

Mexico runs out of death certificates with 122,765 “excess deaths” reported during pandemic

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On Saturday, the Mexican government reported that there have been at least 122,765 “excess deaths” between mid-March and August 1.

The “excess death” count, representing the increase in the overall number of deaths in a given country over the historical average number of deaths during the same period, serves to expose the gross underreporting of COVID-19 deaths, not only in Mexico, but in countries across the globe. Epidemiologists agree that estimating excess deaths is the best way to assess the impact of the pandemic.

Mexico has reported some 69,095 confirmed COVID-19 deaths and 629,409 cases. The country has the world’s fourth highest death toll, trailing India (75,062 deaths), Brazil (128,694 deaths), and the United States, which ranks first, with 194,367 deaths.

Given that at least 600 people are dying on a daily basis, the excess deaths estimated up to August 1 would place Mexico’s real death toll today ahead of the officially recorded toll in Brazil and near that of the United States.

Between 15 to 20 days ago, many states began running out of death certificates. This has particularly been the case in impoverished and working class communities in the State of Mexico—the most populous state—as well as in Mexico City and Baja California, according to Deputy Health Minister Hugo López-Gatell, who leads the government’s pandemic response.

Despite the rapid spread of the deadly virus, the majority of Mexico’s population has not been able to stop working. While many workers fear becoming infected, the catchphrase for the poor has become that their choice is to “die of COVID or die of hunger.” Half of Mexico’s 127 million residents do not earn enough to meet their basic needs, and one in five suffers from hunger. Over half of Mexico’s children live in poverty, and a United Nations

study found that 14 percent of children suffer from stunted growth as a result of malnutrition.

A study by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) found that at least 16 million more people will fall into extreme poverty. According to the UNAM, the Mexican government needs to spend 15 billion pesos (about \$670 million) per month to ensure the provision of the basic food basket for the 32 million people in extreme poverty in the coming months.

Compounding the problem, the Mexican population receives little to no state relief in the form of unemployment compensation or social assistance in a country where at least 58 percent of the Mexican working class relies on the informal economy, which comprises 30 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). Another 25 percent of Mexico’s GDP is derived from the vast maquiladora industry run largely by multinational corporations on the US-Mexican border. This industrial sector remained open during the pandemic, due to pressure from international finance capital, particularly within the US.

Sergio Moctezuma, the state labor secretary for Baja California said that in the state, “The vast majority of infected people are factory workers.” In mid-May the health secretary of Northern Baja California announced that, at the time, 83 percent of official deaths (432 of 519) were maquiladora workers, in an industry where the majority of workers are between the ages of 25 and 45.

The vast degree of social inequality in Mexico, involving poor living conditions and public infrastructure for masses of the population, means that the virus has found ideal conditions for its spread. An April 2020 report by the World Bank found that 51.2 million people are considered at or below the poverty line. The report adds that “inequality in Mexico ... is among the highest in

OECD countries.”

Additionally, 6.2 percent of the population, or some 1.8 million people, have “no access to limited standard sanitation.” This same condition affects an estimated 35 percent of the world’s population or some 2.5 billion people, according to the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) has done nothing to prevent the virus’s devastating toll on the working class and the poor of Mexico.

His government, moreover, has agreed to using the Mexican population as guinea pigs for pharmaceutical companies in the US, Russia and China to test their vaccines on a massive scale. While not necessarily protecting the Mexican population from the virus and potentially causing harmful effects, AMLO hopes to use these trials to suppress popular concerns as the coronavirus spreads out of control.

The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) announced in a statement this week that it had reached a deal with Landsteiner Scientific and the AMLO administration to distribute 32 million doses of its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine in November. “Deliveries are expected to start in November 2020 subject to approval by Mexico’s regulators,” according to the RDIF representative. Mexico has also committed to participating in late-stage clinical trials for vaccines developed by US company Johnson & Johnson and two Chinese companies.

Last month, AMLO announced in a disingenuous fashion that Mexico’s poor would receive equal access to health care and free vaccines, stating that “All the citizens will have access to the vaccine, and there should be no concern for poor people as they will be vaccinated with the same urgency. They will not be the last people to receive it.”

While AMLO paints a fantasy world where the poor have equal access to health care, the reality on the ground is that tens of thousands of poor are dying because they cannot afford to stay home from work or social distance, and lack access to basic sanitation. According to data by the IMF, Mexico has only spent 0.2 percent of its GDP in 2020 to address the pandemic, while other nations have dedicated 2.1 percent of their GDP on average.

According to public records of Mexico’s epidemiological oversight database, in at least 75 percent of Mexico’s coronavirus deaths, amounting to 51,924 people, the patients never received any treatment with a ventilator before they died or any form of intensive care treatment, which could have saved their lives.

The catastrophic COVID-19 health crisis has demonstrated the criminal negligence and incompetence of the Mexican bourgeoisie. According to the OECD, Mexico occupies the last place in implementing large-scale testing. On average, 0.4 tests are done per thousand people in Mexico, while the other 36 OECD member nations have carried out on average 22.9 tests per thousand inhabitants.

The large death toll has also had a devastating effect on frontline workers. Amnesty International reported last week that Mexico has the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths among medical personnel in the world. A total of 1,410 health care workers have died and 104,590 have tested positive. *El Financiero* reported that there have been more than 100 street protests by health care workers from various institutions, demanding safe working conditions to face the pandemic.

AMLO and his Morena party came to power employing populist phraseology to cast themselves as the much needed “change” for Mexico. However, his government is the continuation of the longstanding reactionary rule of the Mexican national bourgeoisie, oriented to protecting its class interests and those of the transnational corporations.

Along with every government worldwide, the Morena administration has made clear its indifference to the deaths of tens of thousands of workers that have resulted from its pro-capitalist policies. It is essential that, as a response, the working class unites on an international basis to fight for socialism.



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