



International
Labour
Organization

► **A forest of opportunities**

Living and working conditions
in Argentina's forestry sector

Contributions for designing and developing
actions to promote decent work



Introduction



Evidence-based initiatives tend to be more effective and efficient because they are guided by precise and pertinent information when addressing certain phenomena. Of course, they include public policies and other actions that can be developed by the tripartite representatives to address decent work challenges in specific sectors.

The Rapid Sector Appraisal conducted in the forestry chain in Argentina is focused on the provinces of Misiones and Corrientes. It is a research and knowledge production exercise aimed at identifying the gaps and opportunities to implement sustainable practices with a strong impact to address possible violations of fundamental principles and rights at work.

The advancement and scope of decent work in different stages of the forestry chain are favoured when knowledge derived from research is oriented to mobilize key stakeholders —either public or private—, and taken into consideration to develop, adjust or update public policies, programmes, and projects.

Companies' representatives, forest producers, sectoral trade unions, and representatives of different national, provincial, and local government agencies were convened to on-the-ground meetings which were part of the joint work carried out with different stakeholders of the forestry chain. Those meetings turned out to be strategic to understand the potentialities and challenges in forestry, and to inform the stakeholders about actions for remediation and for reducing the risks of violations of labour rights.

Below, we will systematically present a series of practical guidelines for the short, mid, and long term that, if properly articulated, can provide a concrete response to the gaps of decent work in the forestry sector.

* Cover photograph: General Directorate of Programs, Sectoral and Special Projects (DIPROSE) Ministry of Economy.

Work in the forestry sector: characteristics and main deficits

Different stakeholders —from business, government, and workers— acknowledge the general progress made by the sector in labour issues. Numerous testimonies show a sustained trend towards formalization, workers' registration and a gradual improvement in working and living conditions in forest camps. However, there are still critical points and opportunities for improvement along the value chain.

Employment in the sector can be characterised as highly informal and with low job security, at the global and at the local level. This is evidenced by practices such as non-registration, piece-work payments, workers paying for their own travel, food and accommodation, lack of social protection, negative health impacts, among others.

In particular, these situations are more prevalent in certain segments of resin extraction, in the exploitation of native forests and in outsourced activities in planted forests.

The fieldwork made it possible to map at least five problem areas linked to decent work gaps and signs of labour exploitation in the sector¹:

- Occupational safety and health.
- Labour relations and freedom of association.
- Transfers of workers between provinces and/or distant locations.
- Working and living conditions in the forest.
- Adolescent work.

It was difficult, from a statistical point of view, to identify situations of forced labour according to the ILO's technical specifications². Of the three elements to be taken into account in identifying these situations - the existence of a profit, the existence of a threat and involuntariness - the last is the most difficult to verify.

However, in some cases observed in the native forest and resin sectors, as well as in certain outsourced links of the implanted forest, the combination of highly inaccessible workplaces, extreme dependence on the employer for the provision of food and supplies, and serious non-compliance with agreements on working conditions, storage and pay, could, from a statistical point of view, be indicative of labour exploitation or forced labour.

¹ For more details, consult "A forest of opportunities. Living and working conditions in Argentina's forestry sector"

² Consult the [Guidelines concerning the measurement of forced labour](#).

Recommendations

A systemic approach outlining the need to articulate different government sectors should be used to address the policy agenda for preventing and combating labour exploitation. These actions —carried out in specific territories— require multi-level coordination at the national, provincial and local levels.

This systemic approach involves working along the value chain, taking into account the different productive activities, their links and different stakeholders. The roundtables, clusters or associations that make up the forestry sector are valid working bodies for addressing different issues. The institutionalisation of social dialogue, with the participation of government, employers' and workers' organisations is essential to reach sustainable agreements to promote decent work.

The suggestions for public policies were grouped following their seasonality and focus so that the recommendations can be implemented with a higher effectiveness potential.

