

MEASURES AGAINST IRREGULAR IMMIGRATION — WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR MEXICO?

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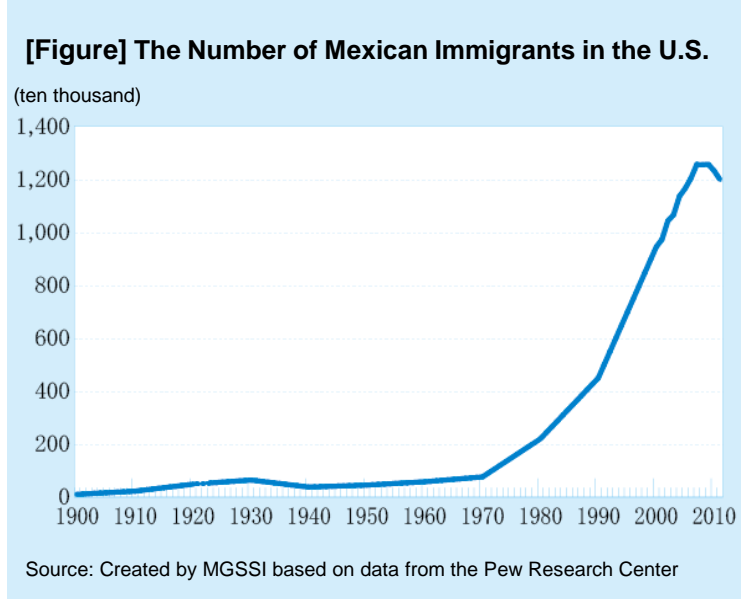
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As globalization proceeds worldwide, the movement of people is becoming easier. According to statistics of the United Nations, the number of migrants worldwide has continued to increase, as the data shows: 170 million as of 2000, 240 million as of 2015¹. While labor shortages in developed countries are becoming critical due to low birth rates, developing countries lack enough job opportunities, due to increasing populations. In addition, economic disparity is expanding between the two parties. These factors are accelerating the increase in migrants globally. Migrants are inclined to be treated as socially heterogeneous because of differences in culture, customs, language, and religion. As a result, both host country and migrant communities become frustrated, which might cause social uneasiness. How to integrate migrants into society will be a big challenge for the world in the future. On the other hand, the status of their stay is also an important point. In the case of irregular stay, migrants dislike being under the protection of public organizations such as a judicial authority or the police. Therefore, they are likely to be victims of trafficking or to energize the activities of criminal organizations. And they do not go to hospitals for treatment, which can lead to the occurrence of infectious diseases and their dissemination to neighboring communities. Thus, regular migration is important also for stability of the social order. Irregular migration itself is not the only problem. This report focuses on Mexican irregular migrants, who have attracted renewed attention due to the emergence of President Trump. The critical issue in Mexico is improvement of the system to receive large numbers of Mexican irregular migrants who are forced to return to their home country. To this end, the Mexican government is already embarked on measures such as increasing its budget and introducing jobs. However, from a long-term viewpoint, measures to stop generating irregular migrants have not been discussed very much. This report considers possible measures based on clarifying the situation of Mexican migrants.

OUTLINE OF MEXICAN MIGRANTS — ABOUT 10% OF POPULATION LIVE IN THE U.S.

Currently, about 12 million Mexican migrants are living in the U.S.; therefore, it can be said that about 10% of the population of Mexico resides in the U.S. This number accounts for about one-fourth of the approximately 46.6 million immigrants in the U.S. In other words, it is the biggest immigrant group in the U.S. According to the Pew Research Center of the U.S., which addresses many issues related to migration, there are an estimated 11 million irregular immigrants residing in the U.S., of which about 6 million are considered to be Mexicans. The irregular-immigrant labor force totals about 8 million, which accounts for 5% of the US labor force. The percentage of such irregular migrants engaged in service industries such as security, childcare, and cooking, and in the construction industry and agriculture is greater than that of the general populace, while the percentage of irregular migrants engaged in sales, management, and finance is small. According to research conducted by the National Autonomous University of Mexico, many Mexican migrants are employed in the construction industry and the culinary field.

As of 2015, 98% of Mexico's migrants resided in the U.S. Therefore, most Mexican migrants can be said to be in the U.S. By the middle of the 20th century, the number of Mexican migrants remained at the same level, as shown right [Figure]. However, in the 1970s it started to increase. This increase was triggered by a labor force shortage in the U.S. as a result of the termination of a program² for dispatching migrant labor from Mexico to the U.S., which continued from 1942 to 1964. The number of irregular migrants is considered to have started to increase since around the time of its termination. Then, at the end of the 2000s, the number started to decrease. Many researchers have pointed out that this shift was caused by the decrease in the number of employees in the U.S. because of the influence of the September 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers. In addition to the forced repatriation of irregular migrants (not necessarily limited to Mexicans), which president Trump advocates, a decrease in the birth rate in Mexico and increasingly tight US regulations on accepting immigrants are likely to lead to a decrease in the number of those migrants in the future. However, there are already about 12 million Mexican migrants in the U.S.; therefore, the fact that about 10% of the Mexican population resides in the U.S. will not change abruptly.



Moreover, the economic effect that Mexican migrants have on their home country cannot be ignored. In 2015, the amount of money transfer by them to Mexico totaled USD 24.8 billion (2.2% of GDP). It is greater than the USD 23.2 billion in oil-related exports from Mexico, and its scale is rather large compared with the USD 32.9 billion of foreign direct investment in Mexico. That is to say, migration contributes to the stability of the Mexican economy. When considering the scale of the population and the amount of money transferred, migration policy can be said to be extremely significant for Mexico.

