



edited by Sergio Díaz-Briquets & Sidney Weintraub

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The Effects of Receiving Country Policies on Migration Flows

Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Sidney Weintraub

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The Effects of Receiving Country Policies on Migration Flows

Series on Development and International Migration in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean Basin

Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Sidney Weintraub, Series Editors

Volume I
Determinants of Emigration from Mexico,
Central America, and the Caribbean

Volume II Regional and Sectoral Development in Mexico as Alternatives to Migration

Volume III Migration Impacts of Trade and Foreign Investment: Mexico and Caribbean Basin Countries

Volume IV
Migration, Remittances,
and Small Business Development: Mexico
and Caribbean Basin Countries

Volume V
Small Country Development and International Labor
Flows: Experiences in the Caribbean,
edited by Anthony P. Maingot

Volume VI The Effects of Receiving Country Policies on Migration Flows

Series Preface

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) was a manifestation of widespread public concern over the volume of undocumented immigration into the United States. The principal innovation of this legislation—the provision to impose penalties on employers who knowingly hire undocumented immigrants—was a response to this concern.

This effort at restriction was tempered in IRCA by other provisions permitting the legalization of two types of undocumented immigrants—those who had resided in the United States since January 1, 1982; and what were called special agricultural workers (SAWs), persons who had worked in perishable crop agriculture for at least 90 days during specified periods from 1983 to 1986. Approximately 3.1 million persons sought legalization (what is popularly referred to as amnesty) under these two provisions. The breakdown was roughly 1.8 million under the regular program and 1.3 million as SAWs. Mexicans made up 75 percent of the combined legalization requests.

Two elements—punishment and exoneration—were essential ingredients of the compromise that made possible the passage of IRCA, but they also had the effect of working at cross purposes, at least temporarily. For a time, many persons who might have crossed the border without papers took the opportunity to regularize their status and thus enter legally. In our research we discovered many non-farmers who had not earlier considered temporary migration but who obtained papers as SAWs to enter the United States. Officials of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) asserted that there was widespread fraud under the SAWs program for applicants from Mexico and elsewhere. We verified from the Mexican side of the border that, indeed, there was fraud, but our evidence does not permit making an estimate of its magnitude. The two provisions together did not slow immigration but instead permitted some switching from undocumented to documented border crossing. During the period that legalization applications could be submitted, therefore, data showing a decline in unauthorized border crossings (apprehensions) were deceptive.

In due course, however, undocumented immigration began to pick up again, and apprehension data and other evidence now indicate that it is at

a level similar to that before enactment of IRCA. There is ample proof of the production of fraudulent documents permitting immigrants to show employers that they are "legally" in the United States. It is probably impossible to end this entrepreneurial document production short of instituting a foolproof identity card, assuming the word "foolproof" is an accurate characterization of technology. The idea of Americans having to show an identity card when seeking employment has not been accepted.

It is an overstatement to say definitively that IRCA has failed to accomplish its main task, to staunch the flow of undocumented immigrants by means of penalties on employers, but that is the initial conclusion one must reach. Its failure means that the available options for reducing the inflow of undocumented immigrants—assuming this is still the U.S. goal—are reduced by the one option that was earlier considered the most promising.

An identity card is not acceptable. A high fence, patrolled by armed guards keeping persons without papers from entering the United States, would be unacceptably obtrusive and also alter the relationship with Mexico. It would be anomalous to forcefully close the border to people at the same time the United States and Mexico are planning to open the border to the free flow of goods and services.

There thus remains only one feasible option—short of leaving bad enough alone and letting those who wish to come do so—and that is to foster the economic development of those countries that send the bulk of undocumented migrants to the United States. If punishment is not the solution, then perhaps development is.

We did not know development was really the only option when this research project was started. However, IRCA had a little-noticed provision that established the Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development with the following mandate:

The Commission, in consultation with the governments of Mexico and other sending countries in the Western Hemisphere, shall examine the conditions in Mexico and such other sending countries which contribute to unauthorized migration to the United States and [shall explore] mutually beneficial, reciprocal trade and investment programs to alleviate such conditions.