The long-term recommendations are essential because they address the structural causes of the problems detected. On the other hand, these recommendations also include more operational ideas for the short term with a focus on concrete actions aimed at building a political and institutional framework that may favour changes with sustainable impacts.

Furthermore, intelligent practices are highlighted; they were identified through a survey among local tripartite stakeholders. They are initiatives with the potential to be reproduced and adapted to other contexts and territories, and to trigger meaningful changes in a short period of time and in a cost-efficient manner.



Strategic recommendation

Operational activities

Intelligent practices

Impact on the business environment and the public policies



Policies for productive articulation

All the companies can reap the advantages of their geographical closeness and productive specialization. These agglomerates benefit from the dissemination of technologies, knowledge, human resource training, exchanges of services or equipment. When deliberate or planned cooperation actions are added to the agglomeration externalities of this special sector, they result

► Promoting sectoral social dialogue instances at the provincial and/or regional level can be of use to address very urgent production and labour issues. There is an inter-institutional roundtable in Misiones that focuses on the forestry sector, and there is demand in Corrientes to set up a similar instance. Such spaces for dialogue may be more dynamic if based on an institutional generosity logics where acknowledging

► Industrial and technological parks, as the ones in Corrientes and Misiones, are tangible examples of the productive articulation and social dialogue that the geographical concentration of business clusters can facilitate. Those parks facilitate knowledge management and build the necessary empathy skills that can foster collaboration between companies, government institutions, the academia and NGOs linked to the forestry sector.

► Productive articulation programmes, such as programmes to develop local clusters or agglomerates, industrial parks and business networks enable a better performance of small and mid-size companies (SMEs) and of their environment (Ferraro & Gatto 2010).
► The public-private articulation emerging in those spaces favours social dialogue instances and the implementation of actions to promote decent work.

Strategic recommendation	Operational activities	Intelligent practices	Impact on the business environment and the public policies
in collective efficiency processes. Current articulation spaces and tools of the forestry sector, as well as its potential for growth in the coming years, create an enabling environment to foster this strategic approach.	gains of scale, productivity, efficiency, among others, end up favouring the entire sector. They can also be used to identify less complex administrative and operational changes with a similar impact; for instance, joint training activities to exchange knowledge and experiences. Other sectoral social dialogue and exchange instances were identified in the region, not as formal as the inter-institutional roundtables, but that can also qualify processes to manage information, including trade unions, business coalitions, etc. In Misiones, it is important to differentiate the interventions/solutions considering the different scales of producers present in the activity. Misiones is a province that features a large number of small and mid-size producers with a diversified production where forestry is included.		► An increased adaptability of public policies based on production characteristics may lead to a more efficient State action. The same may be applicable to the private sector. A better knowledge of the characteristics and needs of the companies and organizations in the forestry sector may result in activities specifically devised for each segment.



Good forest management practices

Good forest management practices are recommendations, measures or practices used to prevent or reduce any negative environmental impact from productive activities carried out in the forest and to ensure the sustainability of forest resources. Such practices are economically and technically feasible, and often include social and labour requirements. PEFC and FSC are international certifications that promote sustainable forest management; they identify the origin of forest resources and give them traceability. While usually large companies get certified, there are increasing efforts to get SMEs also certified.	► Certification processes are long and expensive, and thus difficult for small companies. However, large companies may help their suppliers and SMEs by transferring efficient technologies for forest management. Even without any certification, these practices, when adopted by SMEs, may result in significant gains for the entire forestry sector, even in terms of its image and positioning in global markets.	► A viable alternative is the group certification programme fostered by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) - CERFOAR and the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries since it reduces certification costs. ► The Association of Forest Producers, Industrials and Traders of Misiones and the North of Corrientes (<i>Asociación de Productores, Industriales y Comerciantes Forestales de Misiones y Norte de Corrientes</i>, APICOFOM) is carrying out some support activities for its members. Those initiatives can be reproduced and extended to other associations and organizations in the forestry sector. APICOFOM	► As their name suggests, these management practices favour an increased efficiency and productivity, and enable a better management of natural resources, which is key for the sustainable development of the forestry sector. ► Good practices are fundamental to help the forestry sector gain a positive position in world trade. A better forest management indirectly protects workers from accidents, occupational diseases, and therefore, leads to high productivity levels.
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Strategic recommendation	Operational activities	Intelligent practices	Impact on the business environment and the public policies
		offers training and technical support at no cost; the courses are on administrative and production processes linked to an effective forest management. Besides, consultancy services are provided to companies who wish to be granted a forest management, quality of forest management, and chain of custody certification.	