MEXICAN MIGRATION POLICY

The various countermeasures taken by the Mexican government regarding migration issues are as follows.

【Issuance of ID Card】

Mexican consulates across the U.S. issue an ID card as evidence of Mexican citizenship. Even if a person does not have a passport, the ID card can be acquired with a birth certificate, etc. Therefore, a person's residential status is not questioned. In the U.S., this ID card can be used to open bank accounts and acquire a driver's license, and it functions as a way for irregular migrants to access public services. The Mexican government came to encourage irregular migrants to obtain the ID card, in response to the severer attitude of the US government toward immigrants since the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S.

【Approval of Dual Nationality】

Due to the increasing number of Mexican migrants who have become naturalized US citizens, the Mexican government decided to permit dual nationality in 1998. This governmental permission can be considered to be

intended to prevent migrants from changing their citizenship and to encourage them to maintain their connection with Mexico.

【Measures for Transit Migrants】

The number of transit migrants (mainly from Central American countries) heading for the U.S. via the border in the southern part of Mexico has been increasing, having quickly doubled from about 86,000 in 2013 to about 191,000 in 2015. On the other hand, the U.S. is concerned about this issue and is assisting the Mexican government with strengthening border control in the southern part.

【Migration Law in Mexico】

The migration law enacted in 2011 secures access to services such as education, health care, and legal services for immigrants living in Mexico. From the perspective of human rights, access to those services are approved also for irregular migrants. This law is considered to have been enacted as an attempt to facilitate requests by the Mexican government to the US government regarding the protection of Mexican immigrants.

As shown above, Mexico's policies are mostly supportive measures to solve existing problems and seem not to be implemented with a long-term vision.

WHAT SHOULD MEXICO DO?

The continuous emigration of citizens is not ideal. Employment within the nation should be secured so that citizens can earn enough income and do not need to leave the country as migrant workers. This is an idealistic situation for the nation, and it would not be easy to achieve. That is why the government needs to respond to migration. Currently, the Mexican government is facing difficulties adopting policies for the return of its citizens. Migrants are a resource in terms of the country acquiring foreign currency. As a result, the government has been avoiding tackling this issue, opting to maintain the current situation. However, with the emergence of President Trump, this issue has received prominent attention. Therefore, it would be difficult for the Mexican government not to clarify its position on it. What the Mexican government should do is to respond to its citizens who are in the U.S. irregularly and those who are heading there. Naturally, cooperation with US government is vital. Some countries are implementing regularization of irregular immigrants or sending out regular migrant labor through cooperation between nations on sending and receiving migrant labor. Their activities can serve as a reference.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia are sending a total of three million migrant laborers to neighboring Thailand. Most of them are undocumented workers. Protection of their people and securing remittances of foreign currency are important for the three countries, while Thailand considers the laborers to be valuable. Because of that, the three nation's governments entered into an agreement with Thai government regarding the regularization of irregular immigrants, and support the Thai government's regularization procedure, such as by providing information to the Thai government to confirm a migrant's origin. In the U.S., bills to regularize irregular migrants have been put forth. For example, under the Obama and G.W. Bush administrations, relevant bills were proposed; however, all of them were defeated due to opposition from conservatives in Congress. That is to say, there are forces who are opposed to the easy regularization of immigrants who originally crossed the border irregularly. In the case of Thailand, this kind of opposition was overcome. However, the key to making a breakthrough at that time was diplomatic efforts of the related countries. This should be stressed when reviewing the past situation.

Moreover, Vietnam, having reached agreement with Korea on the Employment Permit System (EPS), dispatches almost 10,000 manual laborers every year. Laborers cannot stay more than four years and ten months. If laborers overstay, the Korean government can stop this program. Actually, Korea had taken a break from receiving laborers from Vietnam since 2012. Because of that, the Vietnamese government set up an office of labor management in Seoul and started to manage Vietnamese laborers. Through this measure, Vietnam's excessive domestic labor force can be utilized; therefore, this system is attractive for nations that dispatch laborers. Accordingly, the Vietnamese government made an active effort to maintain this system. As a result, Korea resumed accepting Vietnamese laborers. Korea has entered into EPS agreements with 15 other countries and accepts tens of thousands of laborers every year. This system was arranged between nations. Therefore, it can be said to be an excellent system in that management of migrants becomes easier for both dispatching nations and recipient nations.

The regularization of irregular immigrants in the U.S. is a matter that can be decided by the U.S. only. However, the above cases were implemented based on diplomatic efforts after discussion between the relevant nations. Maintaining a good diplomatic relationship is crucial for the Mexican government to actively work with the U.S. government. Though Mexico-US relations have indeed cooled down due to the launch of the Trump administration, they should take a turn for the better. More importantly, the Mexican government should have a long-term vision: how to respond to this migration issue as a government and how to position migrants in national policies. Given that the nation will continue to have a fixed number of migrants who are an effective means of acquiring foreign currencies, Vietnam and Korea's program for dispatching regular laborers could be a good example. What is called into question now is the Mexican government's capability of finding a way to address the migrant issue that has clearly emerged as a result of President Trump's forceful stance.

Note:

¹ It includes people who stay temporarily for a long period, such as persons transferred overseas and students from overseas.

² It is called the Bracero Program, which was implemented to make up for the labor shortage in the U.S. during World War II. Mexicans with short term labor contracts worked on US farms and so on. The total number of such laborers amounted to 4.6 million.