

Excluded and Exploited



The New Regime of Trade, Managed Migration & Repression



National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Red nacional para los derechos de las y los inmigrantes y refugiados

About the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Formed in 1986, the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR) is a national organization composed of local coalitions and immigrant, refugee, community, religious, civil rights and labor organizations and activists. It serves as a forum to share information and analysis, to educate communities and the general public, and to develop and coordinate plans of action on important immigrant and refugee issues.

NNIRR works to promote a just immigration and refugee policy in the United States and to defend and expand the rights of all immigrants and refugees, regardless of immigration status. To accomplish this, NNIRR focuses on four core areas:

- Human rights education and advocacy;
- Popular education for immigrant and refugee communities;
- Grassroots policy advocacy and organizing promoting policies and programs for socially just legalization, sustainable community development and other policies and reforms that protect and expand the rights of immigrants, working people and communities of color; and
- Education and organizing campaigns seeking redress and end to abuses and violations committed against immigrant and refugee members of our communities.

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Cover photo by Sara Prestianni "Detained migrants in Tenerife, Canary Islands", design by guillermo prado, 8point2.com

While global migration is facilitated by technology, communications and air travel, dire economic conditions and political and civil strife continue to propel the dramatic and increasing movement of people, particularly within and from the Global South. The roots of these conditions can be traced to economic, trade and development policies that have dominated the globe, coupled with domestic migration policies in countries of destination that have become more restrictive and exploitative.

Background: Neoliberal Economic Development Policies

Since 1990, there has been a 50 percent increase in the number of migrants worldwide, with upwards of 220 million people currently living outside the countries where they were born. In the United States (U.S.), foreign-born persons make up 13 percent of the overall population, while that percentage is higher in other migrant destination countries such as Canada (19%), Australia (20%), and Switzerland (23%).

Migrants have contributed to major population shifts in other parts of the globe. For example, in the Persian Gulf -- a region that draws many foreign-born individuals in search of work -- migrants comprise 69 percent of the overall population of Kuwait, 71 percent of the population of the United Arab Emirates, and more than 80 percent of the population of Qatar. While the foreign-born population in the U.S. has nearly doubled in the last 20 years, by contrast, Qatar's has more than quadrupled. The dynamics that are fueling these dramatic shifts, which are often referred to as "push factors" or the "root causes" of migration, are complex. (Estimates from UN Population Division.)

In the Global South, neoliberal economic development policies, including "free trade" agreements, have been promoted and — in some cases — imposed by wealthier and more politically powerful countries in the Global North, which reap significant benefits from these unequal relationships. Neoliberal economic policies typically include three key elements: 1) privatization of public services; 2) slashing of government subsidies to local industries and producers; and 3) removal of tariffs to enable cheaper costs of imported goods. These measures often have an immediate "double-whammy" effect on a country's poorest residents: a rapid increase in the cost of living, coupled with a swift decline in real income.

When public services such as water or electricity are suddenly privatized there are direct consequences for the overall cost of living and the labor market. They include:

- An increase in the cost of services. Private suppliers, who are primarily concerned with profitability, will usually increase the prices of these services for consumers. For example, between 1998 and 2000, when Guatemala privatized its electricity supply to a U.S.-based company, the per-kilowatt cost to the Guatemalan public rose more than 120 percent, which doubled the cost of electricity for consumers.
- An increase in the price of local goods and products. Higher energy costs lead to increases in production costs as well as the costs of the goods being produced.
- Massive layoffs of public workers. While some former public employees may be re-hired by the private companies that assume control of these industries, most find themselves in a growing pool of unemployed workers.

The slashing of government subsidies to local industries can lead to increased production costs, which hurts both local producers and consumers. While at the same time, the removal of import tariffs opens the door to an influx of cheap, mass-produced goods and products, sometimes subsidized by the exporter's government (see *Corn in Mexico: A Case Study*). These policies not only stifle economic growth in many impoverished countries, but they also fuel global migration by displacing people who are forced to flee to more developed regions in order to survive.

■ **Corn in Mexico: A Case Study**

A prime example of the impact of neoliberal economic development policies is the decimation of corn production in Mexico — a traditional crop that has been produced and consumed locally for generations. Under the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), government subsidies to Mexican corn growers were eliminated, while U.S.-grown corn — produced nearly exclusively by multinational agribusinesses — remained one of the country's most heavily subsidized industries. (As part of the U.S. government's farm bill, the current subsidy of \$10.5 billion annually to U.S. corn producers is more than 10 times the entire Mexican agricultural budget.) In just a few years under NAFTA, U.S. corn exports to Mexico more than doubled and the price of corn imported from Mexico fell by more than 70 percent. Total agricultural exports from the U.S. to Mexico rose from \$4.6 billion to \$9.8 billion between 1994 and 2008, with \$2.5 billion (25%) in corn alone.