Co-responsibility union agreements (CCG)

The initiatives aimed at improving formalisation result from a combination of productive and labour development policies that have a positive impact on guaranteeing human and labour rights, as well as on access to social protection systems. According to the ILO (2021), certain conditions force SMEs to be in total or partial informality: low productivity, the complexity of the regulatory framework, perceiving that formalisation does not result in benefits, little control and failure to enforce sanctions. They are structural issues that require changing the regulatory frameworks and public measures, as well as reorganizing and restructuring the State administrative and productive processes, all elements on which work is needed. The existing inter-institutional roundtables and coalitions may articulate strategic measures with those changes in mind.	► Union agreements are based on social dialogue; participating parties are the government, business and labour organisations. All tripartite agents mentioned that these agreements are an initiative with positive impact on the sector. Furthermore, the negotiations that lead to the CCGs are a win-win situation for businessmen, workers and the government. They indirectly build institutional ties among the forestry sector organisations and set the basis to negotiate more complex and conflictive issues. ► It is important to strengthen these agreements and ensure their correct implementation to take advantage of the positive consensus they have on every link and actor of the production chain.	► The CCGs are relatively new social dialogue and management tools; their implementation started in mid-2015. As typical tools for the rural sector, these agreements are very diverse, which favours the emergence of innovations and comparative analysis. Look for exchanges with other sectors and organisations with more experience in the development of CCGs; conducting specific research on this instrument processes and results may clarify doubts and reduce obstacles for a widespread use of these agreements.	The rural sector features the higher concentration of informality, mainly in seasonal or non-permanent activities, usually linked to the harvest. The CCGs facilitate rural workers' registration and ensure social security contributions. It is an alternative to the General Social Security Contributions regime: the amount of contributions is replaced by a fee based on what has been effectively harvested, not on wages (ILO 2017.)
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Strategic recommendation

Operational activities

Intelligent practices

Impact on the business environment and the public policies



Training and certification of skills

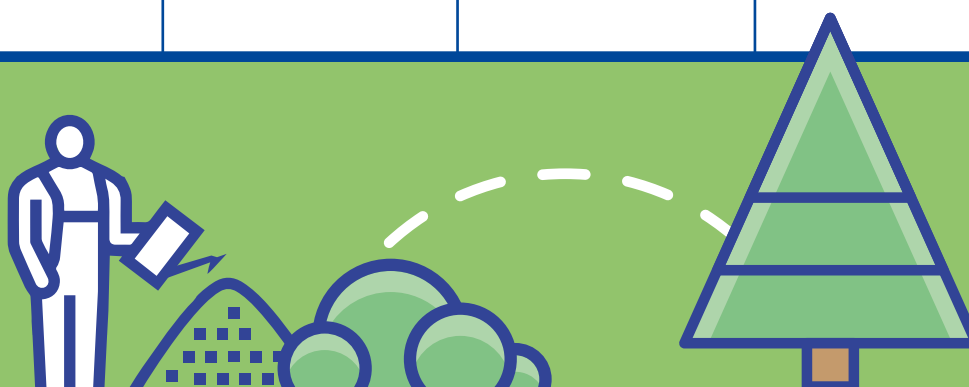
These processes usually require long periods of negotiation and development. On the other hand, existing social dialogue and business articulation instances may facilitate greater effectiveness of this type of activities.

