



MIGRATION AND  
INEQUALITIES IN THE  
FACE OF COVID-19:

# VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND SUPPORT NETWORKS IN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES

NOTAS  
SOBRE  
+ MIGRACIÓN Y  
DESIGUALDADES

Seminario  
MIGRACIÓN,  
DESIGUALDAD Y  
POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS



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## PREAMBLE

**O**ur world changed drastically on February 11th 2020 when the World Health Organization announced the name of the new coronavirus disease as COVID-19, and the pandemic was later considered the greatest challenge we have faced since World War II. Although we have started to experience social life in various new ways, the impacts that it will bring are still unknown. In recent years, migration had already undergone different transformations globally, and more changes are expected. How will populations on the move and migrant populations live in the following years post-COVID, and how different actors will respond to these changes, is yet to be seen.

The Seminar Migration, Inequality and Public Policies at El Colegio de México has worked over the last three years on better understanding the different dimensions of inequality associated to migration, and how public policy mediates these processes. Facing this new context, we decided to generate an academic discussion, albeit accessible to the general public, to apprise how COVID-19 will impact different dimensions of migration processes, and reflect on what would be needed to address these effects. In order to ponder these questions, we brought together the perspectives of a series of binational experts from the academia, the public, social and private sectors, who deliver, on the one hand, a discussion about the economic, political and social context, and on the other, considerations on specific vulnerable mobile populations, as well as of support networks, and implications for policy aimed at diminishing the negative effects of the pandemic. We hope that these two issues of our series *Notes on Migration and Inequalities* will constitute a frame of reference to inform about the current situation and generate proposals that will transcend this contingency.

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## Immigration and the Pandemic in Mexico. Considerations for Public Policies

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The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic essentially happens by contact between people. That is why the strategy that seeks to influence the population's mobility as a means to stop the propagation of the virus is important.

### Pre-pandemic immigration

The dynamic of immigration in Mexico has historically focused on the southern border, especially on the border with Guatemala, where three main flows stand out: a) temporary agricultural workers; b) daily mobility for Guatemalan border residents for commercial and work purposes;<sup>1</sup> and, c) Central American population, the majority of whom are unauthorized, with the intent of reaching the United States. Since 2018, a fundamental change was observed when these last flows mobilized collectively in the self-named *caravans*. The proportion of family groups in them increased and collective displacement, always irregular, became visible.

The new Mexican government initiated its foreign policy participating actively and decidedly by adopting the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, approved in Marrakesh, Morocco. With this framework, the formulation of a *Comprehensive Development Plan: El Salvador-Guatemala-Honduras-México* (as it was originally called), elaborated by the four countries with support from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and which was focused essentially on development, human safety and respect towards human rights of the corresponding populations, was not necessarily convergent with the changes in migration policy adopted since mid-2018 in order to contain the aforementioned flows.

### And the pandemic arrived

During the first trimester of this year, the first cases of the pandemic were detected in the countries

of the region and governments started adopting policies, especially related to health, in order to avoid or minimize its spread. The government of Guatemala stopped flights, both inbound and outbound, but also closed land borders in order to stop the arrival of infected people especially in the main crossing points with Mexico, including people being deported back to their country. The United States government implemented a selective control of its southern border, reducing mobility to movements it called essential, especially from the economic point of view, and not necessarily coinciding with the criteria of what would be essential for the Mexican government.

Mexico's government implemented a policy of adaptation to the policies of its neighbors. Central American migrants in its northern border, awaiting the process of their asylum claims to the United States, started to feel the uncertainty of their situation. Those persons staying in shelters administered by non-governmental organizations endured situations of overcrowding and, just like in Mexico's southern border, the large numbers of migrants in the context of the pandemic constituted a growing risk. The density of their gathering in shelters or in migration stations soon became a threat regarding the spreading of the virus due to the overloaded conditions endured. Considering this risk, non-governmental organizations demanded the liberation of migrants detained in migration stations, given that detention conditions foreshadowed health crisis situations. Finally, migration authorities liberated several migrant groups, which dispersed and cannot be found, and complicates providing healthcare for them.

Meanwhile, the flow of agricultural workers towards the southern border region experienced a relatively positive situation, since those who work in cultivating coffee were not in national territory; in the meantime, sugar cane laborers were in Mexican territory and informative materials were prepared for them,<sup>2</sup> with the help of

public and private organizations, with recommendations to ensure, as much as possible, returning free from the virus and so that they could be admitted in their country. Among the recommendations in these materials it was mentioned that:

An infected or exposed sugar cane worker should not be allowed or forced to return to their home before receiving medical attention and before a doctor authorizes the trip.

Another document establishes that:

...the 2030 Agenda ... Recognizes, among other things, that migrants contribute towards inclusive growth and sustainable development, and their labor rights should be protected. It also states that they have a right to receive quality, inclusive and equal education at all levels, and finally, they should be empowered and their right to return to their country of origin and be received adequately must be respected.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, daily mobility by border residents who cross into Mexican territory with commercial purposes has practically stopped given the strict control of the cross-border dynamics in the south.<sup>4</sup>

### **Post-pandemic period and the challenges it poses**

The expectations for when the pandemic is officially over are grim. What seems certain is that, in terms of migration, we won't even go back to previous scenarios. In terms of immigration and the reasons behind the flows, especially the ones from Central American up until early this year, we can not only foresee they will continue but, in many ways, they will be exacerbated. The forecasts for the regional economy are pessimistic, since the rates of internal products are estimated

to be negative in all cases, which would mean massive job losses and consequently loss of quality of life and living conditions; in other words, an increase in poverty and extreme poverty levels is expected, and even if there is not a clear relation with levels of insecurity and violence, the forecasts are also troubling. On the other hand, social policies had already been lagging tremendously; see for example, the low proportion of spending destined to health services in the three Central American countries.<sup>5</sup>

The fall in economic activities will also be motivated by the loss of some resources, such as remittances sent by migrants to their families and communities, which until now have been vital to the economies of their respective countries:

Mexico and Central America are also exposed to the economic contraction in the United States through the decrease in migrants' remittances; ... (Ibid.:7)

Remittance flows towards Latin America and the Caribbean could contract by 10% and by 15% in 2020 and it could take between 4 to 8 years to reach their 2019 level (Ibid.:10).

