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Protection through Integration: The Mexican Government's Efforts to Aid Migrants in the United States

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Executive Summary

Mexican consular officials safeguard and protect the interests of their nationals in the United States, performing many of the same functions as any other diplomatic staff in a foreign country. As an immigrant-sending country, Mexico also offers its nationals in the United States low-cost transfer rates for remittances and programs that match migrant investment in communities of origin dollar for dollar. In recent years, the Mexican government has moved beyond traditional notions of consular protection by establishing a broad institutional structure, the Institute of Mexicans Abroad (*Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior* or *IME*), to deliver an array of civic, health, education, and financial services to its migrants — 95 percent of whom live in the United States. The proximity and concentration of their diaspora allows Mexico to establish or coordinate programs geared towards helping Mexican migrants transition to life in the United States. By promoting services that seek to integrate its migrants in a receiving country, the Mexican government has taken on a task that has traditionally been the work of receiving-country institutions, not sending countries. IME's work represents one of the most significant, if overlooked, factors in US immigrant integration policy. This report does not evaluate IME programs but rather seeks to detail its activities in a first-ever attempt to map the expanding array of IME programs within the United States.

The United States and Mexico have an important stake in the success of a shared population whose demography poses several challenges to immigrant integration in the United States. Mexican immigrants disproportionately have lower educational attainment, lack English proficiency, lack access to quality health care, and are more likely to work in low-wage, unskilled occupations that do not offer health insurance but may expose many to unsafe working conditions. In addition, the large Mexican unauthorized population and recently arrived legal immigrants remain outside the US social safety net. Mexican immigrants may be left especially vulnerable in this economy as they are concentrated in industries — including construction, manufacturing, leisure, and hospitality — that are struggling through the recession. With limited evidence of return migration, Mexican immigrants increasingly will need assistance to succeed socially and economically.

Driven in part by the opportunity and necessity of supporting a shared population of adults and children, IME has set in motion a range of immigrant integration practices to help Mexican immigrants succeed in the United States. IME's approach is based on a belief that a better integrated immigrant — one who has access to quality K-12 or adult education, learns English, is healthy, understands his or her rights, and is politically active — benefits the individual immigrant, the sending country, and the receiving country. In many cases, IME's programs are binational civil-society collaborations between IME and US school districts, hospitals, universities, foundations, and community-based organizations that fill gaps in the social welfare system caused by funding shortfalls, lack of experience with migrant populations, eligibility requirements, or neglect.

These projects include:

- Creation of a unique model of binational civic engagement through the Advisory Council (*Consejo Consultivo del IME*), a migrant-elected, migrant-led council that focuses on the Mexican government's policies vis-à-vis Mexicans abroad while serving the ancillary purpose of leadership development within diaspora communities.
- Transcript analysis and diagnostic assessments in Spanish for US school districts that need assistance determining the appropriate grade placement of Mexican migrant children to promote graduation and reduce dropouts.

- Provision of low-cost culturally and linguistically appropriate distance-learning instruction for Mexican immigrant adults that is aligned with instruction received in the home country.
- Establishment of in-consulate medical stations (*Ventanillas de Salud*) where unauthorized immigrants and their families can receive basic medical information.
- Provision of financial literacy workshops that encourage the use of formal banking institutions in order to build sufficient credit history in the United States to qualify for a home or car loan.

In some cases, IME serves as the implementing agency for the program, but in other cases it serves a coordinating role between appropriate government agencies.

IME's policies and practices underscore a shift in the Mexican approach to its migrants, from relatively limited engagement with their diaspora to the creation of an institution that cultivates a formal relationship between Mexico and its migrants in the United States. This shift can be seen in the evolution of its consular offices as they become important service delivery sites and coordinating entities for immigrant integration. This development coincides with an increase in the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States and the expansion of Mexican consular offices in the United States over the last decade to meet their needs.

While evaluations of IME's programs remain scarce, its projects offer a number of potential best practices in areas ranging from distance learning, outreach, civic engagement, and health care. We recommend sustaining and broadening evaluation and assessment of these programs. This is especially critical as other sending countries, such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay, look to Mexico as a model for providing services to its diaspora and other recipient countries look to work with sending countries to make migration work for all participants.

I. Introduction

Although Mexican consulates in the United States are widely known for consular protection activities such as issuing consular IDs and promoting their acceptance as valid identification at US banks, police departments, and other local government agencies,¹ Mexican initiatives in the field of health care, financial literacy, education, workforce development, English language acquisition, and leadership have been overlooked. Increasingly, immigrant-sending countries are building institutional capacity to protect their migrant workers and respond to migrants' needs. In the 1990s, the Mexican government began a formal process to expand beyond consular protection, creating innovative extraterritorial agencies or, as some would term, "diasporic bureaucracies,"² that explicitly seek to improve the well-being and lives of Mexican migrants in the United States. Immigrant integration has usually been the work of receiving countries. In contrast, Mexican government-led initiatives to integrate their immigrants in the United States are unique in that they are integration programs coordinated by a sending country.

Through its Institute for Mexicans Abroad (*Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior*, or IME), the Mexican government has acknowledged the importance of building the social and human capital of its migrants in the United States. IME's mission is premised on the belief that a better integrated immigrant — one who has access to quality K-12 or adult education, learns English, is healthy, understands his or her rights, and is politically active — benefits the individual immigrant, the sending country, and the receiving country. In many cases, Mexican programs fill gaps that exist in US social welfare systems because of funding shortfalls, lack of experience with migrant populations, eligibility requirements, or neglect.

This report provides an overview of Mexico's binational immigrant integration strategies, detailing Mexican investments in the human and social capital of its diaspora in the United States. By mapping Mexico's various social programs for its emigrants, this report examines the challenges and opportunities that both sending and receiving governments face in assisting in the process of immigrant integration.

¹ Kevin O'Neil, "Consular ID Cards: Mexico and Beyond," *Migration Information Source*, April 2003, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=115>.

² Robert Courtney Smith, "Contradictions of Diasporic Institutionalization in Mexican Politics," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 4 (2008): 708-741.

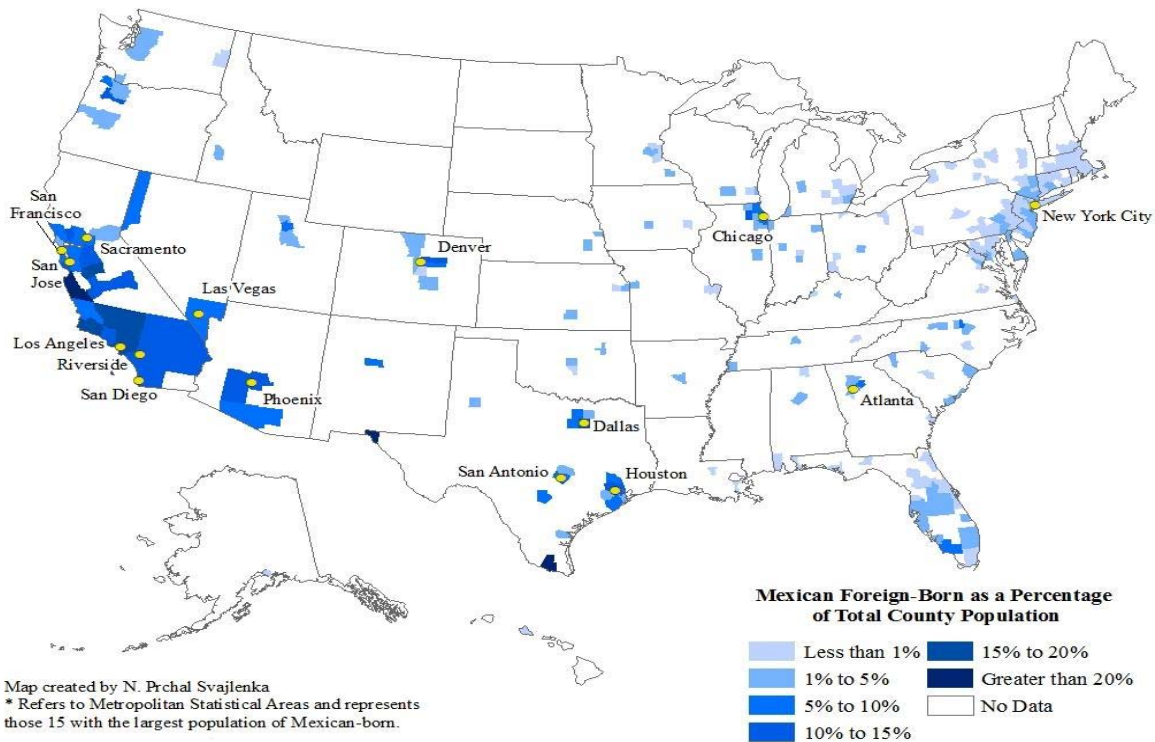
II. Background

A. Demographic Profile of Mexican Immigrants in the United States

Since 1980, immigrants from Mexico have been the largest single immigrant group in the United States. In 2007, there were 11.7 million foreign born from Mexico residing in the United States, accounting for almost a third of the entire US foreign-born population.³ The total number of Mexican immigrants in the United States exceeds 10 percent of Mexico's total population of 106 million⁴ — and 95 percent of Mexico's emigrants are in the United States.

Over 83 percent of Mexican-born immigrants live in just ten states. However, several states have seen their relatively small number of Mexican immigrants double between 2000 and 2007.⁵ Figure 1 displays the top 15 metropolitan areas with the largest population of Mexican immigrants.

Figure 1. Top 15 Metropolitan Areas with the Largest Population of Mexican-Born Immigrants



Source: US Census Bureau, 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

³ Unless otherwise noted, all demographic data on Mexican migrants in the United States are MPI-generated tabulations of the 2007 American Community Survey.

⁴ Percentage calculated based on 2007 American Community Survey estimates of the Mexican immigrant population in the United States and 2006 estimates of the Mexican population from *Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo*, 2007.

⁵ The top ten states that account for over 83 percent of the Mexican immigrant population in the United States are: California (4,427,671), Texas (2,415,084), Illinois (717,289), Arizona (650,193), Florida (316,306), Georgia (273,666), Colorado (245,523), North Carolina (247,395), Nevada (236,555), and New York (235,668). The size of the Mexican immigrant populations in Maine, Hawaii, Vermont, Delaware, and Mississippi more than doubled between 2000 and 2006.

By and large, Mexicans move to the United States in search of better employment opportunities. Working-age adults comprise over three-quarters of Mexican immigrants in the United States, with over 85 percent of Mexican immigrant men living in the United States participating in the labor force. While entry to and participation in the labor force can ease immigrant integration, Mexican immigrants may still face adjustment challenges if they are recent arrivals, limited English proficient, and/or have lower educational attainment.⁶ These same characteristics also make Mexican immigrants vulnerable during a recession, as many are concentrated in industries — including construction, manufacturing, leisure and hospitality, and support and personal services — that are struggling through the recession.⁷

Almost a third of all Mexican immigrants in the United States arrived in 2000 or later. Nearly three-quarters of Mexican immigrants self-reported that they spoke English less than “very well” and as a result, were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) by the Census Bureau. In 2007, three in five Mexican immigrants had no high school degree. Health care access and coverage remain low among this population, with 56 percent of Mexican immigrants lacking health care insurance and 47 percent reporting that they do not have a source of regular medical care in the United States.⁸

Restrictions governing noncitizens’ access to public benefits have limited some Mexican immigrants’ ability to benefit from core US government support services.⁹ Unauthorized immigrants are eligible for few benefits beyond emergency Medicaid. This means that the approximately 7 million unauthorized Mexican immigrants in the United States (59 percent of all 11.9 million unauthorized immigrants in the country) are ineligible for most public benefit programs.¹⁰

Lawful permanent resident (LPR) adults arriving after 1996 are barred for at least five years from central federal safety net programs such as Medicaid and food stamps.¹¹ In 2007, an estimated 3.5 million, or 27 percent, of LPRs came from Mexico.¹² Some states have restored health and other benefits for federally ineligible immigrants but others have not. The confluence of poor English proficiency, low educational attainment, lack of health care, recency of arrival, and unauthorized immigrant status, not only isolates Mexican immigrants but can complicate efforts to deliver services that support their integration. In part as a response, the Mexican government has created localized programs geared specifically to improving the social and human capital of this binationally shared population.