► The assessment review has highlighted the need to intensify training on technical skills and occupations linked to forestry. In the short term, mapping the professional training gaps and needs based on the assessment of local production may be a good start for any training programme.

► Involving the academia and research centers that focus on the forestry sector in the social dialogue may ensure a better articulation of knowledge producers and consumers or, in other words, ensure that the knowledge produced and disseminated is in line with the needs of the labour market in the forestry sector. This will also facilitate disseminating innovations usually identified and discussed only by the academia.

► Another intelligent practice will be the promotion of exchanges and integration of companies that may have joint and complementary training processes. Those exchanges may be organized by industrial parks, sectoral associations or even trade unions.

Training and education policies are essential to improve employability. Processes such as competences certifications—with the involvement of the State, employers and workers' organisations—are an efficient tool to foster the development of skills required by productive activities. These processes also favour the introduction of good practices and reduce the incidence of accidents in the workplace; they have an indirect impact on productivity and performance because they result in lesser costs derived from accidents and absences.



► Actions on decent work gaps and violations of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRWs)

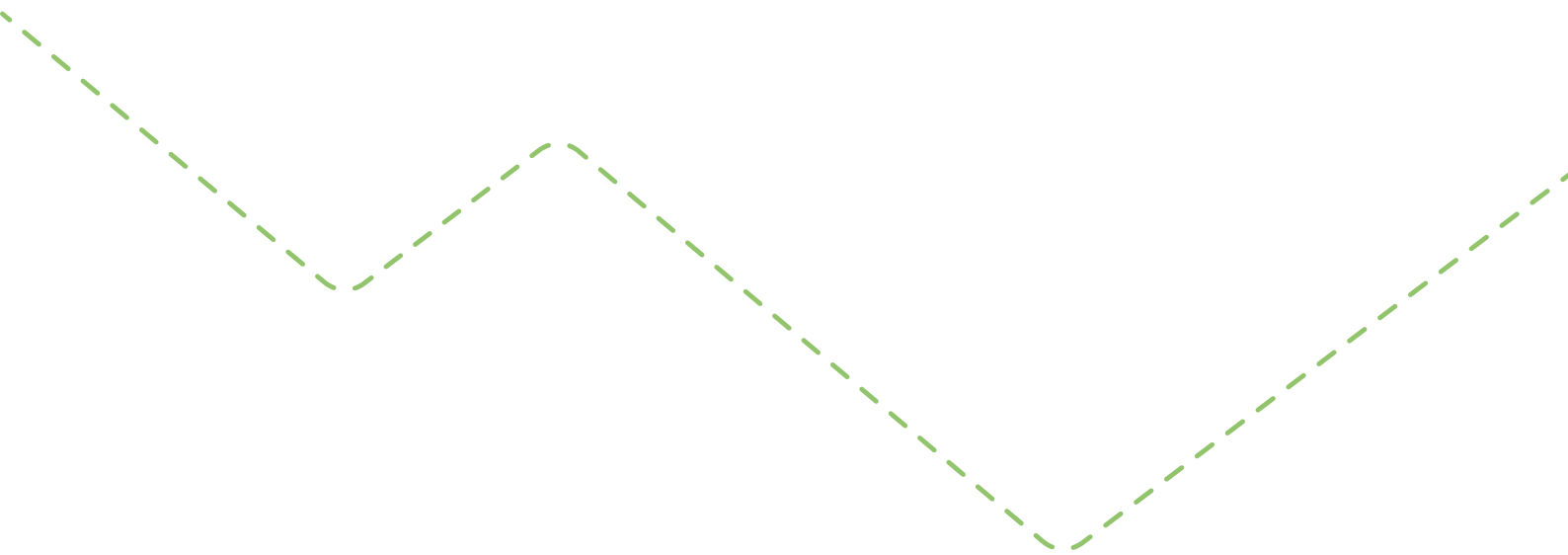
Having each and every worker enjoy their Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRWs) is an ethical goal that impacts on the economy and on production. Ensuring FPRWs is a complex task that requires integrated efforts made by large sectors. The report “Ending child labour, forced labour and human trafficking in global supply chains” (ILO, OECD, OIM, and UNICEF, 2019) describes key areas where governments and companies can make a difference, together with social partners and other essential stakeholders.

