

## **Keynote Address:**

# **MIGRATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND ITS IMPACT ON THE FAMILY**

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I have been invited to comment on the issue of migration in Latin America and its impact on the family. I have divided my participation into four parts: the first one will refer to components of migration in Latin America and its impact on the family; the second part will present the historical variables of migration in Latin America alone; the third will consider the effects of this process and the relationship between migration and development, and finally in the fourth part I will consider the positive contributions of migrants to society.

I will begin by mentioning that UN studies show that in 1980 the total number of migrants in the world, defined as those people living outside their country of birth for more than a year, was close to one hundred million, of which nearly 50% were migrants from developed countries and half from developing countries. By 2006 the number of migrants, according to UN figures, was almost twice as much, close to two hundred million people, of which 62 million came from migrations ranging from south to north, usually understood as from developing countries or developed countries. There were another 53 million migrations from north to north and around 60 million people who migrated from south to south.

One of the main aspects that has made a difference in the migratory pattern in this region and its impact on the family is the increase in women and child migrants who form part of the labor markets under difficult and often extremely adverse conditions.

The family, which provides the most important link between man and society from the moment he is born and the space where he learns to interact with the world

around him, is permanently changed when one of its members, with others often following their example, decides to emigrate in search of better living conditions and opportunities.

Studies also show that in Latin America and other regions, the migration flow is composed mostly of young adults who travel abroad to work for short periods, according to the so-called cyclical migration, and then return to their homes, once they have saved enough. This turns out to be one of the positive effects of migration. However, when migration flows are composed of entire families, this results in cumulative effects of depopulation of vast regions. These groups of families rarely return to their country of origin and as migrant workers have less incentive to send remittances or make significant investments in their places of origin, when their spouses and children no longer reside in the country of origin. From this perspective, cyclical labor migration generally has positive effects on development, especially at the community level, but when migration of the whole family is permanent, this benefit does not exist and large areas of the country of origin become depopulated, as is the case for example of the Mixteca region in Puebla.

Another relevant aspect in the international debate on this issue is the importance of identifying causes and effects in order to prioritize the relationship between migration and development. This in turn leads us to affirm that migration in Latin America is a result of the search for better opportunities and living conditions for migrants and their families. Migration in Latin America also has a relatively new element which requires structured analysis of the positive effects of migrants' contributions to both countries of origin and destination, so as to put the benefits of having a labor force in permanent demand by developed countries, in proper perspective.

We believe that this new approach will avoid piecemeal discriminatory and frankly persecutory attitudes. Finally, there is one other element that has great impact on both origin and host migrant societies. The circularity flow of migrant labor is now being seen as the circularity of knowledge, in which migratory flows increasingly comprise highly qualified people with professional and academic training. This will be one of the main elements to consider about migration in Latin America and its impact on families by 2020.

With regard to the historical variable of migration in Latin America and its impact on the family, this explains the causes of the great currents of migration that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For several decades, substantial flows of Europeans sought refuge in the Americas, in countries like the USA, Brazil, and Argentina. It can be said that in the twentieth century migration has contributed to developing the economies of many countries. Without migrants, neither the United States nor Canada nor Australia would right now be considered among the more developed countries.

The migratory flows, consisting of entire families, of those times meant the opportunity to settle in a new country, and participate in the generation of wealth, as well as taking part in the integration and formation of a new nation with their talents, their work, their values and their future. Mexican migration to the US may be divided into several stages. First of all, many Mexicans ended up on the other side of the US border after the end of the war between Mexico and the US in 1848. Family reunification at that point was the reason why many Mexicans migrated north. Then, from the late nineteenth century onwards until the end of the twentieth century, there was great demand for Mexican labor in the US. This was due to the expansion of the railways, plus the economic surge in the west, mainly in California, as well as the growth of different segments of the U.S. market, in need of manpower.

The “bracero” program established from 1942 to 1964 in the United States to solve the shortage of manpower resulting from the Second World War, also generated favorable conditions for the migration of Mexicans. However, when this exchange program was ended, it had a direct impact on the so called undocumented migration.

From 1964 to 1985 there followed a surge in undocumented migration to the US. This was the result in part of the decline of import substitution and the lack of growth processes within Mexico, but mainly due to the reduction of legal channels previously available in the “bracero” program for entry into the United States. This situation would soon to lead to the stigmatization of undocumented Mexican workers.

Finally, from 1985 to the present day, there is a phase of unprecedented growth in migration to the US, with considerable impact on the families of migrant workers.

It is important to note that the flow of Mexican migration has also been accompanied by great migration flows of Central Americans fleeing civil wars, for example, in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, which caused the displacement of entire families who settled in other countries, including Mexico.

