

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Comprehensive immigration reform must:

- 1. Uphold family unity as a priority of all immigration policies**, enabling families to reunify without years of waiting. For instance, SAALT reports that many South Asians currently being sponsored by U.S. citizen siblings have to wait nearly eleven years before obtaining green cards; others, green card holders in particular, continue to wait to be reunited with spouses and children. The National Council of La Raza and the Urban Institute report that two-thirds of children split up from their parents during immigration raids are U.S. citizens. Upholding family unity necessitates increasing the number of visas available to family members, dealing with the backlog of applications, and dealing with delays due to background and security checks.
- 2. Create a process for undocumented immigrants to earn legal status and eventual citizenship.** This would stabilize the labor market, improve family unity, and improve the standard of living in immigrant communities
- 3. Protect workers and their rights and provide efficient channels of entry for new migrant workers.**
- 4. Restore due process protections.** For example, after 9/11, the detention and investigation of “special interest” detainees has led to prolonged detention without charge; interference with the right to counsel and closed immigration hearings; revocation of bond; and physical and verbal abuse while in confinement.
- 5. Reform detention policies, including conditions at detention facilities and jails.**
- 6. Align the enforcement of immigration laws with humanitarian values.**

In addition to revising U.S. immigration laws, policies, and practices, the United States must work to address the root causes of migration: economic inequality and a lack of development, especially in rural areas.

Economic inequality has been exacerbated by economic globalization policies supported by the U.S. government, such as NAFTA and CAFTA. Oscar Chacón, Amy Shannon, and Sarah Anderson report that “NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) almost certainly contributed to the sharp increase in the number of Mexicans living in the U.S. without authorization, from 2 million in 1990 to an estimated 6.2 million in 2005.” Because barriers to agricultural imports have been lifted and because of World Bank- and IMF-promoted cuts to support for small farmers, Mexican and Central American farmers have had to compete with cheap, heavily subsidized products from the United States, making it impossible to make a living from farming.

Additionally, migration is affected by natural disasters and land conditions, such as depleted soil. Many people have been forced onto marginal lands or housing; when a disaster strikes or crops fail, they are forced to move. Due to structural adjustment and other programs, developing countries have cut funding for social programs that support people.

Without efforts to address global economic inequalities, it will not be possible to address immigration, and any “solutions” will be only temporary. Even further, without addressing economic factors, it is impossible to address the economic scapegoating of immigrants and people who are poor. This reform must extend to ensuring living wages and benefits for all workers, in the United States, Mexico, and other countries.

Resources

- ♦ www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/interfaith-immigration-Platform-2009.pdf
- ♦ “Alternatives to a Wall” by Oscar A. Chacón, Amy Shannon, and Sarah Anderson, printed in *Yes!* magazine, Summer 2006, available at www.yesmagazine.org/other/pop_print_article.asp?ID=1454