



Trade union meetings and conferences

Honduras and Brazil

Overview of the regional trade union and
sectoral situation:

Textiles, clothing, leather and footwear



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Index

1.- *Objectives of our visit to Latin America (Honduras and Brazil).*

2.- *Overview of the situation in Latin America in the fashion sectors: the textile, clothing, leather and footwear industry (TGSL)¹.*

2.1.- *Trends in the region.* 2.2.-

Employment in the region.

2.3.- *Impact of US tariff policy on the TGSL sector in Latin America.*

3.- *Comparison of working conditions, year 2025: Textile, Footwear, Leather and Clothing Sector in Latin America*

3.1.- *Minimum wages and average remuneration in the TGSL sector.*

3.2.- *Working hours.*

3.3.- *Other relevant working and trade union conditions.*

4.- *Analysis of the trade union situation in Latin America in the fashion sectors: the textile, clothing, leather and footwear industries (TGSL).*

4.1.- *Central America.*

4.2.- *The Regional Coordination of Textile Maquila Trade Unions (CRSMT) of Central America*

4.3.- *South America, some sectoral references.*

5.- *Trade union education and organisation workshop in the city of Comayagua (Honduras).*

6.- *Footwear and Garment Sector Seminar in Caucaia (Brazil).* 7.- *Trade*

union conclusions.

¹Textiles, Garments, Footwear and Leather, known by its acronym "TGSL".

1. Objectives of our visit to America (Honduras and Brazil).

On this occasion, our visit was part of the collaboration activities with the regional office of IndustriALL Global Union (IGU) in Latin America and the Caribbean, which are coordinated with those approved in the 2025 work plan for this cluster/region for the implementation of the Global Framework Agreement (GFA) signed with the Spanish multinational Inditex.

With several objectives:

- Hold a trade union education and organisation workshop in the city of Comayagua (Honduras) on how to strengthen unionisation in global value chains (GVCs), increase trade union power and negotiate collectively with companies, brands and multinationals (MNEs).
- Analyse the current situation of the trade union movement in the region, share experiences and define strategic actions. And, approach the fashion sector (textiles, clothing, leather and footwear) and its structures.
- Develop the work plan approved for this year by the representative of Inditex's Global Trade Union Committee (GTUC) in the cluster/region, which includes training and discussion activities on the challenges facing the fashion supply chain - which includes the textile, clothing, footwear and leather sectors (TGSL) – and develop proposals for an appropriate industrial policy with a just transition.
- Visit to a textile factory in Fortaleza (Brazil)².

To this end, we arranged visits to Comayagua (Honduras) and Fortaleza (Brazil) from 15 to 25 May 2025. With a trade union delegation from the IGU regional office in Latin America and the Caribbean, headed by Marino Vani (regional director), with CCOO Industria, made up of Juan Blanco and Víctor Garrido Sotomayor, from the CCOO Industria International Trade Union Action Secretariat (the latter responsible for the CCOO Industria AMG and global co-chair of the IGU for the TGSL sectors).

2.- Overview of the industrial situation in Latin America in the fashion sectors: the textile, clothing, leather and footwear industry (TGSL).

The fashion sector (TGSL) is an important generator of employment and value, key to the global economy and to several countries in Latin America, a region facing major challenges such as international competition, informality and current changes in consumer patterns, especially due to its integration into Global Value Chains, to which are added the "maquilas"³ in Central America.

² There is nothing noteworthy about this visit, because we were practically not allowed to enter the facilities.

³ A company that manufactures products or parts of products for another company, using the resources and materials provided by the latter, and is most often located in free trade zones in this region.

Its relevance in this region (Latin America and particularly Central America) stems from its geographical location for the production of North American brands (USA and Canada), which reduces transport time from weeks to days, with significant savings in freight costs (up to 30-40% cheaper than shipping from Asia).

It is also due to its benefits, trade agreements (which I will detail later) and the obvious reduction in risks that all this entails, as demonstrated during the pandemic, in addition to geopolitical conflicts, tensions with China and high energy costs in Europe.

However, this region is affected by the complex international context, with strong international competition, the impact of the new US government's tariff policy, the resulting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (which caused a major economic slowdown in many countries in the region) and pressure to achieve low production costs, which contribute to precarious working conditions (wages, working hours, safety measures, gender issues, etc.).

2.1- Trends in the region.

This industry is one of the most labour-intensive, employing mainly low-income women and men. It accounts for between 2% and 5% of manufacturing gross domestic product (GDP) in the countries of the region.

Some examples of the main countries and their specialisations:

- a) Central America: Almost exclusively dedicated to producing for export to major brands and MNEs in the TGSL sector, mainly North American, with a high dependence on textile maquila for export, and for some European brands (none Spanish detected) such as: Columbia, Delta Apparel, Fruit of the Loom, Levis Strauss, GAP, New Balance, Nike, PVH, Target, Under Armour, Adidas, VF Corporation, etc.

The region continues to be an assembly centre; it does not produce textile inputs (threads or synthetic fabrics). More than 50% come from Asia, mainly China, with the rest coming from South American countries.

