and review supply chains to help ensure they are not directly or indirectly connected to risks. Be sure managers are trained to identify and escalate potential concerns, and consider participating in awareness efforts as the 2026 World Cup continues.

Conclusion

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