

Mexicans in Canada: Contexts of Departure and Arrival

Prepared by Wei Wei Da for the Latin American Research Group

2002

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I. Context of Departure

a. Numbers of Incoming Population, Time Periods, and Peaks

Table 1. Refugee Claimants from Mexico by sex, 1989-2002

Year	Male	Female	Total
1989	76	36	112
1990	177	100	277
1991	121	92	213
1992	151	122	273
1993	137	77	214
1994	165	99	264
1995	383	229	612
1996	524	423	947
1997	623	416	1039
1998	656	535	1191
1999	674	495	1169
2000	824	598	1422
2001	972	759	1731
2002	837	629	1466

Source: See Elmagrabby, 2002

Table 2. Refugee Claimants from Mexico by age group, 1989-2002

Year	0-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-65
1989	3	7	1	1	12	33	24	18	7	3	2
1990	8	11	10	10	53	73	64	26	14	5	2
1991	10	12	6	15	42	53	31	19	12	8	3
1992	17	27	26	13	51	54	33	21	10	8	7
1993	11	15	11	18	48	55	27	19	5	2	2
1994	19	17	13	33	64	48	32	13	8	8	4
1995	58	35	36	67	160	126	57	32	28	4	5
1996	112	68	50	117	205	169	101	53	39	13	9
1997	132	66	55	189	236	161	81	64	24	16	8
1998	200	72	98	231	228	146	101	63	34	11	4
1999	173	53	114	292	241	137	80	37	25	11	4
2000	259	60	163	328	268	152	90	43	36	14	3
2001	284	85	288	428	293	143	91	72	22	12	11
2002	252	81	257	363	214	132	74	56	22	10	3

Source: Elmagrabby, 2002

Table 3. Refugee Claimants from Mexico by marital status, 1989 to 2002

Year	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated
1989	54	52	1	2	1
1990	132	130	1	4	2
1991	115	91	1	1	3
1992	163	90	2	4	7
1993	129	65	2	7	8
1994	161	82	6	7	4
1995	386	179	5	13	11
1996	526	342	11	21	16
1997	594	362	5	15	19
1998	692	374	3	21	29
1999	596	337	5	24	36
2000	769	364	4	28	30
2001	1046	438	6	48	38
2002	919	410	6	36	36

Source: Figures are provided by Sambia Elmagraby, Section of Statistics on Refugees, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ottawa.

b. State Policies that Contribute to the Displacement

Mexico has the oldest civilization in the Americas. It was conquered by Spanish in 1519 and gained its independence from Spanish rule in 1821. Unlike other Caribbean countries, Mexico became industrialized during the late 19th century. Beginning in 1910, a revolution took place that launched land reform and redistributed the land to the poor. Political unrest continued till the 1950s. Mexico experienced considerable economic growth and prosperity during the mid of 20th century (Goldring, 1999).

Mexican immigration to the US started in the early of 20th century. The majority of Mexicans to the US came from rural or working class backgrounds. Mexican migration to Canada has a relatively short history. Most Mexicans in Canada are either landed migrants or guest workers; the NAFTA agreement signed in 1988 and a guest worker program introduced by Canadian government in 1981 have facilitated their movement and entrance to Canada. Mexico is not a conventional refugee producing country. Yet, there has been a sharp increase in the numbers of refugee claimants from Mexico to Canada since 1995. For example, Mexican refugee claimants were only around 200 persons per year, but this figure was tripled in 1995 with a total of 612 Mexican refugee claimants, and continued to go up to more than 1731 in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Recent Mexicans refugees to Canada are associated with the following issues and events:

- The outbreak of the Marxist-led Zapatista rebellion (peasant uprising) in the southern state of Chiapas on New Year's Day 1994
- The 1997 massacre of villagers in Acteal, Chiapas, in which a paramilitary group killed 45 indigenous men, women and children.

The plight of indigenous population and the unsolved conflicts with the Chiapas-based Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas state has been at the centre of domestic and international attention. Human rights abuse, killings, the torture and ill treatment of detainees, and displacement of indigenous people have all taken place, led by security forces or “paramilitary” / armed civilian groups. Indigenous people are often the victim of conflicts and violence (Amnesty International Report 2000).

Apart from this, there are also severe female abuse and child abuse in Mexico which are expressed in various forms, including child labour, child trafficking, child trade and child pornography. The National Commission for Human Rights published a report that revealed that prisoners were tortured and ill treated. Although the government tried to take measures to tackle these issues, the situation has not improved significantly. During the years 2000 and 2001, Mexico was among the leading source countries for refugee claimants in Canada.