We distinguish Mexico's maquila industry from that of the rest of the Central American countries, with a strong presence in that country of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as informal workshops and challenges due to the migration of "their" companies to other countries in the region. Mexico exports large volumes to the United States, but competes with Asia on costs, as well as with the rest of Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, etc.), with "changing" work, which manifests itself in permanent relocation between neighbouring countries through their maquilas.

- b) South America: Countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Argentina have a strong presence of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as informal workshops. The main producing countries are:

- Brazil: It has an integrated chain (textiles, footwear and leather) and is the regional leader, although it faces strong competitive pressure from Chinese imports. It has a strong sector, but one that is clearly in decline due to competition from Asia, especially China, and affected by labour reforms that have made the TGSL sector more flexible.

With around 2.4 million formal and informal workers in Brazil, the so-called "Fashion Complex" is the second largest employer in the country's manufacturing industry. The footwear sector in the Rio Grande do Sul and north-east regions is particularly noteworthy, although much of it is undergoing significant relocation to other regions.

It faces structural problems such as high informality, precarious working conditions, low wages and high turnover, following the rollback of labour rights under neoliberal governments.

- Colombia and Peru: These countries are strong in fast fashion and cotton, with trade agreements that favour exports for the most diversified industry (leather and footwear), but with serious conflicts over uncontrolled subcontracting, high levels of informality and precariousness, especially in garment workshops, as well as poor social protection for workers.
- Argentina: This sector has a long tradition in leather, leather goods and quality footwear, and is a major producer of cowhide leather (extensive livestock farming), but much of the production takes place in clandestine workshops with unregistered labour. Located mainly in Buenos Aires (Tigre, La Matanza), Mendoza and Córdoba. It has tradition and potential, but is affected by external competition, high costs and lack of scale. It would require more effective industrial policies, access to credit and greater integration of the value chain in order to grow sustainably.

The sector is suffering from falling consumption, inflation and devaluations that make imported inputs (threads, chemicals, machinery) more expensive. It faces competitiveness problems due to high inflation and import restrictions. The severe economic crisis is affecting formal employment.

There are major challenges throughout Latin America due to:

- Asian competition: China, Vietnam, Pakistan, and Bangladesh dominate the global market with low prices and labour conditions.
- Informality: Up to 50% of production in these Latin American countries is informal, affecting working conditions and productivity.
- Logistics and costs: Lack of infrastructure and high energy costs compared to other markets.
- Sustainability: International pressure for sustainable fashion, but with limited adoption of environmental technologies in most countries.

And with great opportunities such as:

- **Nearshoring:** a strategy in which companies move part of their production or services to geographically close countries, rather than to distant regions such as Asia. The aim is to reduce logistics costs, delivery times and risks associated with global supply chains. Some US companies are looking for nearby suppliers. At this time, suppliers in the region can take advantage of this to attract more investment in advanced manufacturing and technical textiles.
- **Ethical and local fashion:** Growth of regional brands with cultural identity (e.g., indigenous fabrics, handmade leather).
- **Sustainable fashion:** Growing demand for ethical and eco-friendly textiles, a niche where the region can try to compete.
- **Trade agreements (as explained below):** with some free trade agreements with the US, the European Union and Asia opening up markets for regional exporters due to the current tariff situation.

There are opportunities for growth through nearshoring and the current demand for fast fashion in the US, where it is estimated that if the tariff situation is confirmed (depending on the ups and downs of the US government), the new American trade policy could generate more than 500,000 jobs in Mexico and Central America in the textile and electronics industries.

The sector has potential in the region, but it requires government policies to promote innovation, formalisation, investment in training, clean energy and customs facilities, so as not to lose investment to Asia, with easy access to markets for global competition, although this will not be easy due to the lack of regional industrial policies.

A negative factor is the high dependence on Asian inputs, which limits its autonomy, added to low productivity compared to Asian countries, with lower labour costs (almost a third compared to these Latin American countries), to which we must add the need to improve its infrastructure in order to compete better.

Without investment in innovation and labour protection, there is a risk of job insecurity and continued job losses in competition with the Asian region.

2.2.- Employment in the region.

Employment in the sector remains vital for the region, employing around 5 million people, but precarious working conditions and union repression are commonplace and are causing these figures to decline.

However, the approximate breakdown of employment in the fashion sectors (TGSL), according to data from: the ILO, some trade union federations and industry chambers⁴ .

⁴Latest available, 2021-2023.

Central America

Country	People workers (approx.)	Main sectors and brands	Notes
Guatemala	250,000-300,000	Maquilas (Levi's, Target)	70% women; high rates of exploitation in informal workshops.
Honduras	200,000-250,000	Exports to the US (Fruit of the Loom)	Trade unions suppressed
El Salvador	80,000-120,000	Garment manufacturing for American brands	High level of informality (40% in clandestine workshops).
Nicaragua	100,000-150,000	Free trade zones (Hanes, Adidas, Bella+Candas)	Trade unions paralysed by the political and social context.
Costa Rica	30,000-50,000	Technical textiles (medicine, sports)	Lower weight compared to other countries, but higher salaries.
Panama	15,000-25,000	Local clothing and footwear	Sector in decline due to Asian competition.
Mexico	900,000-1.2 million	Maquilas (Levi's, Denim (Tehuacán)	60% informal; strong union presence in Puebla/Mexico City.
Dominican Dominican	100,000-150,000	Free trade zones (H&M, Calvin Klein)	Precarious conditions

