Migration and development: what’s the relationship?

While migration has been a constant feature of human history, the last few decades have witnessed an exponential increase in people on the move, particularly across nation-state boundaries. In 1965 the “migrant stock” (all people living outside of their country of birth regardless of how long ago they migrated—a cumulative figure) was estimated to be 75 million; today it is 214 million (UN Population Division 2002, 2012). The current figure includes 15 million refugees.

“Migrant flow” measures the number of people moving each year. Approximately five million migrants cross international boundaries each year. Of these migrants, about half are seeking work (either documented or undocumented) with the intent of returning to their country of origin. Another 1.5 million are permanent government-approved migrants, and around half a million are refugees or asylum seekers. [See the map of migration flows on p. 16.]

In the last 50 years, theoretical and policy perspectives on international migration and development have shifted in close association with prevailing socio-economic development paradigms. Broadly speaking, earlier, more positive perspectives centered analysis on the individual or household unit, and the later, more pessimistic models considered migration within the global political economy.

The first perspective is based on rational decision-making of individuals about their best prospects for maximizing their incomes. More recently, research has expanded this to look at how decision-making happens at the level of the household or family unit: families make decisions about who migrates and who stays in order to secure and advance the whole household economy. In this perspective, migrants are the “heroes” who kick start economic development with their remittances—about $440 billion a year globally. This results in the following cycle, sometimes called the “virtuous circle”:

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The second approach views migrants primarily as objects of economic, social, and political forces beyond their control. This includes various theories of labor market development in capitalist economies. Migration is understood as a means of mobilizing cheap labor for capital. At the nation-state level this includes rural-urban migrations as well as seasonal migrations for the export agriculture sector. Internationally, flows of low-skilled labor from less-developed to more industrialized countries intensify the asymmetrical economic development that was a consequence of European colonialism. This dynamic can be illustrated by the “vicious circle”:

- **Core-periphery division and dependency**
  - Labor migration
  - Majority world labor freely available for capital in core economies
  - Impoverishment and income gap increase

- **Virtuous circle**
  - Beginnings of development in poor countries
  - Individuals migrate
  - Trend to income equilibrium and elimination of the ‘root causes’ of migration
  - Enhanced development in home country with remittances
  - Less migration

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Learn more


Migration for Development Community of Practice: www.migration4development.org/

Global Forum on Migration and Development: www.gfmd.org/en/
In the last two decades, scholarly analysis has attempted to integrate structure and actor perspectives and formulate more nuanced understandings of how migration fits into the increasingly globalized socio-economic system. At the same time, researchers are exploring the ways in which local conditions and individual agency interact with larger socio-economic forces.

While most academic research is recognizing complexity in migration and development, prominent public policy voices, including sectors of the United Nations, seem to have returned to a simple optimistic perspective “celebrating migration, remittances and transnational engagement as self-help development ‘from below’ [and shifting] attention away from the relevance of structural constraints and the important role states and other institutions play in shaping favorable general conditions for social and economic development to occur” (de Haas, 2008).

Critics of this optimistic view question the idea that some of the world’s most exploited workers should provide the capital for economic growth. They argue that a strategy based on exporting workers to richer countries is a sign of the failure to achieve development in the interest of the majority of the population (Castles and Delgado Wise 2008). Without political and economic reform, remittances are likely to lead to inflation and greater inequality.

This issue of Intersections offers a variety of theoretical and practical reflections by MCC workers and others on the dynamics of migration and development in MCC’s diverse programmatic contexts. International development organizations, especially faith-based ones like MCC, have traditionally focused on responding to the immediate humanitarian needs of migrants and refugees. Yet, careful analysis of the migration-development relationship is essential if MCC is to respond effectively to the long-term needs of migrating peoples and their communities of origin and destination.

Adrienne Wiebe is the Policy Analyst and Educator for MCC Latin America based in Mexico City.

Mexico: a global crossroads

Most people equate migration and Mexico with hard-working men and women who build houses, cook in restaurants, and clean shopping malls in the United States. Furthermore, when we think of Mexican migrants we probably think of the estimated 6.6 million people working in the U.S. without approved immigration documents.

