MIGRATION BETWEEN MEXICO & THE UNITED STATES

ESTUDIO BINACIONAL

BINATIONAL STUDY

MÉXICO—ESTADOS UNIDOS SOBRE MIGRACIÓN

A report of the

Binational Study on Migration

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The Mexico/United States Binational Study on Migration was a joint effort undertaken by twenty scholars from both countries who worked together in teams on five separate subject areas and collaborated on the production of this shared report. Their efforts have produced a collective and state-of-the-art assessment of many aspects of Mexico-to-United States migration. We are appreciative of the efforts of the members who, despite their different academic disciplines and subject area expertise, worked in a productive and collegial atmosphere. This report demonstrates the commitment of the Binational members to producing a thorough and groundbreaking document.

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SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Mexican migration to the United States is a complex and dynamic phenomenon with long historical roots. There has been migration northward since the settlement of both countries, across the frontier established in 1848, and especially from the first sizable labor migration flows during the 1870s. Today, much of the migration flow remains economically motivated by wage differences that affect supply and demand, and it is sustained by the family and social networks that connect the two countries.

The two governments have approached this northward migration with unilateral policies, as well as bilaterally negotiated programs, such as the well-known temporary agricultural "Bracero" program that existed from 1942 to 1964. Since then, the major U.S. policies affecting the flow have emanated from the Immigration Act of 1965 and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 [IRCA] that legalized some two million Mexicans in the United States under a long-term or "pre-1982 resident" program and a Special Agricultural Worker program [SAW]. IRCA also applied sanctions against employers who knowingly hired unauthorized workers. More recently, the U.S. Congress adopted the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act [IIRIRA] to strengthen border and worksite enforcement, facilitate removals of unauthorized aliens, and deter utilization of public programs.

This new approach occurred simultaneously with a period of heightened Mexico-United States engagement, driven in large measure by the positive bilateral relations promoted through the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]. In the last five years, there has been an upsurge of initiatives to formalize the bilateral dialogue and consultation on migration, as well as on such other issues as water management and health along the border. The Working Group on Migration and Consular Affairs of the Binational Commission has proven an important and effective forum for frank discussion of various migration issues.

This study is both a reflection and manifestation of the new spirit of cooperation. A joint undertaking by the governments of Mexico and the United States, the study's aim is to contribute to a better understanding of the nature, dimensions, and consequences of migration from Mexico to the United States. The research was conducted by a team of twenty independent researchers, ten from each country, who reviewed existing research, generated new data and analyses, and undertook site visits and consulted with migrants and local residents to gain a joint understanding of the issues raised in this study.

Assessing Mexico-United States Migration

Migration includes residents and sojourners, both legal and unauthorized. We constructed estimates of the Mexican-born population in the United States using well-known national-level data sources, with special efforts to adjust for undercounts and the number of SAW workers included. Our results suggest that the total size of the resident Mexican-born population in the United States in 1996 was within the following ranges:

Total Mexican-Born Population	7.0 - 7.3 million persons,
Legal Residents	4.7 - 4.9 million persons,
Unauthorized Residents	2.3 - 2.4 million persons.

The numbers of Mexican-born migrants represent approximately 3 percent of the overall United States population, about 40 percent of the U.S. population of Mexican-American ancestry, and are equivalent to 8 percent of the overall national population of Mexico. More than one-quarter arrived in the past five years.

About 0.5 million were naturalized U.S. citizens. In recent years, naturalization of legal Mexican-born immigrants has increased dramatically from just over 67,000 in FY 1995 to 233,000 in FY 1996. These figures for the foreign-born population are in addition to the 11 million native-born citizens of Mexican American ancestry as of 1996.

The decade of the 1980s showed a massive increase in Mexican legal immigration, largely because of the legalization program. During the 1990s, legal immigration from Mexico remained sizeable as the family members of legalized Mexicans obtained permanent resident status. In FY 1996 alone, more than 160,000 Mexicans became legal immigrants, all but about 5,300 under family-based admission categories. The future demographic consequences of IRCA could be considerable, with at least an estimated 1 million Mexican family members of legalized persons eligible to apply for U.S. admission.