South America

Country	Number of (approx.)	Main sectors	Notes
Colombia	600,000-800,000	Garment manufacturing (Bogotá, Medellín), footwear	High risk for trade unionists (200+ murders in the last decade).
Brazil	1.5 - 1.8 million	Textiles (São Paulo), footwear (Fortaleza)	Crisis due to Chinese competition; strong trade unionism in ABC Paulista.
Peru	400,000-500,000	Alpaca, clothing (Lima, Trujillo)	70% informal; clandestine workshops for export.
Argentina	300,000-400,000	Leather, footwear (Buenos Aires)	Economic crisis reduced formal employment (30% since

Country	People (approx.)	Main sectors	Notes
		Textiles	2018).
Ecuador	150,000-200,000	Clothing (Quito), leather (Ambato)	Impacted by the end of the ATPDEA in 2013.
Bolivia	80,000-120,000	Handcrafted textiles, leather	Sector in crisis due to lack of investment.

Employment has been severely affected in recent years as a result of the global crisis in the TGSL sector and the pandemic, all of which has been exacerbated by digitalisation and automation, affecting sectors with a strong female workforce and precarious working conditions in most cases. All of this may limit regional competitiveness in the medium and long term.

The serious employment crisis of recent years has led to significant job losses in some countries, for example in Central America, in Honduras, union representatives told us that in recent years they had suffered a job massacre (55,000, as the most affected country), Nicaragua (20,000), El Salvador (17,000) and Guatemala (2,500).

2.3.- Impact of US tariff policy on the TGSL sector in Latin America⁵ .

It is necessary to address the US trade policy (especially in terms of tariffs) as a new issue, as it is having a significant impact on economic dynamics, particularly in the TGSL sector, at the global level and, therefore, at the regional level.

Analysis of some of the key elements of this situation:

A. Competitive advantages of the region due to the main preferential agreements:

Several countries in the region have free trade agreements (FTAs) with the US, which gives them advantages over Asian competitors, partially offsetting Asia's lower costs. These include:

- CAFTA-DR (Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement), or TLC (Free Trade Agreement between the Dominican Republic, Central America and the United States of America), with tariff exemptions for textiles and clothing. Chapter XVI outlines the obligations of the parties with regard to compliance with labour regulations, among other provisions.

⁵ At the time of writing this report

- T-MEC (USMCA) in Mexico: With stricter rules of origin, but with preferential access to the US market. It formally puts strong pressure on countries to comply with labour standards.

Both have anti-smuggling and pro-union provisions and clauses, which seek to prevent countries from lowering labour standards to attract investment (social dumping).

In theory, these should enforce ILO standards, especially Conventions 87 (freedom of association) and 98 (collective bargaining); and allow for trade sanctions in the event of systematic violations (e.g., the US can withdraw tariff preferences). But in reality, these are almost never applied⁶.

Others such as:

- The Association Agreement (EU/CA), an agreement that goes beyond trade. One of its pillars of cooperation is social development, which includes decent work.
- ATPDEA (Andean): In force from 2002 to 2013, when it was replaced by the bilateral FTA between the US and some Andean countries. It was a tariff preference programme for Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, with the stated aim of combating drug trafficking through legal economic alternatives (such as textile and agricultural exports). Although, to a lesser extent, it was a commercial success for the business elites, its impact on labour and trade union rights was controversial, as it failed to improve working conditions. Its replacement by bilateral FTAs (such as Peru and Colombia with the US) did not solve the underlying problem: impunity for the violation of trade union rights. Although, supposedly, countries such as Colombia and Peru benefit from some preferences.

Some regional advantages vs. Asia:

Factor	Nearshoring (Latin America)	Offshoring (Asia)
Distance from the US	1-3 days by truck/ship	3-6 weeks by ship
Logistics costs	Lower	High (fuel, containers)
Flexibility	Rapid reactions on demand	Massive orders (low agility)
Political risk	Stable (with exceptions)	US-China tensions

B. Pressure from trade diversion.

- US-China trade war: Tariffs on Chinese textiles (up to 30% in some cases) have led to companies to relocate production in

⁶ Only one case (Guatemala, 2017) reached a dispute panel, but without effective sanctions.

Central America and Mexico ("nearshoring"), and are helping to keep the region relevant in textile exports.

- **Risk:** If the US reduces tariffs on other countries (e.g. Vietnam, Bangladesh), the regional advantage could be weakened.
- In this context, it is important to take into account some of the different US tariffs imposed on the main producing countries:
 - Latin America and Central America: The United States has imposed tariffs of 10% on almost all countries in the region (except Nicaragua, with 18%), although it has expressed its intention to negotiate to reduce or eliminate some of these tariffs. This measure is part of a "universal tariff base" applied to several countries in the region.
 - Asia-Pacific: The so-called 'plus' tariffs for major global suppliers in the fashion industry mean that seven of the nine leading global exporters of ready-made garments (accounting for around 55% of global production) will be among those most affected by the new tariff policy⁷ promoted by the US. The tariffs are: 54% for China, 37% for Bangladesh, 49% for Cambodia, 46% for Vietnam, 29% for Pakistan, 26% for India and 32% for Indonesia.
 - For the other major countries in the sector, pending review, the tariffs are 10%. This is the case for Turkey and Africa, although there is a free trade agreement with Morocco that could be revised.