THE RESEARCH PROGRAM

The research program of the Commission focused on two broad themes: why people emigrate from their own countries to enter clandestinely into the United States, and what cooperative development measures are most appropriate to reduce the economic incentive to emigrate. More emphasis in the research was placed on the second of these two issues, particularly job creation in migrant-sending countries, because there was already ample scholarly literature on the motives for emigration. These motives are not solely economic, but evidence from years of research demonstrates clearly that the economic dominates.

We have culled the research supported by the Commission to sort out those essays that we think make valuable contributions to the literature on the relationship between development and migration. The authors of the essays are experts in this field from migrant-sending countries, Europe, and the United States. The essays selected are organized into six volumes, each dealing with a specific aspect of the development theme; each volume is therefore self-contained. In our judgment, the six volumes together make the most original contribution that exists to date on the development-migration relationship. We are gratified that Westview Press reached a similar conclusion and wished to publish the series.

Both editors were involved in the research program of the Commission: Sergio Díaz-Briquets as research director and Sidney Weintraub as senior research adviser. Our motive in bringing out the series is to provide scholars with a base of research from which they can delve further into the development-migration nexus.

As the listing of the series shows, one volume (Volume II) deals exclusively with Mexico, and three others (Volumes I, III, and IV) with Mexico and with other countries in Central America and the Caribbean. For the sake of convenience, we use the phrase Caribbean Basin to refer to the collectivity of countries in this region. The emphasis on Mexico is warranted by the evidence that Mexicans constitute about 70 percent of the unauthorized immigrants in the United States. Volume V deals with Central America and the Caribbean, and the final volume (Volume VI) with U.S. policies relating to development in and emigration from Mexico and other countries of the Caribbean Basin. Although we take responsibility as senior editors for all the volumes, the editor for Volume V is Anthony P. Maingot. The final volume contains the executive summary of the report of the Commission submitted to the Congress and the president.

The essays deal mostly with migrant-sending countries in the Western Hemisphere because that was the Commission's mandate and because the bulk of undocumented immigrants into the United States come from Mexico and other countries of the Caribbean Basin. However, the Western Hemisphere emphasis is not exclusive, and several comparative essays on receiving-country policies in Europe are included in Volume VI.

KEY OVERALL FINDINGS

Although research conclusions in the specific areas are discussed in each volume, some overall findings merit emphasis. The most important is the one already stated: that no viable alternative to economic development seems to exist that would significantly reduce undocumented immigration into the United States. It is hardly original to state that as a country becomes better developed, the economic pressure to emigrate is likely to be reduced. Historically, the development thesis has been demonstrated, particularly in Western Europe where countries of emigration became lands of immigration. Western Europe is now coping with its own undocumented, or unwanted, immigrants. Ireland, which has not enjoyed as much sustained growth as other countries in Western Europe, is still a country from which people emigrate. We observed, over time, that domestic economic well-being in European countries overcame the strength of networks in perpetuating outward migration.

Skeptics (including us) acknowledged the need for development, but they argued that it took too long to be relevant for dealing with current problems of undocumented immigration or, indeed, with anticipated migration movements over the next several decades. We do not know what income differential stimulates undocumented migration; nor do we know how much narrowing of this differential is necessary to deter emigration. We do know, however, that the difference between \$1,900 and \$19,000 a year—which are the respective 1990 per capita incomes in Mexico and the United States—is a stimulant to emigration. Completely closing this gap, even under wondrous estimates of Mexican economic growth, is apt to take more than 100 years. This is not the kind of assessment a policy maker likes to hear.

Yet, it is to this advice that our research leads. Sherlock Holmes was fond of saying that if all explanations but one to a conundrum must be discarded, then that one must contain the answer. This is the conclusion we reach. If emigration cannot be curtailed by other means, then the remaining viable option must be exploited; and it really does not matter if policy makers and legislators with a short-term outlook grumble at this conclusion.

The saving grace is that incomes do not have to be identical to act as a deterrent to clandestine migration. There is a natural desire of most persons to remain at home, which can be reinforced if economic hope is offered to would-be migrants and their children. We suspect, based on the research contained in the series, that absolute income differentials may matter less in the migrate-stay calculus than the direction of economic hope (that is, whether economic conditions at home are improving or

deteriorating). We are not referring here to improved economic conditions for one year or two, but sustained over a decade or so.