Legal temporary visits between Mexico and the United States also are substantial. The border crossings between Mexico and the United States are among the busiest in the world. In FY 1996, for example, there were 280 million land crossings through the southwest border. The exact number of unauthorized entries of Mexicans into the United States is unknown, but in FY 1995 more than 1.3 million apprehensions of persons attempting to enter without inspection took place at the Mexico-United States border. These are records of events, however, and not of individuals.

Mexican census data and indirect measurement methods show that the loss of Mexican population from international migration has been systematic since 1960. According to our best estimates, the migration of persons to the United States who have established permanent residence there has been within the following ranges:

1960-1970	260,000 - 290,000
1970-1980	1,200,000 - 1,550,000
1980-1990	2,100,000 - 2,600,000

For 1990-1995, net outmigration was 1.39 million people, with essentially equal participation by gender, which is equivalent to an annual average of 277,000 for the five-year period. Our estimates based on U.S. data indicate a similar net growth in the size of the Mexican-born population from 1990 to 1996 of approximately 1.9 million persons, or about 315,000 persons per year. Breaking down the 1.9 million figure into components, we estimate that approximately 510,000 were legal immigrants, 630,000 unauthorized migrants, and 760,000 migrants who either were legalized under the SAWs program or legalized as an IRCA family member. Many of SAWs legalizations occurred in the first half of the 1990s; future flows of this type should be negligible.

The rate of back-and-forth labor movement seems to be slowing. Mexican border surveys on sojourners show a decrease in the number of persons moving in both directions between 1993 and 1995 (south-north migrants decreasing from 790,000 to 540,000 and north-south migrants decreasing from 624,000 to 433,000). This reduction in the rate of circulation can be explained by several hypotheses, the most likely of which is that many people are deciding to establish residence in the United States or to prolong their stay there. It is possible that, as the Binational Study members heard in their visits to communities in Mexico, the increasing difficulty of crossing the border has led temporary migrants to reduce the number of times they move back and forth between the two countries. New enforcement techniques have caused an increase in the number of times an individual Mexican is apprehended before making a successful entry or determining to return home. Legalization, too, may have permitted Mexican workers to bring their families, thereby reducing their need to return frequently to Mexico. Increasingly, participation of migrants in urban jobs, which are less seasonal than rural jobs, may also contribute to lengthier stays in the United States.

Characteristics vary by migrant type. We are able to approximate the characteristics of three "types" of migrants using combinations of several databases: *sojourner migrant* (legal or unauthorized whose principal residence is in Mexico); *settled resident* (legal or unauthorized who habitually reside in the U.S.); and *naturalized U.S. citizen* (who have met five-year legal residence and other requirements).

The characteristics of Mexican migrants reflect their "type," gender, the historical patterns of U.S. recruitment for Mexican labor, and the job market in which Mexicans continue to find work. For example, some 73 to 94 percent of sojourners are young men and more than one-half work in agriculture. About 55 percent of settlers are slightly older males, and about 13 percent work in agriculture. Women, who are a smaller proportion of employed migrants, tend to work in the service economy. Naturalized citizens are long-term residents and only 54 percent are males in their early forties on average and less than 10 percent work in agriculture. A greater proportion of sojourners and settlers are employed in certain sectors of construction, manufacturing, and services than are U.S. natives or naturalized Mexican-born citizens.

Clearly, the primary motive for the migrant stream is economic; however, that does not mean Mexican migrants necessarily lack jobs in Mexico. Most migrants had some kind of work in Mexico prior to migrating. Border crossing data with large numbers of unauthorized migrants find that most had work prior to leaving. Nevertheless, the majority migrated with the intention of working in the U.S., mainly to obtain higher wages.