3.- Comparison of working conditions, year 2025: Textile, Footwear, Leather and Clothing Sector, in Latin America

Comparative analysis of some of the working conditions in 2025 in the main producing countries in the region.

3.1.- Minimum wages and average wages in the sector.

The minimum and average wages in some countries, as well as trends over recent years, in US dollars (USD) per month, are as follows:

Country	Minimum wage Monthly. US dollars (2023-2025) ⁸	Average Monthly Salary Average Sector (2023-2025)	Trend
Mexico	350–350–450	500–500–700 (maquila)	↗(Adjustment for inflation and USMCA)

⁷ It continues to vary and it is difficult to determine what percentage will ultimately be in effect when the report is published.

⁸ If a single salary is indicated, it refers to the year 2025.

Country	Minimum Monthly Salary per month. US dollar (2023-2025) ⁸	Average monthly Average sector (2023-2025)	Trend
Guatemala	440–464 (increase of 10%)	450–450–600 (free trade zone)	→(Relative stagnation)
Honduras	452	400–400–550 (maquila)	→(Business pressure)
El Salvador	359	400–400–600	↗(Slight increases due to reforms)
Nicaragua	255	200–200–350 (maquila)	↘(Political and economic crisis)
Costa Rica	600–600–700	800–800–1,100	↗(Greater regulation)
Colombia	300–300–350	400–400–650	↗(Annual adjustments required by law)
Peru	280–280–330	350–350–600	→(Moderate growth)
Brazil	250–250–300	400–400–700	↗(Economic recovery)

At union meetings, we were told that, for example, in El Salvador, there are calls for a 25% increase in the guaranteed minimum wage, but last June, the country's government increased it by 12%. In Nicaragua, compared to USD 255/month, the basic basket of goods costs USD 555, which is far from the minimum living wage. Mexico and Costa Rica have the highest wages compared to the rest of the Central American countries, so they face strong competition from the rest in terms of labour costs.

Central America attracts more maquilas but generates much criticism due to the high level of job insecurity resulting from the severe exploitation of workers. The rest of South America is showing gradual improvement, particularly Colombia and Brazil.

3.2.- Working hours.

Country	Working hours Legal (hours/week)	Actual in Maquilas (hours/week)	Overtime Pay
Mexico	48	50-60 (70 border maquila)	2x normal hourly rate
Guatemala	48	50-65	1.5x (not always paid)

Country	Working hours Legal (hours/week)	Actual in Maquilas (hours/week)	Overtime Pay
Honduras	44	48-60	Irregular
El Salvador	44	45-55	Not always paid
Nicaragua	48	50-70	Rarely paid. Only where there is a trade union.
Costa Rica	48	48-50	1.5x - 2x
Colombia	48	48-52	1.25x - 1.75x
Peru	48	48-55	1.5x (sometimes evaded)
Brazil	44	44-50	1.5x - 2x
Dominican Republic	44	48-60	1.5x (not always complied with)

As can be seen, working hours are also very long, in some cases reaching a maximum of 70 hours per month (maquila in Mexico and Nicaragua), but without yet reaching (at least it seems) the usual gruelling working hours in Asia (China, Vietnam, etc.). It should also be noted that in some Central American countries (Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador), it is often difficult to get overtime paid.

Brazil stands out as the most regulated country, while in Mexico, on the contrary, shifts of 10-12 hours are common, especially in border maquilas. Chile is making progress with laws against precarious work and has established a maximum legal working week of 40 hours.

3.3.- Other relevant working and trade union conditions.

Country	Affiliation Trade union	Social security	Work Informal
Mexico	Average (20-30%)	Average coverage	~35% Informal
Guatemala	Low (<10%)	Low coverage	~50-60% Informal
Honduras	Very low (<5%)	Limited	~55% Informal
El Salvador	Low (10-15%)	Improving	~45% Informal
Country	Affiliation Trade union	Social security	Work Informal

Nicaragua	Medium, mainly in grassroots trade unions.	System crisis	~60% Informal
Costa Rica	High (30-40%)	Good coverage	~25% Informal
Colombia	Average (15-25%)	Medium-high	~40% Informal
Peru	Low (<10%)	Low in textiles	~60-70% Informal
Brazil	Medium (20-30%)	High (but with cuts)	~30% Informal
Dominican Republic	Low (<10%)	Medium	~50% informal

Noteworthy trends in the region include Costa Rica and Brazil, which have the most stable labour systems and relations, but face a major challenge in terms of subcontracting and the traceability of their uncontrolled production. There is a very high level of informality in Peru, Nicaragua and Honduras.

On the positive side, it should be noted that gradual wage increases are taking place in Mexico, Colombia and Costa Rica as a result of greater union pressure and the impact of trade agreements that establish greater requirements and control over labour rights (T-MEC, CAFTA-DR).