David Bacon, "Farmer in Mexico"

The results of this shift under NAFTA have been devastating for the people of Mexico. Since 1994, more than 1.8 million family farmers have been forcibly displaced, and Mexico, which used to be a leading corn exporter, now imports most of its corn, along with other agricultural products from the U.S. In turn, U.S.-produced corn now corners more than 70 percent of the world's market share, producing massive profits for a handful of multinational companies. The loss of corn production in rural areas of Mexico had a ripple effect on the country — the loss of farms led to increased poverty and unemployment, sending more people to urban areas in search of work, and contributing to migrant flows to the U.S. ■

A Triangle of Destructive Policies: Impact on Global Migration

Displacement of communities in less developed countries is not an entirely unintended or unexpected consequence of neoliberal economic policies. In fact, since the peak of colonialism by European and other forces in the last century, foreign policies (including migration policies) have sought to: extract raw materials from economically-poor but resource-rich countries; access and control export markets around the world; and control the flow of cheap, disposable labor.

This history has informed the current environment in which three main elements, shape a "triangular regime" of foreign, economic, and migration programs and practices driven by the Global North: 1) trade and development agreements; 2) repressive immigration and border enforcement measures; and 3) government "managed migration" policies.

Trade and development agreements

The cornerstone of this policy model is bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) or Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), advanced by the European Union (EU). As in the debate surrounding NAFTA, when U.S. proponents argued that NAFTA would help to stimulate the Mexican economy and lessen the pressures for migration, the EU also makes the link between trade and migration. In fact, the 2002 EU Ministerial session even stated, “bilateral trade agreements must address the [sic] illegal immigration problem.”

Under such agreements, EU countries offer an all-encompassing trade deal or development aid to a former colony (commonly an African nation) in exchange for access to highly valued natural resources. The non-EU partner is obligated to import products and acquire services from European companies and to enforce EU border and migration policies (see sidebar: The Berlusconi-Gadhafi Agreement).

■ The Berlusconi-Gadhafi Agreement

In 2004, the multi-billion dollar Berlusconi-Gadhafi agreement was signed between Italy and Libya. Under this agreement:

- Italy gets access to Libya's gas pipelines.
- Libya patrols its shores and interior borders, detains, and deports thousands of migrants from neighboring African countries (Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, etc.) who are bound for Italy and Europe in an attempt to flee poverty and/or war.
- Libya uses aid from Italy to purchase patrol boats, firearms, building materials, and other military equipment from Italian companies to fulfill its obligation to enforce EU border and migration policies.

As a result, Libya is now the primary deporter of migrants from North Africa, essentially executing draconian Italian border policies in its own interior. But the agreement certainly has not stopped the desperate attempts of migrants from throughout Africa, to migrate to Italy and beyond, to escape poverty, famine, wars and other conflicts.



The U.S. is already experimenting with similar policies, most significantly through the \$1.4 billion Merida Initiative (or Plan Mexico). As part of this initiative, the Mexican army is being trained and armed by U.S. military supply companies to combat narco-trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border. ■

Sara Prestianni, Migreurop
"Migrants deported from Algeria are abandoned in the desert-wasteland of Tinzaouaten"

Repressive enforcement: militarization, criminalization, and exploitation

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, there has been an unprecedented increase in hostility toward migrants around the world. In large part, this hostility has been driven by harsh enforcement measures adopted in the EU and the U.S. under the guise of protecting “national security.”



Sara Prestianni, Migreurop, "Processing (detention) center on the Canary Islands"

Prior to the events of 9/11, however, the U.S. had already launched an intense campaign to deter migrants from entering the country through its southern border. In 1993, the U.S. government adopted a multi-pronged strategy of “Prevention through Deterrence,” the cornerstone of U.S. militarization of the border with Mexico. This Clinton-era strategy was extended to the entire US-Mexico border in 1994 with the launch of Operation Gatekeeper, and significantly expanded during the Bush Administration. More recently, President Obama allocated an additional \$600 million to increase border security and added 2,000 new border patrol, ICE and Customs agents and other

security personnel to an existing roster of over 20,000 Border Patrol agents. (This does not include the 1,200 National Guard troops Obama deployed to the U.S.-Mexico border.)

The cumulative effect of these programs and policies has been the deliberate funneling of migrants through the most dangerous and desolate desert and mountain regions along the U.S.-Mexico border. Since 1994, remains of at least 8,000 migrants have been recovered from the border region and experts estimate that tens of thousands more remain undiscovered.

Along with increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, criminalization of migrants in the U.S. has continued to escalate. U.S. detentions of migrants have increased almost 400% since 1994 and the number of jail beds designated for migrant detainees has doubled in the last five years. In fiscal year 2010 alone, the U.S. deported nearly 400,000 migrants, a startling statistic amid a worrisome record.