⁶ Michael Fix, Wendy Zimmermann, and Jeffrey S. Passel, *The Integration of Immigrant Families in the United States* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2001), <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410227>.

⁷ Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Aaron Terrazas, *Immigrants and the Current Economic Crisis: Research Evidence, Policy Challenges, and Implications* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009), http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/lmi_recessionJan09.pdf.

⁸ Steven P. Wallace and Xóchitl Castañeda, *Migration and Health: Latinos in the United States* (Mexico City, Mexico: Consejo Nacional de Población, 2008), http://hia.berkeley.edu/documents/conapo_rpt.pdf.

⁹ Michael Fix, “Immigrant Integration and Comprehensive Immigration Reform: An Overview” in *Securing the Future: US Immigrant Integration Policy, A Reader*, ed. Michael Fix (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2007).

¹⁰ Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, *Trends in Unauthorized Immigration: Undocumented Inflow Now Trails Legal Inflow* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2008), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/94.pdf>.

¹¹ Fix, “Immigrant Integration and Comprehensive Immigration Reform: An Overview,” X-XI.

¹² Nancy Rytina, “Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2007,” (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2009), http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/lpr_pe_2007.pdf.

B. The Role and Function of Mexican Consular Officials in the United States

Mexican consular officials perform many of the same functions as any other diplomatic staff in the United States. These functions include protecting the country's interests and nationals, issuing passports and travel documents, and helping and assisting nationals of the sending state. As signatories of the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations,¹³ Mexico and the United States have agreed to policies that aid consular officials in the performance of consular functions. As with all treaties however, implementation of particular consular policies are subject to an individual country's interpretation.

Mexican consular officials defend the rights and interests of their citizens in the United States through the use of diplomatic pressure and specific interventions. Mexican consular staff also issue passports, provide proof of Mexican citizenship through naturalization certificates, assist in the acquisition of Mexican citizenship, and register Mexican nationals resident in the United States through the issuance of consular identification cards.¹⁴

Much attention has been focused on Mexican consular efforts to gain recognition of the validity of the *matricula consular*, or consular identification, in localities, financial institutions, and police departments in the United States. Although Mexico has been issuing consular identification cards since 1871, the demand for consular identification increased significantly following 9/11 owing to tightened US security measures.¹⁵ The consular identification card allows unauthorized Mexican migrants to identify themselves to law enforcement, access certain financial services to save and remit money, and provide identification to participating telephone and utility companies, hospitals, and other institutions.¹⁶ The identification cards also help officials notify foreign consulates when their nationals have been detained for suspected illegal activity.¹⁷

Beyond its traditional consular protection activities, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Mexican government began initiatives in the area of health, education, financial literacy, and leadership development. These initiatives aim, at least in part, to integrate Mexican immigrants in the United States, and are the focus of this report. They offer a unique example of how Mexico supplements protecting its emigrants in the United States with promoting their integration.

C. The Mexican Government and Its Emigrants: A Brief History

Organized Mexican government efforts to engage and remain in contact with emigrants in the United States are relatively new despite the fact that the population and flow of Mexicans to the United States has remained an issue for governments on both sides of the border since the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the resulting social chaos, increased violence, and economic turmoil resulted in a steady flow of emigrants to the United

¹³United Nations, *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations*, April 24, 1963, UN treaty series, http://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1967/06/19670608%2010-36%20AM/Ch_III_6p.pdf.

¹⁴ *Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores* (Foreign Ministry), "Mission and Vision," <http://www.sre.gob.mx/dgpac/>.

¹⁵ Andorra Bruno and K. Larry Storrs, *Consular Identification Cards: Domestic and Foreign Policy Implications, the Mexican Case, and Related Legislation*, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 2005); Kevin O'Neil, "Consular ID Cards: Mexico and Beyond," *Migration Information Source*, April 2003.

¹⁶ O'Neil, "Consular ID Cards: Mexico and Beyond."

¹⁷ Bruno and Storrs, *Consular Identification Cards*.

States.¹⁸ After the Revolution, concern about underpopulation and the lack of domestic labor led the Mexican government to promote policies that prevented labor emigration to the United States and encouraged repatriation.¹⁹ These efforts were only marginally successful because the Mexican government lacked the administrative bureaucracy, financial capability and the cooperation necessary with U.S. officials to prevent workers from leaving Mexico.²⁰ In order to protect Mexicans working and living in the United States, the Mexican government has focused on consular services to protect its citizens abroad from discrimination and exploitation.²¹ The advent of World War II opened the door to bilateral labor agreements which eventually led to the creation of a formalized bilateral guestworker scheme, more commonly-known as the “Bracero Program.”²²

Throughout Mexico’s history, policies that discouraged emigration or efforts to formalize Mexican labor migration have been advanced depending on the leadership, the economy, and the political context.²³ During these periods of shifting labor migration policies, Mexican state engagement with its nationals in the United States remained limited. Prior to the 1980s, Mexican policy focused on repatriation, promoting cultural activities, for example scholarships for Mexican Americans to study in Mexico and the establishment of cultural centers, and limited consular protection.²⁴ As one commentator notes, during the 1970s and 1980s, the Mexican states’ position on their nationals in the United States was “a policy of having no policy.”²⁵ This limited engagement was evident as the Mexican government did not take an official position on the 1983 Simpson-Mazzoli immigration bill, which failed to pass Congress, or its successful heir, the 1986 Immigration and Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which granted amnesty to nearly 3 million unauthorized immigrants and created employer sanctions for knowingly hiring unauthorized workers.²⁶ The government’s “hands-off” approach was reinforced by some Mexicans’ worries that migrants and their descendants were disloyal to Mexico and too eager to assimilate into American culture.²⁷

The Mexican state’s engagement with its emigrants in the United States began in earnest during the early 1970s. As the Mexican population in the United States began to grow, Mexican academics, businessmen, and politicians became increasingly interested in their fellow citizens abroad.²⁸ Reports of discrimination and labor-rights violations fueled concern about migrants’ quality of life. In light of

¹⁸ Gustavo Cano and Alexandra Délano, “The Institute of Mexicans Abroad: The Day After . . . After 156 Years,” (paper presented at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, September 2-5), http://repositories.cdlib.org/usmex/cano_delano/

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² David R. Ayón, “Mexican Policy and Emigré Communities in the United States,” (paper presented at the seminar Mexican Migrant Social and Civic Participation in the United States, Washington, DC, November 4-5, 2005), <http://www.ime.gob.mx/investigaciones/bibliografias/Ayon1.pdf>.

²³ For an in-depth historical review of US-Mexican Migration Policy, see Marc R. Rosenblum, “US-Mexican Migration Cooperation: Obstacles and Opportunities,” in *Migration, Trade, and Development*, eds. Pia Orrenius and James Hollifield (Dallas, TX: Federal Reserve Bank, 2008).

²⁴ Luin Goldring, “The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations: Negotiating the Boundaries of Membership and Participation,” *Latin American Research Review* 31, no. 3 (2002).

²⁵ Goldring, “The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations,” 65, quoting Manuel García y Griego; Carlos González Gutiérrez, “The Mexican Diaspora,” in *The California-Mexico Connection*, eds. Abraham F. Lowenthal and Katrina Burgess (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

²⁶ Goldring, “The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations.”

²⁷ Carlos González Gutiérrez, “Fostering Identities: Mexico’s Relations with Its Diaspora,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (1999): 545-567.

²⁸ Cano and Délano, “The Institute of Mexicans Abroad.”

these concerns, the Mexican administration focused its attention on supporting the US Chicano movement. The Mexican government's early initiatives also included efforts for emigrants and their descendants to learn about Mexican culture through scholarships to study in Mexico, the establishment of cultural centers, and the distribution of Mexican books in US libraries with a large Mexican readership.²⁹

Academics identify at least five factors that led the Mexican government to formalize its relationship with emigrants during the 1980s and early 1990s:³⁰

- the realization that Mexican emigrants could be influential in Mexican politics, as evidenced by their support of opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and opposition to the ruling PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) during the 1988 presidential campaign;
- the legalization of 3 million unauthorized immigrants through IRCA in 1986 which established many Mexicans as lawful permanent residents with needs extending beyond basic consular services;
- the government's desire to establish a lobby comprised of Mexican emigrants and their descendants to advocate for policies that benefit Mexican interests;
- the government's desire to maintain a strong economic connection with Mexican emigrants and their descendants to ensure a consistent stream of remittances and investments; and,
- the need to protect Mexican emigrants from growing anti-immigrant and anti-Mexican sentiment.³¹

Pragmatically, the Mexican government understood both the necessity of maintaining a steady flow of remittance income and the political reality that migrants yielded considerable political influence, especially as expatriates obtained the right to vote in September 2005. The legalization of 3 million unauthorized immigrants — many of whom were Mexican nationals — also created a different type of relationship between the Mexican government and its citizens in the United States. As lawful permanent residents on the path toward US citizenship, the needs of Mexican immigrants extended further than those of temporary workers. Mexicans who obtained lawful permanent residence needed help with long-term social and economic incorporation, including assistance with learning English, finding health care and integrating into the US labor force. The Mexican government also recognized that, as with the Jewish diaspora in the United States, the establishment of a permanent Mexican-American presence in the United States could benefit US-Mexico relations. This meant, however, that Mexico had to be more proactive in defending anti-immigrant attacks on Mexicans and Mexican Americans, such as California's Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot initiative approved by voters but ruled unconstitutional that sought to prevent unauthorized immigrants from seeking social services, health care, and public education in California.

Mexican states formalized relationships with their diaspora before similar national-level efforts began. In 1985, several Zacatecan hometown organizations based in the Los Angeles area formed an

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Goldring, "The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations"; Miryam Hazan, "Incorporating in the United States and Mexico: Mexican Immigrant Mobilization and Organization in Four American Cities" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2006), 97-99; Department of Homeland Security, "Naturalizations," in *2003 Statistical Yearbook*, <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/yearbook/2003/2003NATZtext.pdf>.

