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Public Affairs Chatter

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Lights, Camera, Regulation: Mexico Rewrites the Audiovisual Rulebook

The presentation of Mexico's new Federal Film and Audiovisual Law, along with reforms to labor and copyright law to address AI voice replication, marks a substantive regulatory shift that goes beyond a symbolic cultural gesture. Framed by President Sheinbaum as a measure to promote national production and protect creative workers, the package combines market intervention, labor safeguards and tax incentives. The parallel publication of a 30% ISR tax credit for qualifying productions reinforces that this is as much about industrial policy as cultural promotion.

This proposed replacement of the 1992 Film Law expands the regulatory perimeter to include streaming platforms and formalizes a minimum 10% quota for showing Mexican films in theatres, subject to semi-annual compliance reviews and weekly programming adjustments. A 14-day minimum run and "equitable scheduling" requirement introduce measurable obligations for exhibitors. For cinema operators and distributors, the operative variable will be how compliance is calculated — by screen count, showtime allocation or prime-time access — as this determines whether the impact is incremental or commercially material. Proponents argue the measure corrects structural asymmetries in screen access; exhibitors have historically maintained that market demand already guides programming decisions.

The initiative also seeks to increase visibility for Mexican content on digital platforms, effectively bringing discoverability within regulatory scope. Until the draft text is published, it is unclear whether this will translate into catalogue quotas, interface placement rules or algorithmic obligations. For streaming services, compliance could extend beyond content acquisition into UX architecture and metadata governance.

The AI reform recognizes the human voice as a protected personal attribute requiring express consent for synthetic reproduction. It introduces sanctions for unauthorized use and establishes dispute mechanisms through the National Copyright Institute (INDAUTOR). Media, gaming and AI developers will need to assess how definitions of "imitation" or "cloning" are ultimately codified.

From a political perspective, the initiatives are being seen as a move by Sheinbaum, whose step-son is a film maker, to embrace the culturally important local film and commercial industry. She would have been delighted with the photo of Salma Hayek and other top Mexican actors and directors celebrating the announcement in the National Palace on Sunday.

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Film Tax Details...

The headline offer is an income-tax (ISR) credit worth up to 30 per cent of eligible Mexican spend, capped at MXN 40m per project or production process. It is deliberately targeted at productions with meaningful scale: fiction and animation features (and each episode of a narrative/animation series) must spend at least MXN 40m in Mexico; documentaries require MXN 20m; and stand-alone animation, VFX or post-production processes must clear MXN 5m. Eligible "cost" is tightly defined as what is actually incurred in Mexico across development, pre-production, production, post and delivery, and what is indispensable to making the work.

The detail that will matter to international studios is that this is not a cash rebate. It is a transferable ISR credit that can be used against Mexican income tax — or monetised by selling it to Mexican taxpayers, a mechanism that effectively turns a tax attribute into production finance. The decree allows Mexican residents and foreign producers with a permanent establishment to apply directly; foreign producers without one can still participate, but typically by running the project through a Mexican production company that secures the credit and then monetises it.

Once a Technical Committee issues a compliance certificate, the credit can be deployed in three routes: transferred (for consideration) to Mexican suppliers in the production chain; sold to other ISR taxpayers outside the chain; or used by the beneficiary against its own ISR (with carry-forward for up to two years). The structure is not a blank cheque: local sourcing must reach at least 70 per cent, indirect expenses tied to supplier transfers are capped, and sales to non-suppliers are forced to clear at a discount — buyers cannot pay more than 85 centavos per peso of credit, and may not absorb more than 15 per cent of their prior-year taxable profit.

For a foreign producer that does not pay ISR in Mexico, the credit cannot be refunded; its value shows up only through monetisation — a Mexican partner sells the credit and can pass the benefit back as a lower net budget. A simple illustration makes the point: on MXN 100m of eligible spend, the credit could be MXN 30m. If MXN 10m is used to offset supplier invoices and the remaining MXN 20m is sold at the maximum permitted price, the cash raised would be MXN 17m — an effective benefit of roughly MXN 27m before fees and frictions.

Two constraints will shape the rush: an annual programme cap of MXN 400m, and a strict "use it or lose it" rule if the beneficiary does not apply or transfer when able. In other words, Mexico is offering a prize — but only to productions prepared to plan, document and spend locally at scale.

Professional Minimum Wages Under Review: Structure Before Numbers

Mexico's National Minimum Wage Commission (Conasami) has formally created a new Consultative Commission tasked with reviewing the system of professional minimum wages. Published in the Official Gazette, the resolution institutionalizes a body that will assess three core issues: whether the current list of 61 recognized professions and trades should be maintained, modified or reduced; the cumulative

effects of minimum wage increases since 2017; and the operation of the Independent Recovery Amount (MIR) mechanism. While the mandate centers on technical, economic and legal evaluation, Conasami has not yet clarified whether the Commission will recommend adjustments to the wage amounts themselves — a relevant distinction for cost planning across specialized employment sector.