This panorama suggests that the countries could hardly recover through individual efforts, thus, the importance of international cooperation called on by promoting the Comprehensive Development Plan supported by ECLAC, resurfaces. Nevertheless, a decided and committed involvement of the participating governments will be required, together with aid from international organizations and multilateral agencies, particularly those of the United Nations aimed at migration topics. The design and operation of health and of other social policies geared towards attention to the most vulnerable groups, among which migrants and migrant families are particularly important, are also needed.<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Jéssica Natalia Nájera Aguirre. “Movilidad laboral transfronteriza y vida familiar de los trabajadores guatemaltecos en Chiapas”, (PhD diss. in Population Studies, Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Urbanos y Ambientales, CEDUA, El Colegio de México, 2014), 499 p.
- 2 Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development–National Committee for the Sustainable Development of Sugar–El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, *Recomendaciones para el retorno de grupos de trabajo de corte de caña y sus familias ante la contingencia*. Brochure, 2020.
- 3 Marta Rangel. *Protección social y migración: el desafío de la inclusión sin racismo ni xenofobia*, Social Policies series, N° 232 (LC/TS.2019/127), (Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC, 2020), 54 p.
- 4 The author is grateful for the support of Ailsa Winton, Miguel Ángel Díaz and Martha Luz Rojas W., professors at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, in updating the information on cross-border movements. Nevertheless, the interpretation and analyses are solely the authors’.
- 5 UNITED NATIONS–ECLAC. *Dimensionar los efectos del COVID-19 para pensar en la reactivación*, Informe especial COVID-19 No. 2, April 21, 2020, 21 p.
- 6 Allen Blackman, Ana Ma. Ibáñez, Alejandro Izquierdo, Philip Keefer, Mauricio M. Moreira, Norman Schady and Tomás Serebrisky. *La política pública frente al COVID-19: Recomendaciones para América Latina y el Caribe*, Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank, IDB Monograph 810, 2020. 46 p.

## Immigrants in the United States

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The U.S. is a country of immigrants. With the exception of the nation's indigenous people, practically all Americans can trace their roots to an immigrant ancestor or to their own arrival as an immigrant. Nonetheless, despite the romantic view of the immigrant origins of the U.S., the reality is that immigrants of ethnic minorities have experienced significant levels of hostility and racism throughout their history in this country. The last three decades have seen a variety of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)/Homeland Security operations designed to make entrance into the United States more perilous and deadly, policies that have criminalized immigrants, the rise of a lucrative private-sector detention system, soaring levels of deportations, and more recently in the Trump era unfiltered racism directed against immigrants of color, notably Latinos. Images of Central American children pulled away from their parents arriving on the southern U.S. border fleeing violence in their countries are heartbreaking and demonstrate the rock-bottom level that Trump has taken the country to regarding its humanitarian and human rights concerns.

Enter the COVID-19 into the United States in early 2020. The pandemic has exposed two realities concerning immigrants in the United States. On the one hand, as the nation's residents begin to shelter-in-place, immigrants have been identified as "essential workers" who are indispensable for sustaining Americans and the U.S. economy. Latino immigrants are on the frontlines of COVID-19 taking care of the sick, providing home care services to the elderly and disabled, picking crops and toiling in meatpacking operations to put food on our tables, laboring in construction sites, and other sundry activities.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid out in plain sight the vulnerable conditions of immigrants. Indeed, immigrant essential workers lack personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep themselves safe from the virus, earn low wages, and lack the most basic benefits.

In addition, immigrants who are essential workers as well as their peers who have lost their jobs are not eligible to receive a stimulus check nor unemployment benefits from the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. In fact, even U.S. citizens married to unauthorized immigrants are ineligible to receive a stimulus check. Moreover, immigrants in detention centers in the U.S. are at extremely high risk of contracting the virus due to their cramped living quarters and the lack of basic hygienic necessities.

The analysis conducted below examines the socioeconomic attributes of Latino immigrant workers to assess the challenges that they face now and in the coming months and years following the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus is on the United States and Texas. Data from the 2018 American Community Survey are used in the analysis.

### The disadvantaged position of non-citizen latinos

While immigrants have historically fared worse than their native-born counterparts, it is those without naturalized citizenship status who are particularly disadvantaged. Non-citizens make up 28 percent of the U.S. Latino workforce.

Latino non-citizen men employees are the most likely to be working in industries that have been designated as "essential" during the COVID-19 pandemic. About 57 percent of Latino non-citizen men in the U.S. and 62 percent in Texas toil in essential industries (Table 1). Latina non-citizen workers are the least likely to be employed in essential industries with approximately one-third in these work activities.

However, noncitizens fare significantly worse socioeconomically compared to their citizen counterparts. For example, Latinos lacking citizenship have the lowest levels of education with just slightly over half possessing a high school diploma, and even fewer in Texas. In addition,

**TABLE 1.** Socioeconomic Characteristics of Latino Immigrant Workers in the United States and Texas, 2018

Selected Characteristics	United States			Texas		
	Not U.S. Citizen	Naturalized U.S. Citizen	Native-Born	Not U.S. Citizen	Naturalized U.S. Citizen	Native-Born
% in essential industries						
Males	56.8	53.5	49.2	62.3	58.1	51.9
Females	34.4	48.6	48.9	33.9	50.7	52.5
% high school graduate or higher	53.1	75.5	88.3	47.8	69.6	86.1
% bachelor's degree or higher	9.3	21.9	21.3	8.3	20.3	18.6
Median household income	\$58,760	\$80,035	\$81,048	\$53,694	\$71,525	\$75,172
% in poverty	13.6	6.0	7.8	15.5	6.7	8.4
% without health insurance	45.7	14.5	14.1	57.0	25.9	23.9

**Source:** 2018 American Community Survey.

non-citizen workers live in households that earn 73 cents for every \$1 that other Latino households make. Moreover, Latinos lacking U.S. citizenship have poverty rates that are approximately twice as high as those of citizens. Finally, Latino non-citizen workers are much more likely to lack health insurance with 46 percent nationwide and 57 percent of those in Texas lacking this basic necessity. Put simply, Latino immigrants who are disproportionately on the frontlines of the pandemic are in harm's way with an increasingly eroding safety net. Low wages, high rates of poverty, and no health insurance are recipes for catastrophic ordeals when workers or family members become seriously ill, lose their jobs, or cannot pay their rents or mortgages. These challenges are notably difficult in Texas, where Republicans have ruled over the state for the last three decades and have enacted minimalist social programs along with anti-immigrant policies.

## Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the growing inequality in the U.S. that has created two worlds—one white and the other of color—as well as an underground world consisting of persons who lack U.S. citizenship. It is clear that Latino non-citizens are essential to the U.S. economy as they are on the frontlines during the pandemic, but at the same time they are put in even more dire situations risking their lives in the face of the pandemic as essential workers.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has upended our daily lives, we, social scientists, who study immigration and inequality will need to rethink our own theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and personal values. We need to ensure that we more forcefully push for the establishment of more equitable public policies, including immigration reform, that are just and humanitarian and that do not put people in perilous conditions.

## Returning to Mexico in the Context of the Pandemic

Claudia Masferrer | El Colegio de México

Returning after living abroad is not usually an easy process. A little under twelve million Mexicans live out of the country: almost 11.5 million in the United States and the rest mainly in Canada, Europe and Latin America. Many have had families, have children born abroad and define home as someplace outside Mexico. It is difficult to foresee what will happen in future, but it is highly probable that returning to Mexico increases due to the economic impact of the pandemic, as well as to harsh social and political conditions, even more complex than the ones produced by the Great Recession of 2008.

Coming back to Mexico, often hand-in-hand with the immigration of foreign relatives, will make people face new realities after the pandemic. Upon returning, these Mexicans and their families would have to endure adaptation processes and challenges to find housing, participate in the educational system, in the labor market, meet relatives they have not seen in a long time, be included in their communities of origin, and get used once more to habits and ways of living of a country they may find alien.

