



SECOND TRILATERAL FORUM ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH AMERICA



The Second Trilateral Forum on Workforce Development in North America **took place on August 31, 2022**, as part of the Competitiveness Committee of the Mexico-United States and Canada Agreement (T-MEC/USMCA/CUSMA).¹

The Ministry of Economy of Mexico hosted the event which was co-organized by the United States and Canadian governments. Several Mexican agencies participated in the event, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (STPS, for its acronym in Spanish), the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labor Competencies (CONOCER, for its Spanish acronym), and the National College of Technical Professional Education (CONALEP, acronym in Spanish).

The **main objectives** of this second edition of the trilateral forum were: **1)** to share successful practices in workforce development in North America and **2)** to identify concrete actions that governments can take within the framework of the USMCA's Competitiveness Committee, to develop human capital that meets the needs of the 21st century economy.

Nearly 20 panelists and moderators from the three countries contributed with descriptions of best collaboration practices among government, academia and the private sector in Mexico, the United States, and Canada to promote workforce development. **The forum consisted of three panels focused on labor skills certification, and dual (school-enterprise) and apprenticeship programs.**

¹ <https://www.gob.mx/se/es/articulos/se-llevo-a-cabo-el-2-foro-trilateral-sobre-el-desarrollo-de-la-fuerza-laboral-en-america-del-norte-313264?idiom=es>



Opening ceremony of the Trilateral Forum

During the event's inauguration, the Minister of Economy, Tatiana Clouthier, highlighted the importance of forging alliances between institutions such as STPS, CONOCER and CONALEP to promote competitiveness and improve the well-being of workers. She emphasized that the workforce is one of the economy's main drivers and significantly impacts on the competitiveness of both companies and countries. She underscored the importance of the region's human capital having access to well-paid jobs and as a tool for the whole society to move forward.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare, Luisa María Alcalde, emphasized that the USMCA is a window of opportunity to strengthen the North American trade alliance and protect labor rights. She highlighted the results of the "Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro" (Young Building the Future) –JCF– program, which has trained more than 2.3 million young Mexicans, 60% of whom are women.

The Undersecretary of Foreign Trade, Luz María de la Mora, stressed the relevance of collaboration on this issue, which aligns with President López Obrador's economic and social development agenda to leave no one behind. She underscored that **the economically active population of the three countries exceeds 243 million people**. She explained how one of **the objectives of the Competitiveness Committee for 2022 is to identify actions for developing North American human capital competencies that could be implemented by the three countries' governments** together with stakeholders such as academia, the private sector, and civil society.

CONALEP's Head of the Academic Studies and Exchange Unit, Jorge Shield, described the institution's work, including the objective of providing trained human capital to the country's productive sector according to the industry's current and future needs. He stressed that these challenges require the collaboration of the three countries to develop talent. He proposed that the action agenda focuses on implementing projects involving regional institutions, academia, communities and government, and companies.

Rodrigo Rojas, Director General of CONOCER, pointed out the lack of trained workers and the problem this represents for companies. He said that labor certifications

seek to ensure that workers have the skills required by the market, which increases their productivity, generates greater economic growth and allows them access to better living conditions. He shared the work carried out by CONOCER within the framework of the collaboration with the Pacific Alliance.

Eric Walsh, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister for the Americas of Canada, stressed the importance of supply chains in North America and recalled that the region's competitiveness must be addressed trilaterally due to the close integration and interdependence of the three countries' economies. The Canadian officer referred to the private sector's problems in attracting skilled workers, noting that "we need a skilled workforce, just as workers need opportunities and re-skilling".

Daniel O'Brien, Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for North America, emphasized that the Forum is an excellent opportunity to learn more about each country's workforce development systems and highlight best practices. He noted that a mutual understanding of labor frameworks is sought to close gaps between the demands of industry and the skills of workers to boost competitiveness. He also highlighted the need for greater collaboration between federal and state governments, businesses, civil organizations and local leaders to satisfy the human capital regional needs.





1. Dialogue between Mexican, United States and Canadian labor competency certifications authorities.

On behalf of Mexico, CONOCER officials and members of the Competency Management Committees of the pharmaceutical and automotive sectors shared how labor competency certifications operate through the national system based on the definition of competency standards.

They mentioned the significance of establishing and maintaining a very close relationship with institutions that operate the competency certification system. They exemplified that through certificates in the medical field, they can develop new promotion schemes for new drugs and medical devices.