Mexico had been ruled by one-party government for about seven decades. The year 2000 marks the first time an opposition party has been elected to office. The current government, led by Vicente Fox, promised to tackle long-standing human rights violation issue. The critical break Fox government made from the past is opening the country to international scrutiny by human rights monitors.

Supported by the US, Mexico decided to become a buffer zone for third country migration, and tried to tighten its immigration control. It restricted insurance for tourists' visa. According to Mexican government figures, the numbers of undocumented entrants expelled from Mexico rose from 5,000 in 1988 to 80,000 in 1989, and up to 133,000 in 1991.

The restriction to access to the Mexican border caused great consternation among Central American countries. The Mexican government promised the US that it would adopt more restrictive measures to reduce the flow of undocumented migrants. NGOs have alleged that the promises were made under pressure over the NAFTA and emergency loans between the US and Mexico.

However, there has been an increase of Mexican migrants to Canada (not necessarily refugees) although Mexicans have not traditionally migrated to Canada. The total Mexican origin population has increased noticeably in the last 10 years

The situation that prompts migration to Canada are several:

- The guest worker program was introduced in Canada in 1966 to meet the demand for labours since the WWII. According to Basok (2000a), the programme attracted about **5,000** Mexican workers to come to Canada to participate in the program annually. The working and living conditions of Mexican workers are regulated by a Human Resource Development Canada Statement Policy. They are provided with approved free accommodation and slightly less than half of their airfare by employers who pays PARMS fees of \$Cdn 37.45 per worker and visa fees of \$Cdn 150 per worker. Also

according to Basok (2000b), guest worker programmes have often led to Mexicans to overstay their visa and remain undocumented / illegally in Canada.

- NAFTA, The North American Free Trade Agreement was signed 1992 (Simmons ed., 1996)
 - The Accord facilitated the flow of Mexicans to Canada in general.
 - Relaxed the visa requirements for Mexicans coming to Canada, which might lead to an increased flow of undocumented workers.
 - Opened Mexican national markets to global competing, producing greater economic dislocations in land (peasants), and increase gaps between social groups among different regions and countries. As Grinspun (1996) argued it has made the unequal distribution even worse.

- Mexican devaluation of currency, economic crisis (1996) hits the middle class, prompts new kind of migration (Roberts, Bryan R; Frank, Reanne; Lozano-Ascencio, Fernando, 1999).

- Economic instability information and NAFTA impacts as part of reasons for increased flows; and for increased demographic diversity within the flow (in other words, not just peasants/ workers, but also the middle class; and professionals). There is debate among specialists of Mexican migration regarding a direct link between the currency devaluations of 1994 and increased migration flows, especially undocumented flows. There is surely a link between middle class migration and general economic instability.

To summarize, methods for the increased flow include: overstaying work permits from seasonal worker programme (Basok, 2000b); and overstaying tourist visas.

II. Context of Arrival

a. Canadian State Policy

The Foreign Domestic Workers Program was introduced in 1981, which allowed people to come to Canada on a temporary contract, but could apply for permanent residence (PR) after two years in Canada.

Acceptance rate.

According to official figures, the acceptance rates of refugee claimants from Mexico over the past four years have been:

1999	18%
2000	24%
2001	21%
2002	20%

Source: Elmagraby, 2002.

The Canadian visa office is located in Mexico City. It provides full services for immigrants, workers, visitors and students, and processes applications only from Mexico. Information about staffing in the Visa sections is not available from public source.

b. Civil Society Reception

Residential Concentration

Table 4. Mexican population by citizenship in GTA, 1996 census

By Community Council Areas	Population
Scarborough	160
Toronto	625
East York	45
North York	495
York	120
Etobicoke	220
Total	1,665

Source: Social Development and Management Services Division. 1998. Toronto - Census 1996: Summary report #3. Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services Department. Table 5.

Mexican voluntary organizations

Toronto (Goldring, 1999).

- Mexican Canadian Association, which was set up in 1985. Its goal is to preserve Mexican cultural values. Its activities include celebrating national holidays, publishes monthly newsletter with information on events. It does not provide services related to employment, lawsuit and the like. It has membership of 70 families. Women have an active role in various activities.
- Mexican Canadian Alliance which was established in 1994, split from the Mexican Canadian Association with a 60-person membership. Membership is also open to non-Mexican. Preserving Mexican culture through a dance group.
- Association of Mexican Professionals was formed in 1992 with 150 members. They hold seminars and workshops on various issues for its members, and meetings for networking.
- Group of 100 Women established in the early 1990s. Its members come from a wide range of social circles. They organize forum for its members, and various workshops on issues of interest to its members. They reject mentioning ranks and titles.

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Internet Resources

<http://www.nsi-ins.ca/download/concerns.pdf>

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