Governments should address the public governance gaps and the socio-economic pressures that lead to non-performance and that make people vulnerable to violations of the fundamental rights at work. Governments should also use their regulatory authority and their central role in the economy to guarantee that companies respect human rights in their operations and supply chains, enforcing labour laws and conducting labour inspections.

Companies need an all-inclusive, more preventive approach to their value chains, focusing on due diligence, prioritizing according to their specific activity; integrating risk management and corporate decision making based on social dialogue and the meaningful involvement of their stakeholders, including their men and women workers.

There is need of multiple stakeholders' associations with inclusive commercial approaches in their local efforts to address fundamental causes; also wider platforms to enable collaboration, focus efforts and share experiences. The important role of the tripartite social dialogue is thus highlighted, in any activity or theme.

Below, a table that summarizes a number of recommendations, activities and practices to address decent work gaps in the forestry sector. At the same time, their impact on other stakeholders is identified as well as on the promotion of the activity.





Strategic recommendation	Operational activities	Intelligent practices	Impact on the business environment and the public policies
 Coordination and general aspects of public policies			
Develop information and databases about the problem in specific territories, fostering dialogue among workers, governments and companies.	► Rely on representative and updated information on the sector: number of workers, occupation types, registration level, transfers (origin and destination), contractors, etc. ► Facilitate data exchanges between the different departments of the national and provincial administrations, even between provincial departments. ► Assess the use of satellite information to be better informed of production dynamics and the development of different productive activities.	► Cross-referring existing data, georeferencing them and a better organized information may have immediate effects and increase the sectoral knowledge base on the risks associated with human and labour rights violations. This type of intelligent practice is easily adapted and does not require much time or money. The School of Forest Sciences may be an important partner in this process. ► Analyze the reproducibility of the Misiones <i>Tarefero</i>* Information System (sitami.com.ar), which features a registry of seasonal workers and service providers. This system provides better information and fosters accountability and transparency, two essential elements of an efficient and effective business environment. *Name given in Misiones to yerba mate hand pickers.	► Generating knowledge to inform the decision-making processes expands the information base in the entire sector. ► In the short term, decisions are based on evidences, which results in efficiency and effectiveness. ► In the mid-term, an evidence-based management culture arises, embedding the sector in the information economy. ► In the long term, more complex information systems can emerge and foster the integration and dissemination of different technologies. More and better information translated in better trained workers.
Interventions and in-depth work in the territories should be coordinated with the pertinent agencies through joint operations while reinforcing the work with the justice system, ensuring an adequate dissemination in the media of the critical situations found.	► Articulation between the areas dedicated to preserve the resource, its traceability and those responsible for labour inspections and/or the promotion of rights at work. ► Concerning inspections follow-up, workers' organisations suggest improving the access to the relevant files. ► Differential approach considering the heterogeneity inside the forestry sector. For instance, in Misiones the implanted forest along Route 12 and		Environmental control officials and labour inspectors usually work in the same areas; there is a correlation between environmental crimes and the violation of human and labour rights. The exchange of information, training activities and joint operations may yield profits at scale and make the State actions more efficient.