Mexican-born migrants tend to have low skill levels, relative both to the U.S. population at large and to other migrant groups. The sectors employing Mexican-born migrants tend to seek lower-skilled workers. They also pay low wages, accounting for the low incomes and high poverty rates of Mexican-born settlers in the United States. This situation is exacerbated by the unauthorized status of many of these migrants. Less than one-tenth of sojourners complete high school, but just over one-quarter of the settlers and well over one-third of new legal immigrants and naturalized citizens do. More than one-seventh of new legal immigrants are college graduates. About one-half of the families accompanying sojourners in seasonal agriculture live in poverty while in the U.S., but their roughly U.S. $200 in weekly earnings are substantially higher than wages in Mexico for comparable work. About one-quarter of settler families live on

poverty incomes. While the average U.S. household saw income gains between 1990 and 1996, Mexican-born resident households lost income: in 1996, 11 percent of recently arrived households had incomes less than $5,000, whereas in 1990, about 5.5 percent had such low incomes. Unauthorized status is a factor, the annual earnings of legal immigrants in 1996 was more than $19,000.

Despite much continuity in origins and characteristics, migration shows increased diversity over time. Traditionally, migrants have been rural males from a subset of communities in the west central states of Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato. The new diversity shows up in changing demography, origins and destinations, and labor force characteristics. Today, Mexican migrants appear to be older, have more education, more are women, and more are coming from "new sending" states and urban areas. In the United States, Mexican migrants are highly concentrated in California, Texas, and Illinois: about 85 percent of all Mexican-born immigrants resided in these three states compared to 45 percent of all immigrants to the U.S. in 1990. At the same time, Mexican-born migrants have become attracted to new geographic destinations. Midwestern, southern and eastern states that have had few Mexican-born workers now are destinations for Mexican-born persons employed in agriculture and food processing, construction, manufacturing, and low-skill service occupations.

The demand of United States employers and the economic motivation of Mexican migrants is sustained by network and supply factors. The catalyst for much of unauthorized Mexican migration is better-paying U.S. employment, but over time new factors have created a larger and more complex set of reasons that sustain the flow. Migration is a dynamic process and the factors that drive it change. Today new employers and labor brokers, along with cross-border social networks of relatives and friends, link an expanding list of U.S. industries, occupations, and areas to a lengthening list of Mexican communities that send migrants to the U.S. Push factors that increase the supply of labor seem to have become more important since the mid-1980s as a result of recurring Mexican economic crises and Mexican policies, such as the restructuring of rural Mexico that made small-scale farming less attractive. This means that Mexicans migrate to the U.S. within well-established networks, as well as through new networks that are developing to move migrants to the U.S. from regions without a tradition of migration. One of IRCA's effects was to strengthen such networks and to transform a portion of the flow from sojourner to settler.

Demographic and economic factors may reduce future migration.

There is reason to believe that currently high levels of migration may represent a "hump" or peak in the volume of Mexico-United States migration. In the U.S., American employers are adjusting to higher minimum wages, to greater global competition, and to a likely increased supply of low-skilled U.S. residents shifted out of welfare programs. In the past, employers have adjusted to higher wages and increased competition by switching to means of production that lessen their reliance on low-skilled labor. All of these factors may decrease the availability of jobs for some types of Mexican migrants.

Within the next decade, changes in Mexican demographics and other structural changes should begin to reduce emigration pressures. Net increases in the labor forced aged 15 to 44, which was between 500,000 and 550,000 in 1996, is projected to decrease to 430,000 in 2010. Mexico has adopted an ambitious restructuring and privatization program in the 1990s that promises to increase economic efficiency and job growth in the medium- to long-term. The International Monetary Fund and Mexico's 1997 development plan both project 5 percent annual economic growth that, if achieved, would soon create sufficient new jobs to match or exceed the growth of the labor force. Analyses done for this study show that even a more modest 3 percent rate of growth could generate just under 800,000 new jobs annually by 2005. Sustained job growth can help Mexico catch up on job creation for currently unemployed and underemployed workers, those displaced from agriculture and other industries, and nonworking women who rejoin the labor force. These changes in Mexico may reduce supply-side pressure, while the changes in the U.S. may lessen the demand for Mexican workers.