³¹ Goldring, "The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations." See also, Robert Courtney Smith, "Contradictions of Diasporic Institutionalization in Mexican Politics: The 2006 Migrant Vote and Other Forms of Inclusion and Control," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 4 (2008): 708-741.

umbrella organization now known as the *Federación de Clubes Zacatecanos Unidos*.³² Through this umbrella organization, Zacatecanos in the United States are able to work with government leaders in Zacatecas on infrastructure and service-delivery projects, cultural exchanges, and political mobilization projects.³³

The process of formalizing relationships with the Mexican diaspora at the federal level did not begin until the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Under his administration, consular offices in the United States were strengthened and expanded, and he created the *Programa de las Comunidades Mexicanas en el Exterior* (PCME) within the Ministry of Foreign Relations in early 1990.³⁴ PCME's initial prioritization of adult and K-12 education, sports, health, culture, business, and tourism remain core features of Mexico's current initiatives.³⁵

Federal- and state-level programs for Mexican emigrants enabled the Mexican state to interact with their migrants and created a mechanism for Mexican migrants to stay connected to their hometown or country of origin.³⁶ Working directly with consulates and hometown associations, PCME encouraged the maintenance of ties with communities of origin or hometown organizations.³⁷ Most participants in PCME activities were first-generation Mexican immigrants, although many Mexican-American organizations were supportive of PCME's initial work.³⁸

The 2000 Mexican presidential campaign proved to be a critical moment in establishing Mexico's long-term relationship with its diaspora. Campaigning more frequently in the United States than his PRI and *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD) opponents, Vicente Fox championed migrants as the "heroes of Mexico" and prioritized migrant concerns when he assumed office in 2000.³⁹ President Fox established the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad (OPME) which promoted Mexican business relationships and Mexican investments.⁴⁰ Working closely with the Mexican-American community, OPME bypassed the consular system and conducted its work largely through the director of OPME's personal contacts. In 2003, PCME and OPME were merged into a single office and IME was created.⁴¹

³² For a backgrounder on hometown organizations, see Will Somerville, Jamie Durana, and Aaron Terrazas, "Hometown Associations: An Untapped Resource for Immigrant Integration?" in *MPI Insight*, July 2008, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Insight-HTAs-July08.pdf>.

³³ Goldring, "The Mexican State and Transmigrant Organizations."

³⁴ Carlos González Gutiérrez, "Decentralized Diplomacy: The Role of Consular Offices in Mexico's Relations with Its Diaspora," in *Bridging the Border: Transforming Mexico-U.S. Relations*, eds. Rodolfo O. de la Garza and Jesus Velasco (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997).

³⁵ Cano and Délano, "The Institute of Mexicans Abroad;" Gutiérrez, "Decentralized Diplomacy."

³⁶ Smith, "Contradictions of Diasporic Institutionalization in Mexican Politics."

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Cano, "The Institute of Mexicans Abroad: The Day After . . . After 156 Years."

³⁹ Smith, "Contradictions of Diasporic Institutionalization in Mexican Politics."

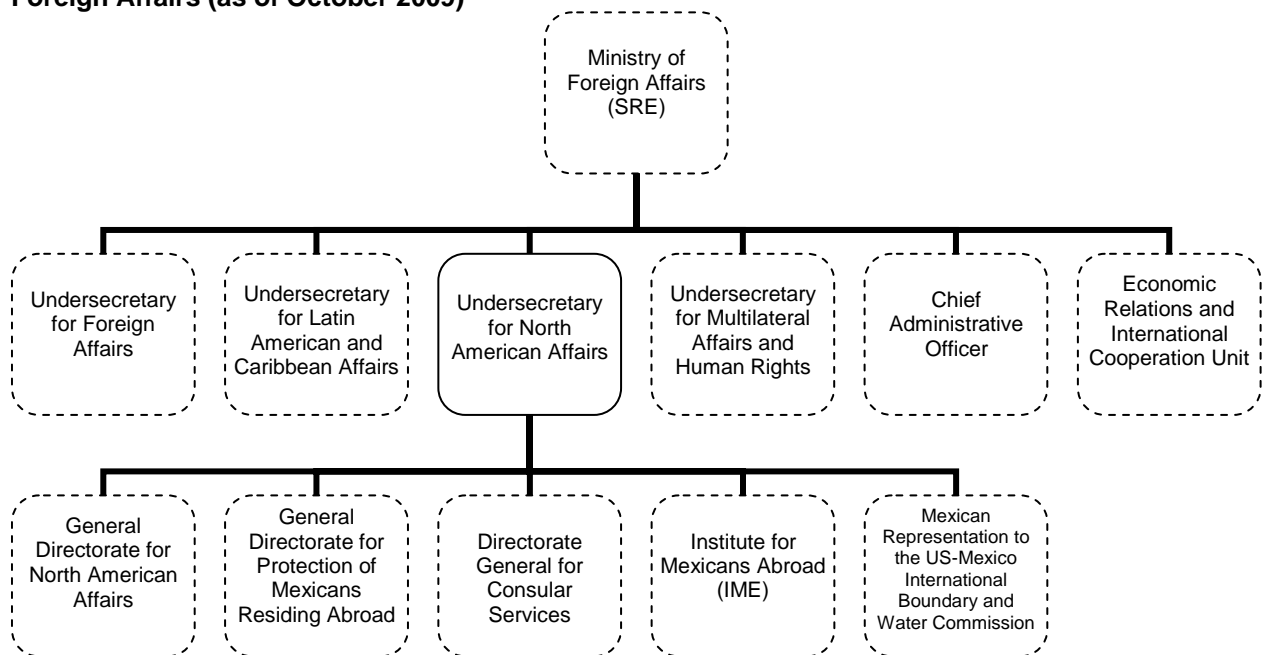
⁴⁰ Cano and Délano, "The Institute of Mexicans Abroad."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

D. The Institute for Mexicans Abroad

IME is an independent department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see Figure 2). According to Carlos González Gutiérrez, a career member of the ministry and former Executive Director of IME, the Institute was created to “empower the Mexican diaspora abroad” through the organization of the Mexican emigrant community in the United States.⁴² IME believes that developing an organized Mexican emigrant community increases the visibility of Mexican immigrants and improves their capacity to advocate for their own interests. Often building on existing Mexican migrant organizations, IME is service-oriented and links the Mexican emigrant community to Mexican government initiatives in the area of education, health, community organization, consular protection, and business promotion.⁴³ In many cases, IME and the local Mexican emigrant community collaborate to develop and fund service programs in these areas with financial or in-kind support from the Mexican government.

Figure 2. The Institutional Location of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (as of October 2009)



Note: Broken borders indicate that subordinate agencies are not listed.

Source: Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As an independent department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IME is a subministry-level institution. González Gutiérrez notes that IME’s location as a sub-ministerial agency affords it the practical advantage of allowing IME to perform its work undisturbed by the bureaucratic politics and infighting that can happen at the ministerial level.⁴⁴ IME’s affiliation with the Ministry of

⁴² Carlos González Gutiérrez, “The Institute of Mexicans Abroad: An Effort to Empower the Diaspora,” in *Closing the Distance: How Governments Strengthen Ties with Their Diasporas*, ed. Dovelyn Rannveig Agunias (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

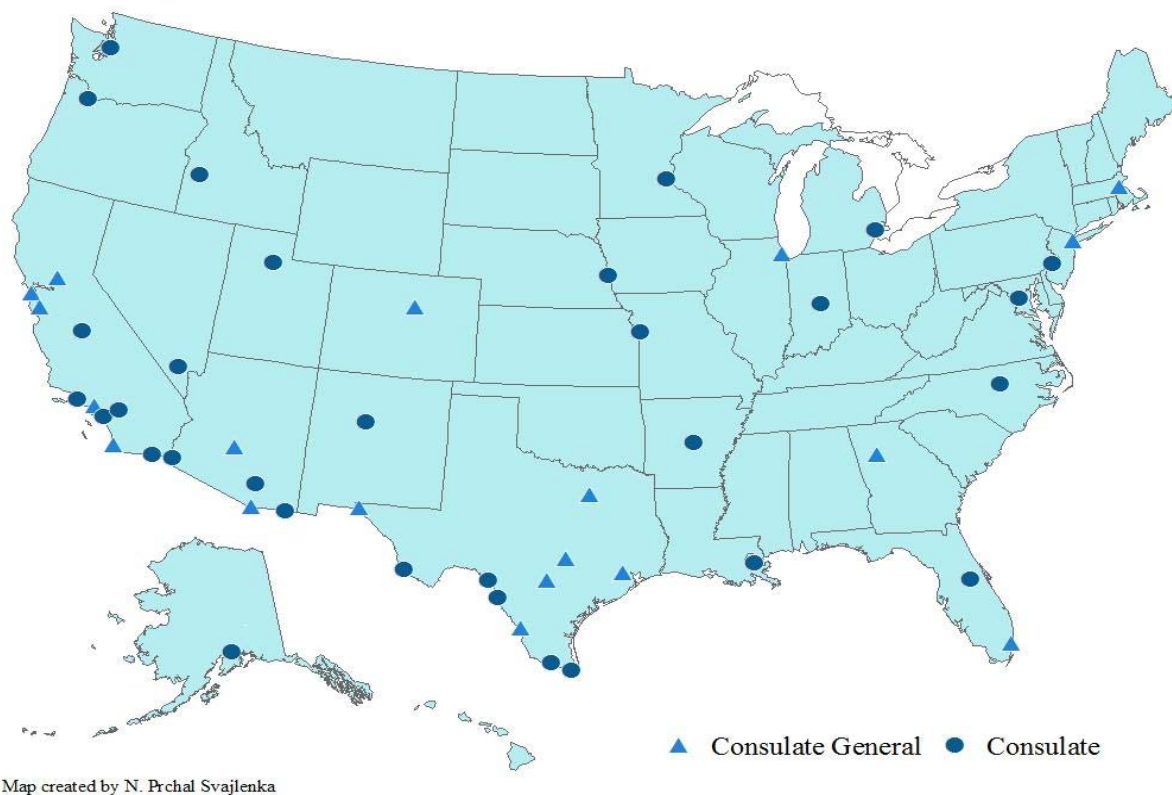
⁴⁴ Carlos González Gutiérrez interview by Aaron Terrazas, Washington, DC, September 22, 2009.

Foreign Affairs also grants it direct access to the consular network and a ministry representative at the National Coordinating Council.

