

Prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation-Aspen Institute Diaspora Program (RAD)

The Mexican Diaspora in the United States

June 2015 Revised

Summary

Approximately 23.2 million Mexican immigrants and their children (the first and second generations) live in the United States, making Mexico by far the largest source of immigration to the United States. In recent decades, the population of Mexican immigrants in the United States has increased both in size and proportion of the foreign-born population. In 1980, there were about 2.2 million Mexican immigrants in the United States, constituting 16 percent of the total immigrant population at that time; by 2012, their share had risen to 28 percent.

The majority of Mexican immigrants arrived in the United States before 2000, but they are the least likely of any group in the Rockefeller Foundation-Aspen Institute Diaspora Program (RAD) analysis to have acquired U.S. citizenship: only 25 percent of Mexican immigrants have naturalized versus 44 percent for all U.S. immigrants.¹ The low citizenship acquisition of Mexican migrants may be related to their long history of circular migration to the United States and the high proportion that reside in the United States without authorization. U.S. immigration law does not offer a direct pathway to legal permanent status or citizenship for unauthorized immigrants, the majority of whom are of Mexican birth. Moreover, lack of legal immigration status poses many challenges to the integration and advancement of Mexican immigrants, such as legal and financial barriers to higher education and professional advancement, ineligibility for public benefits, difficulty accessing health care, and limited ability to acquire significant assets due to low incomes and restricted access to credit; it also carries the threat of deportation. However, at least 200,000 Mexico-born young adults who were brought to the United States as children have a temporary reprieve from deportation as a result of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA beneficiaries also receive U.S. work authorization, although they are not put on a path to legal permanent residency or made directly eligible for other forms of legal status.

Among the 15 populations in the RAD analysis, the Mexican diaspora is arguably the most socioeconomically disadvantaged group. In addition to having the lowest naturalization rate among the 15 populations studied, the Mexican diaspora also has the lowest levels of educa-

¹ All Rights Reserved. © 2015 Migration Policy Institute. Information for reproducing excerpts from this report can be found at www.migrationpolicy.org/about/copyright-policy. The RAD Diaspora Profile series covers U.S.-based Bangladeshi, Colombian, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Filipino, Ghanaian, Haitian, Indian, Kenyan, Mexican, Moroccan, Nigerian, Pakistani, Salvadoran, and Vietnamese diaspora populations. This updates the initial July 2014 diaspora profile to correct an error.

tional attainment and household income, and the second-lowest rate of employment. Members of the Mexican diaspora age 25 and older are nearly four times as likely as the general U.S. population to have less than a high school education (49 percent versus 13 percent); and just 6 percent of the Mexican diaspora in this age group has a bachelor's degree versus 20 percent of the U.S. population overall. Still, members of the second generation—those born in the United States to at least one Mexico-born parent—have made educational gains relative to the first. The median annual household income for Mexican diaspora households is \$36,000, or \$14,000 below the median for all U.S. households. Although the Mexican diaspora has a slightly higher labor force participation rate than the general U.S. population (67 percent versus 64 percent), a lower proportion of Mexican diaspora members in the labor force are employed (88 percent versus 91 percent). They are also far less likely to be in professional or managerial occupations (11 percent versus 31 percent).

Mexican immigrants are broadly dispersed across the United States, although the greatest numbers live in the states of California and Texas. Los Angeles has the largest Mexican immigrant population of any metropolitan area; and the Chicago, Houston, Dallas, and Riverside-San Bernardino (California) areas are each home to more than a half million Mexican immigrant residents. Among the top ten metropolitan destinations, the highest concentration is found in the McAllen, Texas metropolitan area, where Mexican immigrants make up more than one-quarter of the population.

The Mexican diaspora has established numerous well-funded and professionally managed organizations in locations across the United States. They take many forms, including federations of hometown associations, mutual aid societies, labor and migrant-rights advocacy groups, political action committees, institutions dedicated to the promotion of Mexican or Chicano arts and culture, and business and professional networks. It is not uncommon for Mexican diaspora organizations to expand their focus beyond Mexican or Mexican American individuals to broader populations of Latino or Hispanic descent, as exemplified by national organizations such as the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Of the 98 Mexican diaspora organizations identified for the RAD study, 19 reported annual revenues above \$1 million and another 22 groups had revenues exceeding \$200,000 during their most recent fiscal year. In addition to those mentioned above, the Chicano Federation, the U.S.-Mexico Foundation, and Chicanos Por La Causa are also among the most prominent Mexican diaspora organizations in the United States. Though Mexican diaspora organizations are headquartered in cities and towns throughout the United States, they are most heavily concentrated in metropolitan areas close to the U.S.-Mexico border, especially in California and South Texas.