On the negative side, we observe a high level of precariousness in almost all the rest of Central America (Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala), as a result of political crises and the aforementioned migration of businesses to Asia prior to the recent US trade war, with the risk of job losses in sewing and assembly as a consequence of the above-mentioned issues, compounded by automation, digitalisation, etc.

Most countries have labour codes that regulate labour relations in terms of: employment contracts, wages, working hours, social security, hygiene, safety and occupational health. Some countries, such as Honduras, have labour inspection laws that provide for heavy fines if labour rights violations are found. We were also told that Nicaragua has eliminated the possibility of dual nationality (some also had US nationality), which encouraged labour migration to other countries in the region. It should also be noted that in Nicaragua, income tax (IR) is paid on the minimum wage, which affects 100% of maquila workers as it is very low.

Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua have laws regulating companies under free trade zone or free zone regimes, which enjoy tax benefits or incentives in exchange for generating more employment.

4.- Analysis of the trade union situation in Latin America in the fashion sectors: the textile, clothing, leather and footwear industries (TGSL).

The trade union movement in these sectors faces major obstacles in the region, problems that are endemic throughout the world, exacerbated here by the anti-union attitude of governments and business circles. Trade union organisation, including cross-border organisation, and pressure for labour rights in CGV factories are the key to improving working conditions.

Central America remains the most critical area in terms of trade union repression, while South America has more consolidated trade unions, although in some cases they are currently facing serious situations due to the economic crisis and the policies of conservative governments.

There are serious problems, such as informality, high precariousness with low wages, long working hours and lack of social security. The high percentage of women in this industry also favours double exploitation (labour and gender) and there are still few trade unions with a feminist approach.

Pressure from brands and MNEs that subcontract production in these countries (especially in maquilas and free trade zones) hinders trade union organisation, which is compounded by anti-union repression in many of them, with the criminalisation of strikes and protests and the assassination of trade union leaders (especially in Central America and Colombia).

4.1.- Central America

The different trade union realities in the countries of the region make it difficult to develop regional trade union strategies, although there are some interesting examples, which we will analyse later, such as the CRSMT⁹.

The situation in each country is as follows:

- **NICARAGUA:** Many trade unions are paralysed and fighting for their autonomy.
 - They have four labour centres in the maquila sector, with 40 grassroots unions and more than 30 collective agreements per branch covering about 60% of workers. They have tripartite negotiations.
- **GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, and EL SALVADOR:** There is widespread corruption and severe repression of unions, with persecution and murder of union leaders. Our colleagues in Guatemala told us that talking about unionisation is talking about death. Unions are weak and "yellow unions" (controlled by employers) are emerging. The high presence of maquilas is a

⁹ The Regional Coordinator of Maquila Textile Trade Unions in Central America.

Additional difficulty. However, some progress has been made with international support through free trade agreements.

- Guatemala: There are two confederations in the country, with eight company unions in the textile sector, without sectoral collective agreements. One of these unions is currently in the process of negotiating in a maquila.
 - Honduras: There are three trade union confederations in the maquila sector, 33 grassroots unions and more than 23 company collective agreements covering 47,000 people, with 60% of workers affiliated. They have a tripartite agreement.
 - El Salvador: There are 10 grassroots trade union organisations in companies. There are no company collective agreements or sectoral agreements. More than 2,000 people are affiliated.
- MEXICO: The textile and clothing sector is one of the most exploited and precarious, from the duality of its trade union model, with the domination of white unions, to the repression of independent organisations. On the one hand, there are charro unions that benefit companies and political parties, and on the other, there are new organisations that use the TMEC and mobilisation to win rights.

4.2.- The Regional Coordinator of Textile Maquila Trade Unions (CRSMT) of Central America

Given the different trade union realities in each country, their obvious differences in context, trade union capacities, and corporate and institutional pressure on workers, as well as the diverse and necessary dialogue between regional trade unions and with international actors, a trade union strategy was needed to reach specific regional trade union action agreements with a combination of national and regional pressure, a thematic approach and coordinated trade union actions from the factories.

The MNEs operating in the region, the brands that move between countries relocating production according to their commercial interests, exert strong pressure on governments and workers, as well as on trade union organisations. There is a similar problem throughout the region in terms of working conditions and labour relations: repression, lack of trade union freedom, low wages, high production targets, lack of adequate health and safety conditions at work and mistreatment, as well as a lack of public policies on the necessary work-life balance for workers, which is important given the majority presence of women.

Until 2010, trade union division prevailed in countries and across the region. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or consumer organisations ended up displacing and taking over the role of trade unions, due to a lack of coordination between trade union actors, supplanting them in their demands on MNEs, which made trade union action even more difficult, both for individual unions and even more so for joint action, which is more effective. All of this prevented the development of a truly planned and coordinated trade union agenda.

Based on this reality and positive experiences of united trade union action (sectoral branch negotiation) in Nicaragua and Honduras, an initiative arose to coordinate the trade unions of both countries, initiating joint work in 2010, which led to a proposal in 2017 for trade unions in El Salvador and Guatemala to join forces, strengthening trade union unity and seeking more balanced growth in the region.