I. Organizational Structure of IME

IME works through the 56 consular offices in the United States and Canada. Figure 3 maps the 50 consulates and consulate generals in the United States, which not surprisingly are located where Mexican immigrants are concentrated.⁴⁵ At each consular office, there are between one and five community affairs staff charged with carrying out IME's mission. Approximately 75 of these IME representatives conduct their work through the consular offices with approximately 40 staff remaining at IME headquarters in Mexico City. All staff working within IME are employees of the Mexican Foreign Ministry (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, SRE*) and can include both members of the Mexican Foreign Service as well as local hires.⁴⁶

Figure 3. Mexican Consular Offices in the United States



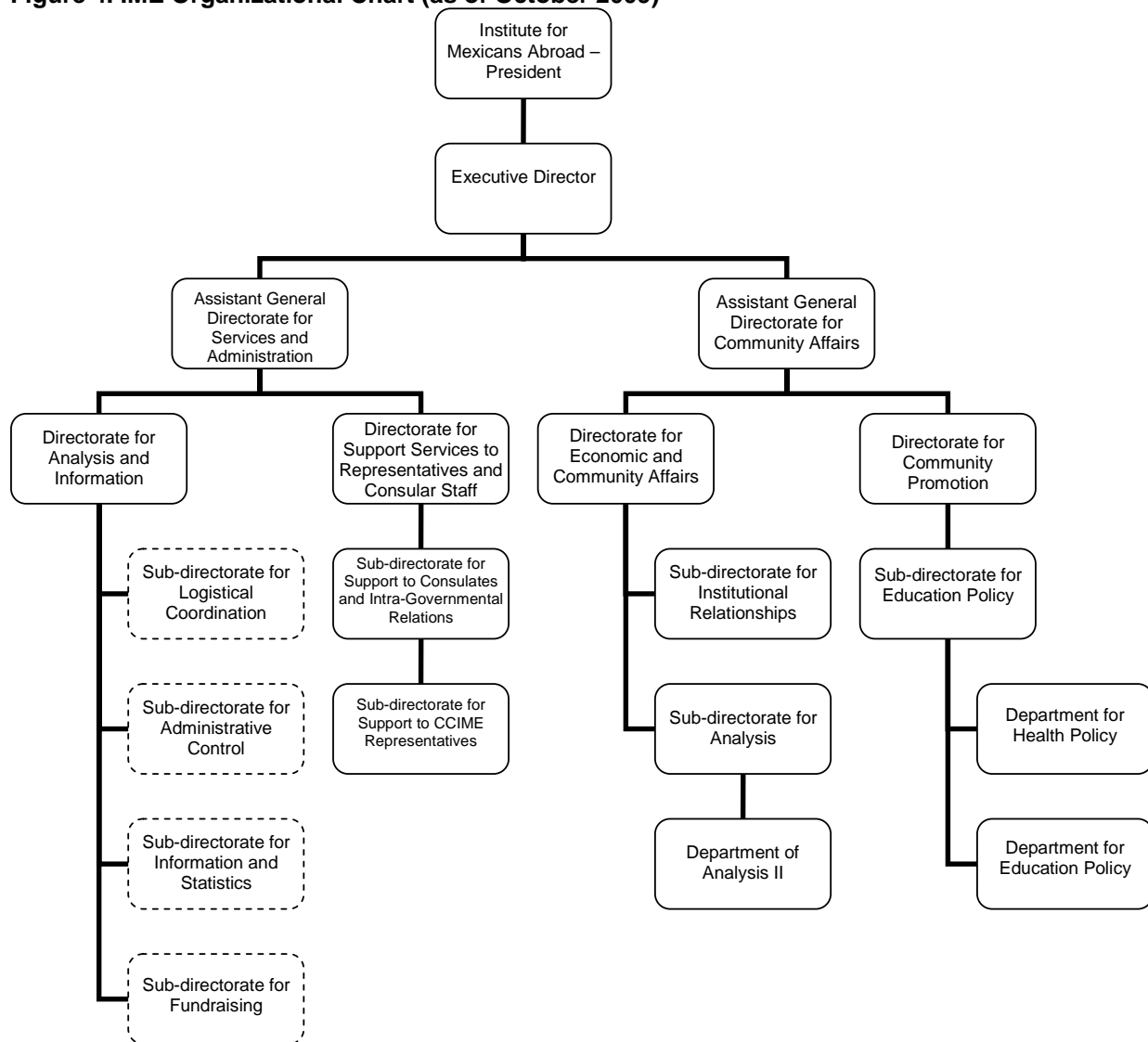
Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000; Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009.

⁴⁵ Consulates report to consulate generals and a wider range of services are generally available at consulate generals as compared to a consulate.

⁴⁶ Depending on their level of experience, geographic placement, and seniority, members of the Foreign Service earn between US\$4,000-\$7,000 per month. Local hires are subject to a different pay structure and earn salaries ranging from US\$1,800 to \$2,200 per month. A few local hires earn between US\$3,000-4,000 per month because they manage nationwide IME programs.

Most senior staff at IME headquarters are diplomats and, as part of their foreign exam for promotion, have studied Mexican migration patterns and needs in the United States.⁴⁷ IME focuses on several areas, including education policy, health policy, and economic and community affairs (see Figure 4).⁴⁸ The Assistant General Directorate for Community Affairs develops IME policy, whereas the Assistant General Directorate for Services and Administration oversees field staff placed in consular offices. In addition to developing policy and working within specific IME program areas, IME representatives also coordinate their work with the relevant Mexican government ministry.

Figure 4. IME Organizational Chart (as of October 2009)



Note: Broken borders indicate that subordinate agencies are not listed.

Source: Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁴⁷ The inclusion of information on the Mexican diaspora on the foreign service exam is another indication of the renewed respect for migrant workers. Robert Courtney Smith, “Contradictions of Diasporic Institutionalization in Mexican Politics: the 2006 Migrant Vote and Other Forms of Inclusion and Control,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 4 (2008): 708-741.

⁴⁸ Iván Sierra, *Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior*, interview by author, Mexico City, April 9, 2008; González Gutiérrez, “The Institute of Mexicans Abroad: An Effort to Empower the Diaspora.”

To demonstrate his commitment to the Mexican community in the United States, President Fox appointed Cándido Morales, a Mexican migrant, as IME president. Morales came to the United States when he was 13 years old and worked with his family in the orchards of Sonoma County.⁴⁹ Having worked and lived in the United States for over 50 years, Morales now serves as director of IME in Mexico City.

2. IME Program Development and Funding

Although IME is an independent agency, its programs benefit from the approval and endorsement of the local consulate general. Correlatively, a consulate general who does not approve of IME's work can impede progress by limiting program reach or pursuing alternative objectives within the consular office.

Although IME's head office is located in Mexico, IME staff emphasize that most of their programs are developed and informed by the needs of the local community. As one IME official remarked, "IME's philosophy is that while the migrant community faces many problems, solutions also come from the community, and this is our source of strength."⁵⁰ IME programs often evolve based on the leadership of individual IME staff and are later shared among the larger IME community through workshops in the United States or Mexico. For example, a popular health program, *Ventanillas de Salud*, began as a pilot project in San Diego and Los Angeles in 2003 but has since been replicated in over 32 consulates. IME's role in creating this program included bringing together health officials who worked with Mexican migrants throughout the United States and conducting workshops in Mexico on how to establish health stations in response to migrant health concerns. If a program is deemed successful, IME disseminates knowledge of that program throughout the US consular network and assists in forming strategic associations between emigrants, businesses, and governments to replicate the program in another community.

In 2009, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated approximately 6 percent of its budget (approximately \$24 million) for services to Mexicans abroad. This money funds IME, consular activities and programs (Directorate General for Protection and Consular Affairs), and Mexican state SRE offices (Directorate General for Delegations). Mexican state SRE offices issue passports and consular IDs, assist returning migrants, promote Mexican businesses, and serve as a local contact point for consular offices.⁵¹

At approximately \$2.8 million, IME's budget for 2009 is the smallest portion of SRE's total budget for services to Mexicans abroad. However, this figure does not include the salaries of IME staff (at headquarters or in consular offices) or the matching funds and in-kind donations individual consulates or programs may receive from Mexican businesses, private individuals, nonprofit organizations, or government entities. It is difficult to quantify the exact amount Mexico spends on its migrants in the United States since IME is able to successfully leverage resources from many difference sources, including in-kind contributions from other ministries.

⁴⁹ Morales also served as vice president of the California Human Development Corporation for 30 years. Interview with Iván Sierra, IME, interview by author, Mexico City, April 9, 2008; Jane Firstenfeld, "Candido Morales: A Voice for the Vineyard Worker," in *Wines & Vines* (2003), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3488/is_5_84/ai_102287202.

⁵⁰ Sierra interview.

⁵¹ Elisa Díaz Gras and José Francisco Anza Solís, IME, telephone conversation with author, February 17, 2009.

Successful IME programs leverage their community contacts and resources to create and fund various initiatives. For example, IME’s on-site education centers teach English to adult English language learners. These centers are hosted by sponsoring organizations that provide the classroom space and teachers. IME acts in a coordinating role while the core curriculum is provided by the National Institute for Adult Education (*Instituto Nacional Para la Educación de los Adultos*, INEA) and the National Council for Workforce Education (*Consejo Nacional de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo*, CONEVyT). Although \$2.8 million dollars remains a relatively small investment for approximately 11.7 million Mexican immigrants, IME has leveraged these resources to build a wide range of integration programs unparalleled by any other sending country in the United States.

III. IME Programs: Building the Social and Human Capital of Mexican Migrants in the United States

Before establishing IME, Carlos González Gutiérrez studied and advocated for the Mexican government to foster practical, long-term ties with its diaspora and to help improve migrants’ socioeconomic condition in the United States.⁵² As Gutiérrez acknowledges, “the role of the Mexican government is not simply to encourage immigrant groups to send their money back to Mexico. Perhaps even more important is to help them improve the quality of their lives...”⁵³ To that end, IME developed a number of programs to improve migrants’ integration in the United States (see Table 1).

Table 1. Mexican Government Immigrant Integration Initiatives in the United States

Focus	Program	Program Description	Implementing Agency
Civic Engagement	Mexican Migrant Advisory Council	Independent migrant-led advisory board to IME elected by Mexican migrants through regional elections in the United States and Canada.	Institute of Mexicans Abroad (IME).
	Migrant-Focused Conferences	Three-day conferences on migrant-related topics (e.g. health care and education) sponsored by IME to solicit feedback and ideas for IME programs.	IME.
Education	Binational Teacher Exchanges	Agreements with the federal Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) and US state departments of education or local school districts to meet teaching needs in US schools.	SEP, US Department of Education (DOE), Secretariat of Foreign Relations (SRE).
	Textbook Distribution for Migrant Children	Distribution of Spanish textbooks to migrant children.	National Commission on Free Textbooks.

⁵² González Gutiérrez, “The Mexican Diaspora”; González Gutiérrez, “Decentralized Diplomacy.”

⁵³ González Gutiérrez, “The Mexican Diaspora.”

	On-site Continuing Adult Education: <i>Plazas Comunitarias</i>	Courses held in Spanish at community centers, correctional facilities, schools, or private businesses for migrant adults. The content-based, technology-driven curriculum includes basic Spanish literacy and writing, elementary and middle school education, computer literacy, and English as a Second Language (ESL).	National Institute for Adult Education (INEA), Council for Workforce Education (CONEVyT), SEP, SRE, IME.
	Continuing Adult Education: Distance Learning	Various programs that enable adult migrants to initiate, continue, or complete online higher education courses in Spanish from Mexican educational institutions.	Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM), National Center of Evaluation (CENEVAL), Consortium for Collaboration in Higher Education in North America (CONAHEC), SEP.
	Grants: IME Becas	Scholarships awarded to recipient organizations that offer ESL and workforce classes to Mexican migrants. Grants can also be used to provide scholarships to individual migrants.	IME
Health Care	Binational Health Week	A week devoted to improving the access and quality of care for migrants in the United States through workshops, insurance referrals, and medical screenings.	Health Initiatives of the Americas, SRE.
	On-site consular health stations: <i>Ventanillas de Salud</i>	Offices or kiosks within consular offices that provide migrants with a gateway to local health care services including health care referrals, medical screenings, enrollment of eligible migrant adults and children in public health programs, and provision of relevant health information.	SRE, IME.
Financial	Formal Banking	Distribution of videos and other educational material that emphasizes importance of using the formal banking system.	IME.
	Entrepreneurial Talent Network	Talent network established to encourage binational cooperation in the area of science and technology	IME.

A. Supporting Leadership from Within the Mexican Migrant Community

Mexicans and their descendants have long encountered discrimination in the United States.⁵⁴ Noting this, Gutiérrez believed that it was in Mexico's national interest to improve the perception and reception of Mexicans and Mexican Americans.⁵⁵ He sought, then, to combat anti-Mexican sentiments within the purview of Mexican consular functions. To reduce anti-Mexican sentiment in the United States, IME has encouraged Mexican immigrants to participate in the American political process, placing civic engagement and leadership development at the forefront of IME's programming.