It is possible that ailment will trigger an early return if someone decides to look for health care in Mexico given the lack of opportunity to access health care abroad, or to overcome the quarantine in the company of family who remained in Mexico. There are some figures signaling an increase of arrivals during March and April 2020, but it is still soon to know the real return numbers, as air and land crossing between the U.S. and Mexico, and other countries, are limited.

Returning implies the risk of being associated with the possibility of contagion through virus import. Unfortunately, deportations have not stopped.<sup>1</sup> During the first quarter of 2020, thousands of Mexicans were removed and returned from the U.S., without taking into account those not registered because they did not cross in points with U.S. migratory authorities. Cases of infection have not only been reported in U.S.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers,<sup>2</sup> but also in shelters in Mexico<sup>3</sup> and Guatemala,<sup>4</sup> all associated with returning from the United States. It is feasible that the stigma of “the migrant as a source of infection” is added to other stigmas stemming from the criminalization of migrant populations. In recent years, with the growth of deportations and tighter migratory controls in the U.S., stigmatization of returning persons became evident in Mexico.

Mexicans return and have historically done so for family, health, or economic reasons, or because of migration authorities, with or without a deportation order. In the collective imaginary, returning is erroneously associated with deportation which, in turn, is linked with detention and having perpetrated a crime. Few know that living as an undocumented person or with an irregular status is not a criminal offense. Since the last six-year (presidential) term, the Mexican government began to inaccurately use the term “repatriate” to name those who have returned to Mexico. There is still time for the reforms to the Migration Laws, which were being prepared before the pandemic, include legislation and language modification that do not stigmatize or criminalize returning people, immigration or refuge, and that acknowledge the needs of a heterogeneous population.

Very often migration and returning imply leaving family behind without knowing when they will be together once more. For others, migrating as a family is the option to avoid separation, even when there may be other challenges in it. Figures for 2015 show that at least half a million U.S. born children live in Mexico, most of them with a Mexican father or mother.<sup>5</sup> Several analyses document the difficulties encountered by U.S. and Mexican children, with or without experience in the U.S. educational system, once enrolled in the Mexican one.<sup>6</sup> Other studies pinpoint the hardships faced by returnees and their U.S. children or spouses when trying to socially enter into the community they arrive to, and to be accepted given

their different attires, their speaking English, or Spanish with an accent, or simply for being different.

The challenges around obtaining a position that guarantees a good salary are even tougher. It is not only hard to find a job, but the relative advantage returnees in Mexico had in the past, is now lost. Both for Mexican returnees and for U.S. nationals in Mexico, labor income or wages have decreased from 2000 to 2015, in every region of the country.<sup>7</sup> The Mexican labor market is precarious and salaries are depressed, both, for those with migration experience in the U.S., and for those who did not migrate. In light of COVID-19, a deterioration of the labor market for everyone is expected. It is necessary, thus, to creatively think of a way to foster access to employment, improve working conditions and provide salaries that may ensure a good quality of life, taking geographic differences and the local contexts in which these migrants and their families live, into account.<sup>8</sup>

As of May 2020, and against expectations<sup>9</sup> and contrary to some measurements<sup>10</sup>, remittances increased. It is yet unknown whether these remittances were sent to counter the toll of social distancing, or if they are destined to prepare an eventual return. A planned return may facilitate reintegration processes and anticipate an extensive series of actions contemplating the diverse challenges ahead. It is relevant to share academic findings that document these challenges for future

returnees. In this respect, consulates are able to approach people prior to returning and help make planning easier. Unfortunately, we shall also face the unexpected return of Mexicans who gave their lives being “essential” during the pandemic. COVID-19 has severely struck the Hispanic community in the U.S., regrettably taking the lives – and continuing to do so- of Mexican nationals.

The 2020 Census will not capture the growth of returnees due to the pandemic, nor changes in migration post-COVID-19. Generating information to define public policies is imperative, even in moments of austerity. It will be important that academia and the public sector look for ways to generate data that allow analyses of the migration phenomenon through administrative data or representative surveys not only at the national level, but also at states levels. Supporting research projects will be a priority, as much as creating programs and policies for populations in mobility, even with limited resources. Supporting civil society organizations that have historically backed these populations will be equally vital.

Several of us have questioned whether return means “going back home”.<sup>11</sup> Future returnees will arrive to a depressed home, austere and tired from the lock-in, whose members have suffered anxiety due to uncertainty, to the sadness of losing loved ones, and to the strain of lack of jobs and salaries. Let us think of ways to offer a better welcome to returnees, to their arrival and reunions.

## NOTES

- 1 Little has been said about deportations from other countries, but Canada deported 39,570 Mexicans since 2000, according to figures of Canada Border Services Agency (obtained through data request). Of these deportations, 493 took place from January 1st. to April 22, 2020.
- 2 Up to May 5th, 2020, there were 705 confirmed COVID-19 cases among those in custody of ICE, 39 confirmed cases among detention center employees, and another 102 employees not in these centers (<https://www.ice.gov/coronavirus>).
- 3 “Vinculan un brote de coronavirus en un refugio para migrantes en México con un deportado desde EE.UU,” <https://www.latimes.com/espanol/mexico/articulo/2020-04-22/vinculan-un-brote-de-coronavirus-en-un-refugio-para-migrantes-en-mexico-con-un-deportado-desde-ee-uu>.
- 4 “Drama Migrante: Suman 85 retornados infectados del virus,” <https://lahora.gt/drama-migrante-suman-85-retornados-infectados-del-virus/>.
- 5 Claudia Masferrer, Erin R. Hamilton, and Nicole Denier. “Immigrants in Their Parental Homeland: Half a Million U.S.-Born Minors Settle Throughout Mexico.” *Demography* 56, no. 4 (2019).
- 6 Víctor Zúñiga and Silvia Giorguli Saucedo. *Niñas y niños en la migración de Estados Unidos a México: La generación 0.5*. (Ciudad de México: Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Urbanos y Ambientales, El Colegio de México, 2019).
- 7 Nicole Denier and Claudia Masferrer. “Returning to a New Mexican Labor Market? Regional Variation in the Economic Incorporation of Return Migrants from the U.S. To Mexico.” *Population Research and Policy Review* (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-019-09547-w>
- 8 It will be useful to go over the review of the state level situation presented in Claudia Masferrer, *U.S.-Mexico Return Migration Atlas*. (Ciudad de México: Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Urbanos y Ambientales, El Colegio de México, forthcoming).
- 9 “Remesas a México sorprenden con récord en marzo pese a Coronavirus”, *Forbes Mexico*, <https://www.forbes.com.mx/economia-remesas-mexico-marzo-record-pese-coronavirus/>.
- 10 “Mexican Workers Hit by U.S. Lockdowns Struggle to Send Money Home”, *Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mexican-workers-hit-by-u-s-lockdowns-struggle-to-send-money-home-11586856600>.
- 11 See, for instance, Claudia Masferrer and Bryan R. Roberts, “Going Back Home? Changing Demography and Geography of Mexican Return Migration,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 31, no. 4 (2012); and Liliana Rivera Sánchez (ed.). *¿Volver a Casa? Migrantes de retorno en América Latina. Debates, tendencias y experiencias divergentes*. (Ciudad de México: Centro de Estudios Sociológicos, El Colegio de México, 2019).

