INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAS

Fourth Report of the Continuous Reporting System on International Migration in the Americas [SICREMI]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2017
An overview of immigration movements in 2014 and 2015

Immigration into countries of the Americas as a whole increased by 6% in 2015, only slightly more than the rate of increase observed on average over the 2010–2015 period. Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) immigration, on the other hand, resumed its strong growth in 2015 (11%) after the barely 2% observed in 2014 relative to 2013. The increase in the Mercosur region was somewhat higher than for the LAC region as whole, at 13%. Overall movements in the LAC region reached 20% of all immigration into countries of the Americas, both permanent and temporary, in 2015. The level of migration into LAC countries stood at close to 880 thousand in 2015, an increase of almost 365 thousand compared to 2010.

The nature of migration in the Americas

Migration is driven by many different motives and the regulation of migration as embodied in the visas and permits granted to immigrants reflects this diversity. Family-related migration is expected to be relatively more common among permanent migration and work-related migration among temporary and this is indeed what one observes in general in virtually all countries of the Americas.

Study migration, while visible in almost all destination countries, plays a significant role in temporary migration in only a few, namely Barbados, Canada, Honduras and the United States. Humanitarian migration is evident only in Canada, the United States and in Brazil, which has granted permanent residence to many Haitian earthquake refugees in recent years.

Asylum seeking in the Americas

Asylum applications in the Americas increased 83% between 2013 and 2015, reaching 184 thousand applications. These represent 6% of all applications worldwide, which increased 187% in the same period, as a result of armed conflict in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Asylum seekers born in the Americas accounted for 56% of all asylum applications in the hemisphere, a 7% rise when compared to 2013 levels.

Between 2001 and 2015, the main countries of origin being Mexico (29%), Colombia (13%), El Salvador (12%), Haiti (12%), Guatemala (10%), Honduras (6%) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (4%).

In the Americas there has been a progressive legislative harmonization with regard to the status of refugees, with countries incorporating the principles and standards of protection contained in the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Many countries of Latin America have also signed the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which expands the definition of the 1951 Convention to include persons who have fled their countries because of internal conflicts, violations of human rights or other circumstances that have seriously disrupted public order. However, the right of free establishment introduced by the Mercosur Residence Agreement and which now applies to virtually all countries of South America, has made the broader concept somewhat redundant for
the countries of the region, while the distance of South America from war zones in Africa and Asia as well as visa requirements have up to now limited the number of asylum requests on this basis.

While requests for asylum have been increasing in many countries of the Americas, refugee status is nonetheless granted to only a minority of applicants in most countries as is generally the case throughout the OECD zone.

The regional dimension of migration in the Americas

Immigration into countries of the Americas remains, for most countries of the region, an intra-American phenomenon, with a heavy predominance of migrants from other countries of the hemisphere. There are exceptions to this, with Canada and the United States, long-standing migration countries, showing relatively more immigrants from Asia in 2015 and indeed in most years, and Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, the three most populated countries of the LAC region, with some 15-20% of immigrants from Asia. Migration within signatory countries of regional agreements (Mercosur, NAFTA, CARICOM, SICA) accounts for a majority or more of all immigration from the Americas for the signatory countries of these agreements taken as a whole. The Mercosur bloc shows the strongest concentration of intra-bloc movements, with almost three quarters of its intra-hemispheric immigration coming from other Mercosur members.

A significant proportion of the increase in intra-American migration, however, can be attributed to persons fleeing conflict zones, natural catastrophes or conditions of economic collapse or underdevelopment, for example in Colombia, Cuba, Haiti and Venezuela.

In other words, the increase in immigration in this region cannot be entirely viewed through the lens of a greater-economic-integration perspective.

The acquisition of nationality by immigrants in countries of the Americas

Overall, outside of Canada and the United States relatively few immigrants in LAC countries appear to take out the nationality of their adopted countries. The low propensity may be associated with the existence of numerous regional agreements facilitating movements among the countries concerned but also because much of the migration in LAC countries involves persons from neighboring countries, to whom settlement may not always appear as definitive.

Recent developments with regard to movements to the United States and Spain

The evolution of migration movements from the Americas to the United States, as tracked by the American Community Survey, shows a notable development, namely, the fact that immigration from Mexico had still not recovered from pre-crisis levels as of 2015. In that year, it stood at about half of the levels registered in 2006. Since authorized migration by Mexican nationals has actually increased by about 32% over this same period, largely as a result of temporary movements, the drop in overall migration suggests a strong decline in unauthorized migration from Mexico. The 2008 economic crisis saw a significant reduction in arrivals to the United States, especially from Mexico, with all regions showing a strong recovery by 2015 except Mexico. Stay rates of immigrants who arrived in the United States between 2006 and 2015 (mostly permanent and unauthorized, but including some temporary) have averaged around 70%.