I. The Mexican Migrant Advisory Council

Unlike other formalized diaspora engagement models such as those managed by the Philippines and Morocco, the Mexican approach proactively seeks migrant input through an elected advisory council voted into office by Mexican migrants themselves.⁵⁶ While other migrant-sending countries may establish institutions for diaspora protection and engagement, migrant input is limited as even members of migrant advisory councils are typically appointed by the sending government.⁵⁷ In contrast, Mexico solicits the input of migrants and holds regional elections in the United States and Canada to fill IME's Advisory Council (*Consejo Consultivo del IME*). The council, in turn, serves as an independent advisory board to IME and discusses strategies to improve the standard of living of Mexican migrants in the United States and Canada.

The council meets twice a year in Mexico City or in the United States. Seven council subcommittees address health, political issues, legal matters, education, media, business, the economy, and border affairs.⁵⁸ Council members serve three-year terms and cannot be re-elected. They are not considered public servants and receive no compensation for their work. However, IME does pay for the travel and accommodation of Council members to biannual plenary meetings.

The first 2003-2005 council was made up of 101 advisors, 10 representatives from American Mexican or Latino organizations, and 10 special advisors, including representatives from Mexico's 32 state governments.⁵⁹ In the last three council terms, approximately three-quarters of council members were Mexican migrants. Although the first council was two-thirds male, later sessions have included more women.⁶⁰

Current council members determine the election procedures for the succeeding terms, setting election rules and creating local elections committees at each consular district in the United States

⁵⁴ Roberto Suro and Gabriel Escobar, *2006 National Survey of Latinos: The Immigration Debate* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, July 2006); Mark Hugo Lopez and Susan Minushkin, *Hispanics See Their Situation in US Deteriorating; Oppose Key Immigration Enforcement Measures* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, September 2008).

⁵⁵ González Gutiérrez, "Fostering Identities."

⁵⁶ Dovelyn Rannveig Agunias, "The Promise and Challenges of Institutionalizing Diaspora Engagement with Governments," in *Closing the Distance: How Governments Strengthen Ties with Their Diaspora*, ed. Dovelyn Rannveig Agunias (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Sierra and Solís interview.

⁵⁹ Sierra and Solís interview; Jorge G. Castañeda, *Ex Mex: From Migrants to Immigrants* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ Sierra and Solís interview.

and Canada. Although some consulates host elections, consular and governmental staff are explicitly excluded from the process of administering the election. Migrants and their descendants are nominated (or self-nominated) for consideration. Election procedures are not consistent across consulates but the council has developed models for election administration.

Each council term makes hundreds of recommendations to the Mexican government, with the first cohort issuing 255 recommendations during its 2003-2005 session. IME staff must reply to each recommendation.⁶¹ If the response to a particular recommendation is outside of IME's purview, IME passes on the recommendation to the appropriate ministry which must respond.⁶² These recommendations are used to shape and inform the activities of IME and SRE activities with respect to migrants. For example, as a result of council recommendations on the role of gender and on the need for scholarship programs for Mexican immigrants, IME sponsored a conference on gender and established a scholarship program, *IME Becas*, for adult migrants who wish to initiate, continue, or complete their studies (see Section IV).

The first term recommendations focused on the council's relationship with Mexican authorities, including suggestions for better understanding of Mexican programs for migrants. This council also advocated for Mexican migrants' right to vote in presidential elections from abroad.⁶³ The succeeding term focused on increasing consular capabilities, promoting relationships with higher-level ministry staff, and fighting anti-immigrant initiatives under consideration in the United States. Many IME leaders were active in the spring 2006 demonstrations across the United States protesting congressional attempts to make illegal immigration a felony. In December 2005, the House of Representatives passed the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437).⁶⁴ Sponsored by then House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) and House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Peter King (R-NY), H.R. 4437 sought to make unlawful presence and illegal entry into the country a felony.⁶⁵ As a former Mexican foreign minister notes, "[m]any of the organizers, promoters, and activists of the anti-Sensenbrenner movement were elected members of the IME Advisory Board in 2005, and many others will in all likelihood be elected in 2008."⁶⁶

Challenges remain to Mexico's use of an advisory council to inform its migrant policy. As with all heterogeneous committees, the council struggles with reconciling differing migrant interests as the diaspora is divided by regional alignments, class, and immigrant status. The needs of a well-established Mexican-American businessman may not always align with those of a newly arrived Mexican migrant. It is IME's goal to support the election of a term-limited council that reflects the disparate interests of the Mexican population in the United States. Some migrants (and consequently their council representatives) may be distrustful or actively hostile towards a government that is viewed as the source of the failed policies that have forced them to migrate. As a result, it is not unusual for council members to openly criticize the Mexican government.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Efforts to gain the migrant vote began in the 1920s but the modern movement to gain this right can be traced to the 1980s. For a full discussion of migrant efforts to gain the right to vote, see Smith, "Contradictions of Diasporic Institutionalization in Mexican Politics."

⁶⁴ *Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005*, 109th Cong., H.R. 4437.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Castañeda, *Ex Mex*.

Through the council, IME aims to build leadership within the Mexican diaspora and establish a generation of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who will better advocate for their needs in both the sending *and* receiving country. Research has found that immigrants' participation in transnational or ethnic organizations has not prevented their political integration in the United States and that leaders of these type of organizations see no contradiction between involvement in their home country and promoting immigrant integration in the United States.⁶⁷ Organizations that focus on civic and cultural activities are more likely to promote the incorporation of immigrants into the American political system.⁶⁸ This concept is best illustrated by the example of Luz Robles, a former council member, who in 2008 was elected state senator in Utah.

As mentioned, IME has looked towards the Jewish diaspora as a model for influencing policy in the United States. IME collaborated with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) to train prospective Mexican-American leaders to “develop strategic skills that are instrumental for emerging leadership.” In September 2007, AJC and IME met in Washington, DC for a series of presentations by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Latino Coalition, and other organizations. As a result of this meeting, a group of council members created the Anti-Discrimination Group, with advice from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), an organization that seeks to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all.”⁶⁹ The Anti-Discrimination Group was formed, in part, in response to rising anti-Mexican sentiment during the 2006 congressional immigration debate. This group continues to meet and recently teamed up with ADL to hold seminars on reducing the use of the word “illegal” in the media.

Understandably, in building a formal dialogue with its diaspora in the United States, Mexico can be perceived as seeking to influence American policy through its citizenry in the United States. As the former executive director of IME once wrote, “[a]s a point of departure, it is important to recognize that Mexico’s objective is not to use its diaspora as a device for pressuring the United States, nor to achieve a communion of interests between two sides...Mexico’s pursuits of Mexicans abroad must not be detrimental to US national interests, but rather must enhance them.”⁷⁰ Council regulations try to strike this balance as council members may be expelled for acting against the interests of IME, Mexico, *or* their country of residence. The council is still relatively new and it is unclear how US policymakers perceive IME’s efforts to engage Mexican migrants in the political process – either in Mexico or the United States.

IME considers the council to be an initial success because it has created a formalized structure that explores migrant needs, develops programs that aim to meet those needs, and communicates migrant concerns to appropriate Mexican government ministries. Migrant community organizations can be unstable and subject to individual rivalries; the advantage of the council is that it allows community groups a forum to discuss issues and coordinate action with some level of institutional continuity. As the program has matured, the council has enjoyed increasing levels of access to top officials at ministries, state governments, and legislatures. The council has been a resource for localized ideas on how best to help Mexican migrants in the United States and it has challenged the

⁶⁷ Alejandro Portes, Cristina Escobar and Renelinda Arana, “Bridging the Gap: Transnational and Ethnic Organizations in the Political Incorporation of Immigrants in the United States” (working paper #07-05, Center for Migration and Development, Princeton University, December 2007).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Anti-Defamation League, “About the Anti-Defamation League,” http://www.adl.org/main_about_adl.asp.

⁷⁰ González Gutiérrez, “Decentralized Diplomacy.”

Mexican government to do more within its own governance structure. As one official notes, “they criticize us so much but they are part of the system.”⁷¹ Although the council is a useful tool to keep the Mexican government accountable to its migrants and to collect migrant ideas, it will be important in the coming years for the council to point to specific gains as a result of its recommendations to the government and to remain an independent “part of the system.”

2. Migrant-Focused Conferences

Another forum used to build leadership among Mexican migrants and their descendents is IME’s conferences or *Jornada Informativas*, which began in 2003. IME hosts approximately ten conferences per year on topics such as health care, education, Spanish-language media, financial literacy, elected office, emerging leadership, and sports. In some areas, such as financial literacy and education, more than one conference is convened annually. Candidates for these three-day conferences are nominated by their local consulate and must pay their travel costs to attend the gatherings which are held in either the United States or Mexico. The conferences have several goals:

- Identify potential partners in the expansion of existing IME programs;
- encourage emerging leadership in the Mexican-American community (almost one-third of council members are conference alumni); and,
- serve as a vehicle for public diplomacy, improving two-way communication, inviting third-party scrutiny of IME programs, and getting first-hand information about major issues affecting the immigrant communities.⁷²

Financed in part through IME and through Mexico’s National Council for Culture and the Arts (*Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes*, CONACULTA), IME also solicits donations from US and Mexican firms for the conference trust fund.

The conferences are an opportunity for the Mexican government to highlight relevant government programs, share significant Mexican policy developments, and encourage networking within the Mexican diaspora. The conferences often bring together networks of similarly interested individuals who may not otherwise meet given geographic limitations. For example, the Mexican Restaurants Association was formed after a conference that brought together restaurant owners from across the United States who saw the value in creating an organization that addressed their specific needs and concerns. Conferences were also used as a tool to convey current research and to share knowledge about existing IME programs. For example, IME’s 54th *Jornada* focused on *Ventanillas de Salud*, consulate-based health programs for Mexican migrants. At this conference attendees learned about the Mexican health care and health insurance system, the latest health care research focusing on Mexican migrants and their children, and challenges and successes of other *Ventanillas de Salud*.

⁷¹ Sierra, interview.

⁷² José Francisco Anza Solís, IME, interview by author, Mexico City, April 9, 2008.

B. Improving Education for Migrant Children and Adults

Improving the educational outcomes of Mexican immigrant adults and their children is a pressing priority for IME. In 2007, 60 percent of the 9.2 million Mexican immigrant adults age 25 and older in the United States had no high school diploma (as compared to 32 percent of all foreign-born adults).⁷³ Compounding the lack of formal schooling, Mexican immigrants also struggle with the language barrier as almost three-quarters of Mexican immigrants age 5 or older report that they speak English less than “very well.”⁷⁴ This barrier, which carries social costs, also can stand in the way of increased immigrant productivity, earnings, and income tax payments.⁷⁵ Further, a parent’s lack of English proficiency may have negative consequences for their children’s educational and workforce outcomes.⁷⁶

Mexican and Mexican-American children also face significant educational challenges. Latino⁷⁷ children begin kindergarten at a disadvantage, falling into the lowest quartile of math and reading skills as compared to their white, black, and Asian counterparts.⁷⁸ Obstacles remain for Hispanic children, with at least one-third of Latinos who begin school in the United States dropping out.⁷⁹ Mexican and Mexican-American children who lack proficiency in the English language are at a further disadvantage. In the United States, English language learner (ELL) students are less likely to score at or above proficiency levels in both mathematics and reading/language arts as measured by the federal government’s National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).⁸⁰ This gap may be narrowed if there is a threshold number of white students in the school. However, ELL students are far more likely to attend public schools with other ELLs.⁸¹

Given these challenges, the Mexican government has made the education of Mexican migrant adults and children a high priority since the establishment of PCME in 1990.⁸² At least two conferences per year are dedicated to the topic and it is the subject of one of the seven committees within the council. IME education programs have largely focused on: (1) migrants continuing and completing the Mexican high school curriculum while in the United States; (2) financially supporting adult education courses for Mexican migrants; and (3) binational teacher exchanges. Although it does not directly provide educational services, IME serves an important coordinating function – linking US-

⁷³ MPI tabulations of 2007 American Community Survey.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Margie McHugh, Julia Gelatt, and Michael Fix, *Adult English Language Instruction in the United States: Determining Need and Investing Wisely*, (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute 2007), http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/NCIIP_English_Instruction073107.pdf.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Usage of the word “Latino” indicates persons from all Spanish-speaking backgrounds and includes both Mexican migrants and their descendants.