## Mobility and Citizenship in the Face of the Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic has displayed the extreme vulnerability and inequality that thousands of migrants experience without acknowledgment of their citizenship rights throughout the world. Every State has established several contingency measures to deal with the effects of an unprecedented phenomenon. The closing of borders and the calls for confinement that entails closure of activities in public spaces and public life are two of the measures that have directly impacted the conditions of populations in mobility situations, which raises two central issues: human mobility and citizenship.

Since these measures were imposed, some movements of populations from different latitudes around the world have been observed. On the one hand, Venezuelans that decide to return to their country of origin from Colombia given job losses and the impossibility to pay rent due to the closure of non-essential activities<sup>1</sup>. Moroccans and Algerians wanting to return to their places of origin from Spain given the economic situation due to COVID-19<sup>2</sup>. Central Americans in high risk conditions in detention centers requesting that the Mexican government deports them back to their countries of origin<sup>3</sup>, among other cases.

On the other hand, there are forced displacements promoted by the State, like the case of deported people from the United States to Mexico and Central America, in principle, a measure to prevent the spread of the virus in detention centers in the United States<sup>4</sup>, but which once again reflects the State's control over peoples bodies, subjected to a biopolitical logic in which they are considered "disposable"<sup>5</sup>. In any case, this scenario of mobilities poses a series of questions that could lead to considerations about the social configurations that the pandemic and post-pandemic times demand.

A first line of analysis or hypothesis surrounding this panorama of world crisis and mobilizations would be based on the fact that the consequences of the closing of public space activities

—a main source of informal work for the best part of undocumented migrants— clearly show the lack of protection by the state under which migrants are, evidencing their not being considered subjects of citizenship rights. This demolishes the myth of the individualism over which extreme levels of social inequality have been sustained and accentuated. Thus, different questions will come up: are recent mobilities due to COVID-19 a search to recover a relationship with the state of origin? And, therefore, the evidence of the cracks in the regimes of modern citizenship?

In conceptual terms, international migration has questioned the traditional notion of citizenship which defines the relationship between State and individuals. Authors like Fisher<sup>6</sup> and Collyver<sup>7</sup> have posed that, with migration, a distancing from the State of origin occurs; migration limits that link. Some people face this condition by trying to be recognized by the receiving State in order to access citizenship rights. In most cases this becomes a lengthy journey that keeps them permanently at risk of deportation. That's why authors like Menjívar<sup>8</sup> have spoken about the "non-citizens" to refer to undocumented migrants who, deterritorialized, remain without citizenship or, as stated by Moreno<sup>9</sup>, undergo a process of loss of citizenship or "de-citizenshipzation".

Overall, individuals' relationship with their State of origin stops being a priority in the face of the possibilities of belonging and permanence parallel to the political affiliation opened up through informal jobs, which mostly take place in public and community spaces. Given the effects of this pandemic, it would seem this is being reverted and that the recovery of the relationship with the State of origin is being set as a resource given unemployment, dispossession and social neglect.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 crisis is global. The limited and overwhelmed capacities of States to protect all population in a phenomenon such as this have been bared; the long-term effects on the economy will no doubt be severe. If migration

entails distancing from the State, the return processes imply unequal paths towards recovering citizenship of origin, especially if the emigration period was protracted<sup>10</sup>. Mobilities produced by the search for protection by the State in the context of the current pandemic, will represent considerable challenges and transformations for State and society in general. The question then is, are the States of origin prepared to face a possible scenario of multiple returns?

At least in Mexico the answer seems clear. In regards to deportations from the United States, the panorama on the Mexican end is chaotic: with shelters closed in order to stop the spread, and the suspension of support programs, plus the closing of INE modules (acronym in Spanish for the National Electoral Institute, in charge of giving out the IDs that have become Mexico's proof

of citizenship document)<sup>11</sup>, for example, which translates into a pause in the processing of documents for deported population and is, therefore, an obstacle to access or claim other rights, the Mexican State's capacities to support and protect can be seen as insufficient.

Given the State's inability to respond to these questions and to the population's needs, it is crucial to establish an international cooperation system which proposes a new citizenship paradigm; one in which States, as administrators of social welfare, act in accordance with the global interconnection and interdependence which has been evidenced during this pandemic, and incorporate humanitarian measures for universal protection for all individuals in their territory into their policies, under which free human mobility is seen as a resource to overcome the crisis.

## NOTES

- 1 "Crisis por coronavirus obliga a venezolanos en Colombia a retornar a su país," El Universal Cartagena, <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/colombia/crisis-por-coronavirus-obliga-a-venezolanos-en-colombia-a-retornar-a-su-pais-NY2643816>; Alexandra Correa, "Estallan los desalojos de venezolanos en Colombia por culpa de COVID-19," Deutsche Welle, <https://www.dw.com/es/estallan-los-desalojos-de-venezolanos-en-colombia-por-culpa-de-covid-19/a-53052755>
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## Childhood and Cross-Border Education. Challenges and Strategies amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Gloria Ciria Valdéz Gardea | El Colegio de Sonora

### Introduction

Research with migrant children and adolescents implies several challenges for those of us who study their migration trajectories and educational paths. First, since they are a vulnerable group, access to these actors is restricted and we generally find them in schools<sup>1</sup>. Second, since updated and reliable databases of migrant children and adolescents do not exist, we have had to design our own strategies to count and identify them. Third, notwithstanding their educational level, there are exclusion dynamics towards migrant children and their families in education offices, classrooms, and recreation spaces.<sup>2</sup> Fourth, there are few or no strategies for educational inclusion of migrant students in the classroom;<sup>3</sup> quite the contrary, several have to repeat the academic year, fail and/or are silenced because they are not entirely fluent in academic Spanish.<sup>4</sup> Finally, there is no follow up of the migration and educational paths of student migrants once they are enrolled in school. In other words, there is no transitional program in Mexico between the education system they come from, into the education system they arrive to.

Specifically, the state of Sonora is among the five states in the country with the highest number of migrant children and adolescents. Only in 2019, there were approximately 30,000 migrant children, returned from the United States, enrolled in schools; they represented 5% of the total student population enrolled in basic education.<sup>5</sup> In addition, between 2018 and 2019, there was an increase in the arrival of migrant children and adolescents from other countries, mostly from Central America. These migrant children added new challenges to cross-border education in the state, given that their identification and follow up is even more complex.

### Education challenges for migrant children and adolescents in the pandemic

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, suspending classes at a national level created even bigger challenges. For example, in Sonora, the Ministry of Education and Culture suspended paperwork regarding receiving documentation and school regularization procedures for returned migrant children and adolescents, and those waiting for asylum in freedom, who had been accepted in school with the condition of obtaining missing documentation. As a result, these unenrolled minors will not be able to receive their “Learn at Home” (“Aprende en casa”) at a distance regularization school supplies, like the rest of the students, which could place them at a greater academic disadvantage when they enroll.