Growing up in Houston, Texas, my understanding of Mexicans and of immigration was mostly informed by television and the kind woman who cleaned our home every other week. After having lived and worked with migrants and refugees in Mexico City for the past six years, that image has completely changed for me.

Mexico is a global crossroads at a moment in world history when people are moving across borders in higher numbers and to farther distances than ever before. Mexico in many ways exemplifies this contemporary reality as a nation that sends, receives, and is transited by migrants.
Mexico “sends” more of its citizens abroad than any other country in the world, 97% of which arrive in the United States. Nearly 12 million men, women and children—one in ten Mexican citizens—live, work, and study in the U.S. Meanwhile, the number of Mexican immigrants to Canada has more than doubled over the past two decades, growing from 22,000 in 1991 to nearly 50,000 in 2006. While Mexican immigrants account for 58% of immigrants without legal status in the U.S., almost 6 million Mexican-born immigrants have their papers. Recent studies show that more Mexicans are returning to Mexico even as fewer are leaving, but it is a net zero migration flow. In other words, as many Mexicans who return, just as many are continuing to move North. Despite the grand promises of NAFTA in 1993, the neoliberal economic policies across the region have only led to a steady stream of Mexicans leaving their homes and communities in search of an adequate income in the United States.

The same neoliberal economic policies have made Mexico a major site of transit migration. Each year, an estimated 300,000 Central Americans travel across the country, many via dangerous routes along the railroad lines going north known as “la Bestia.” Men, women, and children from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize, Panama, and Nicaragua risk life and limb riding on the top of freight trains to make it north to jobs that will hopefully feed their families, build homes, and create futures back home.

The dangers Central Americans face in transit are tremendous. In addition to the trains, they are prey to organized crime and corrupt officials who target vulnerable migrants for kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, rape, and murder. In 2010, 72 Central American migrants were found in a mass grave in Mexico’s northern state of Tamaulipas, a besieged territorial battleground between the various drug cartels and the Mexican military. Mexican human rights organizations estimate that between 20,000 and 70,000 people are missing along the migrant trail, a sobering fact to which 57 Central American mothers drew attention on a caravan protest throughout Mexico in October and November this past year. Mexico also deportes about 60,000 Central American migrants in transit each year.

Mexico furthermore receives migrants from 25 different countries. This fact speaks to the complexity of Mexico’s geo-political location: Mexico is the origin of many migrants, and the site of very risky transmigration, yet the country continues to receive refugees and asylum-seekers from around the world. According to statistics released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, around 200 refugees and asylum seekers arrive each year to join the 1,455 refugees already residing here (as of 2011). Refugees mostly come from El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Nigeria, Cameroon, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and India. Over 90% of refugees live in and around Mexico City.

More Mexican citizens, and their U.S.-born children, are also returning home than ever before. Upon return, their experiences as undocumented and/or documented immigrants in the United States and Canada greatly influence their lives and their communities. According to the PEW Hispanic Center, between 2005 and 2010 the number of returning Mexican immigrants doubled to reach 1.4 million people. Furthermore, the percent of deported Mexicans who had lived in the United States for five years or more rose dramatically from two percent in the previous decade to 17% between 2005 and 2010.
Migration from, through and to Mexico epitomizes the world and the moment in which we live. Since the 2008 global economic crisis, people have been moving back and forth across borders in new directions and in higher numbers among Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Migrants live on the cutting edge of this transition. What happens in Mexico matters to all of us.

Jill Anderson is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for North American Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México.

Economic emigration and remittances in Nepal

Nepal’s two largest exports are its topsoil and migrant workers, neither of which is good news. Each year, approximately 700 million tons of soil and sediment are washed away from Nepal and end up in the Ganges Delta. The loss of topsoil and its valuable nutrients is the main cause for declining agricultural production. Several million Nepalese (mostly young males) migrate to India, the Persian Gulf or Malaysia. This valuable resource is not available for developing Nepal and its communities. Half of Nepalese households have someone working abroad or have a returnee.

Nepal is a landlocked country, located in the Himalayan Mountains between India and China. With a population of 26.6 million, it is one of Asia’s poorest countries. For the past 15 years Nepal has experienced either civil war or political instability.