⁷⁸ Patricia Gándara, “A Preliminary Evaluation of Mexican-sponsored Educational Programs in the United States: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Potential,” in *Second Binational Symposium Resource Book*, (Second Binational Symposium, 2007).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jeanne Batalova, Michael Fix and Julie Murray, *Measures of Change: The Demography and Literacy of Adolescent English Learners*, (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2007), http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Measures_of_Change.pdf.

⁸¹ Ibid.; Richard Fry, *The Role of Schools in the English Language Learner Achievement Gap*, (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2008), <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/89.pdf>.

⁸² González Gutiérrez, “The Mexican Diaspora.”

based community groups and migrant organizations with relevant education ministries in Mexico to develop and enhance educational programs for Mexican migrants.

I. Binational Teacher Exchanges

In 1990, the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (*Secretaría de Educación Pública*, SEP) and the US Department of Education (DOE) signed a Memorandum of Understanding agreeing to cooperate on education issues. The most recent version of this agreement, signed in 2004, identifies 15 priority areas of cooperation for the education of students who frequently cross the US-Mexico Border. Concern about this shared population of school-age children led to the creation of several binational educational initiatives, including teacher exchanges. Through agreements between SEP and various state departments of education or local school districts in the United States, binational teacher exchanges were established to minimize the disruption in a migrant student's educational career and to fill teaching needs in US school districts and states.⁸³ IME and SRE coordinate and facilitate binational education collaboration but the teacher exchange programs remain small, with no more than 300 teachers participating in the Binational Migrant Education Program in any given year and just 182 teachers participating in the US-Mexico Visiting Teacher since its inception in 2001.⁸⁴

2. Binational Migrant Education Program

The Binational Migrant Education Program was started in 1976 when California educators began working with teachers and school administrators in the Mexican state of Michoacán to improve educational continuity for students who regularly traveled back and forth between the two countries.⁸⁵ The program was adopted nationwide and implemented in selected states by the US Department of Education in 1982.⁸⁶

Under the program, the Mexican Education Ministry, along with IME, Mexican consulates, the US Department of Education, and the departments of education of participating US and Mexican states coordinate teacher exchanges. Through the exchanges, Mexican teachers visit US school districts with large numbers of binational migratory students for periods ranging from three to eight weeks and assist US teachers in tailoring their teaching strategies to the needs of migrant students and ensuring culturally sensitive instruction.

While it is difficult to link concrete educational improvements to the exchanges, anecdotal evidence suggests that they contribute to helping students and districts. For example, one state program coordinator says that visiting teachers from Mexico are able to provide bilingual education for

⁸³ For a more comprehensive review of binational teacher exchanges, see Aaron Terrazas and Michael Fix, *The Binational Option: Meeting the Instructional Needs of Limited English Proficient Students*, (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/TeacherExchange-Nov09.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ As defined in US legislation, a binational migratory student is a student whose parent or spouse is a migratory agricultural worker (including dairy workers and fishermen) and who has moved between the United States and Mexico with his or her parents (or as an emancipated youth) at least once during the preceding 36 months in order to enable the parent or spouse to pursue employment in agriculture or fishing.

⁸⁶ The participating states are: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin. Programa Binacional de Educación Migrante, "Integrantes Estados Unidos: Grupo de Estados Unidos," available at <http://www.sep.gob.mx/work/appsite/probem/index.html>.

Mexican-origin students whose native language is not Spanish — notably students who speak indigenous languages.⁸⁷

US-Mexico Visiting Teacher Program

The US-Mexico Visiting Teacher Program is conducted under the aegis of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, more commonly known as the Fulbright Act. The Fulbright Act promotes a variety of educational and cultural exchange programs between the United States and partner countries, including teachers.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 foreign teachers enter the United States each year on Fulbright teacher exchanges. Although most Fulbright teachers apply individually, Mexico has signed bilateral agreements with several US state education departments to coordinate the exchanges.⁸⁸ Mexican teachers apply under an exchange program and are selected by US school districts. The teachers sign one-year contracts that can be renewed twice for a total of three years. Visiting teachers have full classroom responsibilities and may teach any course for which they are qualified. They typically teach ESL or bilingual students and Spanish language courses.

⁸⁷ Terrazas and Fix, *The Binational Option*.

⁸⁸ For a list of participating states, see <http://www.mexterior.sep.gob.mx:7008/accol.htm>.

Box I. LUCHA - Helping Mexican Students Transition to US High Schools

In May 2006, the University of Texas at Austin K-16 Education Center established a partnership with Mexico's Ministry of Public Education to support a program called LUCHA (Language Learners at the University of Texas at Austin's Center for Hispanic Achievement). The partnership recognized that most area public schools do not have the resources to determine appropriate grade placement of Mexican migrant children, diagnose their content-area mastery, or train personnel to recognize and address the challenges faced by immigrant students. LUCHA sought to address this need, in part, through the alignment of Mexican and US high school curricula. High school-aged English Language Learners take online courses in Spanish that meet Texas curriculum standards. This instruction allows immigrant children to maintain their academic progress, continue to earn high school credit, and prepare for postsecondary education while learning English and integrating in the US public school system. LUCHA also obtains transcripts from Mexico, interprets transcripts to provide individual graduation credit analysis, and develops diagnostic assessments in Spanish that allow immigrant students to be placed at the appropriate grade level and in the appropriate course in US high schools.

A total of 22 school districts in Texas and one school district in California participate in LUCHA. Schools may receive LUCHA computer programs which they share with students through online assignments or use LUCHA to help obtain transcripts or analyze transcripts for students with prior high school studies in Mexico. Since it was established, LUCHA has obtained 154 transcripts from Mexico and provided 850 transcript analyses. After analyzing the transcripts, LUCHA recommended that 5,625 credits for courses taken prior to enrollment in US schools be accepted for credit. LUCHA has assisted schools with the placement of immigrant students through the administration of 311 diagnostic assessments of academic skill level. Over 4,000 students have enrolled in LUCHA's online courses.

The program is funded through a mix of revenue generated from the sale of LUCHA services, a grant from the IME scholarship program, and private funding through the Houston Endowment. The program is coordinated by a current IME Council member and former IME employee.

Source: Ramón Talavera, LUCHA Program Coordinator, telephone interview with author, 19 June 2009.

3. Services for Migrant Children

Binational Transfer Documents

IME also promotes the use of documents that record completed academic coursework for Mexican migrant children. A binational migratory student transfer document (*Documento de Transferencia del Estudiante Migrante Binacional*) can assist Mexican migrant children who move to the United States and Mexican migrant children who return to Mexico.⁸⁹ The document contains the primary or middle school child's schooling history, including the student's grade level, subject matter covered, and evaluation. This information can help in placing migrant students in the right grade and course in the United States or Mexico. Consular offices can issue this document for migrant children returning to Mexico and individual Mexican schools may issue the document for Mexican children leaving the country.

⁸⁹ Gándara, "A Preliminary Evaluation of Mexican-sponsored Educational Programs in the United States."

However, acceptance, knowledge and use of the binational transfer documents for children arriving in the United States are limited. US teachers and school districts are often unaware of this document and may not know how to interpret the transfer document to place Mexican children in US public schools. Students leaving Mexico may not have the time to obtain the binational transfer document and Mexican teachers and school districts often do not have the resources to issue the document as quickly as may be necessary for migrating students.⁹⁰

Textbook Distribution

Another service provided through IME is the distribution of Spanish textbooks to migrant children, schools, community centers, and libraries in the United States. Unlike in the United States, where core educational curriculum is decided at the state and local level, the Mexican curriculum is decided at the national level and is reflected in a uniform textbook.⁹¹ Created in 1990, the National Commission on Free Textbooks (*Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos*) distributes books in the United States with the goal of helping migrant children retain their culture, continue learning in Spanish, and supplement and reinforce their English instruction.⁹² The program donated 9,520 textbooks between 2007-2008.⁹³ However, it remains unclear how these textbooks have been used by migrants and no comprehensive evaluation exists on whether textbook distribution has helped Mexican migrants transition in the United States. The distribution of free textbooks in the United States has made the Mexican government vulnerable to domestic criticism when there are inadequate supplies of textbooks in rural and semi-rural parts of Mexico.⁹⁴

4. Continuing Adult Education

On-Site Learning: Plazas Comunitarias

One of the largest education programs coordinated by IME and Mexico's National Institute for Adult Education (*Instituto Nacional Para la Educacion de los Adultos*, INEA) is its community centers, or *Plazas Comunitarias*, program.⁹⁵ IME staff serve as intermediaries between community-based organizations and the Ministry of Education, offering guidelines for establishing these *plazas*.

Held in offices, correctional facilities, private businesses or classroom space hosted by a local sponsoring organization, *plazas* are educational programs for migrants age 15 and older.⁹⁶ The program is open to non-Mexicans and has included Central Americans. Through television programs and the Internet, participants are connected to INEA and the National Council for Workforce Education. The curriculum covers:

- basic Spanish literacy and writing;
- elementary and middle school education;
- high school and US General Educational Development (GED) coursework;
- English as a Second Language; and

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Over the past decade however, public elementary and secondary education has become somewhat more centralized in the United States just as the Mexican system has become more decentralized. See Terrazas and Fix, *The Binational Option*.

⁹² IME *Guia IME*.

⁹³ IME, *Reporte de Actividades*.

⁹⁴ Laurence Iliff et al., "Mexico's Textbook Case of Struggle," *Dallas Morning News*, November 19, 2002.

⁹⁵ Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, *Guia IME 2006* (Mexico City, Mexico: Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2006).

⁹⁶ Ibid.; Gándara, "A Preliminary Evaluation of Mexican-sponsored Educational Programs in the United States," 1-13 to 1-16.

- computer literacy.⁹⁷

The courses offered at *plazas* differ based on the needs of the sponsoring organization and its clientele. The program was created in 2001 and there are currently 373 *plazas* operating in 35 states. INEA estimates that 16,758 students attended *plazas* in the United States in 2007.⁹⁸

Evaluations of *plazas* show mixed results, citing poor course completion rates, high staff turnover due to low wages or over-reliance on volunteers, and inadequate funding.⁹⁹ Students may drop out of the *plazas* if class hours do not meet their work schedule, the program moves too fast (requiring more study time), or there is insufficient feedback from the onsite instructor.¹⁰⁰ The participation and success rate at *plazas* vary and there is very little coordinated data collection and evaluation. The reach of *plazas* depends on the sponsoring agency, with some well-funded programs serving 2,000 students per year to start-up community organizations with little more than ten students per semester.¹⁰¹ As with most IME programs, success depends on the partner organization's ability to leverage Mexican government financial and in-kind resources to build a program responsive to Mexican migrant needs (see Box 2).

