

# POLICY BRIEF

## Economic, Political, and Social Context in Mexico and the United States

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### STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Migration is both a cause and consequence of political and economic change. As the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed global changes to mobility, showcasing the situation that international migrants face during the pandemic will allow us to see that discrimination, poor conditions, and barriers to healthcare access disproportionately affect migrants. Furthermore, issues arise in both Mexico and the U.S. as a result of unresolved problems in migration management in both countries.

### KEY FINDINGS

- The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted supply chains and severely curtailed migration and mobility. In the U.S., some of the restrictive measures placed on migration may become more permanent or give way to similar efforts that have been on political agendas predating the pandemic.
- Foreign workers and refugees in the U.S. play a vital role in essential services, working in industries such as healthcare, agriculture, and food logistics. A large share of Mexican immigrants also work in particularly vulnerable industries, such as restaurants.
- In comparison with previous recessions in Mexico, COVID-19 will have a larger impact on employment due to changes in demand for certain types of labor. Additionally, job loss in Mexico could increase the number of Mexicans considering migration towards the U.S.
- Remittances have declined due to returnees to Mexico as well as the income decrease for migrants living in the U.S. The pandemic has thus underscored the rising importance of digital transactions in the remittance business.
- Immigrant detention centers, including the more humane “shelters” for immigrant children, have become “hot-spots” of COVID-19 infections.
- In the U.S., migrant rights organizations focused on supporting immigrants as essential workers in service and agriculture, whereas in Mexico these organizations focused on providing basic protection to migrants in transit, in detention centers, stuck on the border, or awaiting asylum resolutions.
- If the economic consequences of the pandemic generate unemployment in the U.S. and Mexico, the positive tendencies in salaries and benefits for workers in the agriculture sector will turn around.
- Unauthorized immigrants are not covered by the U.S. unemployment insurance system or other programs providing pandemic relief, resulting in more poverty and income inequality.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clarify the health access structure to anticipate the challenges associated with a recurring wave of respiratory illnesses associated with COVID-19 and increase attention to migrant children’s health needs.
- Foster better living conditions in temporary settings, following examples and protocol from other countries.
- Reform access to healthcare, education, and justice, as the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated weaknesses in these areas in Mexico.
- Continue reviewing asylum applications under safe-distancing conditions or by remote means, releasing healthy asylum seekers under bond or with electronic monitoring.
- Remedy unequal access to technology for financial services so that, in similar times of crisis, financial help will be easier to send and receive.

### SOURCES AND FULL PAPER



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