

**Panel:**

**“MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE FAMILY”**

**THE ROLE OF CSO’S IN HELPING THE FAMILIES OF MIGRANT WORKERS**

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The vast majority of the masses of people who migrate do not do so because they want to. They don't go abroad to go to graduate school or to get happily married in the country of their choice. They leave because they have no choice, either because of lack of economic opportunities or because of political pressure. The vast majority of people leave in very unfavorable conditions. I mention this, because I am aware that in Mexico, after 500 years, we are still a deeply racist society with huge inequalities, that is, differences between the haves and the have-nots, between those who have a lighter skin, and those who are darker or native Mexican Indians.

I worked with native Mexican Indians in the Lacandon rainforest in Chiapas two years. I worked in a Mexican Indian high school and met really bright kids, who I think would have done much better than me, had they a slight coat of paint on the outside, had their skin bleached. But no, they were born into a marginalized native Mexican Indian family, with no opportunity to migrate of their own accord, as I have done, in my own country or abroad.

I think that these inequalities, unfortunately, are increasing dramatically, with clear lines of color, class, nationality, sex. This also creates massive and growing migrations of people who have nothing, and when in the United States they don't have Internet access – I wish they all had - nor a telephone to communicate with their family and maintain their roots.

Such racism can occur in various aspects. There are clearly aggressive racist positions, white people hunt who migrants at the Mexican border. There are also

more benign faces of such racism. When we refer to our “inditos” (poor Indians), “chinitos” (poor Chinese), the “negritos” (poor black people), there is an ontological difference, that is, a completely different understanding of who am I in relation to others and who is inferior to me. It is not a black person, it is a poor black person. This is not exclusive to governments or legislators, but permeates all society and is a cause for concern. We come across cases every day of black people, for example, physicians, who cannot find work because they are black, and if they do find work they can only work as laborers, and others who are Colombian, and on the verge of signing a contract to rent a house, then they discover they are Colombians, and, strangely enough, suddenly it turns out, gosh, you know, somebody else offered me to pay a higher rent, better forget it.

These expressions of discrimination affect the factors that push migrants to leave for lack of opportunity, and on top of it, when they reach their countries of destination, they do not arrive at the top with educational opportunities, employment, and so on, but arrive at the bottom of society, and they end up underselling themselves.

During the last few years there has also been a clear increase in acts of violence against migrants. There are no statistics, because the phenomenon is illegal, by definition illegal migration is not seen, heard, nor spoken about. The people whom we work with in shelters realize that there is marked increase in human rights violations, kidnapping, extortion by authorities, and systematic rape of women. This is why Central American women carry not only food or whatever in their bag, they also carry contraceptives, because they assume that they will be raped during the journey.

This increase in inhumane acts of violence against migrants has been accompanied by a strengthening in control and containment migration policies. For us, these two phenomena, i.e., better control of migration and the increase of violations of human rights, are not casual but causal. They are directly related, because the increase in control systems and other steps are supposed to make migration more difficult, and they do, but they will not stop migrants. They will find migrating much more difficult, but will they will keep on doing it, even under conditions of total vulnerability.

What about a foreign person, black or brown or whatever, who has no papers at all, is totally helpless and vulnerable in this society that sees itself as very progressive, open, and revolutionary. We note with great concern that the roots of the problems are not being addressed and this is creating many new problems.

To speak of the family, in particular, which is the theme of the symposium, it is impressive that in immigration detention centers there are specific areas for children, and areas for families, families and children, who have committed no crime, other than seeking a better life. Whole families are detained, deprived of their freedom. Children aged 10 - 12, stuck alone in a prison which has a nicer name, a migratory station. It is painted, has many bathrooms, at least no longer a bathroom for 100 people, but is none the less a privation of liberty for people who left their country seeking a better place to live, and who have not committed any crime. What is the impact on these families, these children, on their future? In what kind of a world are these children, these families growing up in? In what world are they living in?

I will give another example of the challenges facing families, particularly children. Our Constitution states that all those who were born in Mexico, or have been naturalized as Mexican, are Mexican. So if a Honduran or Brazilian mother or whoever, has a child here, that child is Mexican, therefore entitled to a Mexican identity, and a right to education, health and other services. But in practice when a foreign mother goes to register her child as Mexican, she is usually faced with tremendous barriers: "let me see your ID or your birth certificate". "I don't have one." "Then you cannot register your child". That is an issue that we're working hard on with Sin Fronteras, with the National Migration Institute and the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance, in order to train civil servants that it is illegal to deny birth registration, because the law says: a child is entitled to an identity and so on. We are working on that part of identity which is a lot of work, so that the child may have a birth certificate. Then the barriers for those children to enter school, the health service and other systems are also insurmountable in most cases.

I worked for a long time in the Puebla and Oaxaca Mixteca region. People say there are more Mixteca people in New York and Los Angeles due to the number of people migrating, than in the Mixteca area, which is one of the poorest and also one of the driest regions of the country.

What causes the migration of young people, the most suitable for physical work in rural areas? I have witnessed this in the Mixteca and in the Chiapas regions. Those who know how to work the land leave. Those who know how to work the land leave and work as laborers and things like that in the U.S. Educational possibilities in Mexico are deplorable and in rural, indigenous, villages, they are disgraceful. Then these children, whose family traditions provide their only education, for education really does not exist in the spaces that are called schools, have no possibility of getting educated. At school, they go and sit and the teacher keeps telling them that Benito Juárez was born on such and such a date and this is no use to them. Where they used to learn was in the field with their parents who worked the land, who knew which seeds were good and which were no good, how to “chaporear”, as they say in Chiapas, clear the field so that plants can grow.

There is an extremely strong cultural breakdown, that is to say, there is no cultural reproduction within the family. When the people who have all the knowledge and strength to do the work leave, we only have the elderly, and women, and less and less so, as women also are leaving with their young children. So what is going to become of the other children left at home, with no family, no educational opportunities within the family, with few formal educational opportunities, and that is the future of Mexico, and it happens a lot. I am grateful that there are success stories, it really makes me happy, but the vast majority of people in Mexico do not migrate under these conditions, neither those who migrate from here nor those who come here as migrants.