⁹⁷ Gándara, "A Preliminary Evaluation of Mexican-sponsored Educational Programs in the United States"; Sierra, interview; IME, *Guía IME*, 26-27.

⁹⁸ Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, *Reporte de Actividades del Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior 2007-2008* (Mexico City, Mexico: Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, 2008).

⁹⁹ Gándara, "A Preliminary Evaluation of Mexican-sponsored Educational Programs in the United States."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.; Sierra, interview.

Box 2. Providing Spanish Curricula to Immigrant Adults and Youth

In 2006, the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (Metro Center) at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development (NYU Steinhardt) signed an agreement with the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) to develop and implement a *plaza*. Renamed the New York State Adult Education and Immigrant Community Development Network at NYU's Metro Center, the network aims to maximize the distribution and use of Mexico's free, content-based, technology-enhanced Spanish education program for Latino immigrant adults and youth in alternative schools and adult education programs. The network's program addresses the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate basic education for English Language Learners, immigrants, and other disadvantaged or marginalized students.

The network coordinates a range of educational programs from basic literacy education to GED preparation in English and in Spanish. It offers service providers with the opportunity to improve their programs through professional development and enhanced academic, language, and workforce curriculum. The network does not instruct participants in schools or programs. Instead, through its relationship with 27 member organizations, the network serves over 2,000 students by offering support and training to education site directors, coordinators, organizers, and teachers.

INEA supplies the network with instructional modules in Spanish, instructional content for a web portal, teacher training, student tracking software, and educational television resources and videos in Spanish. INEA also awards certificates and accreditation to those who meet their educational requirements of primary education, secondary education, and the GED. In addition to INEA curriculum, some network members offer health literacy, financial literacy, counseling, legal services, job training, parent education, and referrals to key social services. Classes are offered in a range of institutions including alternative high schools, church groups, family literacy programs, correctional institutions, volunteer-run programs, and community-based organizations.

In New York, the network's partners include the New York City Department of Education, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, New York State Department of Corrections, and adult education programs funded by the city, state, and federal government. Since its establishment, community referrals have increased as have achievement levels, students seeking post-secondary education and training, and the number of students taking and passing the GED in Spanish in order to enter post-secondary education.

The network receives a relatively small share of its funding through the IME scholarship program. Most contact between the network and the Mexican government occurs directly through INEA.

Source: Nellie Mulkay, Director of the NYS Spanish Bilingual Education Technical Assistance Center, telephone interview with author, June 22, 2009.

For migrants who often face long waiting lists for ESL or workforce classes, a rigorous *plaza* may offer much-needed English literacy and workforce preparation. The curriculum at *plazas* also holds promise for Mexican and Central American immigrants who may not be literate in the Spanish language. Many US adult schools and community colleges incur significant costs by providing native-language literacy before moving low-literacy students into ESL. By providing a low-cost, Spanish-language literacy curriculum, IME can better prepare migrants for ESL and other workforce opportunities.

Distance Learning

For migrants who are not able to participate in the *Plaza Comunitarias* program, several distance-learning and accreditation options exist. IME promotes several Mexican government educational initiatives that provide alternative pathways for Mexicans in the United States to obtain the Mexican equivalent of a high school education, known as *bachillerato* or upper secondary school. These programs offer varying degrees of flexibility and are targeted to different types of learners.¹⁰²

Through the *Bachillerato a distancia B@UNAM* program — a distance education program run by the National Autonomous University of Mexico, one of the country's premier higher education institutions — Mexicans in the United States can enroll and complete their Mexican high school degree through distance courses. Targeted principally toward young adults, students who apply and are accepted into the program must follow a rigorous curriculum within an established period of time. Upon completing the upper secondary program, participants can choose to pursue undergraduate studies at UNAM or at one of its satellite campuses in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Antonio, and Quebec.

For Mexicans abroad seeking to complete their upper secondary education but who are unable to follow the comparatively rigid curriculum and course schedule of the *Bachillerato a distancia B@UNAM* program, there are other options. The *Bachillerato en Línea del Colegio de Bachilleres* program offers online upper secondary courses through the Colegio de Bachilleres, a national public upper secondary education institution based in Mexico City.¹⁰³ Unlike the program operated by UNAM, the *Colegio de Bachilleres* program offers open enrollment (i.e., there is no application process and students can begin courses at several points during the year) and students advance at their own pace. This program is targeted to Mexicans abroad who face greater time constraints and may prefer an informal academic pathway.

Finally, the *Acreditación de Bachillerato por Acuerdo 286* program is targeted toward Mexicans who have acquired substantial experiential or life knowledge and who feel prepared to test out of Mexican upper secondary school without additional coursework. The program is open only to individuals age 25 or older.

Despite the variety of options, relatively few Mexicans in the United States have participated in these programs. One reason may be that Mexican upper secondary degrees (*bachillerato*) are not formally recognized as valid in the United States (although some individual employers may recognize them).¹⁰⁴ In order to address this important challenge, IME recently began working with three US universities — the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Texas at Austin, and the City University of New York — to translate the Mexican upper secondary curriculum followed by students in the *Bachillerato a distancia B@UNAM*, *Bachillerato en Línea del Colegio de Bachilleres*, and the *Acreditación de Bachillerato por Acuerdo 286* programs into US standards. The initiative — known in Spanish as the *Programa de Alineación de Créditos* — aims to establish equivalencies between the

¹⁰² IME, *Reporte de Actividades*; further details and data about Mexico's distance learning programs derives largely from Atala Perez Rodriguez, Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, telephone interview by Aaron Terrazas, 13 August 2009.

¹⁰³ For a description of the Colegio de Bachilleres, see http://www.cbachilleres.edu.mx/cbportal/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=145&Itemid=60.

¹⁰⁴ For an overview of the Mexican Education System, see Terrazas and Fix, *The Binational Option*.

Mexican and US educational systems. If successful, the equivalency initiative could assist Mexicans who complete their upper secondary degrees through these three programs continue into US community colleges, workforce training programs open only to high school graduates, or other post-secondary education. Although these distance learning programs must still be aligned with US coursework, migrants can benefit from maintaining and building their college preparatory coursework in the Spanish language, especially in technical fields such as mathematics and computer science. These programs can serve a useful purpose — continuing college preparatory work as migrants learn English in jobs and classrooms in the United States.

Grants for Adult Education

Since 2005, IME has offered grants of up to \$15,000 per year to organizations that provide adult education for Mexican migrants.¹⁰⁵ Created in response to the Council's recommendation to promote access to higher education, IME grants (*IME Becas*) are awarded to recipient organizations that offer ESL and workforce classes to Mexican migrants and can be used for the provision of scholarships to individual migrants. IME's grant program is administered through the University of California's Office of the President. As a subgrantor, this office receives approximately \$685,000 from the Mexican government and determines the recipient and size of each IME grant, up to \$15,000. Between 2005 and 2007, IME provided 210 grants, helping approximately 14,482 students and teachers. Beneficiaries help Mexican and non-Mexican migrants alike but must be non-profit organizations to qualify for the grant (see Box 2).

C. Providing Health Care for Its Migrants

IME has also prioritized safeguarding the health and well-being of Mexican migrants in the United States, 56 percent of whom are not covered by health insurance and 47 percent of whom do not have access to regular medical care.¹⁰⁶ Mexican immigrants are less likely than African Americans and non-Hispanic whites to have early cervical, breast, or colon cancer screenings and, along with African Americans, have the highest admission rates to hospitals due to complications from uncontrolled diabetes.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Mexican immigrants are more likely to work in low-wage, unskilled occupations that do not offer health insurance but expose them to work accidents.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, fatal injuries to Mexican immigrants constitute 44 percent of all work-related fatal injuries suffered by foreign workers in the United States, even though Mexican immigrants represent only 31 percent of the total foreign-born workforce.¹⁰⁹

Given their limited access to quality preventive or curative health care, IME has focused on improving migrant health in the United States. In 2001, Mexico's Ministry of Health collaborated with US local, state, and federal agencies, Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, foundations, and

¹⁰⁵ Solís interview.

¹⁰⁶ Only immigrants from Honduras (62 percent) and El Salvador (60 percent) have higher levels of uninsurance whereas immigrants from other Latin American countries (45 percent), and immigrants from other regions (18.9 percent) all have lower levels of uninsurance. Mexican immigrants have comparably limited access to regular medical care as immigrants from other Latin American countries (25 percent), and from other regions (15.6 percent). Steven P. Wallace and Xóchitl Castañeda, *Migration and Health: Latinos in the United States* (Mexico City, Mexico: Consejo Nacional de Población, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.; Jeanne Batalova, "Mexican Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Information Source*, April 2008, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?ID=679#11>.

private companies to launch Binational Health Week. The program's goal is to improve access and quality of care for underserved migrant populations living in the United States through workshops, insurance referrals, and medical screenings.¹¹⁰ Since its inception, Binational Health Week has now grown to include the governments of Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.¹¹¹ Staged in multiple venues and states, the 2007 Binational Health Week drew over 6,500 participating agencies in 33 states with discussions and workshops on promoting health behavior and lifestyles among Latino families, understanding risk factors affecting people crossing borders, local health resources, and the challenges and opportunities of bilateral health work.¹¹² The week also features a policy forum where researchers and policymakers present and exchange their work on migrant health.

Consular Health Stations: Ventanillas de Salud

In addition to supporting policy-level work on migrant health issues, one of IME's hallmark programs is its health stations, or *Ventanillas de Salud (VDS)*. Begun in 2003 as pilot projects in Los Angeles and San Diego, *Ventanillas* were a joint project between IME, the California Endowment, and the US-Border Health Commission. *Ventanillas* are offices or kiosks within Mexican consulates in the United States that provide Mexican migrants with a gateway to local health care services. Aimed at providing on-site assistance and outreach to low-income Mexican migrants unfamiliar with the US health system, health stations have three main goals: (1) to provide local health care referrals and appointments; (2) to enroll eligible adults and children in federal, state, and local public health programs; and (3) to provide information on health issues relevant to the Mexican migrant community.¹¹³

IME regional staff do not provide any of the health care services. Instead, IME works with a local sponsoring nonprofit organization to develop and establish a *Ventanilla*. The partnering nonprofit organization manages day-to-day operations at a *Ventanilla* and offers services depending on geographical location, sponsoring fiscal agency, local nonprofit agency, and type of community need. These services can include: health education, insurance eligibility determination, and referrals in both the United States and Mexico, health-care screenings, immunization, support groups, referrals to primary care services, and limited follow-up and case management.¹¹⁴

As the national coordinator of the *Ventanilla* program in the United States, IME has developed program guidelines and collects uniform program evaluations and reports. IME also brings *Ventanilla* staff from across the United States together periodically to learn from one another and exchange resources.¹¹⁵ IME provides some financial support for a *Ventanilla* through funding from the Mexican Health Ministry (*Secretaria de Salud*, SSA). In 2007, SSA contributed approximately \$460,000 for IME health-related initiatives, almost doubling their previous allocation of \$240,000 in

¹¹⁰ Health Initiative of the Americas, University of California, Berkeley, "Binational Health Week," available at <http://hia.berkeley.edu/binational.shtml>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Research and information on *Ventanillas de Salud* was collected by the author during conversations and through presentations by IME personnel at a Conference on *Ventanillas de Salud* on April 27-30, 2008 (*54 Jornada Informativa IME: Ventanilla de Salud, hacia su consolidación*); Josana Tonda, "Ventanilla de Salud Program" PowerPoint presentation at *54 Jornada Informativa IME: Ventanilla de Salud*, Cuernavaca, April 2008.