The review comes against a backdrop of narrowing differentials between the general minimum wage (MXN 9,582.47 per month nationally in 2026) and professional minimums, which range from marginally above to more than double the general rate, depending on occupation. Since 2017, policy-driven increases have significantly lifted the general minimum wage, reducing the historic premium attached to professional categories. One contributing factor is that professional minimums have not systematically incorporated the MIR component used in annual adjustments. Conasami notes that a methodology for updating these wages has existed since 2021 but has lacked consensus among labor and business representatives.

The Commission is tripartite — including six worker representatives, six employer representatives and chaired by Conasami's president — and began work on February 13, with a final report due in October 2026. For employers, particularly in sectors reliant on defined professional wage categories, the process introduces potential recalibration risk: elimination of occupations from the list could reduce mandatory wage floors, while methodological changes could formalize higher benchmarks.

Northbound Signals: Trade Architecture Before the USMCA Review

The Team Canada Trade Mission to Mexico (February 15-20) is unfolding with more formal public and private sector agreements than previous visits, even if it remains to be seen whether they amount to very much in practice. In Mexico City, the Canadian Council of Business and the Mexican Consejo Coordinador Empresarial signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing a mechanism for private-sector coordination. In parallel, Economy Minister Marcelo Ebrard and Canada's Minister of International Trade, Dominique LeBlanc, agreed to develop a bilateral "action plan" to expand trade and investment and reduce regulatory frictions alongside (not instead of) the USMCA framework. According to the Mexican government, nearly 900 companies participated in the meetings, described as one of the broadest commercial dialogues in recent years.

The proposed action plan, expected to take shape in the second half of the year, is set to address minerals, port and infrastructure investment, supply-chain security and youth workforce integration. Sector priorities highlighted by Canadian officials include advanced manufacturing, automotive, clean technologies, agri-food, ICT and creative industries. Each intersects with Mexican regulatory processes currently under review: energy interconnection, environmental permitting, customs facilitation, labor compliance and digital governance. Whether this bilateral framework meaningfully reduces administrative timelines or harmonizes technical standards will determine its operational value.

The timing is also notable amid ongoing trade tensions with the United States and ahead of the July 2026 USMCA review. Mexican authorities have framed the bilateral channel as a way to accelerate specific agendas within the broader North American architecture. A reciprocal Mexican business delegation is expected to visit Canada in coming months.

Chatter box

- **Textbook Governance Reset at the SEP**

The appointment of Nadia López García as head of the General Direction for Educational Materials (DGME), effective February 16, follows the high-profile removal of her predecessor amid an internal dispute over proposed modifications to federal textbooks, and perhaps more deeper ideological differences with the outgoing and radical leftist, Marx Arriaga (who as of writing refused to leave his office). The Ministry of Public Education (SEP) stated that Marx Arriaga declined to implement adjustments to existing materials and rejected alternative administrative arrangements once the post became subject to discretionary appointment. Federal authorities, including the President, have emphasized that textbooks remain subject to periodic revision and are not the preserve of any individual, framing the change as part of routine policy evolution rather than a reversal of the New Mexican School model. The SEP has indicated that forthcoming updates may include expanded indigenous-language materials, accessibility formats, gender perspectives and content revisions aligned with intercultural and humanist criteria.

- **Water Regulation**

The Water Advisory Council (CCA) is preparing a set of technical proposals to inform the forthcoming Regulation of the General Water Law, with a stated focus on strengthening legal certainty across the water sector. According CCA President Raúl Rodríguez Márquez, while there has been openness from the federal administration, the secondary regulation will be decisive in clarifying allocation rules, operational standards and compliance parameters. The Council is convening specialists to draft recommendations aimed at reinforcing regulatory clarity, particularly where the statutes leave room for interpretation.

- **Electoral Reform**

The Presidential Commission on Electoral Reform, led by Pablo Gómez, has formally delivered its draft proposal to President Sheinbaum after a working session at the National Palace. The document will undergo final review by the executive before being submitted to Congress in the coming days. While details have not yet been disclosed, the handover marks the transition from internal drafting to the legislative phase, with the initiative expected to shape the framework for upcoming electoral processes once formally introduced.

- **Forty-hour Work Week**

The Senate approved the constitutional amendment establishing a gradual implementation of the 40-hour work week, sending it to the Chamber of Deputies. For the reform to enter into force, it must still secure approval from a majority of state legislatures and then be published in the Official Gazette.

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