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Demographic Change and International Labor Mobility in the Asia Pacific Region: Implications for Business and Cooperation

Migration of Laborers: A Mexican Case-study (Draft)¹
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Introduction

Mexico is a country of migrants: those passing through, those leaving the country and those arriving here. In some states such as those on the borders, both in the north and in the south, migration is an integral part of people's daily life. In this paper, we will begin with the emigration of Mexicans towards the United States; later we will present some of the tendencies of immigration into Mexico of people from the southern border; and finally we will consider cases of permanent immigration towards Mexico itself.

The present report is based on studies carried out by the National Council on Population; there is also an analysis of a number of Mexican and American authors who possess lengthy experience in studying the migration of Mexicans towards the US. We have also drawn information from the report *Alternative Mexico*, which was presented by the Committee on Rights of Migrant Workers of the United Nations in December, 2005; and from the report *Mexican Immigration* presented by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information (INEGI).

Volume, trends and patterns of labor migration in Mexico

Although the migration process in Mexico and the United States has been going on for more than a century, we will set out to explain the principal changes and transformations that have emerged in the last two decades with regard to its intensity, magnitude, composition, routes and destinations, as well as the development of new characteristics and patterns of migration.

The migration of Mexicans towards the United States has been, since it started, due largely to the asymmetrical nature of these two nations' development, but it has also reacted to demographic changes and public policies, both of Mexico and the United States.

Temporary Labor Migration²

Information given by the National Council on Population (CONAPO) and the Census of Migration at the Border (EMIF) shows a marked reduction in flow during seasons of migration in the 1990's and is principally composed of young men with a secondary school level of education, who come mainly from recent emigration zones

¹ Traduction by Peter Hubbard

² This section is based on the chapter "Flujos migratorios". La Nueva Era de las Migraciones, México, 2004, www.conapo.gob.mx

such as the center and south-southeast of Mexico. Towards the end of the 1990's (1998-2003), 75% of the migrants had no papers.

Migrant workers in the United States stay longer each time they go, as an average stay of five months gradually became extended to twelve months. This can be explained by the increase in vigilance along the southern border of the US, once they had established their policy of containing immigration of workers without papers; and this in turn caused immigrants to extend their stay in that country because of the threat of not being able to come back.

Approximately 70% have no experience of migration and mainly find work in the primary or secondary sectors. Nevertheless, work in the agricultural sector has diminished little by little from 44% to 20% in a span of ten years (1993 – 2003).

Apart from the pressures of supply and demand that maintain this temporary flow of migrant workers there is also a complex network of relationships that link places of origin to destinations in the US, helping to perpetuate migration in certain regions. However these networks are also jumping off points for migration to other regions that previously were not involved in migration. It is thought that 8 out of 10 immigrants receive this support, which helps them develop a strategy on how to cross the border, on where to arrive once across and where to get lodging.

*Permanent migrants*³

Migrants who establish a more or less fixed residence are called permanent migrants or settlers. The increase of people of Mexican origin is unprecedented. From 1970 to 2003 there was an increase of 5.4 million to 26.7 million; in the latter stages 8.1% have been sons of Mexican immigrants and 8.6% of the second generation.

In the United States Mexicans represent the biggest group of immigrants if we consider Latin America, the European Community and Asia as the principal contenders. This community has spread to 40 of the States and comes from places that traditionally displace workers north of the border, such as Zacatecas, Jalisco, Michoacan, now including the State of Mexico and the Federal District, as well as some others such as Veracruz, which has had an intense and recent immigration towards the interior of the country and the US.

According to CENSO of the US, 2000, 45% of the total of residents of Mexican origin are women⁴. Women stay for longer periods than men. According to the study by CONAPO (2000), with reference to the information from the Current Population Survey, “a little less than the half of the Mexican women who live there form part of the economically active sector of this country and of these only five were unemployed in 1994” (13-14).

³ This section is based on the chapter entitled “La migración mexicana hacia Estados Unidos: La Nueva Era de las Migraciones, México, 2004, www.conapo.gob.mx

⁴ According to the Population Census of the United States there was a total population of 281,421,908, of which 35,303,818 were Hispanic or Latino, and of these 20,640,711 were of Mexican origin (12.2 & 58.5% respectively).