Immigration workplace enforcement operations and raids are occurring with greater frequency in the U.S., but they rarely result in more than a slap on the wrist for employers that hire undocumented workers. In contrast, thousands of immigrant workers caught up in these raids have been arrested and deported, separated from their families, or put in more vulnerable, exploitative situations. The threat of deportation forces many undocumented workers to endure labor rights violations and widespread abuse by small employers and large companies alike.

Like the U.S., the EU has followed a similar path of increased border militarization and criminalization of migrants over the last 20 years. For example, Fortress Europe has tripled the size of its border security troops, the number of processing (detention) centers in the EU has significantly increased, walls have been built around the migrant crossroads of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco (replicating the U.S.-Mexico border wall), and close to 10,000 dead bodies have been recovered from the seas around Spain’s Canary Islands and Lampedusa, Italy.

Managed migration: The new frontier?

International migrants are living through an immense humanitarian crisis despite the significant role that their labor plays at all levels of the global economy. Instead of alleviating their suffering and ending the abuse, governments have developed a new “managed migration” framework over the last decade. This framework argues that migrants can make significant contributions to the development of both sending and receiving countries, as long as migration is managed according to current economic (market) needs. While governments claim this would “lessen repression” against migrants, workers subjected to this system fare no better and are reduced to being a labor commodity, to be used and disposed of according to economic trends and employer needs.

Governments’ reliance on temporary or guestworker programs has also become a cornerstone of migration policy among many migrant-receiving countries in the Global North. These programs are based on a theory of “circular migration” in which migrant workers return to their home countries after a period of temporary employment, supposedly acquiring new skills to contribute to their home countries’ development and, if necessary, migrating back again in the future to look for work. However, because these migrants are not accorded the same rights as other citizens while in these “temporary” situations, they are frequently subjected to employer exploitation and are almost always forced to remain separated from their families since they are provided with temporary work visas only for themselves.

Many migrant-sending countries in the Global South support circular migration policies because they rely on remittances from migrant workers in order to meet their economic and development needs. Some governments, such as the Philippines, have even gone so far as to develop Labor Exportation Programs (LEPs) to ensure that the export of its people continues to be one of the primary sources of income for the country. (Currently, more than 10 percent of Philippine workers are employed overseas.)

Perhaps most troubling has been how international agencies in charge of migration and development are institutionalizing a policy of managed migration. For example, in 2008 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) established its first Migration Management Center in Bamako, Mali. Costing upwards of €10 million, the Center was designed to:

- Attract and recruit potential migrant workers from around West Africa according to EU market needs
- Train potential migrant workers to fulfill required “EU skill sets”
- Deport migrants who did not fit EU market needs
- Monitor the flow of remittances
- Foster “efficient management of the human, financial and technical value of Malians abroad.”

And the Obama Administration is also touting the benefits of migration management as a desirable policy framework. Reversing the previous U.S. administration’s policy of non-participation, the U.S. recently joined the steering committee of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), which seeks to “streamline migration policy and identify ways and means to maximize the development benefits of migration.” The November 2010 meeting of the GFMD in Mexico will be an unprecedented opportunity to observe the U.S. in this role and see whether an Obama Administration will promote better protections for migrants or if it will help lead other countries down the dangerous path advanced by the EU model of managed migration.

Principles for Advocacy

As this “triangular regime” progresses, policies and principles centered on human rights and the interests of migrants themselves should lead the discourse on the global economy and migration. The current neoliberal economic model and the unequal development that it causes must be exposed for fueling, not alleviating, pressures for migration. In the nexus of migration and development, civil society groups should advocate that governments support community-based models of development, including job creation, that ensure sustainability, equity, and communities as beneficiaries, rather than promoting migrant labor as a commodity.

Moreover, governments should be urged:

- To not rely on remittances as a source of income and development. Remittances should be treated as families' attempts to address their most basic needs in dire situations.
- To develop, approve and implement migration policies based on the recognition, protection, and advancement of the human rights of all people, regardless of migration status, political climate, and socio-economic pressures. Migrants who are not excluded from and exploited by society can contribute to the flourishing of the communities where they work, live, and play.
- To officially recognize the standard set by the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families, and those that have failed to ratify it, including the U.S., should do so expediently.
- To adhere to basic human rights principles and be accountable to international laws in formulating migration policies, rather than being driven by misleading “market needs.”
- To engage in viable consultative processes in policy-making where communities, especially migrant-based ones, are treated as critical stakeholders and have a decisive voice in determining the kinds of policies that will impact them.



Arnoldo Garcia, NNIRR. "2nd GFMD, 3rd People's Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights, Manila"

