

Highly Skilled Mexican Women Migrants To the United States

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Tobias Schwarz/Reuters

International migration is undergoing profound transformations; understanding them requires a thorough review of the conceptual and methodological frameworks used for analysis and the design of public immigration policies. Recent UN information confirms that 232 million peo-

ple, or 3.2 percent of the world's population, live somewhere other than their usual country of residence. Of that total number of migrants, 136 million are located in industrialized countries and the other 96 million in developing nations.

It should be noted that in recent years, growth in international migration has slowed significantly due to the recessive effects of the global crisis that broke out between 2007 and 2008. However, different information sources, among

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than men and are more prone to integrate
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for themselves and their families.**

them the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), suggest that flows are reactivating with the incipient economic recovery in some advanced countries, which puts the issue of migratory policy back on the multi-lateral agenda.¹

In this context, it is very important to remember that, since the 1990s, one of the emerging realities of international migration has been an increase in the number of highly skilled individuals vs. that of less skilled, and that in Latin American and Caribbean nations, women make up the most significant contingent.

Skilled migration corresponds to very different factors, among which are the transformation of knowledge into one of the most valuable assets of development, globalizing markets, the segmentation of goods production so that they can be made in several countries, as well as the line-up of incentives from the industrialized nations to attract highly skilled persons, unleashing a truly global competition for talent.

This article presents evidence about the dynamics of highly skilled migration from Mexico to the United States from 2000 to 2013, underlining that women are managing to incorporate themselves more favorably into the U.S. labor market. It also emphasizes the need for Mexico to develop a policy to reduce highly skilled migration and to take better advantage of its potential benefits.

**CURRENT SITUATION OF SKILLED MIGRATION
FROM MEXICO TO THE UNITED STATES**

Countries' competitiveness relies increasingly on their capacity to create knowledge and apply it to the production of goods and services. This has unleashed a worldwide demand for talent that spurs increasingly large flows of highly skilled individuals both among advanced nations and from emerging nations to the advanced ones.

As part of the policies to attract talent, developed nations, the headquarters for scientific and technological advances, are reproducing programs used in the United States, the main destination country for skilled migrants, by facilitating their visas.

They also offer them better opportunities for finding employment appropriate to their capabilities, higher wages, and facilitating their families' integration into society, in addition to offering scientific infrastructure and an institutional environment conducive to professional development. The United States also makes attractive job offers for persons who have moved there to do graduate work in strategic areas and have performed well academically. The U.S. elite shares a broad consensus about this policy of attracting talent.

In the case of highly skilled Mexican migration to the United States, in addition to those factors, others are also at work linked to the development gap between the two countries, the better educational quality of U.S. universities, the secular nature of migration, the powerful social networks built by migrants over time, and geographical proximity, which reduces transaction costs.

The operation of these forces, together with the U.S. economic boom in the 1990s and the first five years of the new century, made for a significant increase in Mexican immigrants. The micro-data from the U.S. Census Bureau *Current Population Survey* (CPS) confirm rapid growth in recent decades of Mexican migration, reaching 8 million born in Mexico and residing in the United States.²

By 2005, 11 million Mexicans were living in the United States, a 37-percent increase over 2000. However, the outbreak of the 2007-2008 financial crisis there, and the resulting recession, which translated into unemployment and the loss of real income, affected immigrants more than others, and not only made migration contract abruptly, but also encouraged the return of thousands of Mexicans to their homeland. So, in 2013, 11.8 million Mexicans were living in the United States, a modest increase of 7 percent between 2005 and 2013.

Several years of CPS information show that the schooling levels of Mexicans in the United States has increased rapidly as a result not only of a higher average in years of schooling in Mexico, but also because of the greater incorporation of persons with high qualifications into migratory flows.³ According to the CPS, the migration of Mexicans with higher education increased 154 percent between 2000 and 2013, rising from 411 292 to 1 045 326, while in that same period, total migration to that country increased 46 percent.

It is revealing that these new trends can be seen among those with master's degrees, whose numbers have gone from 31 000 to 122 000 in that same period, followed by those with a bachelor's (156 percent increase), or a technical uni-

versity degree (133 percent). Migrants with doctorates increased 49 percent, rising from 12 416 to 18 529 Mexicans.

MORE MEXICAN WOMEN AMONG HIGHLY SKILLED MIGRANTS

One of the emerging phenomena in international migration is women's increasing participation, not only in passive roles as wife, mother, or daughter, but also autonomously, increasingly frequently, regardless of their marital status or fecundity.

In that sense, a gender focus on the study of international migration has not only made visible women's multifaceted participation, but also enriches the understanding of recent dynamics in migration, both with regard to determinants (which must be differentiated by gender) and to the impacts on the dynamics in the households and communities of origin and destination.

In the case of international skilled migration, a gender focus reveals that women are improving their professional qualifications significantly more than men; they get better jobs and are more prone to integrate into U.S. society, with which they achieve better living conditions both for themselves and other members of their households.

