

*The Global-Local Links Project  
Issue Brief*

## **Economic Integration and Migration**

Co-Hosts/Facilitators:

**Inter-American Forum**  
Collins Center for Public Policy  
Miami, Florida

**Enlaces América**  
Chicago, Illinois



enlacesAmérica

## **About the Global-Local Links Project**

The Global-Local Links Project is an Inter-American Forum initiative that explores the interplay between local, hemispheric and global issues so as to generate engaging critical thought, questions and recommendations from a variety of voices and perspectives. The project examines a wide variety of public interest issues—including migration, health, media, democracy, privatization, and drug trafficking, among others. Projects are developed in partnership with leading institutions, analysts and activists. Global-Local Links initiatives include roundtables, convenings, issue briefs and other publications. Each initiative is designed to provide accessible information resources and tools to assist diverse audiences of community leaders, policymakers and opinion leaders in government, media, academia, business, social movements and other interested parties working to develop “pro-community, pro-equity” policies and approaches.

The Inter-American Forum and Enlaces América are pleased to be partnering on the Global-Local Links Project initiative which focuses on the theme of Economic Integration and Migration.\* The Inter-American Forum is hosted by the Collins Center for Public Policy.

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### **Note to Reader:**

The Global-Local Links Economic Integration and Migration Issue Brief is a synthesis of a range of opinions and perspectives that were offered during a Roundtable conversation. This Issue Brief is not intended to attribute specific statements to a particular Roundtable contributor. It is our hope that it will serve as a catalyst for further discussion, debate and ideas.

### **Roundtable Contributors**

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### **Introduction**

The Inter-American Forum and Enlaces América are pleased to be partnering on the Global-Local Links Project initiative on Economic Integration and Migration.

This Issue Brief raises fundamental questions about the impact of global trade rules on international migration. Here are a few highlights from the roundtable:

- Historically, economic integration and migration have been treated as separate issues. Yet, the aggressive pace of economic integration in the Western Hemisphere and beyond is quickly bringing to light the fact that the two issues share a complex relationship.
- Economic integration, despite previous claims that it would reduce migration, often fuels it instead.
- A new migration agenda has not materialized partly due to the lack of public engagement with and understanding of the relationship and issues at hand. A history of harsh anti-immigration and anti-immigrant rhetoric at the policy level has worked to prejudice the opinions of the general public.
- The challenges to the creation and implementation of a new vision regarding these issues point to the pressing need to begin addressing the misperceptions about migration across diverse social sectors.
- Despite the many hurdles faced by migrants, the efforts of new and diverse actors within these populations to enact positive social change at the local, national, and international levels must be strengthened and supported.

We were honored to have had the Global-Local Links Project Economic Integration and Migration Roundtable informed by the insights of a stellar group of practitioners, analysts and activists (noted on the left). The following Issue Brief captures the general highlights and key elements of this timely discussion among these individuals, including some diversity in their opinions.

There has never been a more urgent and opportune time to develop enforceable conventions and policies, at all levels, that comprehensively address the issue of migration, both within and beyond the context of trade negotiations.

With your active participation, we believe we can contribute to a broadening of the discourse and options currently on the table regarding the relationship between economic integration and migration.

Your ideas and responses are welcome and invited. Please send your comments and suggestions for this brief to us at [tdawkins@collinscenter.org](mailto:tdawkins@collinscenter.org) and [ochacon@enlacesamerica.org](mailto:ochacon@enlacesamerica.org). Thank you for your interest.

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## **Trends and Observations**

- The Americas region has historically been the recipient of migration, starting with transoceanic migration from Europe and Asia, and shifting toward Latin America and the Caribbean during the last three decades. Recent years have seen dramatic shifts in the intensity and geographic orientation of migration patterns.
- Pushing these shifts has been the growing economic interconnectedness between nations via trade agreements that serve as the primary vehicles for economic integration. Through trade agreements, barriers to trade between nations are dismantled. Current trade negotiations propose to eliminate not only traditional tariff-barriers to trade, but also to remove *non-tariff* barriers. Non-tariff barriers can include a wide variety of local, regional and national regulations and legislation intended to serve the public interest. Economic integration and macro-level economic growth and stability have multiple implications for migration.
- Despite these linkages, analysts continue to treat migration and economic integration as separate phenomena, as evidenced by the lack of institutional and policy overlap among agencies charged with addressing these issues.
- The “silo” approach to these issues has been largely adopted by US public policy officials who generally do not focus on root causes and catalysts of migration, like economic, social or political unrest. Instead, they tend to target their responses toward the most immediate impacts and implications of migration, such as illegal border crossings, and increasingly, militarized responses.
- Years of exposure to these narrow debates and approaches have only served to limit the public’s interest and willingness to explore more comprehensive approaches to migration.
- Some analysts argue that economic integration only increases migration in the short-term, and that the long-term gains of integration will eventually lead to decreased levels of migration. Yet, given that the gains of economic integration are not being equitably distributed, it is doubtful that, even in the long-term, migration levels will decrease.
- Efforts to articulate a broad approach to addressing migration have not been helped by the trends in government downsizing. Policies generated within the context of economic integration tend to stress minimizing government and increasing the role of market forces in addressing socioeconomic dilemmas. Yet, the market is not a substitute for effective government.

