There and back: well-being and vulnerability among Mexican migrants in the U.S. and Mexico

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There have been several major Mexico-United States, government-expert, migration-related policy dialogues (1995-7, 2000, and 2004-6). They have enabled both governments, academic communities and the public to gain a much improved understanding of Mexico-U.S. flows and the populations arising from them. They provided policy recommendations and influenced policymakers’ views. In addition, they helped moderate extreme nationalist positions related to migration in both countries, and provided continuity to academic and governmental exchanges that might otherwise be interrupted.

However, they have had three major shortcomings:
1. They approach the subject as if migrant welfare depended, mostly or entirely, on U.S. immigration policy;
2. They have paid little attention to documented Mexican immigrants in the U.S.
3. They have paid even less attention to migration and migrants in Mexico, and to Mexican policy vis-à-vis return migrants.

This past decade (2000 – 2010) defined new directions in Mexico-U.S. (and U.S.-Mexico) migration flows and stocks. The number of Mexicans in the U.S. ceased to grow, while the number of returnees recorded by the Mexican census quadrupled. Their jobs, incomes, well-being and vulnerability shifted appreciably.

Our study provides an up-to-date, original analysis that:
- Achieves an up-to-date balance of demographic change between 2000 and 2010, thanks to censuses in both countries, including the size and distribution of return migration;
- Emphasizes the diverse migrant stocks, and not the movements. The subject is the populations, not migration.
- Shifts attention towards those issues mainly responsible for the welfare of migrants, namely health, labor, security (their security) and education.
- Gains a much better understanding of the ways in which current policy environments (health, labor, security and education) affect migrants.
- Analyzes Mexican migrants in both countries, namely Mexicans who are currently residing in the U.S., as well as return migrants in Mexico, and their well-being and relationship to Mexican public policy.
- Finally, not to impact immigration legislation in the U.S., but instead to point at the specific policies in both countries that impact the well-being and vulnerability of migrants and their families.

Team:
The study was carried out by a group of 28 experts from the U.S. and Mexico.

- The team is led by Agustín Escobar (CIESAS), Lindsay Lowell and Susan Martin (ISIM, Georgetown University).
- There is one executive coordinator for each country team (Escobar and Lowell).
- Each issue was approached in a chapter written by 2 or more academics with binationa study experience and 2 or more other academics, from the U.S. and Mexico.

Study Structure and participants:

I. The Mexican population of the U.S. and return migrants in Mexico: Claudia Masferrer (McGill University), Gretchen Livingston (Pew Hispanic Center), Lyndsay Lowell (ISIM, Georgetown University), Carla Pederzini (Universidad Iberoamericana), and Jeffrey Passel (Pew Hispanic Center).

II. The health and access to health care of Mexican migrants in the U.S. and Mexico: Miguel Ángel González Block (Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública), Fernado Riosmena (University of Colorado), V. Nelly Salgado de Snyder (Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública), and Rebeca Wong (University of Texas).

III. Educational attainment, cognitive attainment, and access to education services by Mexican migrants in the U.S. and Mexico: Frank Bean (University of California), Susan Brown, Silvia Giorguli Saucedo (Colegio de México), Bryant Jensen (Bard College), Felipe Martínez Rizo (Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes), Adam Sawyer (Bard College), and Víctor Zúñiga González (Universidad de Monterrey).

IV. Employment and occupation, earnings, formality, tax contributions, social security, access to pensions: Jesús Arroyo Alejandre (University of Guadalajara), Salvador Berumen (National Migration Institute-México), Philip Martin (University of California), Pia Orrenius (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas).

V. Access to social services and programs in Mexico, and the role of Mexican social policy in retaining population or attracting return migrants. Israel Banegas González (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Agustín Escobar Latapí (Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social) and Graciela Teruel Belismelis (Universidad Iberoamericana).

VI. Security and crime in Mexico and their impact on emigration: Michael Feil, Liliana Meza (Universidad Iberoamericana).

VII. Vulnerability and fear among Mexican residents of the U.S.: Nestor Rodriguez (University of Texas).

VIII. Policy, politics and migrant populations: a binational approach. Susan Martin (ISIM – Georgetown, Rafael Fernández de Castro (ITAM), René Zenteno (COLEF).