Migration has varied effects, producing both benefits and costs.

It is difficult to establish a balanced evaluation of migration's impacts because of the lack of data and the need for focused research in both countries. We caution against overly simplistic conclusions about costs and benefits and note that the perspectives on the balance differ in each country. In Mexico, those who return most often are the sojourners, many of whom benefit from their U.S. experience. In the U.S., the settler population—often older and sometimes unauthorized, but increasingly with legal status—has relatively low skills that place it at a disadvantage relative to other U.S. residents in an "information age" economy. At the national level, economic impacts are diffuse in both Mexico and the United States. However, strong impacts are found at local and regional levels.

Remittances play an important role in many Mexican communities, but migration creates costs due to the loss of human capital and social disruption. The most important direct impact of migration is the income sent home to Mexico by migrants in the United States. Remittances were equivalent to 57 percent of the foreign exchange available through foreign direct investment in 1995, and 5 percent of the total income supplied by exports. In Mexico, the impacts are concentrated in about 100 municipalities in the west central and northern regions of the country. The average remittances received by migrants' families are equivalent to the household's other earnings. Remittances have financed some productive investments, as well as housing and urban development. Although the direct beneficiaries are households that receive remittances, markets spread some effects to other households and businesses.

Remittances vary widely among migrants depending on their U.S. earnings and the cost of trips back-and-forth. Most migrant earnings do not accrue directly into Mexico's economy as they are spent in the U.S. Migration represents some loss of human capital for Mexico as migrants are mostly a working-age population with education and good health. Other adverse effects in Mexico include the social disruptions that affect the outmigrants' families and communities.

Migrants themselves, businesses, and consumers benefit most in the United States, with costs incurred by state and local governments and low-skilled workers. The primary beneficiaries of Mexico-to-United States migration are the migrants themselves and the U.S. owners of capital and some agricultural land, as well as American consumers and the American economy that grows through the employment and the consumption generated by Mexican migration. In the labor market, the costs associated with the migration are primarily to labor "substitutes," i.e., new Mexican migrants compete primarily with other low-skilled workers, especially already resident Mexican migrants.

On the fiscal side, Mexican migrants were not more prone to use welfare than similar natives. A statistical analysis of 1990 Census data finds that, *compared to similar native* households, Mexican-born households with young heads are *less* likely to obtain means-tested benefits. By contrast, those with heads older than 65 years are *more* likely to receive assistance, probably Supplementary Security Income [SSI]. Sojourners and recent migrants pay some taxes yet rely little on government services because they are young and, oftentimes, their unautho-

rized status makes them ineligible. However, research on settlers finds that many state and local governments pay more in services to Mexican-born households than they receive in taxes, largely because their lower incomes result in lower taxes paid. The single largest fiscal cost is related to education, which can be seen both as a public expenditure and as an investment in the future.

The Mexican-origin population is projected to be of increasing importance early in the next century. Because of the combination of migration and higher than average fertility rates, the proportion of the U.S. population that is of Mexican origin will grow. Low past rates of naturalization and of voter turnout, coupled with voting districts apportioned according to Hispanic population totals that have few eligible and voting-age persons, have weakened the potential impact of the Mexican migration in the U.S. political system. This could change. In some cases, Mexican-Americans have helped rebuild decaying inner-city neighborhoods.

Border relations are largely positive, although tensions do erupt. Migration within the border area is a special case because of the strong family, commercial, and social connections of the residents of many neighboring communities. The vast majority of border crossers go for short visits, often purchasing goods on the other side of the border. The contributions to local economies on both sides of the border that emanate from this cross-border commerce are substantial. Nevertheless, some byproducts of cross-border migration, including petty crime, vandalism, vice, violence, and uncompensated use of health care and other services, can create tensions.

Violence and human rights abuses of unauthorized migrants are major sources of concern. Unauthorized migrants are sometimes victims of crimes—from attacks and abandonment by smugglers to theft, rape, and even murder—and suffer the physical consequences of difficult border crossings. Human rights abuses by federal, state, and local officials have been recorded, which is a matter of great concern for both countries. Officials in both countries have been attacked by smugglers as well. Both governments have taken action to curb these various abuses but border violence continues to be a source of tension.