*“The traditional and historical responsibility of the nation-state is for the people in their nation...that includes providing basic safety nets...defending political rights and issues of equality and justice...and playing an active role in development.”*

*– Dr. Lourdes Gouveia, University of Nebraska*

- Analysts and activists in Latin America link integration and economic liberalization efforts over the past two decades to persisting poverty and inequality. The inability of all levels of government to compensate and/or respond to the needs of those most negatively impacted by these processes contributes significantly to migration.

*“Given the actual effects of these economic policies that continue to be emphasized and implemented throughout Latin America, immigration is only likely to continue, and perhaps in increasing numbers in the years to come.”*  
– Oscar Chacón, *Enlaces América*

- Ironically, economic integration proposals are often framed as mechanisms that can deter migration. For example, during the debate leading up to the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, political advocates in both the United States and Mexico stated that NAFTA would help stem or slow migration. The continuing influx of migrants shows the limits of this argument.
- The events of 9/11 have further complicated efforts to balance legitimate security concerns with migration flows. Yet, conservative advocates continue to push for restrictive policies that do not address the root causes of migration.

*“The more radical voices in the anti-immigrant world in the US have not succeeded at completely closing down the border and travel, but they have created an atmosphere in which the possibility of real reform is going to be harder to achieve because of the way in which their ideas are seeping into the US public mind, i.e. cost of immigrants, the loss of jobs, etc...”*  
– Maria Echaveste, *Nueva Vista Group*

### **Local Impacts**

- Migrants residing in the United States face multiple policy barriers in most aspects of their social, economic and political lives. For example, migrants lacking adequate access to quality healthcare must sometimes resort to using hospital Emergency Rooms as their main access points to medical attention—at which point illnesses and injuries have been allowed to worsen considerably.
- Young migrants face challenges in furthering their education. For example, in many states across the US, undocumented students are not afforded in-state tuition at local public colleges. This carries negative implications not just for the youth unable to access higher education but also for their families’ future economic prospects.
- The post 9/11 climate has especially complicated community-level efforts to address the needs and safety of growing migrant populations. For example, following the arrival of over 200 Haitians on October 29, 2003 in Miami, FL, the Justice Department denied Haitian asylum-seekers their release from detention centers on the basis of “national security.”

*“...one of the Middle Eastern asylum seekers asked an immigration official why he was being taken into custody when he reported to the Immigration and Naturalization Services [office] and the official responded something like, “You people come and bomb our country. What do you think we’re going to do?”*

*- Cheryl Little, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center*

### **Local Reactions & Processes**

- Despite the many hurdles faced by migrants, new and diverse actors within these populations are seeking to enact positive social change at the local, national, and international levels. These migrant-led organizations bring a transnational perspective to policy debates
- Transnational community organizations can play important roles in advancing a more progressive migration policy given their ability to organize and act across borders at the grassroots level. Transnationalization allows them to impact and engage more people and potential partner institutions within the context of loose networks.
- Local advocacy organizations, such as the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC) in South Florida, are developing new national partnerships to bridge the policy and practice divide in the areas of migrants’ rights and government accountability.
- At the same time, immigrant-led community-based groups are looking for ways to participate in national policy debates.

*“I think that the forces point in the direction of better migration policies that are linked to human rights, development policies and a more human approach to trade in 15-25 years.”*

*– Frank Sharry, The National Immigration Forum*

*“The pragmatic issues and the 40 million Latinos living in the US are the things that will promote a more rational immigration policy. I don’t think it’s going to be an appeal to some kind of a policy rationality, but really practical issues with groups like businesspeople, labor and so on that have real clout in Congress and the Executive branch of government.”*

*- Dr. Max Castro, North-South Center, University of Miami*

- Migration is shaping major public and institutional debates in surprising ways that signal both the opportunity and need for new thought and action. For example, in 2000, the AFL-CIO announced its support for legalizing undocumented migrants - an unprecedented position given its historical view of migrants as unfair competition for domestic workers.

