

Mexico-United States Migration

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Health Issues

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*Mexico-United States Migration
Health Issues*

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Foreword

Mexican migration to the United States has been part of the relationship between the two countries for more than a century. Geographical proximity, increasing regional integration, demand for Mexican workers in the U.S. labor market, as well as the economic asymmetries between the two countries and the inability of the Mexican economy to fully absorb a constantly growing labor supply, have favored the accelerated increase of both the migratory flows and of the Mexican population resident in the U.S.

One of the most worrisome trends of Mexican migration to the United States over recent decades has been the notable increase of undocumented migration. This trend now constitutes the predominant type of migration and has profound implications for both the originating and the receiving communities, and especially for the migrants themselves. The intensity and scale of this phenomenon have led to the recognition that international migration between our countries is among the top priorities on the political agendas of both and in the binational relationship.

The available legal channels for migration are limited, especially compared to the size of the migratory flow generated by supply and demand factors on both sides of the border. These conditions favor increases in undocumented migration as well as increases in the risks and costs associated with border crossing and integration into the receiving society under profoundly disadvantaged and vulnerable circumstances. This situation contributes decisively to limiting immigrant access to medical services and to increasing the risks migrants' health.

Good health constitutes an essential asset for the integral development of an immigrant's capacities, for performing labor, and for social participation. Enjoying good health not only benefits the immigrants themselves and their descendents, both Mexican and American, but also has larger social and economic implications for both the receiving communities and the places of origin. The health of immigrants, particularly the poorest and most mobile among them, is therefore a concern requiring attention from both Mexico and the United States in the form of programs and strategies with a binational perspective.

It is likely that Mexican migration to the United States will continue to be a pressing issue in the bilateral relationship for at least the next 15 years. It is therefore urgent that we delay no further in designing strategies and policy guidelines that address the most pressing needs of the Mexican population residing in the United States.

The Ministry of Health and the National Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Población-CONAPO) of the Government of Mexico, and the University of California through the California-Mexico Health Initiative of the California Policy Research Center, Office of the President, and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research have produced this document. The fundamental purpose of "Mexico-United States Migration: Health issues" is to present a general overview of the conditions faced by Mexican residents in the United States concerning their health care.

The document begins by describing the volume, trends, and characteristics of Mexican migration to the United States. It then addresses specific questions on migrant health, such as the availability of medical insurance coverage, the main ailments this population suffers, and access to and use of medical services. Finally, some consideration is given to the implications of the prevailing situation, conditions requiring special attention are identified, and the main political challenges are noted.

This report is a binational effort. It offers a good example of the potential for exchange of views, joint analysis, and shared use of diverse information sources that binational collaboration can foster. This document exists within the framework of initiatives that aim to strengthen the bonds of cooperation between the two countries, with the common purpose of contributing to the well-being of the Mexican population in the United States. We have not attempted to be exhaustive; instead this slim report offers an initial approach whose primary purpose is to motivate more thorough multidisciplinary study and institutional attention.

We trust that this report will contribute to shaping further initiatives directed toward promoting greater access to health care, encouraging a culture of prevention and timely attention to illness, as well as contributing to a better state of health for Mexicans and their descendants who reside in the United States.

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