In 2004, prior to the economic crisis, barely 1% of immigrants from the Americas in Spain left that country every year. As the Spanish economy fell into a deep recession, outflow rates of immigrants
from the Americas stood at close to 6% in 2013. However, not all of this increase appears to be related to the economic crisis, since rates had already begun increasing strongly before the crisis hit. As in the United States, the highest departure rates from Spain were for immigrants from Canada and the Southern Cone. About one third of immigrants from the Americas present at any time in Spain from 2002 to 2016 had left as of 2015, ranging from under or close to 20% for immigrants from the Caribbean to over 40% for immigrants from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Paraguay. As in the United States, differences in mobility patterns among immigrants of different nationalities have changed the composition of immigration in Spain.

A general overview of emigration from countries of the Americas to Europe and to other countries of the Americas

Despite the strong increases in immigration observed in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years, they remain for the most part countries of emigration. From a situation where only 27% of migration movements from the Americas went to countries of Latin America and the Caribbean over the period 2009-2012, a mere three years later (2012-2015) it was fully 34% of movements. This is a large change over such a short period. Most of the change came at the expense of emigration to Europe and in particular to Spain.

Recent outflows from the Americas show signs of a partial return to traditional patterns of expatriation, but with continued strong increases in intra-LAC movements.

The labor market outcomes of migrants from the Americas in Europe and the United States

By 2015, migrants from the Americas had reached 22.8 million in the United States and more than 2.4 million in Spain. They represented fully 9.4% of the working-age population in the United States and 6.2% in Spain.

In 2014-2015, three quarters of immigrants from the Americas living in the United States or European OECD countries were in the labor force. Their employment rate reached 69%, a 1.6 percentage point increase since 2012-2013 and their unemployment rate 9%, down 2.7 percentage points. If all immigrant from the Americas groups saw their situation in the labor market improve recently, immigrants living in Spain are still lagging behind with an employment rate of 58% and an unemployment rate of fully 29%. Nonetheless, the risk of being unemployed has decreased for virtually every group of immigrants from the Americas between 2012-2013 and 2014-2015.

Migrant men living in Spain in particular gained from the employment recovery, with their employment rate increasing by 3.6 percentage points between 2012-2013 and 2014-2015.

In the United States, immigrant men from other countries of the Americas register higher participation and employment rates and lower unemployment rates than other foreign-born men and indeed, than US-born men. The situation for immigrant women from the Americas in the United States is the exact opposite.

In Spain, the largest destination country in Europe for emigrants from the Americas, men and women face a higher risk of unemployment than the Spanish-born but a lower one than other immigrants.

In 2014-2015, in the United States and European OECD countries there were respectively 3.2 million and 800 000 employed tertiary-educated immigrants from the Americas. Compared to other
regions of origin, immigrants from the Americas represent 10% of the employed tertiary-educated immigrants in Europe – a more substantial share in Spain, 39% – and 29% in the United States.

Tertiary-educated immigrants from the Americas are often over-qualified for the job they may hold. In particular, over-qualification affects more than half of Central Americans working in the United States and of Andeans working in Spain.

Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2016

In 2016, remittance flows to Latin America and the Caribbean reached record levels in nominal terms, with an undoubtedly positive impact on millions of recipient households.

The most important characteristics of the flows were: i) the total amount reached USD 70 369 million, after increasing for 7 consecutive years; ii) the growth of the inflows from 2015 to 2016 was 7.2%, which is the highest growth rate recorded in the past 10 years, iii) the increase in remittances was general throughout all the different sub-regions; and iv) the increase stemmed from, among other factors, higher employment and higher average wages and, consequently, a larger total wage bill for migrant workers from the main destination countries.

After the fall in remittances experienced in 2009, the flows of remittances recovered, albeit at a much slower rate than had been observed prior to the financial crisis. By 2014 levels exceeded those observed before the financial crisis in nominal terms. In real terms, the pre-crisis levels were exceeded only in 2016, by about 4%. In countries such as Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, Jamaica and Guatemala, income from remittances was between 10% and 29% of GDP in 2016.
This is the fourth annual report of the Continuous Reporting System on International Migration in the Americas (SICREMI, for its acronym in Spanish). The report collects data from diverse sources (censuses, surveys, administrative records, etc.) in order to process and disseminate information regarding the magnitude, trends, and characteristics of international migration in the countries that participated in this report: Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, United States and Uruguay.

The methodology of this report is based on the Permanent Observation System on Migration (or SOPEMI) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), adjusted to the needs of the region in accordance with a participatory process involving the countries through a network of national correspondents and the participation of national and international organizations working in the field of migration.

SICREMI is an initiative of the Organization of American States (OAS) that aims to contribute to the promotion and development of public policies that lead to improved migration management in the Americas through the facilitation of dialogue, cooperation, institutional strengthening and access to information.

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