- Organizations made up of migrants living in the United States who share a common point of origin at the national, city or even neighborhood level have emerged as social change advocates. These organizations, known as “hometown associations,” are working on multiple fronts.
- In Illinois, for example, the Federation of Michoacanos—a hometown association comprised of immigrants from the State of Michoacán, Mexico—offers advice to its members on how to navigate the various situations recent immigrants to the US often encounter. As a result, the Federation has become involved in advocacy work surrounding the issuing of state identification to undocumented immigrants in the state of Illinois. At the same time, the Federation supports its members’ efforts to support local development projects and to attract Mexican government support for economic development in their communities of origin.

*“One of the main reasons why people get involved in hometown associations to begin with is because we need to do something that will help us with our self-esteem. Usually the majority of the members of these hometown associations are first generation in the US. Many of us do not speak the language; do not have the educational background in order to be more effective in understanding the systems...”*

*– Gonzalo Arroyo, Family Focus*

- Hometown associations are increasingly active in promoting the right to vote in their country of origin. This demonstrates their interest and capacity in impacting the development of policy across borders.

- Hometown associations and other innovative migrant-led community-based organizations have the potential to make a difference in promoting integrated policies, but will not meet ever-increasing expectations without a commensurate investment in building their institutional capacity.

- Organizations working on migration issues are increasingly seeking to connect with other actors in making the global-local link between migration and economic integration.

*“I agree that hometown associations and other transnational organizations could have the potential to be enormously important actors in promoting the kind of integrated agenda that breaks out of the silo mentality...specifically because they have a complex and binational agenda that resists being described as domestic or international. It’s not an ‘either or agenda.’”*

*– Amy Shannon, Enlaces América*

### **Possibilities, Alternatives and Recommendations**

- **Multifaceted Approaches** - Migration and economic integration have deep interconnections. Analyzing them as separate issues is no longer viable in light of the current global socioeconomic reality.

- **Accountability-** Increasing the focus and emphasis on holding governments and elected officials accountable for better migration policy and better economic development policy is a principal starting point for true reform.
- **Public Reassertion of Effective Government Roles–** The role of government must be reconstituted in tandem with increased public participation and the inclusion of the voices and perspectives of local communities into the debate on migration and development.
- **Public Education & Engagement -** Holding open and frank conversations in public settings with diverse participants will help to educate and engage the broader society on these important issues. Immigrant populations in the US must continue to become increasingly involved in and engaged with their local political systems.
- **Public/Private Sector Involvement -** Mobilization requires reaching out to both the public sector (i.e., county commissioners, city councils, and mayors) and the private sector (i.e., business leaders, chambers of commerce, and local economic development agencies). Banks, for example, have already recognized the enormous market potential residing in the immigrant population and could be cultivated as policy allies.
- **Transnational/Trans-sectoral Alliances -** At the community organizing level, alliance building across borders and sectors will continue to be a powerful tool for organizations seeking to impact the development of policy. For example, one area where trans-sectoral work is needed is between the migration advocates and the environmentalists. Silo thinking by either side often creates barriers to collaboration. Other potential points of intersection include consumerism, health, occupational safety, and investment policies.
- **Transnational Perspectives -** In an increasingly globalized world, the way people think about domestic issues and their relationship to international processes is very important. New approaches to migration issues must be constructed through the lens of transnationalism. Part of this lens entails recognizing that the “community” of concern to immigrants is *both* the place they live in now, and the place they came from.

*“...those of us who work on the local level know how important it is for national organizations to collaborate in calling attention to the discriminatory policies that are adversely affecting populations in our areas.”*

*-Cheryl Little, Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center*

- **New Paradigms for Economic Development and Integration –**New approaches to regional integration and economic development should prioritize poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and dignified job opportunities, all factors that would alleviate some of the root causes of migration.



- **Movement Building** – Alliance building also means supporting the establishment of movements around the issues of migration and other justice/human rights agendas. These movements can work to generate resources and extend the reach of all organizations in framing the issues for the general public. Greater civic participation must part of the development of progressive immigration policies.

*“What’s happening slowly but surely is that we’re going from a bunch of disparate organizations working on a variety of issues, feeling besieged, to the beginning of what sure feels like we’re going to grow into a movement.”*

*-Frank Sharry,  
The National Immigration Forum*

- **Hemispheric Political Alliances** - Much of the new leadership emerging in the Western Hemisphere is generating counterpoints to the dominant economic theories that are fueling international migration. This presents US communities a timely opportunity to continue making transnational connections with actors working for positive change.

*“As we have in this hemisphere leaders coming into power, such as those in Brazil, that have a more assertive bargaining position vis á vis the United States, it would be a positive thing if communities in the US would work with new leaders in Latin America to encourage them to make migration, the decent treatment of immigrants, and the incorporation of the migration issue into the hemispheric integration agenda part of their negotiations with the US.”*

*– Dr. Max Castro, North-South Center, University of Miami*

- **People of Color Leadership and Empowerment** - The leadership of movements must reflect the diversity of the populations affected by the current policies. Too often debates concerning migration tend to disempower migrants by not recognizing their potential as actors for change in their own communities. The voices from communities where the impacts of these issues are most acutely felt must be at the forefront of the public and policy debate.