On visits to rural communities one notices very few men. Women are left behind to do the farm work, raise children and run their households. When he went to Dubai to work in food packing, Esuda’s husband left her and their five-year-old son behind in Lalitpur District. He left four months ago and will be gone for another two years. Their small parcel of land provides food for only two months of the year. Although both Esuda and her husband have high school educations, they had no other opportunity for earning money. They agreed that he should work overseas.

Nepalese have migrated to India for generations, often as security guards or soldiers. More recently, groups of villagers travel to do short-term agricultural work. The India-Nepal border is open, allowing free movement between the two countries. Nepalese going to India are generally illiterate and do not own land. During their journey home, Nepalese can lose a lot of their earnings from unscrupulous hotel-keepers and bus conductors who will cheat them or steal their money. Some migrants returning from India are also infected with HIV/AIDS. In Accham District, HIV/AIDS is called the “Mumbai disease,” after the location where Accham people work.

For the past fifteen years the new trend in Nepal migration is overseas. Each day, over a dozen flights, full of Nepali workers, fly to the Gulf countries or Malaysia. Nepalese take loans averaging U.S.$1500 at high interest rates (35%) to pay recruiters for their new jobs. Generally, workers sign a contract to work for two-and-a-half years and then return to Nepal for six months before going back to the Gulf. Some workers are treated well, while others are cheated. Many Nepalese workers learn after reaching their destination that instead of a promised high-paying skilled job, they are forced into heavy labor with poor working conditions.
and low wages. The employers hold the migrants’ passports so that they cannot leave. They are not aware of their human rights and have no one to help them. Some young Nepalese women going to the Gulf countries are abused while working as domestic workers. Now the Nepal Government has restricted women under the age of 30 from working overseas.

Nepal’s lack of jobs, food shortage, declining agricultural production, conflict, and poverty drive many Nepalis to leave the country. For others, there is a sense of adventure. Nepal’s economic and political instability has not encouraged investment. Many young, educated, and unemployed men have no alternative except to work overseas.

Remittances from overseas employment sent back to families are valued at U.S.$3.5 billion per year, making up approximately 20% of Nepal’s GDP. This has to be seen as one of the best ways of getting large amounts of cash straight into the hands of poor rural women. After loans are paid off, remittances are often used for food and children’s education. The World Bank estimated that in the past 15 years, Nepalese living in extreme poverty has declined from 70% to 25%, largely due to remittances from overseas.

At the same time, however, migration has had a complex impact on Nepal’s social fabric. Families are breaking apart. With fewer men around, women are making more household and community decisions. Women’s empowerment has increased. Fertility rates have fallen 30% in the last decade. Some Nepalese rural communities do not have enough men for farming or for rituals related to taking care of the dead.

While Nepal’s soil loss to India will never be recovered, Nepalese workers will return home. Migration in Nepal raises important questions for Nepal’s development. What will be the future impact on families and communities when a large proportion of men are absent? Can the migrants’ experience working overseas be used to develop their own communities? Can they invest their earnings for small local rural businesses? Can remittances be used for buying land or livestock, and increase agricultural production? Answering questions such as these will be crucial to determining whether or not Nepali labor migration ends up as a net benefit for Nepal.

John Williamson is the MCC representative for Nepal and Afghanistan based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

**Christian emigration from the Middle East**

Christians in the Middle East number between ten and twelve million in comparison to the Muslim majority of 150 million. However, the Christian minority population is currently declining rapidly. Forty years ago, Christians were six percent of the Iraqi population; today, they are less than three percent. Before the civil war in Lebanon began in 1975, Christians constituted half of the population; today, they are about one-third. In 1948, Christians composed half of Jerusalem’s residents; today, they are not more than three percent of the population and a significant number of these Christians are expatriates.
Although, on average, the size of Christian families is smaller than that of Muslim families, the most obvious reason for decline is that Christians are emigrating more rapidly than Muslims, and in disproportionally greater numbers, to countries outside the Arab World. There are many reasons why Christians emigrate and each country has its own specific story and circumstances, but there are some broad factors that have strongly contributed to the decline of Christians across the entire Middle East.

The first reason is that political Islam threatens all Arab Christians. Its goal is to establish a Muslim religious state. In such a state, the status of Christians would be no better than resident aliens, guests, or, at best, second-class citizens. To be sure, not all Islamist political organizations advocate the same goals, but Christians are concerned about the conflation of religious and secular authority espoused in different ways by Islamist groups. Given the correct circumstances of time, place, and power alignments, political Islam can lead to human rights violations, including compromise of the all-important right of equality before the law.