The United States is the top destination for Mexican emigrants, and the U.S.-based Mexican diaspora is Mexico's primary source of remittances. The Mexican diaspora in the United States sent \$22.8 billion in remittances to Mexico in 2012—more than U.S. residents remitted to any other country. Mexico's overall recorded remittances totaled \$23.4 billion that year. Despite the scale of these monetary transfers, they accounted for only 2.0 percent of the country's \$1.18 trillion gross domestic product (GDP) in 2012.

Detailed Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics²

Analysis of data from 2009-13 reveals a Mexican diaspora in the United States of about 23.2 million individuals, an estimate that includes immigrants born in Mexico and U.S.-born individuals with at least one parent who was born in Mexico.

First Generation (Mexican immigrants in the United States)

- More than 11.5 million immigrants from Mexico resided in the United States, making Mexicans the largest U.S. foreign-born group.
- In recent decades, the population of Mexican immigrants in the United States has increased both in size and proportion of the foreign-born population. In 1980, there were about 2.2 million Mexican immigrants in the United States, constituting 16 percent of the total immigrant population at that time; by 2012, their share had risen to 28 percent.³
- Mexican immigrants to the United States were about as likely to arrive before 2000 as the U.S. foreign-born population overall: 65 percent versus 64 percent.
- One-quarter of Mexican immigrants in the United States were U.S. citizens (25 percent). Mexican immigrants had the lowest naturalization rate among the 15 RAD analysis populations, a proportion that was considerably lower than that of the general foreign-born population (44 percent).
- Unauthorized Mexico-born immigrants comprised 59 percent of the unauthorized immigrant population in the United States in 2011.⁴
- Nearly 200,000 unauthorized Mexico-born young adults who came to the United States as children were granted work authorization and a temporary reprieve from deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. From mid-August 2012 to mid-March 2013—the program’s first seven months—about 349,000 immigrants from Mexico applied for the benefit. The vast majority of all DACA applicants during this time period were born in Mexico (75 percent).⁵
- Eighty-seven percent of first-generation Mexican immigrants were working age (18 to 64) while only a small share were age 65 and older (6 percent). The median age of Mexican immigrants was 38.

2 Unless otherwise noted, estimates for the diaspora population and its characteristics are based on Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Surveys (CPS), using five years of pooled data (2009 through 2013) collected in March of each year. All Census Bureau data were accessed from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database], Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

3 These estimates are based on MPI analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010-12 American Community Surveys (ACS) and the 1980 Census.

4 Michael Hofer, Nancy Rytina, and Bryan Baker, *Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2011*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012), http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2011.pdf%20. In January 2011, an estimated 11.5 million unauthorized immigrants were in the United States.

5 Audrey Singer and Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, *Immigration Facts: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2013), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2013/08/14%20daca/daca_singer_svajlenka_final.pdf.

Second Generation (U.S. born with at least one Mexico-born parent)⁶

- The Mexican second generation was as large as the first generation, consisting of an estimated 11.7 million U.S.-born individuals with at least one parent born in Mexico.
- Sixty-seven percent of the Mexican second generation reported that both parents were born in Mexico and 28 percent reported one U.S.-born parent.
- The Mexican second-generation population in the United States had a median age of 14, meaning that it was one of the older second generations among the 15 groups in the RAD analysis. Only the Philippines, Colombia, and Haiti had a higher median age among this generation group.
- Sixty percent of the Mexican second generation was younger than age 18, and 37 percent were working age (18 to 64). Three percent of the Mexican second generation was age 65 and older, tied with the Philippines for having the highest proportion of senior citizens in the second generation among the 15 groups in the RAD analysis.