Policymaking has been episodic in nature. The political responses of Mexico and the United States to migration have an episodic character; the debate on migration is greatly influenced by the changing economic conditions in

both countries. Policymaking also has been reactive with the action of one country leading to the reaction of the other. The pace of the reactive process has accelerated in recent years. Often the U.S. has acted unilaterally. And due to the influence of various interest groups, migration policy at many times has been contradictory and yielded unexpected results. There may be many unanticipated impacts for resident—authorized and unauthorized—populations in the wake of a trilogy of legislation passed in the United States in 1996 (on immigration, terrorism/crime, and welfare).

The Mexican government has shifted from a position of deliberate nonengagement on migration matters, based on the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries, to a stance of increasing dialogue with U.S. counterparts to better address migration issues. The Mexican government also has developed a presence in Mexican communities in United States. In addition, diplomatic and consular protection activities and cultural and business promotion, have increased. The North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] signed in 1993 did not contain major policy on migration; nevertheless, it created new institutional arrangements facilitating political and economic contacts and breathed new life into consultative groups. These developments are of major consequence for the bilateral relationship. However, with the policy of opening the border for commerce and investment but not for people, the potential for bilateral tension remains.

Institutionalizing Cooperative & Effective Dialogue

The study findings argue for increased dialogue and forward-looking consultative mechanisms to facilitate bilateral cooperation in finding mutually beneficial solutions to unauthorized migration between Mexico and the United States. The Working Group on Migration and Consular Affairs of the Binational Commission has been an effective platform for frank discussions on migration issues. However, the Working Group's efforts could be supplemented and enhanced with frequent discussion around an agenda of issues that would be informed by the best possible empirical and policy analyses. At a minimum, the framework for discussion must acknowledge that no single approach will address adequately the issue of unauthorized migration. Demand, supply, and networks all contribute to these movements, and, thus, solutions must be multifaceted and found in both countries. And there must be a careful approach to migration problems that is sensitive to differences in perspectives and build on the joint Mexican-United States commitment to foster human rights.

More specifically, the following issues should be on the agenda for joint discussion:

Outcomes of 1996 Legislation. The U.S. adopted a trio of laws affecting migration, including the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, while Mexico adopted a Constitutional amendment that will allow dual nationality for Mexicans who naturalize. Regular, joint monitoring could help identify the intended and unintended results of newly enacted legislation in a more timely fashion.

Migration Impact Statements. One way of bringing these issues to discussion would be to formalize them as "impact statements" along the lines of the suggestion in 1990 by the U.S. Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development. These impact statements should assess direct changes in immigration policy as well as changes in economic and other policies that may affect migration patterns.

Addressing the Demand, Supply, and Network Factors. On the top of any rolling agenda list should be unauthorized migration that both countries have an express interest in addressing. The governments should assess the effectiveness of strategies to reduce employer demand for unauthorized workers, to provide increased economic opportunities within Mexico, and to reduce the efficacy of formal and informal networks that now link the supply of unauthorized labor in Mexico with U.S. demand for such labor.

Facilitating Legal Movements between Mexico and the United States. Economic and social integration means increased need to accomodate, and even to facilitate, mobility of persons between the two countries. Mexico and the United States should engage in systematic analysis of policies that will support trade, investment, and commerce by facilitating legal movements and easing barriers to legal entry.

Continued Bilateral Research and Data Collection. The development of a binational policy agenda would be greatly enhanced, as we have learned from the Mexico-United States Binational Study, with the use and analysis of data from both nations. The dynamic process of migration, also documented in this study, calls for building capacity and infrastructure to assess migration's nature, effects, and responses.