On the other hand, whether migrant children and adolescents had access to open television and/or internet was not taken into consideration. Likewise, if their native language is not Spanish, the “Aprende en casa” program and lack of face to face communication with teachers could be barriers to their learning and to continue getting acquainted with the Mexican educational culture. Further complications arise when mentoring at home is done by parents whose educational level is low, or their grandparents, who aren’t familiar with technology and cannot offer guidance.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, these education challenges increase for migrant children and adolescents who are confined in government shelters, like the Tin Ocho government shelter for Central Americans, and for those who are free awaiting asylum. After the suspension of activities, these children lose access to different courses, classes, and tutoring, like those provided by the Seminario Niñez Migrante. Likewise, visits to those shelters by staff who volunteer has stopped, which makes migrant

children and adolescents fall behind in socialization and contact with the outer world. These circumstances could generate depression, anxiety, or other psychosomatic illnesses.

### Intervention strategies from academia

The pandemic challenges us to rethink research activities in order to make visible, count, educate and follow up migrant children and adolescents. The current context requires creative and innovative interdisciplinary strategies, which integrate new technologies, in order to continue research projects, but especially to help migrant students obtain quality education. Therefore, we recommend:

1. Using existing platforms from several research centers like the Seminario Niñez Migrante, in order to make visible and promote truthful and real time information related to protection measures and strategies.
2. Keep in touch with migrant children and adolescents and their families through mobile apps and social media, in order to strengthen friendship ties and follow up their educational paths.
3. Use snowball sampling strategies so that education programs can be shared with friends and family who are in the same situation.
4. Promote real-time, virtual interaction spaces between students and tutors specializing in Spanish, math, geography and history, in order to avoid educational lagging.
5. Provide interactive tools that motivate students in their educational paths. Among them: education apps, instructional videos, infographics, webinars and content for social media like Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat and personal blogs, among others.

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## Laborers in Export Agriculture, Poverty and COVID-19

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Few people know that the remittances from international migrants do not reach the poorest households in Mexico. Although there are extremely poor households which depend on remittances by more than 50%, the largest part of remittances arrives at homes with a greater number of workers, with good housing conditions and with a variety of resources and assets.

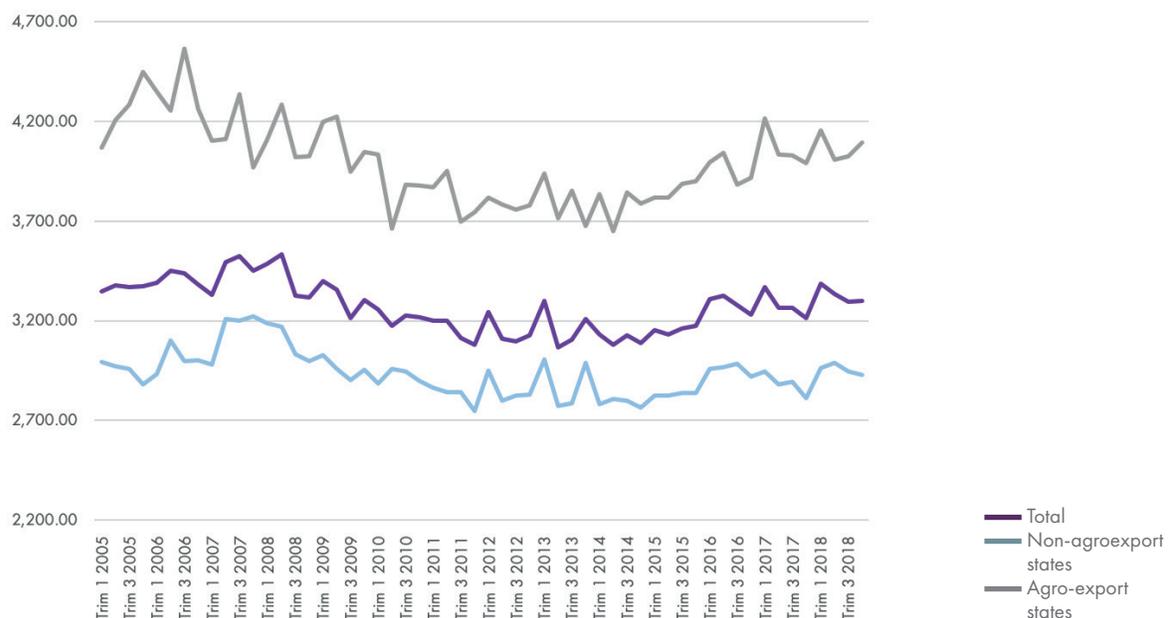
On the contrary, agricultural laborers who are internal migrants, particularly indigenous people, do leave from the poorest communities and households in the country, and their remittances –whenever they can send them– are directed to those communities and families. In terms of the effect on poverty, extreme poverty in particular, internal migration is much more “focused” (by migrants themselves) and much more effective.

Since 2014, the agricultural trade balance<sup>1</sup> is positive. For the years 2018 and 2019, the trade

balance for agriculture and livestock<sup>2</sup> accounts for over 80% of Mexico’s commercial surplus with the U.S. On the other hand, manufacturing has a trade balance close to zero. It is encouraging that Mexican agricultural exports grow between 6% and 10% each year, and that, consequently, agricultural labor grows at a similar rate.<sup>3</sup> By 2019, agricultural export laborers exceeded 1.2 million people. Wages increased for the poorest workers in Mexico. There were more laborers in agricultural exports than auto industry workers, which for many years has been considered the pillar of Mexican exports.

This growth has two important characteristics. In the first place, laborers’ wages in the largest exporting states are 40% higher than in least exporting states and have increased since 2013–14, even though they haven’t recovered their purchasing power of 2007. Both facts can