Similarly, in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Zionism has imposed an exclusivist claim to a land and a city that historically was not only spiritually important to the three Abrahamic faiths but also was the homeland for many Muslims and Christians. Since the formation of the Zionist state in 1948, Arab residents of Israel proper have been treated as second-class citizens and with great suspicion. A variety of discriminatory national policies have led both Christians and Muslims both inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories to feel unwelcome in the land of their birth.

Another major reason for Christian emigration is the economic situation. The internal displacement of Christians in their home countries, thanks to armed conflict in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, has resulted in the loss of homes, farms, commercial stores and schools. This caused the pauperization of the Christian communities who then felt that the only option for their survival and livable economic conditions was to move to the West. Youth leave their countries to work in the Gulf States, with hundreds of thousands applying for immigrant visas to Europe, Australia, the United States, and Canada.

Another factor encouraging emigration is the existence of old immigrant networks abroad, originating from the same villages, towns, cities or even families. Such networks offer assistance to new immigrants upon arrival. Also, these communities often invite people from their country of origin to emigrate. This in turn can facilitate what Fr. Pierre Masri calls “preemptive emigration,” which pushes people “to leave in dignity” and thus avoid being forced to depart.

Among other incentives for emigration one can name deteriorating educational levels, the prevalence of bribes and corruption, sectarian introversion, and a weak ecumenical movement, all combining to produce a feeling among Christians that their communities are too small for their ambitions and aspirations.

Additionally, many Arab intellectuals think that emptying the region of its Christians is the objective of a plan of Western governments to put an end to a culture of diversity and difference which characterizes the region, replacing it with a stubborn one-sided stereotype hindering any communication among the Arab Levant States and civilizations where Christians have always played a key role.
Counteracting these negative factors requires a stronger and more insistent emphasis on concepts of “nation” and “patriotism” that are distinct from and not to be replaced by religious identity. Challenging political Islam and political Judaism also requires that the notion of “religion” be clarified and affirmed. Religious faith ought to be neither subject to nor exploited for political purpose.

It is important that we recognize that we have to live and coexist with Muslims in our contexts. Our Christian presence cannot be developed and empowered in this region without having dialogue with Muslims. We should work to stop the emigration of the Arab Christians and build the modern state on the basis of equal citizenship.

What is happening nowadays in the Arab World should not lead Christians to despair and hopelessness. It is a difficult period in time for both Christians and Muslims, but history comes and goes. It is necessary to live through this period in a creative way in order to discover the living space available to us. Challenges are not a place for despair, emigration and death, but an opportunity for life, hope, courage and struggle.

Riad Jarjour is President of the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue in Beirut, Lebanon.

**Pendulum displacement in Eastern Congo**

In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), repeated forced displacement has become a fact of life for more than a decade. The progressive decline of effective governance beginning in the later years of former President Mobutu in the mid-1990s and continuing to this day, coupled with the influx of over two million Rwandan refugees and combatants in 1994, have laid the foundation for a proliferation of local militia, Rwandan rebel groups, and national armies carrying out overlapping attacks and campaigns with impunity throughout North and South Kivu provinces. An abundance of valuable natural resources, productive agricultural lands, and historical ethnic diversity in the region have added fuel to the fire.

In 2011, there were 26.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide. The total number of displaced in the DRC reached a high of 3.4 million in 2003, dropped to one million in 2006, then rose to over two million in 2009. Since then the total remained relatively stable until surging again in mid-2012 to more than 2.4 million displaced by conflict. Over two-thirds of these IDPs are located in North and South Kivu Provinces and the overwhelming majority of them are children.

One can easily be numbed by such large figures and lose sight of the trauma and disruption that each individual IDP represents. Regardless of cause, the impact of displacement is socially devastating at the individual, family, community, national and regional levels.