Educational Attainment

- The Mexican diaspora had relatively little formal education, although schooling levels were higher in the second generation than the first. The Mexican and Salvadoran diaspora populations were the least educated of the 15 groups in the RAD analysis.
- Forty-nine percent of the Mexican diaspora age 25 and older had not completed high school, compared to 13 percent of the general U.S. population. Mexico-born immigrants age 25 years and older were more than twice as likely as their children's generation to have less than a high school diploma: 58 percent versus 22 percent.
- Six percent of the Mexican diaspora age 25 and older had a bachelor's degree as their highest credential compared to 20 percent of the general U.S. population. Only 5 percent of the first generation age 25 and older had a bachelor's degree versus 12 percent of the second generation age 25 and older.
- Two percent of the Mexican diaspora age 25 and older had an advanced degree (master's, advanced professional, or PhD) compared to 11 percent of the U.S. population overall. Only 1 percent of the Mexican first-generation population and 4 percent of the second generation age 25 and older had such a credential.

Household Income

- Households headed by members of the Mexican diaspora had a lower median annual income than U.S. households overall: \$36,000 versus \$50,000. Among the 15 groups in the RAD analysis, the annual median household income was lowest for the Mexican, Ethiopian, and Salvadoran diaspora populations.
- Eleven percent of Mexican diaspora households reported annual incomes above \$90,000, the threshold for the top 25 percent of U.S. households. Of the 15 groups in the RAD analysis, the lowest proportions of Mexican and Ethiopian diaspora households were in the top quartile of the U.S. income distribution.

⁶ U.S. born is defined as born in the United States or born abroad to a U.S.-citizen parent.

- Three percent of Mexican diaspora households had annual incomes exceeding \$140,000, the threshold for the top 10 percent of U.S. households. Mexican and Ethiopian diaspora households were least likely to have annual incomes in the top decile of the U.S. income distribution among the 15 groups in the RAD analysis.

Employment

- Mexican diaspora members age 16 and older were slightly more likely than the general U.S. population to be in the labor force: 67 percent versus 64 percent.
- Within the labor force, members of the Mexican diaspora were less likely to be employed than the U.S. population overall: 88 percent versus 91 percent. Of the 15 groups in the RAD analysis, the Mexican diaspora had the second-lowest employment rate (after Haiti).
- Members of the Mexican diaspora were in professional or managerial occupations at a rate well below the general U.S. labor force: 11 percent versus 31 percent.⁷ Salvadoran and Mexican diaspora worked in professional or managerial occupations at the lowest proportions of the 15 groups in the RAD analysis. These occupations include specialized fields (e.g. engineering, science, law, or education) as well as administrative and managerial jobs (e.g. finance or human resources).

Geographic Distribution⁸

- Mexican immigrants were dispersed throughout the United States, but the largest numbers and concentrations were in the West and Southwest, led by California (with 4.3 million Mexican immigrants) and Texas (with 2.5 million).
- Significant populations of Mexican immigrants could be found in many different U.S. metropolitan areas. The Los Angeles area was home to the greatest number of Mexican immigrants (1.8 million). The Chicago, Houston, Dallas, and Riverside-San Bernardino (CA) metropolitan areas each had more than 500,000 Mexican immigrant residents; and more than 300,000 Mexican immigrants were settled in and around Phoenix, San Diego, and New York City.
- Among the top ten destinations, the McAllen (TX), Los Angeles, and Riverside-San Bernardino (CA) metropolitan areas had the highest concentrations of Mexican immigrants (27.5 percent, 13.6 percent, and 13.1 percent respectively).

⁷ This rate is calculated based on the share of all individuals reporting an occupation for their primary job at the time the CPS was administered, or their most recent primary job.

⁸ Analysis based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008-12 ACS. Note that geographic distribution is only analyzed for the immigrant population. Second-generation Mexican diaspora members are not included in this section due to data limitations.

Remittance Volume⁹

- Mexico's remittances totaled \$23.4 billion in 2012, comprising 2.0 percent of the country's \$1.18 trillion GDP.
- The United States was by far the most common destination for Mexican emigrants and Mexico's top source for remittances. The Mexican diaspora in the United States transferred \$22.8 billion in remittances to Mexico in 2012. More of the United States' remittance outflows went to Mexico than any other country in the world.