Several NGOs from other parts of the world, from the social and geographical North, provided financial support for this task. Specifically, FOS (Belgium), 3F (United Federation of Danish Workers) and the Solidarity Centre (AFL-CIO, USA) held exchanges on this issue and discussed possible tasks, which led to the development of a first biannual coordination plan (2018-2019) with four thematic areas:

- Freedom of association and social dialogue.
- Wages and incentive systems.
- Medical services and occupational health.
- Childcare and other social benefits with a gender focus.

This led to the creation of the Regional Coordination of Textile Maquila Trade Unions (CRSMT), made up of trade union organisations from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, specifically:

- Guatemala:
 - General Workers' Centre of Guatemala (CGTG).

- El Salvador:
 - Federation of Independent Associations or Trade Unions of El Salvador (FEASIES).
 - The government of Bukele criminalised labour labour protests, despite commitments in the FTA.

- Honduras:
 - Independent Federation of Honduran Workers (FITH)/CUTH
 - FESITAH/CTH
 - FESITRATEMASH/General Workers' Union of Honduras (CGT).
 - Despite CAFTA-DR, murders of trade unionists (e.g. Berta Cáceres) remain unpunished.

- Nicaragua:
 - Trade Union Confederation of Free Trade Zone Workers (CST-ZF)
 - Within the CST-ZF: National Federation of Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Trade Unions (FESITEX)
 - Federation of Trade Unions of Carazo Workers "Cesar Estrada" (FESICASE).

This facilitates relations with business chambers, brands and MNEs in the region and allows for the proposal of coherent and regional policy options to improve labour rights, as well as the exchange of experiences on key issues. The CRSMT is now well established as a key player.

regional trade union recognised by most international actors such as: ILO, USDOL, IGU, Group of the Americas (SILS)¹⁰ and others.

Work is also being done with trade union initiatives to build trade union networks, specifically with four international brands at this time, to share experiences of trade union organisation and collective bargaining and to promote solidarity among different trade unions.

For each case, we have:

1. FRUIT OF THE LOOM / HANESBRANDS

- Key locations: Honduras (Choloma, San Pedro Sula) and El Salvador. Problems reported include: anti-union dismissals (e.g. closure of plants in Honduras in 2019 following protests, etc.).
- Trade union actions: International campaigns with USAS¹¹ and pressure on shareholders in the US. In their maquilas, unionised workers were dismissed en masse (2019).

2. GILDAN ACTIVEWEAR

- Key locations: Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. Reported problems include: refusal to recognise independent unions (e.g. SITRAGIL in Honduras).
- Trade union actions: Strikes in 2022 supported by the ITGLWF (International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation).

3. ADIDAS (SUPPLIERS SUCH AS HANSAE AND YUE YUEN)

- Key locations: Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. Reported problems include: workshops with unsafe conditions, temporary work or work without benefits.
- Trade union actions:

4. OTHER BRANDS: SAE-A/TEGRA GLOBAL

4.3.- South America, some sectoral references.

- COLOMBIA: one of the most dangerous countries in the world for trade unionists (murders and threats, especially in the footwear sector). Trade unions such as USO and CUT denounce the lack of state protection.

1. Federations and Confederations

- National Federation of Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Industry Workers. It brings together several local trade unions in the sector.
- Confederation of Workers of Colombia (CTC). It has affiliated unions in the textile and clothing sector.

¹⁰ Students for International Labour Solidarity

¹¹ United Students Against Sweatshops

- Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT). It is the largest union in the country, with several trade unions in the textile and footwear sector among its affiliates.

2. National and Sectoral Trade Unions

- Textiles and Clothing
 - National Union of Textile Industry Workers (SINTRAININDUSTRIA TEXTIL) Affiliated to the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT). Represents workers in textile and clothing factories.
 - Union of Textile and Clothing Industry Workers (UTITEX). It has a presence in Antioquia, Bogotá and the Coffee Region.
 - Trade union of Workers of the Textile Garment Workers (SINTRACONFECCIÓN). Active in Bogotá and other areas with textile maquila.
- Leather and Footwear
 - National Union of Leather, Footwear and Similar Workers (SINTRACALZADO). Affiliated with the CUT and present in Bogotá, Bucaramanga and Villapinzón (Cundinamarca). It brings together workers from footwear and leather goods factories.
 - Union of Workers in the Leather, Footwear and Manufacturing Industry (SINTRACUERO). With a presence in Medellín and the Aburrá Valley.

- BRAZIL: With a strong trade union tradition, with unions at national and regional level.

1. National and State-wide Trade Unions (c o v e r i n g Brazil or certain states).

- Força Sindical (FS) – General trade union confederation, with members in the textile and clothing sector.
- Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) – Also a trade union centre with affiliated unions in the textile sector.
- Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias de Fiação e Tecelagem – Active in several states.

2. Unions by Specific Sector.

- Textiles and Garments
 - Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias Têxteis (in several states). Example: SINTTEX (Union dos Trabalhadores Têxteis de SÉo Paulo).
 - Union dos Costureiras (in cities with a strong presence of maquilas, such as São Paulo).
- Leather and Footwear

- Union of Workers in the Footwear and Leather Goods Industries (present in states such as Rio do Sul, São Paulo, and Ceará). Example: SINTICABC (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias de Calçados de Birigui e região, SP).