The conflict that creates IDPs in eastern Congo is distinctive in its highly sporadic and localized nature. While there have been some formal military campaigns since the 1990s, it is more often the case that inhabitants are chased from their homes and villages by very localized, irregular armed groups, whose combatants are not easily distinguished from the villagers themselves. This unique context of localized and erratic conflict has
produced a particular form of the IDP phenomenon sometimes referred to as pendulum displacement. This form of displacement has several distinct characteristics:

- First, because of the local scale of the conflict and the deep attachment to and dependence on land by the rural population, nearly ninety percent of IDPs in eastern Congo find refuge among “host families.” These are usually relatives, located near the IDPs’ home villages, who have often themselves been previously displaced. Only two percent of IDPs find shelter in formal camps, while the remainder takes refuge in informal or “spontaneous” sites, often occupying vacant buildings or plots in urban areas. This creates challenges in targeting and delivering timely humanitarian assistance.

- Second, in many cases IDPs fleeing their homes initially take refuge in the forest or in neighboring villages at night, returning to their fields whenever possible during the day. This involves considerable risk and creates further difficulty in identifying IDPs as such. At the same time it makes early return to their homes more possible and likely.

- Third, families often split up, with some finding refuge in host family or camp settings while others stay in the forest near family fields. It is unusual to find a complete family unit of IDPs in one setting, whether with host families, in camps, or in spontaneous sites. A representative example: Sifa Bitasimwa, an IDP head of household, related that since her family was displaced in 2009, her husband had gone to a mining site to earn money for the family, an older son was staying in the forest near the family’s home and fields, three other children were sent to live with relatives elsewhere, and four children remained with her in a formal camp (the Mubimbi IDP camp). These decisions are made based in part on the resources available through the different options, including food assistance, access to agricultural land, school proximity, and the availability of school fee assistance, health care, and income opportunities.

- Finally, rural populations in eastern Congo have often experienced displacement on multiple occasions. One survey by Human Rights Watch showed that “the vast majority [of interviewees] had been previously displaced an average of three to four times” over a number of years (19).

The repeated displacement of thousands of Congolese has incalculable psychological, economic and social costs. For humanitarian actors, this pendulum displacement requires assistance to be adaptive and flexible in order to meet constantly shifting needs.

Tim C. Lind is MCC Co-Representative for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Learn more


Pastoralism and conflict in the African Sahel

In the fourth week of August 2012 Kenyans were shocked by newspaper headlines that shouted, “Massacre in Tana River Delta.” The stories, which spread over the ensuing several weeks, detailed a spiral of revenge attacks among two groups of people in this eastern region of Kenya, beginning with the killing of cattle and eventually resulting in the deaths of over 150 people.

The Tana River killings are a recent example of ongoing tensions that spread across the Sahelian zone of Africa from west to east, and include long-standing conflicts in Burkina Faso, northern Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan. While these conflicts differ and have received differing attention and interpretation from outside observers, they have common roots in seasonal migration of pastoralist communities.

The Sahelian zone, stretching across Africa immediately south of the Sahara Desert, represents the intersection between pastoralists and settled agriculturalists. For untold generations, these groups have found traditional ways to interact and to share the land based on seasonal rains. Pastoralists, who move with their herds to find pasture, traditionally spend the wetter months farther north, when the rains have brought grass for their animals, and move south during the drier months to the river valleys, where some grass and forage remains.

Meanwhile, settled farmers near the rivers in the wetter south plant their crops during the rainy months and expect the herds of migrating animals, together with their human owners, to move into their fields during the drier, fallow months, depositing along the way the manure that keeps their fields fertile. This rhythm of interaction has held over centuries, allowing the herds and pastoralists to shift back and forth with the seasons, and bringing some benefit to both groups.

So why the conflicts? Both farmers and pastoralists are now being squeezed, causing strain in the traditional patterns of interaction. One force contributing to the difficulties is that of climate change. The Sahel, and the African high plateau areas in general, are becoming drier, and rainfall is less predictable. This puts stress on both groups: the farmers can no longer predictably reap enough to sustain their families on one crop a year and the pastoralists need to roam farther to find the forage their livestock need to survive.

In addition to climate change, another contributing dynamic is a reduction in the availability of and access to grazing land. Expansion of agriculture onto marginal land, driven by population pressure and the growth of national conservation areas and parks, has restricted movement along migratory corridors. In the case of the Tana River Valley, the past several years of drought have seen pastoralists settling more permanently close to the river: both because they need to ensure that their herds can get food and water, and because changes in land tenure mean there is less available, open land for them to roam. At the same time, farming villages have increased in size and so need more land.