The importance of sustaining economic growth over some unquantifiable time period must be emphasized. What we found in study after study was that a short-term increase in income, over one or two years, leads to increased emigration. We came across no study that contradicted this finding. The reason, presumably, is that a modest increase in income makes it possible for people to afford the trip. If, as in the Mexican case, income per person increases by, say, 3 percent after inflation, this adds only \$57 to the annual income of the average Mexican. Even this overstates the case; the "average" Mexican, some 50 percent of the population, earns much less than \$1,000 a year. An increase in income of \$57 or less is not enough to deter the economic incentive to emigrate. But adding 3 percent a year, compounded over 10 or 20 years, might make a difference.

The conclusion that it requires continued economic growth to have a meaningful influence on curtailing emigration has as its corollary that the "cooperative" U.S. policy contained in the Commission's mandate must also be sustained. Although development is essentially an internal responsibility, and Mexico and other countries in the region are taking many needed steps to restructure their economies, the external environment plays a decisive role. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of U.S. economic policy except to note that if sustained economic growth is required in sending countries to reduce emigration pressures, then U.S. measures that frustrate this growth (particularly trade protectionism but also U.S. macroeconomic policy that slows U.S. growth or pushes up the interest rate that sending countries must pay on their foreign debt) will stimulate undocumented immigration. If the current push toward free trade between Mexico and the United States serves to augment the growth of income and employment in Mexico, it will also have a long-term effect of curtailing emigration pressure. Free trade between the United States and other countries of the region is a less immediate prospect, but it too may eventually help to stimulate the growth of income and employment of these nations.

One other overall conclusion that emerges from the research is that the economic development process as it has been pursued, certainly in the period since World War II, has stimulated internal migration. In country after country, the rural-urban population relationship has shifted in favor of the urban part of the ratio. Cities have burgeoned as the relative role of agriculture has diminished. Manufacturing and services have grown in importance compared with agriculture. This is the normal pattern of development, as witness the historical experience of Europe and the United States. Habits of migration have thus become commonplace

in sending countries in the Western Hemisphere, as elsewhere. Although it is more traumatic to pick up stakes and leave one's own country than to shift within the country, the difference is a matter of degree. Once networks, or ethnic diasporas, have been established in the United States, as they generally have for migrant-sending countries in the Western Hemisphere, even the difference of degree between internal and external migration diminishes. Thus, the number of undocumented immigrants to the United States should not be expected to diminish for the foreseeable future; and this fact increases the importance of sustained economic growth to keep people home.

The relative importance of Mexico as a sending country may decline in coming decades because its economic prospects are more auspicious than those of other countries in the region, particularly in Central America. In addition, migrant networks in the United States have now been established for Central American countries.

Populations in the migrant-sending countries are quite young, and none of these countries is creating enough jobs to satisfy all persons entering the labor force. This situation, once more, points to the primacy of economic growth as the necessary deterrent to emigration.

We have been struck in our investigations by how extensively people in the world are on the move. Our studies concentrated on the movement of people in the Western Hemisphere to the United States, but there are large migrations within Africa and Asia, and into Western Europe from the east (the former Communist countries) and the south (such as from North Africa into France and Italy). It is easier—not easy, but easier—to control immigration into Western Europe than it is into the United States, to which migrants can come across a large land border with Mexico. Yet the West Europeans are not having much success either in dealing with their immigration problem. As with the United States, the key to control is development in the sending countries. We are dealing, in other words, with a global phenomenon. The subject presents itself as a migration issue, but at its core it is a development matter.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The proper approach to development must differ from country to country—even apart from the conceptual or ideological model that is used. Mexico is a large, populous country in which there is scope for regional differentiation. This approach is not available to any meaningful extent for other countries in the Caribbean Basin. Mexico has a substantial industrial structure on which to base export-led growth, as it is now

doing. The industrial structure is more modest in Central America and hardly exists in much of the Caribbean.

Overall findings of the type set forth in this preface can take a policy maker only so far. Understanding the link between development and migration, and then making policy to influence both phenomena, requires intimate knowledge of conditions in sub-regions and in each country. This is provided in the six volumes in this series.

Our objectives in bringing out these volumes are twofold: to augment understanding of the development-migration relationship based on the extensive research that was carried out; and, much more importantly in the long run, to stimulate further scholarly research about this theme.

> Sergio Díaz-Briquets Sidney Weintraub

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Introduction

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