**Graph 1** Monthly wages 2005-I to 2018-IV (constant pesos 2016.III=100)

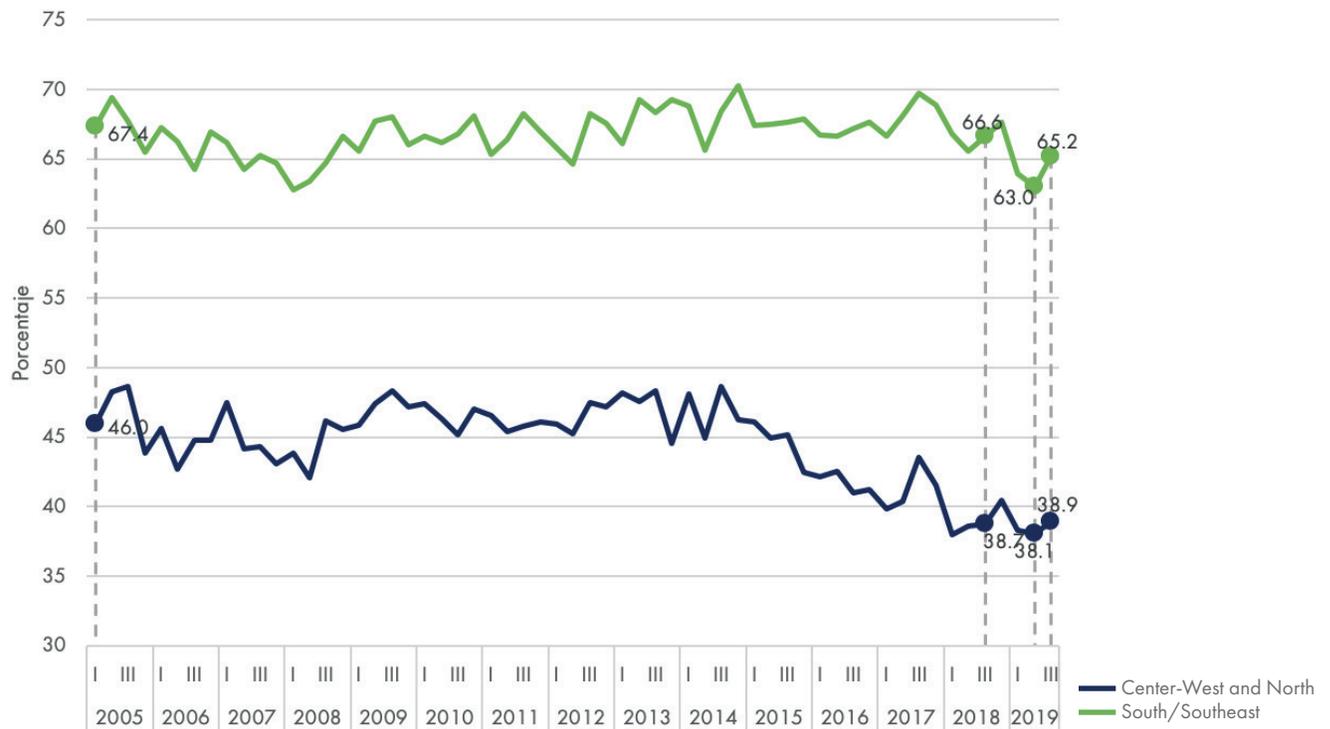


Source: ENOE – INEGI, 2005 – 2018.

be seen in Graph 1. There are several factors that explain this increase since 2014: 1) a scarcity of labor produced by decades of massive migration to the United States and to Mexican cities, mainly from rural areas in western Mexico, reducing, as a consequence, approximately 40% of the young adult population, which also decreased the amount of births in Mexican rural areas; 2) the foundation and start of operations of the International Alliance of Fruit and Vegetables for Social Responsibility (AHIFORES, acronym in Spanish), and of regional and sector associations with the same aim.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this Alliance is to promote better general working conditions in the export sector. The Alliance promotes certifications related to no child employment, eradication of human trafficking and meeting the benefits established by law; 3) the occasional and unequal intervention of the governments of Mexico and of the U.S.A. in this sector, has ordered audits, closed companies, supported employers who want improvements, and pressured in different ways for enhancing the laborers' working and living conditions.

The second important fact –and a positive one– is that labor poverty has been reduced considerably in the largest exporting states, as seen in Graph 2. The graph compares the percentage of laborers whose income does not cover the price of a basket of goods, according to the official Mexican definition by the Mexican National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL). The upper line shows rural labor poverty in the states of Tlaxcala, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Chiapas, Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo, which are states that contribute little to exports. The lower line shows the percentage of workers along the same lines in the largest exporting states: Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Sinaloa, Sonora, Baja California, San Luis and Nuevo León. The largest exporting states have a lower percentage of their rural labor population under the line of poverty, so they have higher incomes. Also, between 2005 and 2019 in the graph, the gap between both groups of states gets wider and goes from 21 to 27%. While in the southeastern states labor poverty remains constant, in exporting states it decreases significantly, from 46 to 39%.

**Graph 2** Percentage of workers with labor income below the price of the market basket of goods in rural areas, by region



Source: ITLP, Coneval.org. Estimated by CONEVAL for the author.

Nevertheless, and despite this, employing more of these workers opens opportunities for abuse: contractors or employers scrimping on their rights, benefits or salaries or, through mechanisms such as debt, they don't let them leave. According to Escobar, Martin and Stabridis<sup>5</sup>, the most vulnerable and exploitable sectors of society are the ones who participate in agricultural day-labor jobs; and agricultural work -when turned into positions for a minority-, becomes the receptacle of people excluded from other jobs and areas. Thus the trafficking, child labor, being exposed to toxic substances, unacceptable living conditions in some shelters and camps. A positive tendency is no guarantee that everything is alright.

What has happened and what is expected as an effect of the pandemic? In multiple interviews with producers and associations, we have found that tomato has received a huge impact, with big economic losses, but that the rest of fruits and vegetables have not felt important changes. There is uncertainty and closures and sudden changes in the U.S. that have generated and will generate closures and losses in Mexico. The largest producers are planning a smaller production for September-October 2020. Surprisingly, employers and associations do not see an imminent danger in massive unemployment in the United States,

where 20 million people lost their jobs between March 15 and April 15, 2020.<sup>6</sup>

If this optimism is materialized and the sector does not suffer major impacts, its positive contributions might continue, benefitting an extremely vulnerable labor group.

Nevertheless, even with this scenario, if there are negative impacts, the risks are substantial: while the homes with two laborers in the sector are above the poverty line, when they lose a worker for any reason, they go below it. Beyond that, if the economic consequences of the pandemic generate unemployment in the U.S. and Mexico and the lack of workers ends, the positive tendencies in salaries and benefits will turn around. Without government intervention and shielded by the "essential sector" classification in Mexico and the U.S., abusive employers will take advantage with impunity.

The Ministry of Social Labor and Welfare (STPS, acronym in Spanish) has substantially cut its budget in areas in charge of protecting laborers. They have practically no inspection capacity. To ensure that all employers abide by minimum wages and legal benefits, it is vital that such capacity is restored and to guarantee fulfillment of the law and labor rights for those employed in this export sector.

## NOTES

- 1 Strictly regarding the agricultural sector, Mexico exports, above all, fruits and vegetables. Half the fresh fruit and a fourth of the vegetables bought in the U.S. come from Mexico, the main exporter of these products to the U.S.A.
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## Challenges to Asylum and International Protection during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ana Saiz | Sin Fronteras IAP

### Introduction

In Mexico, 26,000 persons have been acknowledged as refugees since 2016, according to data from the Mexican Commission for Refugees (COMAR, acronym in Spanish). This institution faces one of its biggest challenges given the constant increase in refugee applications since 2017, when they received 14,619. In 2018 the figure was 29,634 and in 2019, 70,609. They received the largest ever number of applications in the last two years<sup>1</sup>.

The response from the Mexican government was to decrease the budget for the institution, which is not over one million dollars a year. In addition, there's a lag in their work and the COVID-19 pandemic increases pressure on the asylum granting system.

This system, which was already insufficient, precarious and overwhelmed, is now even more compromised with Mexico's acceptance of the Migration Protocols Program (MPP) or "*stay in Mexico*",<sup>2</sup> through which more than 60,000 people have been returned to the border to await their turn for months in order to meet with asylum judges in the United States. There are also the expedited deportations implemented by the USA, and the closing of borders in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

There are three characteristics of people in mobility that place them at a disadvantage:

### 1. Precarious health before beginning their journey

Limited access to health, a preexisting condition or acquiring an illness are all reasons to migrate. In countries like Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, medical treatments are not very accessible. This situation includes illnesses like cancer or HIV and forces people to migrate and seek asylum to access treatment.