One of the reasons for the interest to migrate is the difference in income gap and purchasing power in the country of origin and the country of destination. This variable combines two distinct effects that reinforce each other in an enticement and a removal effect of the workforce with a direct impact on the disruption of family and community. At the same time, there are trends towards the liberalization of international trade and investment, including the free movement of technologies. However, it must be said, while acting as the key player in the technological, cultural, social and institutional aspects of our time, resulting in greater economic, financial and communicational integrity, man is yet excluded from free circulation within the planet. Paradoxically, migration does not form part of the economic agenda of the world. Only in some cases, has it been included as part of the social agenda, and increasingly, unfortunately, has it become part of the security agenda of nations.

One of the reasons that explain this is that the political classes of the various migrant host countries consider immigrants migrating from the south as a problem for the preservation of their national identity and social cohesion. They have even come to be regarded as a threat to national security in some countries. Hence, those who design and implement migration policies in southern countries, and who have done everything possible to emphasize the potential benefits of international migration, have had to face attitudes that do help their cause.

Under this strategy, countries in the region have taken action in international forums, at the UN, at the OAS, at the International Organization for Migration and at regional consultation forums such as the Regional Conference on Migration, the South American Conference on Migration, inter alia, for the purpose of promoting and defending the human rights of migrant workers and their families, to ensure full

respect for these people and their right to emigrate. Therefore, Mexico's initiative at the United Nations International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families, which calls attention to this issue, was adopted at the 1990 General Assembly and entered into force in 2003.

The situation in Mexico is very varied. Few families migrate with all their members at once. Most have a pioneer who sets up the link, especially in the case of migration to the U.S. This is followed a mechanism, which at the bottom of the scale at least, maintains a minimum of financial support and occasional communication with the family left behind. If the pioneer does well, he opens up spaces for other family members to follow. There is still an issue of cultural shock in these cases, but at least the whole family together can face the problems once re-united. The hardest cases, at the bottom of the scale, are those where the economic contributions to the family left behind in the country of origin, suddenly disappear. The pioneer, who opened up the way, stops showing signs of life. Some may think a tragedy has occurred, but often it may be that the pioneer has perhaps found other bonds of affection in his new life.

We have, then, from the point of view of the family, two basic scenarios: one that maintains family ties from a distance, which contradicts the essence of family life, and the other, a clear rupture in the family.

Migration and development in Latin America with its impact on the family of the migrant worker, is a trend that is directly linked to the limited capacity of the countries in the region to generate productive jobs, rising levels of unemployment, the concentration of work in the informal sector and the widening of the income gap. Migration in Latin America has been largely determined by causes, such as population movement from rural to urban areas, as a result of social and political distribution processes, the establishing of patterns of production and consumption that are detrimental to ecosystems, institutional reforms changing the state's role as a generator of employment and provider of services, and the reduction of geographical distances in cultural terms as a result of globalization.

Also other notable changes have occurred in Latin American migration flows, which have increased non-border inter-American migration. Boundary currents have

declined, and traditional immigration flows from Europe to Latin America have virtually disappeared.

At present there is a migratory flow from all Latin American countries destined for the United States of America, and to a lesser extent, to Canada. Within Latin American and Caribbean countries, there are migration currents stemming from Central America to Mexico, from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, from the Caribbean and Colombia to Venezuela, from Bolivia and Paraguay to Argentina, from Brazil to Paraguay and Ecuador to Colombia, among others.

It has also been noted that there are migratory flows from Argentina to Europe, from Brazil to Japan, and from Ecuador, Peru and Colombia to Spain.

In all cases, migration flows have benefitted the families and communities of the country of origin with the remittances sent by migrants working in the United States, Canada and Europe.

Experts agree that migration flows are highly beneficial to the development of societies and communities in the country of origin. Moving abroad is economically beneficial to the majority of migrants and their families, if not, they would not undertake the journey.

Migration is welcomed by employers in the host countries, who may even depend on the migrant workforce.

Philanthropic donations made by transnational migrant organizations help the local communities of origin, because they often provide infrastructure and services that otherwise could not be provided. Examples of such programs in Mexico are the 3X1 and the 4X1 programs.

At a national level, remittances from major labor importing countries take on national importance as an indispensable source of foreign currency, as is the case in Mexico and El Salvador. In the latter, a third of its gross domestic product depends precisely on remittances from Salvadorans in the United States.

On the other hand, experts have agreed that there is no clear evidence that remittances alone economically develop a country that exports labor. The investment of migrants in productive activities in the communities of origin, at the most has had a modest effect on national economic growth. Even when indirect multiplier effects of remittances can be substantial, they are neutralized by the cumulative nature of migration, leading to the depopulation of the countries and regions of origin.