The proliferation of small arms, especially AK-47s, in the region, spilling over from conflicts in neighboring countries, means that quarrels can


quickly become deadly. In some cases, the differences have been exploited by state actors for political gain, where the pastoralist groups have been armed by the government in order to push out the farmers who support opposing political groups, such as in Darfur.

In the Tana Valley, farmers resented the herds encroaching on their land along the river. Arguments led to the death of a farmer. In revenge, some from his family attacked and killed the herders’ cattle. The herders then attacked the farming village, killing fifty people, including women and children. Although authorities have tried to bring the groups to the table for conversation, the feud continues: a month later, the newspaper recounts more killings, first of a herder who was bringing his herds to water, and then a counter-attack on a village that left 38 dead.

MCC works in a number of places across this zone of conflict. A past project in Chad worked with farmers and herders to develop peace accords that would govern this seasonal interaction. MCC has long worked with traditionally pastoral Maasai in Kenya who are moving toward a more settled way of life, helping them develop skills in dry-land farming and water harvesting and storage techniques. MCC has begun to explore potential program involvements in the Ateker region that crosses the Turkana (North Western Kenya), Karamoja (North Eastern Uganda), and Toposa (South Eastern Sudan) region. These pastoralist groups move across national borders, and so any involvement focusing on livelihoods and especially on water-harvesting, must include all three countries.

The populations along the Sahelian zone of Africa migrate not in order to find new homes or settlements, but in order to maintain a way of life that has existed for centuries and as a way to meet their current livelihood needs. But this way of life is now threatened by larger changes — of climate, restricted mobility, lack of access to resources, and politics — resulting in deadly conflicts. MCC seeks to respond to this complex dynamic through our partners in Africa who are working to adapt to increasing change.

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Judy Zimmerman Herr is MCC Co-Area Director for East Africa, living in Nairobi, Kenya.

Deported Americans at home in Cambodia

Michael (a pseudonym) grew up in Salem, Oregon. Although he was the only Asian in his school, he had a very American Childhood; speaking English, playing basketball and football. Today, however he finds himself living in Cambodia, a country he knows almost nothing about.

Michael is one of the growing numbers of “Returnees” in Cambodia. That is, Cambodian-Americans who came legally to the U.S. as refugees — mostly as children — and grew up immersed in American culture. But due to delinquency as youth, and interactions with the justice and immigration system, they have been deported permanently to Cambodia.

Michael’s earliest memories are of the refugee camps in Thailand in the early 1980s. From 1975-79, the brutal Khmer Rouge left millions dead. Hundreds of thousands fled the genocide to Thailand. The U.S. responded...
by accepting 178,000 refugees to the U.S., Michael’s family included. He was eight years old when he arrived in the U.S.

In high school, Michael got involved with the wrong crowd and ended up in trouble with the law. A stolen car and breaking-and-entering charge landed him his first conviction. Others followed. Michael served ten years in prison for convictions within the criminal justice system.

But the immigration system was also involved in his case. In the intervening years, they held him in detention 4 times for an additional total of 3.5 years. Although Michael was a legal permanent resident, he was not a citizen. And, under U.S. law, all non-citizens with a felony conviction are to be deported.

The introduction of this law in the mid-90s coincided with the expansion of the definition of a felony. The law applies retroactively, only after sentences are served, and has no provision for judicial discretion. In 2002, the Cambodian government agreed to start accepting deportations. Since then, nearly 400 individuals have been deported.

Many civil society and human rights organizations consider this law to be fundamentally unjust. All of the returnees entered the U.S. legally, upon invitation of the U.S. government, were welcomed as members of U.S. society and granted Permanent Residence status. It is an injustice to invite a child refugee to the U.S. as a full member of society, but not grant that child the full legal protections that are given to all other legal members of that society, the protections that come with citizenship.

Secondly, the automatic deportation of law-breakers also fails to be just. This is because it violates the principle of proportional justice. As in Michael’s case, he already served a 10-year jail sentence for his crimes. The addition of a deportation which separates him from his family and community is a disproportionate punishment.

