

Why Immigrant Workers Should Care About the FTAA

Immigrant workers in the United States are facing many challenges in their communities: low-paying jobs, discrimination, attacks on their rights and lack of access to basic services.

Now there's another threat to immigrant workers: **the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).**

What is the FTAA?

It's been 10 years since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) began eroding workers' rights, jobs and the environment. FTAA is NAFTA all over again—but 10 times bigger. The FTAA would include almost every country in the Americas. Most people think free trade is just about trade in goods—orange juice, tennis shoes and steel, for example—but the FTAA would cover much more and affect the lives of every worker in the hemisphere, including immigrant workers.

How will the FTAA affect immigrant workers?

It could force workers to leave their families. Despite promises for increased economic development, NAFTA has proven to be a disaster for workers in Mexico. Small farmers in Mexico cannot compete with large corporations exporting cheap food under NAFTA, so many of them have lost their land and have been forced to migrate. The FTAA, based on NAFTA, could force many more people in the Americas to leave their families and homes in search of work.

It would degrade working conditions.

Many immigrant workers have jobs with low pay, few benefits and no protections for their rights. When immigrant workers try to organize a union, they face threats of being fired or deported. NAFTA did nothing to protect the rights of immigrant workers against such abuse. NAFTA also destroyed high-quality U.S. jobs, dragging down working conditions. Employers continue to use NAFTA as a threat to move jobs to Mexico and to undermine union organizing drives. The FTAA will

destroy more jobs and speed up the race to the bottom for workers' rights.

It could increase discrimination and tension in communities where immigrants live and work. Unfortunately, as people feel less secure about the economy, they often look to blame immigrant communities for the loss of jobs or economic downturn. This increases tension between immigrant and nonimmigrant workers instead of focusing attention on the employers who exploit immigrant workers and seek to turn workers against each other. FTAA job loss will only increase these tensions.

More guest workers would enjoy fewer rights. NAFTA allowed hospitals to hire nurses on temporary visas with few protections for the workers' rights, undercutting conditions for all nurses. The FTAA could lead to even more employer exploitation of guest workers.

We need policies that protect the rights of immigrant workers. We need trade policies that create high-quality jobs for all workers and equitable economic development in all countries. Trade agreements must include enforceable protections for the fundamental rights of both immigrant and nonimmigrant workers. Workers who are undocumented and have ties to their jobs and communities should be allowed to adjust their legal status.

What can we do to stop the FTAA?

Join your brother and sister trade unionists and allies from throughout the Americas as they say **NO** to the FTAA and **YES** to good jobs, workers' rights and immigrant rights. Be sure to sign a Vote No "ballot," which local unions and labor councils will present to the trade ministers who are considering the FTAA. You also may take online action, get more information and join the Stop FTAA campaign at www.aflcio.org/stopftaa.