Mexican immigrants suffer a disadvantage as regards educational level in comparison with immigrants from other countries or natives of the USA. 85% have 12 years of education and only 6% have reached professional level. It should be stressed that the occupations in which Mexicans are employed are at a lower level and lower income. Their average income tops 21,000 dollars, 62% lower than other groups of immigrants. Despite this, the difference in income and the population in employment (more than 90%) represents a significant benefit for immigrants in comparison to their conditions in their place of origin.

It is also important to emphasize that the work force of Mexican immigrants is beneficial for the US economy, since it represents more than 28% of the immigrant work force. In California, the Mexican work force covers more than 90% of the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, it is beginning to diversify into industry and services. Only 7% of Mexicans are professionals, much below other migrant groups, which go up to above 30%.

By American standards more than 2.6 million of the Mexican population live in conditions of poverty. One out of every five Mexicans has US citizenship and 53% lack health cover.

The economic implications of labor migration in Mexico⁵

The transfer of funds from the US has become a major resource to improve the standard of living for millions of Mexican homes, but it is also under scrutiny by public and private institutions that see in this financing potential for development in the communities from which the emigrants derive.

According to estimates of the Bank of Mexico presented by CONAPO, Mexico went from 2,494 million dollars in 1990 to 16,630 million in 2004. In my opinion, this last figure should be treated with caution, because I believe that a country cannot base its growth, economic development and social welfare on money sent by migrants abroad, a fact that has been borne out in a number of studies, and that more than 70% of the resources received are used for subsistence and health. It is unusual for these resources to be used to finance productive development in the places of origin or communities of the migrants.

One in every 17 Mexican homes receives funds from money sent home by migrant workers. On average, the annual sum in 2002 was 2,590 dollars per family. It is important to point out that in 2004 only six states received greatest benefit from these resources: Michoacan, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Federal District, the State of Mexico and Puebla.

Implications of migration policy in the US on labor migration

The reform of the immigration law in the US (Immigration Reform and Control Act or IRCA) in 1986 was considered to be a policy option to control and restrain the flow

⁵This section is based on the chapter on entitled “La migración mexicana hacia Estados Unidos: La Nueva Era de las Migraciones, México, 2004, www.conapo.gob.mx

of illegal immigration from Mexico. Nevertheless, this reform of the law did not obtain the ends that it sought, because legalization of the migrant workers stimulated incorporation of people who had hopes of becoming legal settlers and this increased the migration of family members and friends who had no experience of migration, which in turn provoked changes in the flow of immigrants. Of the 2,300,000 legalizations of immigrants under this act, 20% were of people from Jalisco, 14% from Michoacan and 7% from Guanajuato.

There are a number of studies that demonstrate that the main effects of the IRCA were: the introduction of a new population to the migratory process (younger, of urban origin and with a higher level of schooling); changes in migratory patterns (principally diversifying their destination, their labor market and prolonging their stay in the US); intensification of families joining up, increasing the participation of women migrants in the process. Thus it was that the IRCA was a watershed in the migration process, which changed the flow of immigrants, the pattern of migration and the characteristics of the migrant.

In the decade of the 1980's, when there were more studies of Mexican migration towards the US and these detected changes in the characteristics of the migrant and migration patterns, there was a departure from the assumption that the poorest sectors of the community did not emigrate because they lacked economic resources to undertake the journey to the north. Someone maintained that there was no direct cause/effect relationship between poverty and emigration and that, what is more, there was emigration of people of greater means.

However, in these very same studies it has been found that individuals with a very low socioeconomic level continue to migrate to the US, utilizing the social networks already formed by other migrants.

From the 1990's onward, there has been a constant hardening of migration policy in the US, based on border controls and national security, which threatens the human rights of migrants in terms of development and integration.

The consequences of this hardening of migration policy have resulted in an increase in deaths of immigrants on the northern border at the rate of more than 400 a year.