At the time of Michael’s deportation, he had been out of prison for two years. He had two children, and was working in Oregon as a welder at a mobile home fabrication plant. In early 2011, immigration asked him to come in for another check-in. He never came home.

When he got to Cambodia, he had no friends or relatives he could go to. The weather was hot, the traffic was chaotic, and he didn’t know how he was going to survive. He couldn’t read or write Cambodian. He didn’t know anything about the culture, how to deal with the negative perceptions locals have of those who are deported, or where to go to for help.

Fortunately for him, he was not the first to be deported. Others who had come before him had set-up the Returnee Integration Support Center (RISC) in 2002. RISC staff meet all deportees when they arrive in the country and offer housing, employment, medical and legal assistance. RISC provided Michael with temporary food and housing until he got on his own feet. They helped him get his Cambodian paperwork, so that he could legally work and rent an apartment. They even sponsored him to take a five-month English teacher training program.

In the last two years, the number of deportations has increased sharply, and RISC is very busy. Since the beginning MCC has provided both financial and advisory support to RISC. This steady support has enabled
RISC to be a life-line for deportees. Desperation can lead to risky behavior, but RISC as a safety-net to fall back on is building a more harmonious returnee community and a more peaceable Cambodian society.

On the day I interviewed Michael, he happily announced that thanks to RISC he had a job interview for a teaching position at a local university. “When I first got here, RISC was my backbone,” he said. “Without RISC, I’d probably be out in a ditch somewhere, certainly not where I am now”.

Michael hopes that someday he can visit the U.S., because he knows that it is too expensive for his family to come to Cambodia for a visit. He seems to be fully aware that he will not ever be able to return home to the U.S. under current law, and that the likelihood of the law ever changing is low.

Daniel Talstra has been working as a Partner Advisor to RISC since 2010. He and his wife Amanda have been serving with MCC in Cambodia since 2008, during which time they have also been blessed to have two children.

**Temporary foreign workers in Canada**

Over recent years government surveys in Canada have tracked a slow but steady decline in the Canadian public’s formerly positive attitudes toward immigrants, which now sits just above fifty percent. Traditionally Canadians have taken pride in a mixed flow of immigrants ranging from skilled workers to family reunification (called Family Class immigration in Canada) to refugee resettlement. Now the largest category of new arrivals are temporary foreign workers (TFWs). A recent video on TFWs provocatively asks, “Is this the end of immigration?” It well could be, if current trends and policies continue.

The public sees an economy that is booming and in chronic need of workers in the service, agriculture, and resource extraction sectors — jobs that Canadians do not want. When Parliament tabled new immigration levels for 2013, it touted the growth in ‘skilled workers’ as just what the economy needed, matching what the market demanded. The lack of any mention of Canada’s shrinking immigration space for reasonable levels of Family Class and refugee admissions went largely unnoticed.

TFWs are just that, “temporary,” and as such they are less protected by laws and rights, especially in enforcement aspects. They are more vulnerable to sub-par wages which can (legally) be fifteen percent less than those paid to permanent residents. Even more disturbing practices are common, such as the Central American TFWs who were recently paid just $3.50Cdn/hr. to dig the tunnel for a sky train in Vancouver. Such abuse is all-too-reminiscent of the horrors faced by Chinese immigrants who were specifically brought in to build the rail tunnels through the Rockies in the 1880s.

Often the public is unaware that TFWs pay into social benefits such as healthcare and pensions, benefits they will likely never enjoy due to their temporary stay. A few years ago, the amount thus contributed to the economy by such workers and their employers added over 300 million dollars annually to our coffers. That total is clearly much higher by now as this category has grown significantly over the past years. Temporary
workers have no right to acquire permanent status and little or no access to settlement or language assistance which permanent newcomers are all eligible for, even wealthy entrepreneurs.

Last summer saw a sharply increasing volume of news items about employer abuse of TFWs. In addition to wage issues, reports note deplorable living conditions and illegal attempts to recover travel and other fees which are usually employer responsibilities. While this is now coming to light, there is very little public outcry over these breaches and abuses. At the same time, the TFWs and migrants face much public suspicion if they voice concern over their lack of rights including working conditions.