This can be illustrated in the case of a Honduran family which arrived to Mexico seeking protection and to look for a treatment for their baby *Juan*<sup>3</sup>, born with kidney failure. The doctors in their country suggested they should migrate. Juan received the necessary treatment and a few months afterwards, his recovery was significant, his cognitive development improved, and he was able to have affective interaction with his family.

### 2. Failing health in transit and caused by unsuitable places like migration detention centers

The journey for people who leave their countries is precarious and dangerous. We need only remember the accidents they are exposed to while traveling by train. Many deaths and acquired disabilities have been documented in the so called "beast," the only transportation option for many people.

The terrible conditions that desperate people are exposed to due to the limited access to their destinations by regular means have also been documented; even children and pregnant women, in hiding while traveling, guided by people smugglers in trucks where they may die suffocated,<sup>4</sup> or in boats without knowing how to swim and without any protection.<sup>5</sup>

Clandestine travel exposes them to extortions by public officers or organized crime. In Sin Fronteras IAP, it is not surprising to see cases like *Pedro*, a 22-year-old Salvadoran who was traveling by train and was raped between Chiapas and Oaxaca. As a result, he got syphilis, an illness that could have been treated more effectively and without grave consequences had there been access to regularization in Mexico, reporting the crime and timely medical attention.

Like *Pedro*, many women are victims of sexual violence during their journey through Mexico, without access to medical and psychological

treatment to alleviate the effects, and/or resulting in unwanted pregnancies.<sup>6</sup>

There are cases like Nancy, a 9-year-old who arrived with her family from Venezuela. When seeking asylum, she was taken to the Migration Detention Center in Mexico City, where she had a respiratory complication due to asthma and not having access to Salbutamol. Or the case of *Farid*, a 34-year-old Iranian who lost eleven kilos while being at a detention center, without access to a proper diet for him as a Muslim, provoking serious complications from a cold.

### 3. Limited access to health and to information while in transit and at destination

It is frequent for refugees not to access medical services in the same way as nationals due to several barriers such as lack of documents that can prove their legal stay in the country, language and cultural barriers, situations sometimes complicated due to their fear of being persecuted or deported back to their countries.

We can take the case of *Jonathan*, a 24-year-old homosexual person who ran away from El

Salvador when threatened by a gang because of his sexual preferences and for having HIV. When he arrived in Mexico, he was afraid of being stigmatized and discriminated, so he hid his medical condition for several months. That made his case more complicated and his antiretroviral treatment even more complicated.

Additionally, the information asylum seekers access is limited or not very accessible and can generate risk situations like the recent riot at the detention center in Tenosique, Tabasco, in which unfortunately an asylum seeker lost his life.<sup>7</sup>

### Conclusion

Refugees or people who need international protection are a particularly vulnerable group in the pandemic. They are heterogeneous populations and therefore, more than designing specific policies for their protection, it's essential to include them in general health safety measures in order to effectively eradicate this illness. The obligations in terms of asylum must be equally shared according to each state's possibilities in order to adequately address the challenge imposed by COVID-19.

## NOTES

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## Mexican Communities in the United States during the Pandemic: Precarity, Mutualism, and Solidarity

Alexandra Délano | The New School

I am writing from the table in the small dining room in my house in Queens, New York: the epicenter of the epicenter,<sup>1</sup> one of the most ethnically and racially diverse counties in the United States and the world.

COVID-19 has exposed in a crude and brutal way the inequalities and exclusions people of color in the United States unjustly face, especially Latinos and African Americans, particularly the 10.5 million undocumented migrants who live in this country (47% of them of Mexican origin).<sup>2</sup> The disproportionate effect the pandemic has on marginalized populations—more than half of the deceased so far have been African Americans or Latinos—uncovers the economic, political and social structures that determine the vulnerability of these groups.

This precarity is the result of discrimination, of an economic system sustained by poorly paid and disposable labor of people with lower levels of education and income, and of the absence of mechanisms that guarantee the rights of migrants people. The pandemic reveals and exacerbates these conditions. We are also forced to face the fact that all of us depend on the wellbeing and health of every other individual.

Mexican migrants in the United States are one of the populations with high risk factors in the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> They have high rates of diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, addictions, and domestic violence. Since they have low income jobs, with no benefits—jobs that in the context of the pandemic are finally valued and applauded as *essential*<sup>4</sup>—, a large percentage does not have access to healthcare. Employers generally do not offer safe work conditions or the necessary equipment to protect them from accidents or infections, as in the case of meatpacking plants, where some of the main spreads of the virus occurred.<sup>5</sup>

Cultural and language barriers limit migrants' access to health care and hospitals—especially in the case of indigenous—. The difficulties to access health information and services become

particularly acute due to the constant fear of deportation that many migrants live with. Individuals undocumented status, or with mixed status families do not trust authorities or any institution that might question their migration status and place them at risk of facing detention and deportation processes.

COVID-19 also places housing at the center of the debate as another indication of this precarity. In order to save money or simply because they don't have access to other type of housing due to discrimination, cost, or lack of credit history, many low income migrants share small apartments or rooms with families or co-workers, sleeping together in individual beds or taking turns to use them throughout the day.<sup>6</sup> Under these living conditions, social distancing is almost impossible; confinement is unmanageable for those who depend on an hourly wage to survive and to support families on both sides of the border.<sup>7</sup>

Even though there are federal government resources for the emergency, including the CARES Act, undocumented migrants are not eligible. In addition, the enactment of the final Inadmissibility on Public Charge Final Rule on February 2020 increased non-citizens people's fear of requesting support, even of state funds or special local funds.<sup>8</sup> The threats by President Trump that he will limit economic support to sanctuary states or cities contribute to this environment of mistrust.

In this context, and notwithstanding social distancing limitations and economic difficulty, migrant communities have once again shown their resilience, solidarity, and spirit of mutualism. Pro-immigrant organizations and coalitions have created funds to help community members, inviting people who have received a check from the CARES Act to donate it to those who are not eligible. Groups of neighbors, community organizations and restaurants like La Morada in the Bronx organize aid brigades and give out food. The Sanctuary Movement supports virtual consultations about legal migration processes and

promotes information through its wide network of volunteers. Furthermore, groups like Cosecha organize new ways of protest to demand the liberation of migrants in detention centers, where COVID-19 spreads have been reported and the risk of contagion is remarkably high.

The political and economic effects of the pandemic—unemployment, the decrease in remittances, new migration controls and other restrictions to human mobility—will have an impact beyond the immediate context and will aggravate existing inequalities. We must be ready to respond to the effects that confinement, the deaths, and the economic crisis will have on mental health, schooling, the stigmatization and xenophobia associated with COVID-19, new migration flows and on migrants' return to their countries of origin.

In light of this reality, the Mexican government, through its Consulates, must redesign its strategies and objectives, and redistribute its budget. For example, it could use consular infrastructure (including mobile consulates) to support community organizations that are carrying out support activities. They could also extend their Health Windows services and offer virtual education

platforms adapting the Plazas Comunitarias model. More than ever, Mexico will have to respond to the urgent call of returned and deported communities for comprehensive return policies.

