

common interests. These common interests are at the base of brave decisions undertaken recently, such as: Merida Initiative. Through this Initiative, funds, intelligence, and strategy are invested to fight a shared war against the organized crime, which impacts both countries.

Also, US government and the government of Mexico have established local procedures for orderly and safe repatriation, aiming to regulate the flow of persons at the common border in a way that is consistent with the respect of the human rights, and dignity of Mexican nationals who are found in the US in violation of US immigration law. To this day, all local agreements have been signed by both parts.

With respect to the movement of Mexicans coming back to Mexico from the US, Mexico responds in different ways. Since last year, the Government of Mexico, implements through the Migration National Institute (INM), the Humane Repatriation Program, in order to offer those who could not cross the border successfully a better reception in Mexico, once they have been returned by the US authorities.

Regarding another program, this year *Programa Paisano* celebrates its 20 years. During this period *Paisano* has been consolidated as an interagency effort oriented to support and inform our paisanos from the US, while visiting their country of origin and in order to prevent abuses and violation of their rights.

Border Crossings Data

The US-Mexico border dynamic is complex and constant, the flows go on both directions, and are caused by touristic, trade, and labor reasons. According to some data, 1 million crosses are registered each day on both directions, and through the authorized crossing points. However, this year, crossings have diminished, probably due to economic crisis and regional insecurity in the north of Mexico.

During the 1998-2000 period, the number of Mexicans repatriated by US authorities reached its highest level, more than 1 million repatriations per year. Additionally, the number of repatriated people from states with no consistent migration tradition, such as: Chiapas and Veracruz, has increased. This novel flow is more vulnerable, lacking experience and knowledge about the routes, and consolidated social networks.

Economic Crisis Data

Given the current economic context, there is evidence that immigration flows to the US have noticeably slowed in the last year, raising questions about the effect the current economic crisis is having on inflows and return migrations (Migration Policy Institute, MPI).

MPI finds that illegal immigration flows should be more responsive to economic changes than legal immigration flows, even through economic prospects at home and family reunification are also factors. Additionally, recent trends suggest that large returns may be unlikely, because of the rising cost of illegal entry to the US, which has contributed to reducing back-and-forth migration dramatically.

In this sense, border apprehension data add support to the conclusion that illegal immigration is correlated with the business cycle. There is broad recognition on disconnect between the US immigration system and its labor market, this crisis may provide impetus toward creating a more coherent Immigration System.

US Immigration System Debate

Following a campaign promise, President Obama has expressed his intention to tackle comprehensive immigration reform this year, including looking for a path for illegal immigrants to become legal. According to Obama, immigrants who are long-time residents but lack legal status “have to have some mechanism over time to get out of the shadows.”

Immigration reform is a controversial issue, and although the current economic context seems to be at odds with political will, the debate has already started, and early reactions are promising, such as the labor unions’ common position, specially and after the failure to pass the reform in 2007.

Closing Remarks

The immigration debate is on the table, and although agreement is not going to be reached soon, as President Obama well knows, there is a clear commitment.

At the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast, he said: “America will let you go as far as your dreams and your hard work will carry you (...) We also know that keeping this promise means upholding America’s tradition as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. Those things aren’t contradictory; they are complementary (...) I’m committed to passing comprehensive immigration reform (...)”

Finally, while discussing the possibility of the reform with Congress men and women, President Obama said: “It’s going to require a victory of practicality and common sense and good policymaking over short-term politics. That’s what I’m committed to doing as president”