The Delmarva Peninsula, which includes parts of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia, is home to more than 19,000 workers employed in the region’s poultry, seafood, and meat processing plants. Over 50% of frontline meatpacking workers are migrant or immigrant workers.

Language barriers, limited legal protections, and a pervasive fear of retaliation exacerbate protein processing workers’ vulnerability to occupational health and safety hazards in a notoriously high-risk industry, particularly during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Due to crowded working conditions and lack of access to resources like PPE, workers contracted COVID-19 at disproportionate rates.

The Protein Processing Worker Project: 2020-2021

Through a 5-year cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc. (CDM or Center for Migrant Rights) launched the Protein Processing Worker Project (PPP) to address the disproportionate toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on processing workers and their communities, focusing on Delmarva during the project’s demonstration phase from October 2020 - September 2021. To implement the project’s diverse activities, CDM convenes a coalition of community-based partners who are deeply connected with immigrant and migrant workers and their communities.

The project’s overarching goals include:

Control the spread of infectious diseases among frontline protein processing workers. Support workers in defending their rights to health and safety at work. Through feedback and data analysis, share learnings to inform CDC guidance, best practices, and project adaptation.

The Protein Processing Worker Project was renewed for a second year with increased funding, allowing the coalition to expand to Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. During the project’s expansion, we expect to reach at least 48,000 workers and hundreds of thousands more online.
In the spring of 2021, project partners surveyed 288 workers in the meat, poultry, and seafood industries. The assessment collected data on working conditions, COVID-19 exposure, attitudes towards vaccination, and employer-provided PPE and training on preventing the spread of disease in the workplace. The survey findings demonstrated that speakers of other languages, immigrants, and non-unionized workers were less likely to have access to PPE, more likely to have experienced possible violations of workplace rights, and less likely to be vaccinated. These results reflect the particular vulnerabilities of many workers in this industry. Further details can be found in CDM’s report, *Unpacking the Facts*.

Visits to CDM’s worker-facing platforms like Contratados.org portal and social media channels exceeded 100,000 visits per month. Through these platforms, we disseminated more than 160 online multimedia resources in Spanish, Mixtec, Haitian Creole, and English.

In summer 2021, the coalition launched the Health Within our Reach campaign, bringing a new, multilingual, multicultural face to our communications efforts.

Leveraging digital media tools
- Visits to CDM’s worker-facing platforms like Contratados.org portal and social media channels exceeded 100,000 visits per month. Through these platforms, we disseminated more than 160 online multimedia resources in Spanish, Mixtec, Haitian Creole, and English.
- In summer 2021, the coalition launched the Health Within our Reach campaign, bringing a new, multilingual, multicultural face to our communications efforts.

Community Outreach
- Our efforts supported more than 60 in-person community events, sharing information and resources with more than 20,000 workers and their family members and distributing more than 16,000 print materials with culturally and linguistically relevant health and workers’ rights information.

Worker advisory committee
- CDM engaged a dozen protein processing workers to serve on a Worker Advisory Committee as expert consultants. These workers represent all three states and have decades of combined experience working in the seafood, poultry, and meat processing industries. The group provided crucial insights into their experiences related to workplace health and safety, vaccine confidence and access, and paid sick leave.

Training
- Virtual “Know Your Rights” training modules were created in collaboration with legal, medical, and labor rights experts in response to workers’ priorities. Sessions conducted through Facebook Live reached over 11,000 viewers.

Intake bot

Informing public guidance
- CDM shares data and feedback with key stakeholders, such as the CDC and local health departments, to ensure that their guidance and resources reflect workers’ priorities and concerns.