¹¹⁴ Tonda, presentation.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

2006.¹¹⁶ To finance a *Ventanilla*, IME combines money from SSA with funds from the fiscal sponsor and lead nonprofit organization.

The program has grown rapidly since its inception as pilot projects in Los Angeles and San Diego in 2003. While the California Endowment and the US-Mexico Border Health Commission continue to fund *Ventanillas* in California, the program has diversified in terms of services offered and sponsoring agencies. In the last six years, the program has grown from two locales to 32; *Ventanillas* currently operate in 17 US states and the District of Columbia (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Ventanillas de Salud* in Operation as of June 2009

Consulate	Lead Agency
Albuquerque	Cancer Institute/Concilio Hispano
Atlanta	Saint Joseph Mercy Care Services
Austin	Area Health Education Center
Brownsville	Texas A&M University, Colonias Program
Calexico	Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo
Chicago	Mujeres Latinas en Acción
Dallas	Area Health Education Center DFW
Denver	American Diabetes Association, Programa Por Tu Familia
Eagle Pass	Migrant Clinician Network
El Paso	Texas A&M University, Colonias Program
Fresno	Family Healthcare Network
	Mobile Unit: Family Health Network/Initiative of the Americas
Houston	Texas Children's Hospital
Indianapolis	Wishard Health Services
Kansas City	Samuel U. Rogers Health Center
Las Vegas	Latino Research Center, University of Nevada – Reno
Los Angeles	Altamed
McAllen	Migrant Health Promotion
New York	Bellevue Hospital Center
Philadelphia	Community Health Care
Raleigh	General Hospital of Duplin
Salt Lake City	Comunidades Unidas
Saint Paul	Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)
San Diego	Project Concern International
San Francisco	Tiburcio Vazquez Health Center
San Jose	<i>Santa Clara Family Health Plan</i>
Santa Ana	Por la Salud y Educación de Migrante (PSEM)
Seattle	Washington Health Foundation
Tucson	El Rio Foundation
Washington, D.C.	Hispanic Institute of Blindness Prevention
Yuma	Campesinos Sin Fronteras

Source: IME, <http://www.ime.gob.mx/>.

The *Ventanilla*'s most common form of support is health information provided through workshops or by health materials. The *Ventanilla* program's strength lies in its ability to target Mexican migrants who may not otherwise seek medical services or information because of their immigration status. Because *Ventanilla* workers are located in consular offices, they can provide bilingual and bicultural

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

health information and assistance in a relatively safe environment. In 2007, approximately 650,000 Mexican migrants received health information from *Ventanillas*.¹¹⁷

Ventanillas have helped 38,000 individuals establish a medical home (e.g. individual general practitioner) or find an appropriate health center, community clinic, or public hospital.¹¹⁸ *Ventanillas* also offer assistance and enrollment in public health programs, with approximately 10,000 Mexican migrants receiving information about public health programs and 5,220 adults and children actually enrolling in the program. Moreover, *Ventanillas* performed 17,055 diagnostic tests including glucose/cholesterol, HIV/AIDS, vision, vaccination/flu shots, and blood pressure.¹¹⁹ IME has also worked in partnership with the National Institute for Occupational Safety (NIOSH) to educate and help migrants avoid workplace accidents in at least four *Ventanillas*. While it is not unusual for embassies and consulates to host health care and community fairs for their diaspora,¹²⁰ the establishment of permanent structures within the consulate represents a unique institutional form of migrant protection.

D. Promoting Formal Banking & Improving the Financial Literacy of Its Migrants

The Department of Economic Affairs within IME is responsible for programs focused on the financial and in-kind contributions Mexican migrants make to their community of origin. The size of Mexican migrants' financial contributions is significant. In 2008, migrant remittances to Mexico through formal channels totaled \$26 billion or about 3 percent of the country's gross domestic product.¹²¹ The average monthly remittance to Mexico is approximately \$329.¹²² Given the volume and magnitude of remittances and other financial contributions to Mexico, it should come as no surprise that IME's economic programs have sought to:

- promote banking among Mexican migrants and to provide them access to financial services, allowing them to increase the share of their incomes that they keep and to establish a secure place to keep their money;
- disseminate information about low-cost alternatives for sending money to Mexico;
- support programs that give remittances an additional value by matching, and, in some cases, tripling migrant investments in Mexico; and,
- organize programs and projects to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of highly qualified entrepreneurial migrants who can invest in or become partners with Mexican corporations.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ For example, the Philippine consulate hosts annual or semi-annual health care and community information fairs in collaboration with the Philippine Medical Association, the Philippine Nurses Association, and alumni associations of various Philippine Medical Schools. Rico Fos, First Secretary and Consul, Philippine Embassy, e-mail correspondence with author, 4 February 2009.

¹²¹ World Bank, Development Prospects Group estimates based on International Monetary Fund Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook, March 2009, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGEP2009/Resources/5530448-1238466339289/GEP-Update-March30.pdf>.

¹²² Based on the average monthly remittance from January to June 2009. Michael Fix et al., *Migration and the Global Recession: A Report Commissioned by the BBC World Service*, (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2009).

¹²³ Annie Carillo, Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior, interview by author, Mexico City, 9 April 2008.

As with other IME programs, IME staff do not provide financial services but serve an important coordinating function with the relevant Mexican ministry that provides financial or economic services.

IME promotes banking and access to financial services in response to the lower participation rate of Mexican migrants in the formal financial system. According to a 2006 survey conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank, the Multilateral Investment Fund, and Bendixen and Associates, only 48 percent of Mexican remittance senders had a bank account.¹²⁴ This figure is consistent with analysis of the 2004 US Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation which estimates that 53 percent of Mexican immigrant households do not have access to a checking or savings account (compared to 14 percent of white US-born households, 20 percent of Asian immigrant households, and 37 percent of other Latin American immigrant households).¹²⁵

Without access to formal banking, migrants resort to using expensive check-cashing shops, carrying their earnings in cash and using costly wire-transfer services to send money home.¹²⁶ Migrants carrying large amounts of cash may also be targeted and robbed.¹²⁷ In addition to any immediate danger, failure to use formal banking also has long-term costs as very few payday lenders and check cashing outlets report to credit repositories, preventing migrants from building sufficient credit history in the United States to qualify for home or car loans.¹²⁸

To protect these vulnerable, and often unauthorized, Mexican immigrants, IME has created videos and other educational material that emphasize the importance of using the formal banking system. IME and the consular staff have sought agreements with banks to accept the *matricula consular* as a form of identification to open a bank account. In exchange, banks are authorized to provide banking information inside the consulate office, including information on safe remittance methods and basic financial literacy. Currently, more than 400 financial institutions accept the *matricula consular* as an official ID and 45 agreements with financial institutions have been signed in 17 consulates in the United States.¹²⁹

Fostering Transnational Entrepreneurial Talent

IME has used its convening skills to bring together Mexican and Mexican American high-skilled workers and professionals to share information and explore possible partnerships and business opportunities in Mexico and the United States. The *Red de Talentos*, or talent network, began as a request from the United States-Mexico Foundation for Science, an organization that fosters binational cooperation in the area of science and technology.¹³⁰ Interested in learning about high-

¹²⁴ Antonio Carrasco, "Educacion Financiera y Bancarizacion," (presentation at the Bansefi-SHCP-MIF meeting on remittances, San Salvador, El Salvador, October 1-2, 2007), <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=1216881>; Sherrie L. W. Rhine and William H. Greene, "The Determinants of Being Unbanked for US Immigrants," *Journal of Consumer Affairs* 40, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 21-40.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ O'Neil, "Consular ID Cards."

¹²⁷ Emily Brady, "For Mexican Workers, A Long Walk Home," *New York Times*, October 21, 2007.

¹²⁸ Lois Pilant Grossman, *Increasing Wealth in the Latino Community: A TRPI Conference Summary Report* (Los Angeles, CA: The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, 2007), <http://www.trpi.org/PDFs/wealthreport.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Consulates with bank agreements include: Austin, Brownsville, Calexico, Dallas, Denver, El Paso, Houston, Los Angeles, McAllen, Miami, Omaha, Saint Paul, San Antonio, San Diego, Seattle, Tucson, and Washington. Carillo, interview.; IME, *Reporte de Actividades*.

¹³⁰ Carillo interview.

skilled Mexicans abroad, the Foundation approached IME to investigate ways to share knowledge and talent across borders. In response, IME held three conferences (or *jornadas*) in 2005, 2006, and 2007 that brought together business owners and experts in the field of information technology, biotechnology, health and the automobile industry. As a result of the talent network, Silicon Valley businesses mentor fledgling Mexican IT companies and Detroit automobile factories accept interns from Mexico. The talent network was also instrumental in establishing the TechBA program, a project that supports Mexican companies' efforts to bring their products to the global market.

IV. Conclusion

Through its Institute of Mexicans Abroad, Mexico offers a range of immigrant integration services and practices aimed at helping its migrants succeed in the United States. By expanding consular services to include activities that promote integration, IME has taken on a task traditionally reserved for receiving-country institutions and has embraced immigrant integration as a strategy to protect its nationals in the United States. Grounded in the belief that a better integrated immigrant benefits the individual migrant, the sending country, and the receiving country, IME's integration work represents one of the most significant, if overlooked, factors in US immigrant integration policy. Although small in scale, Mexico's promising activities in the field of integration have the potential to ease their migrants' transition to life in the United States. In addition to benefiting from programs that help to improve Mexican immigrants' educational attainment, civic engagement, and financial literacy, the United States stands to gain from integration initiatives that fill gaps in the social welfare system caused by funding shortfalls, lack of experience with migrant populations, eligibility requirements, or neglect.

While the idea of a sending country actively encouraging the integration of its migrants in a receiving country may seem at odds with seeking to maintain ties with its diaspora, there are several strategic benefits that flow to Mexico from a migrant population that is well integrated. Research shows that the Mexican migrants who are most capable of contributing to Mexico are stable members of the middle class who do not confront the daily struggle for survival.¹³¹ By seeking to eliminate barriers to integration in the areas of civic engagement, education, and health care, Mexico recognizes its shared responsibility for the well-being of its nationals and understands that it must aid in the success of its migrants if it expects to maintain lasting ties to its diaspora. The idea of assuming responsibility for a shared population even after it has left the country challenges the notion that a government's responsibility ends with migration and places Mexico at the forefront of diaspora engagement.

Although the direct outlays for IME are relatively small, approximately \$2.8 million in 2009 for approximately 11.7 million Mexican immigrants in the United States, IME has leveraged these resources to build a wide range of integration programs unparalleled by any other sending country in the United States. The fact that 95 percent of Mexico's diaspora is in the United States allows for such directed investment in one country but could complicate efforts to replicate IME programs in other receiving countries.

It is too early to tell if Mexico's efforts to improve the social and human capital of its migrants have been successful from the perspective of the sending country, the receiving country, or the individual migrant. Although IME collects data on the number of migrants served through its program — and their reach has certainly expanded — few evaluations exist that assess how much migrants benefit from IME's work. Moving forward, it seems important that IME quantify its program results, especially as other countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay look to Mexico as a model for constructing diaspora organizations.

¹³¹ Portes, "Bridging the Gap."

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About the Author



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