Strategic recommendation	Operational activities	Intelligent practices	Impact on the business environment and the public policies
	Route 14 feature highest levels of informality and configurations of lower productivity and scale—even in the first transformation stage.		
Strengthening the existing tripartite inter-institutional coordination spaces for the development of the activity, as well as the inter-institutional roundtables that combat trafficking in human beings.	► Both spaces are presented as platforms to promote better living and working conditions in the forestry sector. ► Focus on the management and communication tools used in these spaces, to give them more dynamism and to prioritize informed decisions.	► Promote inter provincial exchanges. The forestry sector is not the only one structured in neighbouring territories; goods and services are exchanged and migrant workers go from one province to the other.	► Business activities and State actions are processes based on complex and thorough governance schemes. The existence of tripartite spaces of social dialogue results, in the short term, in a better understanding of the needs and interests of every segment involved. ► In the mid-term, institutional empathy and generosity increase; each segment gets to understand the other better, building more trust and increasing the efficacy of negotiation processes because priority is given to the elements that raise more consensus. ► In the long term, more social dialogue means more efficiency and a longer reach of decision-making processes, less bureaucracy, profits at scale, more democracy, more transparency.
Support the initiatives with awareness campaigns, programmes, and actions on workers' rights.	► It would be important to increase the knowledge and use of the 145 Line (a free phone line to get information, request assistance and denounce cases of human trafficking). ► Opportunity to advance training on labour exploitation indicators in companies, sectoral associations and chambers, and forest professionals.	► In other rural production chains, agriculture experts get training to identify any possible violations of human and labour rights. ► Besides identifying possible risks, this process can select the production zones or agents that need more training and awareness. ► Forest engineers and technicians may replicate it in the forest production process, generating substantial improvements in the sectoral risk management.	► It would increase the efficacy of complaints and labour inspections; it would make companies have a deeper knowledge and tighter control of their value chains, managing risks more efficiently.

Strategic recommendation	Operational activities	Intelligent practices	Impact on the business environment and the public policies
 Safe and healthy working environment			
Explore technological alternatives associated with work and personal protection elements, housing, etc. that are specific to the forestry sector. This variable would facilitate a wider presence of women workers.	► Increased training, awareness campaigns and inspections relative to personal protective equipment and work tools (PPE.) ► Beyond detecting the gaps in the availability and use of PPE, these activities can also pinpoint the problems derived from inadequate work tools, lack of training and PPE use, and the inadequacy of available PPE in forest environments. It would be important to develop skills at senior management and management levels. ► Accidents on the way to and from work are an important aspect to consider. Fortunately, accidents currently show a decreasing trend. Poor rural roads conditions can often prevent access to safer vehicles for workers transfers. Investment in infrastructure would have a very positive impact on OSH.	► Production chain stakeholders, due to their knowledge of the territory, may help government identify the hardest-to-reach locations as those with the highest accident rate.	► Safe and healthy working environments drive economic growth and productivity. ► Workers are more productive if they are safe and healthy. ► Good logistics, roads and access routes are a structuring element of any productive activity, more so in timber extraction and transportation of wood.

 Children and Adolescents' Labour			
Unprotected adolescent work (children aged 16 and 17) and low child labour (children aged 14 and 15). In general, these children and adolescents go to work accompanied by some family members. The social and economic context forces them to work to help their families, which was aggravated further by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to conduct a far-reaching analysis of the social context in every region and assess every case to find proper, specific solutions.	► The recommendation is to follow up those adolescents and their families to ensure compliance with the special conditions provided in the law for the protection of adolescent workers (Law 26061.) There should be an explicit, free and informed authorization given by the parents or tutors, and respect for the right to study, to work a limited number of hours in safe working conditions, and full compliance with restrictions imposed on dangerous work described in Order 1117/16.	► Professionals working in forestry could be trained to identify danger areas and tasks where child and adolescent work is most probable to be found. Child and unprotected adolescent work exists in different value chains in the territories where forestry activities are carried out. It is of particular interest to plan joint activities including more than one value chain to prevent child labour from migrating from one activity to another, resulting in losses for companies and society as a whole.	► Combating child labour is not only the ethical thing to do but also important to preserve the future of any society. Boys and girls with access to proper development opportunities become more productive adults; they contribute more to society and to the economy. ► Tackling child labour is good for companies. Child labour facilitates almost all the other problems mentioned in this section. Child labour victims, for instance, are more at risk of accidents.