Maximizing Benefits and Minimizing Costs. It is to the clear benefit of both countries to work towards eliminating unauthorized migration, which creates costs for both countries and makes migrants vulnerable to exploitation. That process should be helped over the long-term by demographic and potential economic trends in Mexico and the United States. In the interim, the two countries should explore ways to capitalize on the economic return to migration (for example, by reducing the cost of transferring remittances and helping families use them towards productive purposes) in order to stimulate economic development in Mexico. Further, ways to enhance labor standards in the United States should be explored to reduce the incentives to employers for hiring unauthorized workers.

A "Guestworker" Program is unlikely to be a Solution to Unauthorized Migration. The United States and Mexico should study carefully the concept of a bilateral foreign worker program, recognizing that such a program is unlikely to be an effective remedy to unauthorized migration or to have sufficient labor standards to protect the rights of workers. A guestworker program could stimulate new migration networks, adding to, rather than substituting for, unauthorized workers. Continued outflow of workers also might make investors reluctant to invest in emigration areas.

Recognizing and Addressing Social Costs of Migration. Mexican migration has social costs, particularly the separation and breakup of families. Attention should be given to ways to alleviate the disruption to families and communities. For example, the two governments could explore ways to identify and obtain support for families, mostly female-headed, who have been deserted by migrating husbands/fathers.

Glossary

Immigrant. A person who migrates over international-boundaries into a country of which he or she is not a citizen. In the United States, the legal-technical meaning of "immigrant" is restricted to persons admitted for legal permanent residence. Because international migrants from Mexico sometimes are not legally admitted or are not permanent residents, the text often refers simply to migrants.

Legal Status in the United States. There are several major legal status categories (Mexico has a parallel division of legal status as well):

> **Unauthorized Migrant.** Person who has entered without inspection [EWI] or overstayed his or her U.S. legal temporary visa. Also a person who works without authorization, regardless of mode of entry. Commonly referred to as "undocumented" or "illegal alien."

Legal Nonimmigrant [NIV]. Person admitted into the United States legally on a temporary visa for a temporary stay for tourism, study, or work.

Legal Permanent Resident [LPR]. Most Mexican-born settlers are LPRs and are predominantly sponsored in the family reunification categories of the U.S. admission system.

Legalized Resident. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 granted a one-time amnesty to formerly illegal residents who, after one year, become LPR-eligible (DOL 1996:87).

Pre-1982 Residents [245A]. 1.09 million Mexican-born were legalized under this program that required continuous five-year residency at the time of application.

Special Agricultural Workers [SAW]. 877,000 Mexican-born were legalized with the requirement that they had worked at least ninety days in agriculture in the preceding three years.

Naturalized Citizen. Legal permanent residents must wait five years and meet certain qualifications before becoming "naturalized citizens" with the full voting and societal rights of the native-born citizenry (born on U.S. soil).

Mexican-Born. Persons born in Mexico and, with few exceptions, originally nationals of Mexico at birth.

Mexican-Origin. Residents in the United States, who are Mexican or native born of Mexican ancestry. Includes Mexican Americans.

Migrant Types. Persons vary in the time they spend abroad and/or their purpose for migration. Of the many different patterns that exist, we distinguish two broad ones:

Sojourner. Includes many different types whose primary residence is in Mexico, the largest subgroup may well be "circular" or "target" migrants who work in the United States for short periods.

Settler. Encompasses both unauthorized and legal permanent residents of the United States whose primary residence is in the United States.

Networks. The social connections between people that provide information and, often, a way of facilitating migration northward. For example, a "migrant network" might link an aspiring migrant in Oaxaca with a friend or relative in Los Angeles, from whom the aspiring migrant can learn of job and housing possibilities.

Remittances. Monies sent by migrants abroad back to their families or friends in their country of origin.

Stock and Flow. Migration is measured either as a "stock," or persons who reside in a place, or "flow," persons who have moved in or out of a place within a given period.

Supply and Demand. Employers need workers or, as economists say, they demand labor. The supply of labor refers to the number of workers with certain characteristics from whom the employer can choose. Just how many workers employers "demand" or how many workers are "supplied" depends on the wage employers offer and the wage that workers will accept.