At the same time the following considerations should be taken into account:

- When migrants move with their families as in permanent migration, the depopulation process is accelerated and the return of the migrants becomes less likely.
- When migrant workers take their families with them, they encourage the growth of a second generation in the host countries, who will often grow up there, in conditions to their disadvantage.

The experience of adapting of a lower level of the second generation reinforces the negative stereotypes of the migrant population in host countries, thus increasing the possibility of their becoming an impoverished minority, similar to a caste. All the same, it is important to note that for countries in the region, migration represents a form of self-assurance among the rural and urban households that use it as one of several strategies for economic survival.

Likewise, it has been proven in most cases that remittances are used for consumer goods, generating a multiplier effect on the economy, because they create a renewed demand for local goods and services.

In practice, cyclical migration works better for the countries of the region, for the countries of origin, and for the recipients, probabilities to save and make productive investments in their place of origin.

Of greater importance is the fact that temporary migrants do not compromise the future of the next generation, by putting their children in the context of a possible downhill situation abroad. It is, however, worth noting that the positive relationship between migration and development is not automatic, it must be worked on.

Market forces alone will not make the virtuous connection required. The active intervention of the State is needed to build a productive structure in rural areas, as well as scientific and technological institutions capable of innovation. This is the condition necessary for achieving the development potential of migration flows.

Regarding the positive contributions of migrants to their societies of origin and destination, we can say that Latin American countries should identify and promote the positive contributions of migrants to our societies of origin and destination in order to broaden opinion on migration in general. In this section some of the most important positive contributions of migrants to their societies of origin and destination, regardless of their immigration status are mentioned. The aim is to contribute to the relevance of analyzing migration from Latin America, and to channel secure, legal and orderly migration flows.

Statistics from the Department of Homeland Security in the United States notes that in January 2008, there were 11.6 million undocumented migrants living in the United States, of which seven were of Mexican origin. This group contributes to the aggregate demand in the country of arrival, i.e., by the increase in production, as well as consumption, and its multiplier effect, by spending most or part of their income in the host country on consumer goods and housing.

The replacement of older adults, and American citizens at retirement age, the formation of a workforce available to perform jobs that arouse little interest among local workers, because they involve hard, difficult and dangerous jobs, and less pay, in some cases in agriculture, or construction, hospitality services, and domestic services, among others.

Since 2004, competitiveness in some sectors of U.S. industries, together with the skills of the vast majority of Mexican migrants, and migration surveys in the northern border, all point to the majority of undocumented Mexican immigrants having 7.5

years of education on average. They exceed the average 1.5 years of education that prevails in Mexico.

The favorable economic balance in the balance cost benefit of Mexican emigration to the United States has resulted in favorable economics for the communities on arrival in the United States, while showing a historical pattern of higher payment of taxes, while demanding fewer social security services.

From the purely economic aspect, the work of Mexican migrants has helped to increase the GDP of the United States, with more than 485,000 billion dollars in 2006, an amount that represents more than half the GDP of Mexico. It is estimated that the purchasing power of the Latino community in the United States during 2008 was approximately 951,000 million U.S. dollars and is expected to increase to 1.4 billion in 2013. This purchasing power has increased by nearly 350% since 1990.

According to its consumer capacity, Mexican migrants spent more than 268,000 million U.S. dollars in 2006 on consumer goods.

In 2008 a recent report by the Advisory Board of the U.S. President, stated that the work of immigrants in that country increased national income by 30,000 million dollars a year. The work of migrants, it must be said, tends to complement and not replace the American workforce. Undocumented migrants constitute 5% of all U.S. workers and about one third of foreign workers. Most undocumented immigrants come from Latin America and 55% are of Mexican origin.

It is estimated that in 2002, Hispanic-owned firms created more than 1.5 million jobs, which meant an income above 220 million, and generated a payroll of 36,000 million. In the long run, the elimination of undocumented labor would mean losses of more than 55,000 million dollars in annual expenditure of the 244,000 billion in annual revenues and more than 2.8 million jobs lost.

Also undocumented immigrants and their descendants contribute more through the payment of taxes than they actually receive in social services. They perform millions of jobs essential to the economy, increasing productivity and reducing the cost of

goods and services, and pay taxes for services that do not correspond to the work they perform.

The U.S. government reported a total of 70.000 million dollars a year on over payments in taxes and Social Security, health insurance and other rights, which suggests that these payments correspond precisely to the contributions of illegal immigrant workers in the U.S., of which 52% are attributed to undocumented Mexican immigrants.