3. Federations and Confederations:

- FITEC (Interstate Federation of Textile Industry Workers) – Brings together textile unions from several states.
 - CONACCOV (National Confederation of Leather and Footwear Workers) – Represents workers in the footwear and leather sector.
- ARGENTINA: The fashion sectors have a long-standing union structure, but it is fragmented between traditional unions (many of which are criticised for their lack of internal democracy) and new independent organisations. The unions are powerful, but highly fragmented.

Here is a breakdown of some of them:

1. Textile Workers' Union (UOT)

Affiliation: General Confederation of Labour (CGT). Textile industry (yarn and fabric factories). One of the oldest unions (founded in 1945), but with little activity in clandestine workshops. Presence: Formal factories in Buenos Aires, Córdoba. They negotiate in large factories.

2. Sindicato de Trabajadores del Calzado (STCAL)

Affiliation: CGT. Footwear industry (e.g. factories in Flores, Buenos Aires).

3. Union of Workers in the Clothing and Related Industries (SOIVA). Buenos Aires (La Matanza, Avellaneda), Santa Fe. They negotiate in large factories.

4. Tanners and Leather Workers Union

Affiliation: CGT. Coverage: Tanneries and leather manufacturing (e.g., Lomas de Zamora).

- PERU: There is a high level of informality in the garment industry and unions are still in the process of being established.

1. Federation of Textile Workers of Peru (FTTP). General Confederation of Workers of Peru (CGTP). Formal workers in textile and garment factories with a long-standing presence in Lima (Villa El Salvador, Gamarra) and Arequipa.

- Negotiated the Textile Industry Collective Agreement (applicable to large companies).
- Weaknesses:

- Low membership (only covers ~15% of the formal sector).
 - Little penetration in informal workshops.
2. Single Trade Union of Workers in the Textile Industry of Peru (SUTEXTIL)
 3. Shoe Industry Workers' Union (SUTICAL). CGTP. Formal shoe factories (Lima, Trujillo).
 4. Tanners and Leather Workers' Union. Mainly in Arequipa and Lima.

5.- Trade union education and organisation workshop in the city of Comayagua (Honduras).

During our visit, organised by the regional office of IndustriALL Global Union (IGU) in Latin America and the Caribbean, together with the CRSMT, we participated in a trade union education event/workshop with trade unions from the TGSL sector and others, an initiative to advance the necessary trade union identity in the search for a common regional space.

At this event, we analysed the current situation of the trade union movement in the region and shared trade union experiences and strategic actions. Ideas were exchanged on how to strengthen unionisation, highlighting the labour, social and political challenges faced by Central American workers and how to gain more union power to negotiate with MNEs that produce in the GVCs in this region.



The meeting brought together more than 60 people representing both unions affiliated with the IGU and those not affiliated with the International Federation IGU, specifically: the Independent Federation of Workers of Honduras (FITH), CST-ZF/FESITEX of Nicaragua, the Federation of Food, Agro-industry and Similar Workers, FESTRAS, SINTRATERNIUM, the union of workers at Ternium Internacional, and STINDE, the union of workers at INDE in Guatemala), FEASIES and the electrical industry union SIES in El Salvador, together with several people acting as observers from NGOs (FOS, 3F and ISCOD from UGT Spain).

The trade union representatives highlighted the critical situation they face, particularly due to the relocation of production and the closure of companies in the maquila sector caused by the fall in demand from North American countries

, which exacerbates the difficulties of unionisation and collective bargaining, already limited by legal and political barriers.

They also highlighted the impact of migration and deportations from the United States, denouncing the discrimination suffered by workers who are being deported as a result of both anti-immigrant rhetoric in the United States and the stigma attached to returning and reintegrating into their countries, which reduces family income and increases job insecurity. Central American trade unions reiterated their willingness to collaborate with governments to mitigate these problems through more effective social policies.

For our part, we shared our European experiences in addressing similar challenges in the defence of human and labour rights for both unionised and non-unionised workers. We addressed current global challenges such as digitalisation, just transition and the effects of US tariff measures, as well as the consequences of armed conflict on workers, which led us to identify common strategies and lessons learned between both regions.

The IGU regional secretariat highlighted the need for trade union strength to confront global capital, emphasising the key role of trade union networks in addressing labour challenges in Central America, as well as the work being done by the CRSMT to promote workers' unity in tackling issues such as reindustrialisation, relocation, state policies and private investment with the aim of achieving decent jobs and decent work.

The CRSMT's activity in supporting IGU affiliates, as well as independent trade unions that strengthen the strategy of confronting global capital by organising workers in the GVCs of major brands, should be highlighted. The IGU's commitment to its affiliates to support trade union action plans, public policies and the building of regional and global trade union power, in line with the mandate of international trade union solidarity, was reaffirmed.

6.- Footwear and Clothing Sector Seminar in Caucaia (Brazil).