By disaggregating 2013 CPS information by sex, one finding is that, of the one million highly skilled Mexicans living in the United States, 598 412 are women, a clear majority of 57 percent, compared to 446 914 men (43 percent). This has come about during the crisis and the subsequent recession, given that in the previous period, the figures favored the men slightly. However, it should be pointed out that today, men are the majority of the Mexican population in the U.S. with up to a high school education; women are the majority among those with a technical university degree (62 percent), a bachelor's (55 percent), or a master's (58 percent); only on a doctoral level do men continue to be an overwhelming majority: 15 467 compared to 3 062 women.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION IS LESS DISADVANTAGED

Higher schooling levels among women migrants and the measures to reduce their vulnerability are creating relative advantages for them *vis-à-vis* men, which can be checked by looking at their more favorable insertion into the job market

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and their greater integration into U.S. society. The same 2013 CPS micro-data sustain this assertion. In the first place, it is noteworthy that the largest occupational group for women is professional activities (29.4 percent); while this activity is also the most important for men, the proportion is significantly lower (21.5 percent). In order of importance, the second most important occupation for women is in the service sector (23.5 percent), while for men, it is public administration, business, and financial sector jobs (17.8 percent). The third largest concentration of women is in the financial sector (19.5 percent), and among men, it is construction and mining. These are followed, for women, by office work and clerical support (11.5 percent), and for men, the service sector (10.2 percent).

The economic sector also shows a clear gender bias: in 2013, one out of every three highly skilled women worked in education and health, 15 percent in professional and business services, 11.4 percent in manufacturing, and 10.5 percent in retail and wholesale sales. By contrast, the men were spread over a wider area of economic activity: the largest grouping was in professional and business services (17.9 percent), followed by construction (17.1 percent), wholesale and retail trade (13.9 percent), education and health (10.9 percent), and manufacturing (9.5 percent), among the most important.

Another sphere that shows up gender differences is in whether a person is employed or not. Thus, 95 percent of men with master's degrees had jobs, as did all of those with doctorates; among women, the proportion was different, since of those with master's degrees, only 69 percent were employed. Unemployment among both men and women with advanced academic degrees was non-existent, except for women with master's degrees, 7.3 percent of whom were jobless.

Wages and salaries among highly qualified Mexican migrants living in the United States were lower than those paid to equally academically qualified U.S.-born employees or immigrants from other nations. Among Mexicans, significant gender differences also exist, which, when added to the different situations in their households, determine different living conditions for men and women.

In general, 2013 CPS data suggest that gender inequality is less adverse for highly qualified Mexican women residing

in the United States than in Mexico. Women with master's degrees earn a monthly average of US\$5 720, while men with the same schooling earn US\$3 711 on average. The situation is the reverse among those with doctorates, since the men earn a monthly average of US\$8 536, while women with the same degree earn US\$6 833.

It should be pointed out when assessing this information that the data are a snapshot of March 2013, and that the high level of women's inactivity may be due to their tasks in the home, raising children, and taking care of older adults, activities that traditional cultural patterns assign to women, and that this stereotype may continue to be affecting them even though they are part of this highly skilled segment of the population.

One way of approaching knowledge about the living conditions of highly qualified Mexicans living in the United States is to ask about their opportunities for escaping poverty. According to the U.S. norm, 19 percent of the homes of men with a master's and 8.5 percent of those of women with a master's are poor; and while no household of women with doctorates lives in poverty, 13 percent of the homes of males with doctorates live in poverty.

To complete the picture that reveals less vulnerability among Mexican women migrants with advanced academic degrees, it should be pointed out that 52.5 percent and 75.4 percent of women with a master's and a doctorate, respectively, have become naturalized U.S. citizens. The proportions among the men in the same circumstances drop notable: 31.1 percent and 47.4 percent, respectively.

FINAL CONSIDERATION

Mexico-U.S. migration patterns are moving rapidly toward greater participation by highly skilled Mexicans; among them, more and more women are present, except among PhDs, where men continue to be the majority. Women are also achieving more favorable insertion into the labor market, and the income they earn and kinds of households they are in allow them to fight off poverty to a greater degree than the men.

The U.S. 2007-2008 financial crisis and the slump that has followed until today caused a brusque containment of Mexican emigration north, as well as the return to Mexico of a little over one million people between 2005 and 2010; of these, only a minimum number is highly qualified.

The new profile of international migration and the eventual recovery of migratory flows with the reactivation of the U.S. economy put forward the imperative that Mexico structure a new migratory policy to avert the loss of human capital and increase productivity and the national economy's competitiveness. In this sense, it is a priority to deepen our knowledge of women's migratory patterns. ■■■

NOTES

¹ OECD, "International Migration Outlook 2014," Paris, <http://www.oecd.org/migration/>.

² U.S. Bureau of Census, *Current Population Survey. Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC)*, March 2013, <http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar13.pdf>.

³ CPS, <https://www.census.gov/hhes/migration/data/cps.html>. [Editor's Note.]