Update on Cuba's Medical Mission in Mexico
February 2025

Excerpts from
"Forced/compelled labor (trafficking in persons) by the Cuban state: Information for the 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State," Free Society Project/Cuba Archive, February 2025

Edited excerpts from "Update on selected countries' medical brigades": Mexico

Mexico was classified as a Tier 2 country in the 2024 TIP report because "the Government of Mexico does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so." The Prioritized Recommendations include: "Increase efforts among front-line officials to proactively identify victims among vulnerable groups in Mexico and overseas – including ... Cuban government-affiliated workers." The report is quite detailed and extensive on the matter of the labor trafficking of Cuban workers: "authorities did not screen Cuban government-affiliated workers in Mexico, including medical professionals, for indicators of forced labor, despite evidence the Cuban government may have forced some of them to work. Immigration officials had formal SOPs to screen for, identify, and assist potential trafficking victims during initial immigration verification. (…) Mexican authorities continued to employ Cuban government-affiliated medical professionals but did not report efforts to prevent forced labor among these workers." It goes on to detail media and NGO reports on the payment by the Government of Mexico to the Cuban government that left the workers only 6 percent of their salaries.

Mexico had publicly announced that the Cuban doctors would be sent to remote, marginal areas, and violent areas of the country where local doctors did not want to serve. This justification has often been used to neutralize complaints by medical associations and other groups when the arrival of a medical brigade is announced. Yet, when hurricane Otis hit Mexico in October 2023, only 52 Cuban doctors of the promised 610 had been sent to the southern state of Guerrero.[1]

Official information on the number of doctors, their specializations and compensation, the costs of the medical brigade to the federal and/or regional governments, and other details has been sparse and contradictory, however, media coverage and statements by Mexican government officials have been much more plentiful than in most other countries. Mexican journalists cover the Cuban medical brigades frequently and have reported extensively on complaints —even from medical associations— of their lacking professional training, qualifications, experience, and licenses, of having certain doctors assigned to cover specialties they lack, of displacing local doctors, of paying the Cubans more than the local doctors and nurses, and of cases of malpractice.[2]

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[1] "Los profesionales cubanos ya están en Acapulco," op. cit; "Envían a Acapulco a 20 médicos cubanos tras el paso del huracán Otis," *14ymedio*, La Habana, Oct. 27, 2023. l

[2] See a recent report: José Luis Ramos, "Académico mexicano expresa preocupación por la calidad de los médicos cubanos," *MartiNoticias*, Feb. 5, 2025.

By September 2024, at least 3,101 Cuban doctors with 35 specialists had been reportedly hired by Mexico's federal government or the different provinces; an official told the 14y medio digital newspaper that the goal was to hire 5,223 doctors as soon as possible.[3] Other workers not doctors who are likely also deployed have not been reported. The Cubans are deployed all over the country, using the same model favored in countries such as Brazil and Angola. From 2022 to December 2023, at least 48 doctors had escaped.[4]

Mexico is said to be paying an average 100.000 Mexican pesos a month (equivalent to US$5,125) to Cuba plus 27.000 pesos to each worker (around US$1,300) in an account in Havana.[5] The Cuban entity entering into the agreements is Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos Cubanos, S.A. The Mexican government has also helped Cuba by buying its COVID vaccines (2.8 million in October 2023 and 2.8 million in January 2024)[6] despite loud protests from medical professionals and patients and even refusals to use it.[7] It has also greatly increased the number of students on government scholarships to study in Cuba (504 in 2023), especially medicine, paying a higher price than in the historically preferred locations, where the numbers have diminished: the US, Spain, Germany, and UK.[8] Mexico's Foreign Relations Secretariat announced that the governments of Cuba, Mexico, and Colombia are advancing in the creation of a Latin American and Caribbean Drug Administration (or Agency).[9] Finally, the Mexican government sent several oil shipments to Cuba in 2024 and President Claudia Sheinbaum has confirmed that Mexico is supporting Cuba for humanitarian reasons and will continue providing it 400,000 barrels of oil from its daily production of 1.6 and 1.8 million barrels.[10]

Meanwhile, the US provided Mexico $232 million in aid in 2023, including $28 million in humanitarian aid, $1.5 million for women protection and health, and $1.5 million to combat human trafficking,[11] which did not take into account the trafficking. Moreover, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) has strong language against labor trafficking. Its Labor Rights Chapter (Chapter 23) requires all three countries to adopt and enforce labor laws that comply with International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, including prohibitions on forced labor and human trafficking. The Forced Labor Ban (Article 23.6) specifically commits all three countries to prohibit the importation of goods made with forced labor. (The equivalence of services provided by forced labor in the national

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[3] México contratará otros 3.800 médicos cubanos, para llegar a un total de 5.000, 14ymedio, Jul. 29, 2024; "México pagó a Cuba más de 23.000.000 de euros por 610 médicos especialistas por casi dos años," *14ymedio*, Sep. 22, 2024.

[4] "México pagó a Cuba más de 23.000.000," op. cit.

[5] Ibid; "México desembolsa por cada uno de los 3.101 médicos cubanos más de 5.000 dólares mensuales," Ciudad de México*, Diario de Cuba*, Oct. 10, 2024.

[6] "Reforzarán en México campaña anticovid-19 con dos millones de dosis de Abdala," *Cuba Debate / Granma*, Jan. 29, 2024.

[7] Angel Salinas, "Los mexicanos huyen de la vacuna cubana Abdala y hacen cola para la Pfizer," México, Dec. 21, 2023.

[8] "Cuba monopoliza los becarios mexicanos y les cobra más que Reino Unido, Francia o EE UU," *14ymedio*, México, Jan. 18, 2024; José Luis Reyes, "La Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos Cubanos, el principal socio educativo de México," Madrid, *Diario de Cuba*, Jan. 18, 2024; "Cuba, prioridad de AMLO: Las becas de México para estudiar Medicina en la Isla crecen un 142%," Ciudad de México, *Diario de Cuba*, 10 Oct 2023.

[9] "Colombia, Cuba y México preparan agencia de fármacos de capacidades tecnológicas y organizacionales," *Prensa Latina/Granma*, Mar. 19, 2023.

[10] "President of Mexico announces that she will assist Cuba with fuel: "For humanitarian reasons," *CiberCuba*, Jan. 11, 2024.

[11] https://www.foreignassistance.gov/cd/mexico/

territory could be argued as equivalent.) The agreement also has "Stronger Enforcement Mechanisms" which gives the U.S. more power to investigate and take action against labor rights violations, including labor trafficking.

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