On 20 and 21 May, the city of Caucaia (CE) hosted a key seminar for the footwear and clothing sector in Brazil. It was organised by IGU and SASK⁽¹²⁾ in collaboration with its affiliates Brazilian of the textile sector, grouped under IndustriALL-Brazil, and with the support of DIEESE⁽¹³⁾. It was also part of the regional work plan approved by the regional representative of the Global Trade Union Committee (CSG) of the Global Framework Agreement signed between IGU and Inditex.

The seminar was attended by prominent trade union leaders, including: Aroaldo Oliveira da Silva (IndustriALL Brazil), Cida Trajano (CNTV/CUT), member of the

¹² Trade Union Solidarity Centre, Finland

¹³ Inter-union department of statistics and socio-economic studies in Brazil.

Inditex Global Trade Union Committee, Elias Ferreira and Ricardo Leite (CONACCOVEST), Marino Vani (IGU Regional Secretary for the region), and Lucineide VarjÉo, Vice-President of the IGU Executive Committee for the region.

The event is part of the "Industrial policy for a just transition" initiative, which the working class is calling for in order to:

- Promote the leading role of workers in the development of public policies for industrial development.
- Promote productive sovereignty, the creation of decent jobs and the reindustrialisation of the sector.
- Strengthen trade union action in five key industrial sectors in Brazil in order to combat job insecurity and formulate proposals to this end for the government and employers.

During the meeting, it was highlighted that this space was key to reflecting on the labour and industrial situation in the sector and building joint proposals to strengthen the fashion industry in Brazil and Latin America through trade union strategies at national and regional level.

This seminar is also part of a broader IGU strategy with trade union action plans that contribute to:

- Strengthen its affiliates in Brazil.
- Organise workers in the fight against job insecurity.
- And promote industrial policies that guarantee decent jobs with sustainable development.

On behalf of CCOO Industry, we addressed the challenges facing industrial unions in Europe, emphasising the strategic importance of organising workers in the GVCs of large MNEs. We insisted that union action must be coordinated at both the local and global levels in order to achieve significant impact.



We analysed current global trends in the TGSL sector and the obstacles to unionising workers around the world. We also shared our experiences in implementing GMAs. How to promote freedom of association and collective bargaining and integrate respect for fundamental rights into the production chains of our MNEs. This activity is part of the work plan approved by the representative of the Inditex Global Trade Union Committee (GTC) in this cluster/region, which includes these training and discussion activities on current trade union challenges.

7.- Trade union conclusions.

At present, South America and Central America are experiencing a profound employment crisis due to industrial relocation and the closure of many companies. In Central America, this mainly affects maquiladoras, exacerbated by falling demand from the US and Canada, digitalisation and other issues discussed in the report.

However, changing trends in tariff policies may alter the employment situation. Depending on these fluctuations, the region could lose future investment and continue to experience job losses, or it could reverse the employment situation and commit to investment in maquilas. Local trade unions told us that they are beginning to see a slight slowdown in the "usual" layoffs or company closures and slight growth in the textile sector (we will have to keep an eye on how this develops).

This situation of uncertainty weakens unionisation, accentuates the negative impact of legal barriers and undermines labour rights, especially for migrant workers, who are victims of stigmatisation and loss of rights.

In response to all this, IGU and CRSMT must continue to promote regional strategies for:

- Trade union organisation around reindustrialisation, to guarantee decent jobs and public policies.
- Uniting the struggles of formal and informal workers to tackle precariousness.
- Build the necessary transnational alliances and cross-border networks in the GVCs, with key alliances with trade unions in the countries where multinationals are headquartered, as well as with North American consumers. And strengthen the four networks active on behalf of the CRSMT in Central America, although this requires improving communication, coordination and leadership among them.
- We cannot forget the FTAs, with their progressive clauses that exist on paper but in practice are ineffective instruments for guaranteeing rights due to their lack of use and therefore do not guarantee freedom of association. To take these steps, trade unions must:
 - 1) Document and bring cases before international bodies (IACHR, ILO, countries with due diligence legislation).

- 2) Pressure the US to link market access to real rights.
- 3) Demanding:
 - a. Automatic sanctions for violations (not just "dialogue").
 - b. Independent audits with trade union participation in free trade zones.
 - c. Protection in matters of:
 - i. Gender
 - ii. Migrants: Many maquilas employ people in exploitative conditions, circumventing the clauses.

It is clear that there are obvious needs and opportunities in this region for global solidarity and joint strategies against transnational capital, with which CCOO Industria will continue to collaborate.

To this end, it is necessary to make key commitments such as those proposed by the IGU regional office, in support of local plans. With regional public policies and the development of trade union initiatives with a global vision.

Trade unions must also seek to exert greater influence on their governments to mitigate the impacts of migration and the industrial crisis. The response we give as trade unions, at local and global level, must have a regional and global focus, which is essential to achieve substantial changes that must combine local action and regional coordination with international alliances to defend labour rights in a scenario of economic crisis, migration and the reconfiguration of global value chains.

Collective union organisation is vital in order to tackle the various forms of labour exploitation. Solidarity and transnational pressure (from trade unions in the global North and consumers) must be strategic allies and emerge as fundamental pillars in order to face these challenges at a global level.

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