

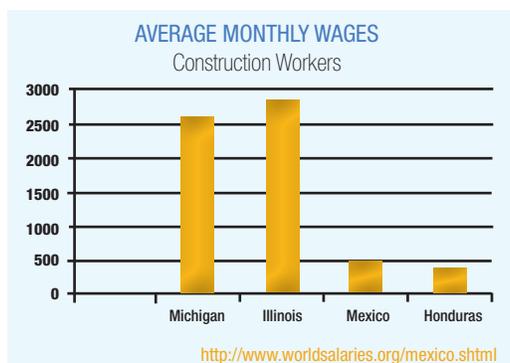
Why do People Migrate?

People move around—in search of jobs, to connect with families, and to avoid danger. This is as true today as it has been throughout history. If properly managed, migration can have many positive effects. But forced migration—when people see no alternative but to move—can have negative impacts for families and communities.

In the case of the U.S/Mexico/Central America corridor, there are many reasons for migration:

Economic Inequality and Wage Disparities. Despite promises of rising wages under NAFTA, wages in Mexico have remained largely stagnant since 1994. Adjusted for inflation, wages rose only 2.3 percent between 1994 and 2012, according to the Center for Economic and Policy Research. For poor families, gains in income were wiped out by increases in costs for basic goods. Purchasing power for low wage work has fallen by nearly 75 percent since a high in the 1970s. Workers in the lowest 20 percent do not make enough to eat three meals a day.

While wages have also stagnated for U.S. workers under NAFTA, disparities between the United States and Mexico/Central America are dramatic. While the trend holds true across multiple sectors, the chart below offers an example of wages for Midwestern construction workers compared to their peers in Mexico and Honduras.



These same trends hold in Central America, where the first 14 years of CAFTA (a similar treaty to NAFTA involving Central American countries, the United States and the Dominican Republic) brought a surge jobs in the low-wage maquila manufacturing industry, but few improvements for workers. According to the World Bank, 66 percent of the Honduran population lived in poverty in 2016, a figure virtually unchanged from pre-CAFTA days.

About 130,000 people work in the maquila industry in Honduras, many of them women, who earn \$150 to \$200 per month. Workplace abuses, including sexual harassment and abuse, wage theft, dangerous conditions, and reprisals against labor organizers have been extensively documented.

Environmental and Economic Displacement of Rural Communities. Prior to 1992, many small farmers in Mexico lived on small plots of land known as ejidos that had been deeded to them in the post-revolution reforms of the 1920s and 1930s. In preparation for NAFTA, Mexico changed its constitution to allow these plots to be sold or seized by creditors. After a short grace period, NAFTA also opened the door for exports of US corn on the Mexican market, which dramatically lowered prices.

The two NAFTA-related events had the combined effect of forcing more than two million Mexican farmers were forced off their land between 1997 and the early 2000s. Many of them went to already overcrowded and heavily polluted cities and manufacturing zones of Mexico, worsening existing environmental and health conditions. Others had no alternative but to seek work in the United States.

Safety and Security Concerns. Many recent Central American migrants have fled violence and insecurity in the region. In previous decades, civil wars and violent conflict also drove migration from this region. Violence, often linked to the drug war is a less-reported, but still important driver of migration from parts of Mexico as well.

El Salvador had the highest homicide rate in the world in 2016, edging out Honduras, which held that dubious honor between 2011 and 2013, according to CNN. Children, women, and young people were among the most at risk. The number of murders of women in El Salvador increased 140 percent during the first four months of 2016 compared to 2015, and the Northern Triangle Countries collectively comprise three of the top four countries for femicide in the world.