Some considerations on the migration of Mexicans towards the US

Here we should highlight certain aspects of the "New Era" of labor migration towards the US.

a) The pattern of migration and the characteristics of the immigrant have changed. We still have temporary migration, but what is becoming more common is migration for longer periods. At the same time, we have a migrant that is increasingly urban, of a higher level of schooling and with more women among the population, not just to bring the family together, but also to become part of the work force.

b) Mexico loses a valuable resource when its human capital emigrates, albeit permanently or temporarily.

c) As regards demographic effects, our estimates considerably outstrip the figures given out by Mexican institutions. According to the study carried out by Canales and Montiel⁶ there is a displacement of population at the rate of 68% in municipalities in the traditional region of migration of the west of Mexico, say the authors. We are participating in the configuration of a new system of demographic dynamics, which do not guarantee either social reproduction or sustainable local development: a lower birthrate and rate of mortality, together with a higher rate of emigration in a context of lack of coordination with local and regional economies.

d) Labor migration has become stigmatized and related to drug trafficking and with terrorism, so that there is an urgent need to establish an integrated binational policy.

e) As regards migration policy, Mexico has participated only in a marginal fashion in so far as the flow of migrants has been controlled by US legislation without obtaining a policy that serves both nations' interests, as it should if it were to establish a process of migration that was orderly and secure.

*Labor migration from the southern border of Mexico*⁷

At the beginning of this paper we said that Mexico is a country for migrants who are passing through, but also a destination in itself. In the south, Mexico shares borders with Guatemala and Belice.

There is written evidence that in the zone of Soconusco, Chiapas, there is considerable commercial exchange and an active movement of people from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and, to a lesser degree, countries of South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil), and indeed from other continents. Many arrive with the intention of continuing their journey to the US or some city in the north or center of Mexico, but because of the lack of resources they remain in the border area⁸.

Mostly these are young men and women, with children, who work as agricultural workers, rickshaw drivers⁹, domestic servants, prostitutes, construction workers, and wandering salespeople, as well as offering other services, all with terrible working conditions, in which labor rights are frequently violated by employers.

According to the report on which this section is based, in the year 2004¹⁰ 119,440 migrant workers were deported solely in the two border states of Chiapas and Tabasco, with a grand total for the whole country of 211,218 people. People with the nationality of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador represent the majority.

⁶ "Depopulation and international migration in the west of Mexico" by Alejandro I. Canales and Israel Montiel Armas, in press, 2007.

⁷ This section is based on the paper. Report "Alternative Mexico" presented by the Committee for the Rights of Migrant Workers of the United Nations in December, 2005.

⁸ Violations of Human Rights in the context of Migration, Center for Human Rights Fray Matias of Cordova, A.C., Tapachula, Mexico, May 2005.

⁹ These are people who offer services of transport with bicycles that are equipped to carry passengers.

¹⁰ Statistics from the INM: <http://gob.mx/paginas/710000.htm>

*International Immigration into Mexico*¹¹

It is important to establish that international immigrants in Mexico are those people who are residents in the country that manifestly declare that they were born outside the territory, whether or not they possess one or more Mexican parents.

Historically, Mexico has been a haven for political refugees from all over the world, notably Spanish citizens that emigrated after the Civil War, but also Chilean exiles, Argentinians, Uruguayans and Guatemalans in the last thirty years.

It is significant that the great majority of foreigners resident in Mexico were born in the United States (69.7%), followed by groups such as the Spanish and Guatemalans, who represent less than 5%. 2.3% have arrived from Asia.

70% of the foreign work force is male. In terms of sectors, 65.7% are tertiary, 20% secondary and 9.5% primary.

As regards age, foreigners who work in the tertiary and secondary sectors are between 25 and 49 years old; and in the primary sector, less than 25.

Overseas immigration has different characteristics from migration from the American continent: in the first case, they are predominantly heads of families and in the second they are the children.

Certain points to be borne in mind:

- a) It is generally agreed that the registration of foreigners is unsatisfactory: there needs to be better methods and planning involved.
- b) There is interest in carrying out specific studies on foreign communities, such as Japanese residents or Cubans or Columbians, just to mention a few.
- c) Mexico should revise its General Law on Population and Migratory Policy so as to bring into line the treaties that it has signed on migration and international rights.

¹¹ This section is based on *Los extranjeros en México*, INEGI. www.inegi.gob.mx