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Survey Shows Violence Contributes to Internal Displacement in Mexico

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A study by Mexico's population council Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) found that six out of every 100 people who leave their communities have experienced violence or are facing the threat of violence at the hands of criminal organizations. The Encuesta Nacional de la Dinámica Demográfica (ENADID), which the government statistics agency Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) released in early July, said violence, along with other factors such as a lack of economic opportunities, have contributed to an exodus from many states in southern and northeastern Mexico.

INEGI presented some of the results of the study at a press conference in Mexico City on July 10, held in conjunction with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) on World Population Day.

"Violence is a serious concern—whether the perpetrators are the regular army or some other militia, whether the source is an armed confrontation or an action by a criminal organization," said Leonor Calderón, UNFPA representative in Mexico. "This is a major factor that interrupts stability of communities in an important way and makes the situation of its residents more fragile and vulnerable."

Laura Rubio Díaz—a researcher who collaborated with the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH) on a report on internal displacement in Mexico— noted that the situation worsened in 2007, the start of former President Felipe Calderón's campaign against drug traffickers ([SourceMex, Jan. 24, 2007](#)).

The findings of the CMDPDH report are supported by two other studies. A report from Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) said Calderón's campaign against drug traffickers directly or indirectly caused the displacement of 140,000 people in Mexico. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), an organization that collaborates directly with the IDMC, reported in its Global Overview 2015 that 38 million people were displaced in 2014, including at least 9,000 in Mexico.

CONAPO officials were quick to point out that many other factors in addition to violence contributed to the exodus of people from their hometowns in Mexico. Almost 40% of the people in the ENADID study cited the need to reunite with a family member elsewhere in Mexico or overseas as a reason to leave their community. Work-related factors were also important. About 17% left their community because they could not find employment at home, while another 10% migrated because they wanted a different job. Another 7.5% said they left home to pursue educational opportunities elsewhere.

"It is not only the violence [that is promoting migration]," said CONAPO director Patricia Chemor. "There are many other reasons why people leave: school, work, natural disasters."

Eleven states lost more population than they gained between 2009 and 2014, including some strongholds for criminal organizations like Tamaulipas, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, and Durango. The Federal District and Zacatecas also lost population during this period. The states that recorded an increase of 2% to 4% in population during the five-year period include Colima, Querétaro, Baja California Sur, Quintana Roo, Yucatán, and Aguascalientes.

Mexicans who left their communities also migrated overseas. The ENADID report said some 719,000 people left the country between August 2009 and September 2014. Three of every four of the emigrants were male.

More than 86% of the people who left the country during that five-year period moved to the US, slightly more than 2% went to Canada, and a similar percentage departed for Spain. The remaining 9% was scattered around the globe.

The majority of the emigrants, about 68%, said the main reason they left Mexico was to find employment, and another 15% indicated they wanted to reunite with a family member overseas. Slightly more than 12% said they departed the country to attain an education. Respondents to the survey generally did not mention violence as a reason for leaving the country, but this is probably another factor behind emigration. Violence is often cited as one of the top reasons emigrants from Central America are leaving their homes to migrate to the US ([SourceMex, June 25, 2014](#), and [NotiCen, Aug. 14, 2014](#), and [Aug. 28, 2014](#)).

A likely reason why violence is not a major factor in foreign emigration for Mexicans is that they can easily move to other states in the country that are considered safer, while Central Americans have few options in their own countries.

Mexican population surpasses 121 million

Another important trend reported in the ENADID report was the continuing growth of the Mexican population. CONAPO found that Mexico's population surpassed 121 million, an increase from about 112 million recorded in the 2010 national census.

The population includes 43 million Mexicans between the ages of 10 and 29, and half of those in the age group—about 21.5 million—were girls and young women. "Even if they do not face a situation of direct threat, women face risks that are not favorable to their personal development and security," Chemor said.

INEGI pointed out that the median age of the population in Mexico is 27 years, similar to Colombia and Brazil but below the levels in the US and some European countries like Germany and Spain.

Chemor noted that the situation has improved in general for youth in Mexico relative to recent years, but there is still a lag in the quality of life for young people. "A major portion of the youth still suffers from a series of cumulative disadvantages, such as extreme poverty, the lack of access to education, violence, discrimination, and unequal labor conditions, among other factors," she said.

Even though the number of youth in Mexico was large in absolute terms, other signs point to the aging of the population. ENADID found that the percentage of Mexicans between the ages of 30 and 59 increased to 36.6% in 2009-2014, compared with 34.4% in the previous five-year period.

Poverty concerns

Some observers expressed concern that Mexico's economy would not be able to accommodate the population growth, as evidenced in a companion survey released along with the ENADID, entitled Encuesta Nacional de Ingreso y Gasto de los Hogares (ENIGH 2014). "The survey not only pointed to the persistence of economic and social disparity in our country but also a new decline in the median income for individuals and families," Mario Luis Fuentes wrote in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*.

"We are facing a scenario that is become more and more complex, where the institutional system is almost always reacting in a belated and insufficient manner," added Fuentes. "We have experienced almost three decades in which poverty and inequality have increased systemically, and we have been incapable of generating a sustained process of growth with equity."

Others agreed that the increase in population has profound implications on Mexico's ability to address poverty. The most recent poverty statistics published by the Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL) in 2012 indicated that 45.4% of Mexico's population, or about 53.3 million, lived in poverty. If the percentage of the population living in poverty remained unchanged while the total number of people increased, then existing problems would worsen. A poverty rate of 45.4% for a population of 121 million means that 54.4 million would be living in poverty.

"Those numbers are enormous," columnist Saúl Arellano wrote in the daily newspaper *La Crónica*. "We would have to measure the impact in a number of areas. How many people lack access to health services, to clean drinking water, to drainage and basic sanitation, to education, to employment?"

The surveys also noted that infant mortality remained high, which is another indicator that often accompanies high levels of poverty. The death rate for children under one year of age was 14.3 per 1,000, or about 29,000 deaths per year. While the infant mortality remains three times higher than in Cuba and Sweden, the rate has been declining in the past years. The rate was 68.4 deaths per 1,000 in 1970, the ENADID report noted.

The ENADID and the ENIGH surveys both indicated that Mexican households on average comprised 3.9 persons, and that the median age for heads of households was close to 50 years of age. "This means we have households where the principal breadwinner is still in the productive age but also part of the population that is vulnerable to health problems," said Fuentes. "This is compounded by the insufficiency of our social security services."

While the highest rates of poverty are found in rural areas, the surveys indicated that the majority of Mexico's population, about 92 million people, lives in urban settings. This compares with 27.8 million who live rural areas.

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