Strategic recommendation	Operational activities	Intelligent practices	Impact on the business environment and the public policies
 Discrimination in the workplace			
It is important to foster organizational and technical initiatives to contribute to the inclusion of more women in the forestry sector. Consider any possible scenario derived from this larger female presence in traditionally male environments.	► Increase awareness campaigns on gender equality and the relevance of women in the forestry sector. ► Explore alternatives to attain a broader intervention and/or integration of indigenous communities and population in the forestry sector. Their participation would impact on the supplier's chain.	► Developing materials and training specific for the forestry sector, such as the Good Labour Practices Guide to Promote the Inclusion of Women in the Agroindustrial Sector of the Argentinean Forestry Association (<i>Asociación Forestal Argentina</i>, AFOA). An increasing participation of women in senior management positions in organizations of the forestry sector, such as AFOA and APEFIC, local organizations such as AMAC and APICOFOM, in Misiones and the north of Corrientes.	► Women working in the forestry sector usually have positions with a higher value added, with a greater use of technology. Fostering gender equality becomes an opportunity to promote decent work, since women participation involves higher professional qualification, more productivity and higher value added.

 Labour relations and freedom of association			
Review the obstacles that prevent workers' registration and foster literacy and other programmes to certify workers' competences. The testimonies gathered highlighted workers' fear to lose social benefits, which make them reluctant to accept registration.	► Support and increase the different rural literacy programmes, and explore other experiences that may benefit workers in the region. ► Review the social benefits regulations — for instance the feeding programme called <i>Tarjeta Alimentar</i>— and the registration of seasonal workers. ► Explore the regulatory framework provided by the National Programme for the Socio-Productive Inclusion and Local Development (<i>Programa Nacional de Inclusión Socioproductiva y Desarrollo Local "Potenciar Trabajo"</i>) that provides options to integrate seasonal workers into formal registration categories. ► Strengthen the proper identification and adequate actions on pseudo cooperatives that actually enable the irregular hiring of some segments of workers.	► Relevance of producers and industrial associations follow up the hiring, working and forest accommodation conditions provided by forestry services providers.	► Address the underlying causes of informality and barriers that prevent registration in the formal economy. ► Eliminate the negative aspects of informality while looking after opportunities and companies' capacities; foster the protection and inclusion of workers and economic units in informality to formal working conditions. All in all will contribute to decent work in a sustainable manner.

Strategic recommendation

Operational activities

Intelligent practices

Impact on the business environment and the public policies



Working environment, transport and camps

Living and working conditions showed grave violations of rights. Unsafe transport, extremely precarious living conditions in the camps and isolation require interventions to improve living and working conditions.

- Increase control on unsafe vehicles that are not appropriate to transport workers; look for economically feasible alternatives for each situation.
- Guarantee adequate housing in the forest camps: proper shelter, bathroom, hygiene, kitchen, storage space, and access to safe water.
- Make commitments with the security forces to control the vehicles and the alternative roads forest that workers usually ride under extremely precarious conditions.
- Have specific information on the locations workers come from and go to, for follow-up purposes.
- Increase knowledge on workers' recruiting processes in their locations of origin.

- Considering the isolation present in many cases, it is essential to guarantee that workers can go to proper facilities in emergency situations. This can be achieved with an adequate Internet and cell phones connectivity, and also using spot devices, mid and long-range devices and satellite phones.
- Disseminate the solutions that companies have found to ensure proper living conditions in the forest camps, and their implementation strategies in smaller units.
- Explore the possibility of developing wood housing for seasonal workers in the forest. The Misiones housing plan for the forestry sector may be adapted.

- Ensure proper safety and health conditions in the workplace and transfer vehicles to significantly reduce the risk of accidents and economic losses. This will improve and develop the activity as a whole.



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