*“At the community level we need to strengthen local networking, emphasizing the building of trust in relationships as well as the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills necessary for communities to respond to their respective need as well as to build alliances.”*

*– Oscar Chacón, Enlaces América*

- **Media Framing** - Shifting public opinion requires changing how the media portrays these issues. A rethinking needs to take place as to how migration issues are being framed for broad dissemination through the media.

*“At the local level, the challenge and opportunity is to positively and productively politicize and link issues in a ways that increase the political space for multiple issues simultaneously.”*

*- Tanya Dawkins, Inter-American Forum*

*“We have to find a way to try to incorporate those social and economic realities so that they’re consistent with our values of human rights and also with maximizing our economic gain domestically as well as for the people in those countries who are trying to survive.”*

*– Dr. Max Castro, North-South Center, University of Miami*

- **Political Engagement** – Immigrant populations in the US are often interpreted as powerful political and electoral blocs. Yet, these communities are not homogeneous in their preferences and priorities. Approaches to fostering political engagement must acknowledge differences and seek areas of common ground. Issues that may resonate broadly include: stewardship, justice, economic opportunity, and opportunity for future generations.

### **Key Policy Questions**

#### ***At the international/Hemispheric level:***

- How do we align economic integration efforts with social value systems, both of industrialized and developing nations?
- How can the issue of migration be addressed within the context of increasing economic integration in the Western Hemisphere?
- What are the reasons why the liberalization of migration flows have historically been omitted from international trade agreements?
- Should there be bilateral/multilateral migration agreements that are constructed outside of the economic integration framework?
- What role can the United Nations play in the international political arena on the issue of migration?
- How can we best educate the U.S. population as to the importance of the historic ties that exist between the U.S. and other regions of the Americas?
- How can leaders from Latin American, Caribbean and the United States reshape their debate to prioritize the rights of migrants?
- How do we address the growing extension of rights to capital and private interests while the rights of human beings are increasingly being limited?

#### ***At the national level:***

- What kinds of protections can be developed for US workers while at the same time providing undocumented workers with the legal means to ensure that labor and human rights are respected?

- What opportunities do recent Republican and Democratic party proposals for immigration reform present for a broadening of the discussions around migration?
- How can it be ensured that approaches to reforming current immigration legislation are carried out in a manner that reflects the accurate needs, priorities and capacities of immigrants?

***At the local level:***

- What investments will be necessary to enable immigrants to participate more fully in civic and political life in their adopted communities? (training, organizational support, etc)
- There are currently several pieces of migration-related legislation being debated in the US Congress:
  - The **Development, Relief and Education Relief for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act** is a bi-partisan Act that would eliminate current federal legislation that discourages states from providing in-state tuition at public colleges for migrant youth. The DREAM Act would also allow some long-term resident immigrants to obtain legal residency after graduating from a US high school.
  - The **Agjobs** legislation would allow nearly half a million migrant farm workers to earn permanent legal status in the US. This proposed legislation would allow a historically exploited portion of the migrant population to obtain and exercise their labor rights.
  - The **Clear Law Enforcement for Criminal Alien Removal (CLEAR) Act** would allow local and state level police forces to become quasi-immigration agents by extending them the right to enforce national level immigration laws. This proposed legislation is rooted in the “interdiction” approach to migration.

How can communities become better informed about these pieces of legislation and their potential impacts? How can their voices influence the policy debate and process? What steps can be taken in diverse communities to work on these pieces of legislation?

## **About the Co-Hosts/Facilitators**

### **About the Inter-American Forum (IAF)**

The Inter-American Forum is a leadership and public policy project dedicated to promoting a dynamic pro-community, pro-equity economic and trade policy agenda at the international, hemispheric and community level. The Forum seeks to transform the increasingly polarized public and policy discourse about globalization, regional economic integration, communities and social equity by creating a unique space for developing, highlighting and promoting new visions of trade and economic policy that places social equity, public interest and community at the center of the policy agenda. The Inter-American Forum is a hosted initiative of the Collins Center for Public Policy.

### **About Enlaces América**

Enlaces América promotes sustainable, dignified futures for communities in the Americas by strengthening transnational communication and collaboration throughout the region. A central element of this work entails enabling immigrant leaders to become effective policy advocates around issues that effect transnational communities such as trade, economic development, and migration. Enlaces América is a project of the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights, based in Chicago.