In relation to the positive contributions of migrants in Mexico, the percentage of foreign-born population residing in our country is very low, less than 5% of the total population. Nonetheless, the real figure may be even less, since a significant number of these are children of Mexicans born in the United States, during a temporary visit of their parents in that country, or as a result of the border life of some communities. This phenomenon occurs mainly in the northern border and the western central region of the country, most traditional points of Mexican migration to the United States.

In November 2008, the migration regularization program that will run for 30 months entered into force in our country. This program aims to establish the criteria under which foreigners of any nationality who are in our country illegally and who express interest in becoming permanent residents may initiate proceedings of their immigration documents as immigrants. This applies to professional in positions of trust, with scientific, technical, family, artistic or athletic links, or as employees. Foreigners who have entered the country before January 1, 2007, have a legal job, are spouses of Mexican or foreigners legally established in the country, and who also have first-degree blood relationships with Mexican citizens or foreign persons legally established in Mexico, will benefit from this program.

Foreigners benefit from regularization as it enhances their personal security and integral development. Irregular status makes them vulnerable to violations of their human rights while threatening their right to family unity and legal security.

The benefits and contributions that foreigners have made in Mexico are:

- Foreigners residing in our country, either those maintaining their foreign status, or living as naturalized Mexicans, are individuals with a high level of education, averaging over 12 or more years of formal education, which is far above our national average.
- Foreigners over 25, 42.5% have a degree in higher education against the 11.9% of Mexicans in the same age group.
- The high impact of immigrants in the development of host communities, given the number of foreigners with studies and economic resources who tend to take up residence in the country.
- Foreigners living in Mexico represent a pool of highly trained human resources and entrepreneurs, thanks to the immigration of investors, traders, business people, families, professionals and technical workers, artists, researchers, scientists, and so on.
- Other benefits to be mentioned are the foreigners resident in our country. For example, American investors, executives, merchants and professionals who have settled in various states of the Republic, in San Miguel de Allende, in Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, Guadalajara, Chapala, Cuernavaca, Puerto Penasco, Rosarito, Ensenada, among others.

Spaniards working as professionals, educators and business owners are well known for the impact they have had in the educational and intellectual development of Mexico, following the Spanish Republican exile during the 1940's.

South Americans and Cubans, working as professionals, writers, artists or athletes in the nation's capital or in other states, have made a strong impact in the mass media industry.

French, German, Italian, Canadian, Lebanese, and British communities have been cornerstones in the mining, textile, automotive, and electronics industries in our country.

In all the afore-mentioned cases, foreigners have provided a source of employment for local people, they have influenced the emergence and development of businesses linked to the buying and selling of real estate, and the construction of housing estates, and they have given an extra boost to international tourism by attracting family and friends from their places of origin to visit them.

With almost 24,000 migrants born in Guatemala, according to the 2000 census, Guatemalans constitute the second largest group of foreigners in Mexico. Their presence is a result of refuge sought in Mexico between 1981 and 1996 and life on the southern border of the country. 58% are in the 20-44 age group with an average age of 29, forming a pool of young labor for the states of Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco and Campeche. Most work as laborers, hired help, drivers or industrial employees. Their level of education is very low compared with other communities of foreigners, with only 7% aged 25 or more at graduate level or higher.

Let me conclude by mentioning finally that migration in Latin America is a complex issue. Its causes lie in a wide variety of factors, such as war, persecution, ethnic conflicts, famine, natural disasters, among others.

Economic factors are critical to migratory behavior, as people flee from poverty, disease, hunger, overcrowding, lack of opportunity in general, in the search for better living conditions for themselves and their family.

Migrants will always find work to do that either local workers will not do, or do not want to do for the wages offered. In general, people do not migrate to where the work is not well-paid. In Latin America, as elsewhere, the development model has not devoted sufficient attention to international migration. Recently the size of expatriated communities and the volume of remittances to their countries of origin have attracted the interest of public policy makers. It has been found that migration can have different effects, such as economic stagnation, abandonment of the places of origin and massive loss of talent, but it also can have positive effects, such as invigorating local economies, generating new productive activities, and contributing significantly to the development of science and technology.

In the same way, the so-called cyclical migration works better for the countries of origin of the region, as well as for the host countries. The migrant workers who return to their countries of origin are more likely to save and make productive investments, which will benefit their families, who receive substantial remittances. In contrast, the migration of entire families tends to diminish the positive effects of development.

The current migration policies in the United States and Europe not only seek to limit the number of migrants, but also to discourage family reunification and formation, with ensuing anti-social consequences for family and society.