One of the certainties that the pandemic leaves us with, is that returning to a normalcy based on precarity is unacceptable, and that today we have an opportunity to transform this reality. The principles of mutualism and solidarity – that the injustice and inequality affecting one person affects all of society<sup>9</sup>— show their clearest example today. The lack of protections for essential migrant workers; the normalization of inhuman conditions in detention centers and jails; the differentiated access to healthcare; the negligence behind having thousands of asylum seekers living on camps along the border; and the lack of programs focusing on the inclusion and wellbeing of marginalized populations, indicate the fragility and vulnerability of all society in the face of rapacious, extractivist and individualistic economic and political systems. COVID-19 clearly shows these structures are unsustainable and incompatible with the fight for life, for equality, for humanity. It is up to us to fight.

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## The Power of Local Leaders in the Era of COVID-19

**Rachel Peric** | Welcoming America  
**David Lubell** | Welcoming International

As the world responds to COVID-19, it is clear that our norms are being upended.

The question is, what would we like those norms to be as we emerge, around the treatment of migrants and broader issues of poverty, inequality, social cohesion and human rights?

There will be people working to bend those norms toward exclusion, profit for the few, increasing “us vs. them” narratives, and restricting the movement of people. The coming months are a perilous inflection point, creating the conditions for authoritarian regimes to use fear and the desire for safety and security to drive agendas that serve the few at the expense of many.

At the same time, COVID-19 is also a poignant reminder of the need for cooperation and cohesion to achieve public health and broad economic recovery. In fact, we are being given a once-in-a-generation, potential unifying moment to move beyond us vs. them to “we.” We shouldn’t squander it.

Our success in this pandemic - and so many of the issues that confront us today - is rooted in our ability to make sure everyone, including migrants, are part of the solution. After the pandemic, the effort to rebuild economies and societies is going to be one of the biggest global challenges for humanity since the end of World War II, and we will need everyone’s full talents and contributions to come out the other side stronger. For those who care about migration and inequality, this is a unique moment to demonstrate how the inclusion of all members of communities - whether they have lived in a place for two years or their entire lives - produces healthier, more resilient societies for all of us. To do that, we need to make sure that both newcomers and receiving communities are cooperating, building trust, and solving problems together.

Welcoming communities are ones in which there are ongoing efforts to create a culture, policies and practices that enable migrants and long-time residents to thrive and belong, together.

Over the past decade, hundreds of cities and towns in the United States and across the world have built this welcoming infrastructure, and it is leading to a more resilient, equitable response to COVID-19, as it has to other shocks in the past.

This kind of resilience is exemplified by places like Christchurch, New Zealand, where a terrorist attack on a local mosque took place in 2019. The Welcoming Communities<sup>1</sup> initiative led by Immigration New Zealand - an agency of the national government - has for several years been supporting a cohort of cities across the country to become more intentionally inclusive and cohesive. All of these cities have conducted community-wide “welcoming planning”<sup>2</sup> processes, engaging residents from all sectors of their communities to build social cohesion and identify and address systemic barriers to social and economic inclusion. As a result of these intensive efforts, participant cities proved particularly resilient in the wake of the shootings, coming together quickly and decisively to avert further conflict and build solidarity across ethnic and religious lines.

As the Office of Business, Innovation and Employment stated in their 2019 cabinet paper that led to a significant expansion of the program, “The 15 March terror attacks underline the importance of the Welcoming Communities Programme in building community resilience and supporting social inclusion and understanding. Welcoming Communities coordinators used their community contacts and networks to take a leadership role in their communities’ responses following the events in Christchurch.”

Another example is Salt Lake, Utah, which embraced a welcoming agenda and is demonstrating the impact of doing so as it confronts COVID-19. There, community leaders came together to create Welcoming Salt Lake<sup>3</sup>, an initiative led out of the Salt Lake County’s Mayor’s Office, in partnership with business, NGO, and other community leaders, and guided by the Welcoming Salt Lake Action Plan<sup>4</sup>. This plan led to the creation

of an office within local government, which today is playing a vital role ensuring that migrants are part of an inclusive emergency response<sup>5</sup> –an effort that is not without its challenges. More recently, and stemming from advocacy by Salt Lake leaders, Utah’s Governor announced the creation of a taskforce designed to ensure that migrants are incorporated in the state’s response to COVID-19—underscoring how local policy and narrative can influence higher levels of government.

In 2018, Salt Lake became a Certified Welcoming community<sup>6</sup> - the result of an in-depth audit assessing policies and practices designed to ensure that immigrants and refugees can fully participate alongside their neighbors in the social, civic and economic fabric of the place they call home. Certification continues to be used as a tool by local leaders, including the business community<sup>7</sup> to celebrate the importance of Salt Lake as a place that is diverse and inclusive - an asset for economic development.

The Salt Lake initiative has also played an important role in fostering social cohesion and trust across the community, and elevating the values that drive its policy work. This inclusive narrative has been a vital counterpoint to the toxic messages so commonly heard in the immigration debate in the U.S., and globally. While so often immigration policy takes a top-down approach, Salt Lake shows the important role that communities play in incorporating migrants and framing the issue - creating a greater sense of “we” that is the antidote to today’s us versus them debate.

Over the last decade, many more cities and towns across the world have used similar strategies, coming together through Welcoming International<sup>8</sup>, a global coalition of welcoming initiatives launched and supported by Welcoming America. Now is the time to build on the lessons those places have learned, and adapt their approaches for the current moment, as well as the Mexican context.

Recently, Welcoming International has begun working with the Commission for Human Rights of Mexico City (CDHCM, acronym in Spanish), and other partners, to begin to incorporate, and adapt, these approaches into the Mexican context. El Colegio de México and other research, NGOs, business, faith, government and civil society partners have played and can play an important role in crafting a vision and strategy for what an inclusive response and recovery can look like. Such a strategy would address the unique barriers to protection and support that migrants, refugees and other marginalized populations face during the height of the pandemic. Once out of emergency mode, a multi-sector “inclusive recovery planning” effort, similar to the local welcoming planning examples described above, could address the major barriers that migrants, other marginalized groups, and all residents will face on their journeys toward full economic and civic participation.

Can Mexico be a positive role model for new norms of cohesion and inclusion that can emerge from this pandemic? We hope so, and stand ready to support its leaders.

## NOTES

- 1 <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/what-we-do/welcoming-communities>
- 2 <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/what-we-do/welcoming-communities/resources>
- 3 <https://slco.org/welcoming-salt-lake/>
- 4 [https://slco.org/globalassets/1-site-files/new-americans/welcoming-sl-action-plan\\_pdf.pdf](https://slco.org/globalassets/1-site-files/new-americans/welcoming-sl-action-plan_pdf.pdf)
- 5 <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/news/member-spotlight-resilience-during-covid-19-salt-lake-county>
- 6 <https://certifiedwelcoming.org/>
- 7 <https://slchamber.com/salt-lake-county-announced-as-certified-welcoming/>
- 8 <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/welcoming-international>

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