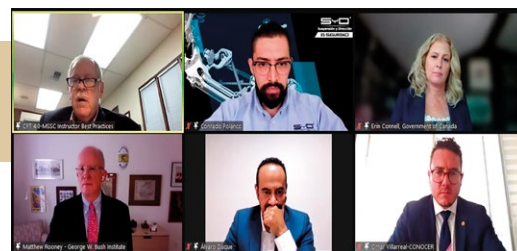
Regarding the automotive industry, the Mexican representatives recommended expanding information exchanges between the industry and educational institutions. They commented that certificates of labor competencies help close this gap and also in the professionalization of employees. This results in an increase in added value and the growth in Mexico's skilled labor force, making the country more competitive.

The representative of the U.S. Manufacturing Skills Standards Council expressed that the three countries have different labor policies, but they must work together with the participation of governments, the private sector and academia to achieve a convergence on labor issues. He reiterated that there is a need for competency standards

to be focused on the 4.0 Industry and to develop a vision for those that will be generated in the future.

The director of the Ministry of Employment and Social Development of Canada described the foreign certificate recognition program implemented by her government, which considers the incorporation of immigrants into the labor force. She explained that migration policies had been a fundamental pillar of the Canadian economy thanks to the increase in the country's human capital.

The Canadian official explained that Canada's decentralized system of government allows each province to determine its own regulatory frameworks for certifications. She pointed out that one of Canada's main certifications is the Red Seal program, which includes 54 trades which are standardized and recognized throughout the country. They have also specialized programs in certain industries, which seek to attract more women and other underrepresented groups into economic activity.



2. The dual education model in North America

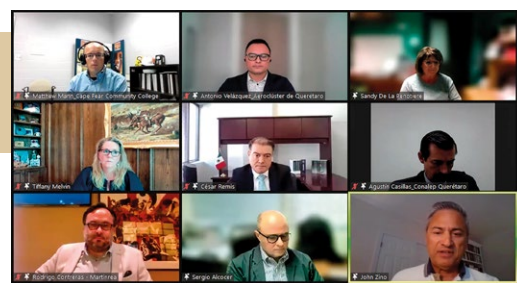
At the top of the panel, the Ministry of Economy presented the **Mexican Talent Dashboard**, a tool that geo-references student enrollment according to fields of study to identify areas of opportunity to strengthen regional competitiveness.

Tiffany Melvin, president of the NASCO² emphasized that in order to relocate value chains in North America, it is essential to work on workforce training in a trilateral manner, developing common standards.

Representatives from educational institutions and industry from the three countries shared their best practices regarding the implementation of the dual model that combines school-based education with

in-company training. They referred to the shortage of skilled workforce in strategic industries, the importance of collaboration between governments, businesses, and educational institutions, as well as the need to enable the mobility of the region's talent.

The general director of CONALEP Querétaro, Agustín Casillas, highlighted companies' role in the dual program and the coordination they must have with educational



² <https://www.nasconetwork.com/>



entities since this model is 70% theoretical and 30% practical, which benefits both the student and the company. The general director of Queretaro's Airspace cluster, José Antonio Velázquez Solís, mentioned the motivations that led them to participate in the dual model and its financing, as well as the process they have carried out with the educational institutions. Both evaluated the dual program as very successful.

Representatives of Cape Fear Community College, GE-Hitachi Nuclear Energy, Martinrea and Saint Clair College shared successful on-the-job training experiences in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

3. Models of apprenticeship programs or internships in specific sectors: Automotive and Pharmaceutical.

The STPS explained that the *Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro* (JCF) program is being implemented in conjunction with the Sembrando Vidas program in Central America in order to reduce migration. Also, the Mexican Association of Automotive Distributors indicated the benefits for participating companies as JCF's training centers.

The Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education noted that their on-the-job training program is very successful and allows their workers to increase their incomes due to increased job skills and competencies.

The representative of the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum mentioned that they want people from underrepresented groups to be included in these collaborative programs, noting that this requires cultural and mindset changes inside companies.

The Nova Scotia Automotive Sector Council presented its summer apprenticeship program called "Test Drive," which connects young people with employers and community colleges in the province. They suggested working on Industry 4.0 future technologies, primarily in the automotive sector in North America.



Continuous trilateral effort

As a follow-up to the commitments under the USMCA's Competitiveness Committee, the **third Trilateral Forum** on North American Workforce Development will take place **in Winnipeg, Canada, on October 19, 2022.**



BROWSE

Video of the First Trilateral Forum on Workforce Development in North American, held in Dallas, Texas, in December 2021:

<https://www.bushcenter.org/exhibits-and-events/events/2021/12/usmca-and-workforce-development.html>

Video of the opening ceremony of the Second Trilateral Forum on Workforce Development in North American, held in Mexico City, in September 2022:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tUJfYSmEYM>