In Mennonite congregations there are employers, employees and advocates, but so far Mennonites have been mostly ambivalent or silent about an appropriate response to the inconsistencies they are seeing and in which they participate.

Local churches in some regions are beginning to reach out to workers with informal settlement support, language training, and more intentionally inclusive congregations and communities. This is good news in many ways. The increased interaction exposes churches to the realities and stories of the workers, which for some Canadians is where advocacy begins, just as it did in refugee concerns.

The long tradition of Mennonite churches in Canada championing the cause of refugees, including supporting claimants or sponsoring refugees out of camps abroad, is well known and cherished. As churches are noting these changes in who is coming to work here, they also look back over the decades when they were heavily involved in debates over refugees and claimants, and they stood up for such newcomers. Some now wonder, “should it be any different in today’s economy, for new kinds of neighbours?”

More churches are beginning to see a globalized economy in which trade is purported to be “free,” but ever higher walls and barriers are raised so that hands and feet can only cross temporarily, while capital slides through silently and unimpeded.

It truly may be time for Christians to revisit the old question about “who are our neighbours?”

Ed Wiebe is National Refugee Program Coordinator for MCC Canada in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Telling stories of undocumented workers in the U.S.**

During a visit to a Mennonite congregation in the U.S. I heard the story of a member of the church who had recently lost his job. He shared that the layoff was supposedly due to the economic recession, but that he later found out that the company was hiring again, with most of the people the company was hiring being immigrants. He is a U.S. citizen, who had been working in this factory for many years. That same week I had a conversation with a member of another church who recently found a job
in that same industrial park. This person attends a Hispanic Mennonite church and is an undocumented immigrant.

Both of these men are my brothers in Christ, both of them have families, both of them need a job, and both of them are competing for the same job. While talking to my U.S.-citizen Mennonite brother, I sensed bitterness towards undocumented immigrants. To him, the immigrants’ presence was threatening his wellbeing and that of his family. On the other hand, my undocumented Mennonite brother was thankful that God had provided a job for him.

During my presentations to U.S. churches I often talk about the root causes of migration, particularly the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and how it has sent manufacturing jobs south, and also how it has displaced and pushed Mexican farmers north in search for jobs. Frequently, learning about migration root causes sets a different tone for how people in congregations talk about newcomers. However, sometimes knowledge does not respond to the immediate needs of my brothers and sisters. For my U.S.-citizen Mennonite brother, knowing that NAFTA and the broken immigration policies in the U.S. were behind him losing his job did not take away the anxiety of being unemployed, and he did not change his position about undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

Working for MCC U.S. as Immigration Education coordinator has brought me into many situations like this one. When I started five years ago, many perceived my work as an “immigrant defender,” and I probably thought of it the same way, but slowly I have realized that in order to advocate for immigrant communities and rights, one also has to build bridges with the established citizen/resident communities and take seriously their concerns. How do we do that? We listen to each other and tell stories.

The more I work as an immigrant advocate, the more I find our work similar to Paul’s struggle to make the case for the Gentiles, and bringing down walls of hostility is not an easy task. I have heard many stories about immigrants cheating on taxes, which in some cases is true. I have heard Romans 13 more times than John 3:16. I have had to explain hundreds of times that undocumented immigrants do pay taxes. But, I have also heard stories of how congregations have changed as they related to an immigrant family and heard that family’s story. Such real-life encounters allowed the “immigration issue” to become flesh rather than an abstraction.

Speaking of broken laws, NAFTA, and root causes does make a difference in how we view migration. However, there is something miraculous about the simple act of telling and listening to stories as we work for peace and build bridges. In the Old Testament God time and again instructed the Israelites to tell their Exodus story: storytelling would keep them close to the heart of God and would remind them to care for the vulnerable — widows, orphans, and strangers — in their midst. As peacemakers we have many resources, and we keep creating more and more, and with the ease of technology today, our resources are becoming very powerful tools – and also very expensive. However, in my experience working with immigration education, nothing has worked better to build a bridge than to listen to others’ stories and to tell mine.

Saulo Padilla is Immigration Coordinator for MCC U.S. based in Goshen, Indiana.

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Principal migration flows at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century

Regions/countries that mainly receive migrants
Main regions that migrants are leaving
Principal flows

Map adapted from: http://www.lahistoriaconmapas.com