⁹ Remittance data are taken from World Bank Prospects Group tables for annual remittance inflows and outflows (October 2013 update) and the 2012 Bilateral Remittance Matrix (both available here: <http://go.worldbank.org/092X1CHHD0>). GDP estimates are from World Bank World Development Indicators data. Population estimates are from the United Nations Population Division mid-2013 matrix of total migrant stock by origin and destination.

Tables, Maps, and Graphs

Characteristics of the Mexican Diaspora in the United States, 2009-13

	Mexican Diaspora in the United States*	Total U.S. Population
Household Income		
Median household income	\$36,000	\$50,000
Average household size	3.7	2.5
Share of households with high incomes (\$90,000+)	11%	25%
Share of households with very high incomes (\$140,000+)	3%	10%
Employment		
Total population age 16 and older	16,100,000	239,386,000
Share in the labor force	67%	64%
... that was employed	88%	91%
... that was in a professional occupation ⁺	11%	31%
Educational Attainment **		
Total population age 25 and older	12,603,000	201,925,000
... with less than high school education	49%	13%
... with high school or some college education	42%	57%
... with a bachelor's degree	6%	20%
... with an advanced degree	2%	11%
Population Characteristics by Generation		
First- and Second-Generation Immigrant Population	23,201,000	73,140,000
First-generation immigrant population***	11,515,000	38,468,000
... that was working age (18-64)	87%	81%
... that entered the United States before 2000	65%	64%
... naturalized as U.S. citizens	25%	44%
Second-generation population****	11,686,000	34,672,000
... that was under age 18	60%	46%
... that was working age (18-64)	37%	43%
... with only one parent from Mexico	33%	

* defined as all first and second generation

** highest level reported

*** all individuals who report Mexico as their place of birth, excluding U.S. births abroad

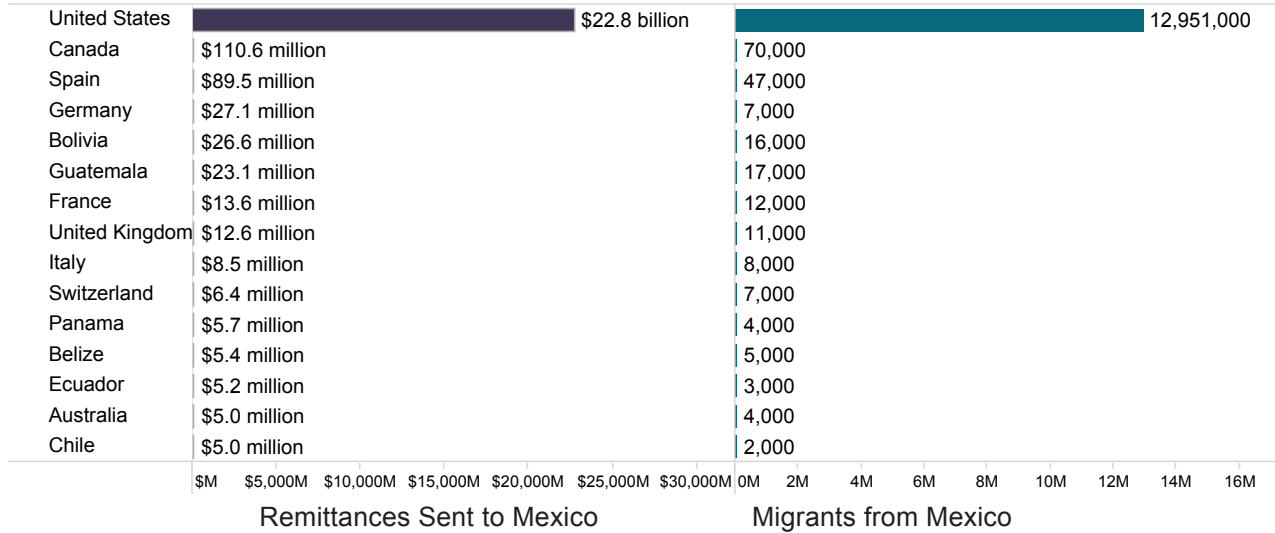
**** all individuals who report having at least one parent born in Mexico

⁺calculated based on the share of all individuals reporting an occupation for their primary job at the time the Current Population Survey (CPS) was administered, or for their most recent primary job.

Note: Estimates are based on Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey pooled 2009-13 data.

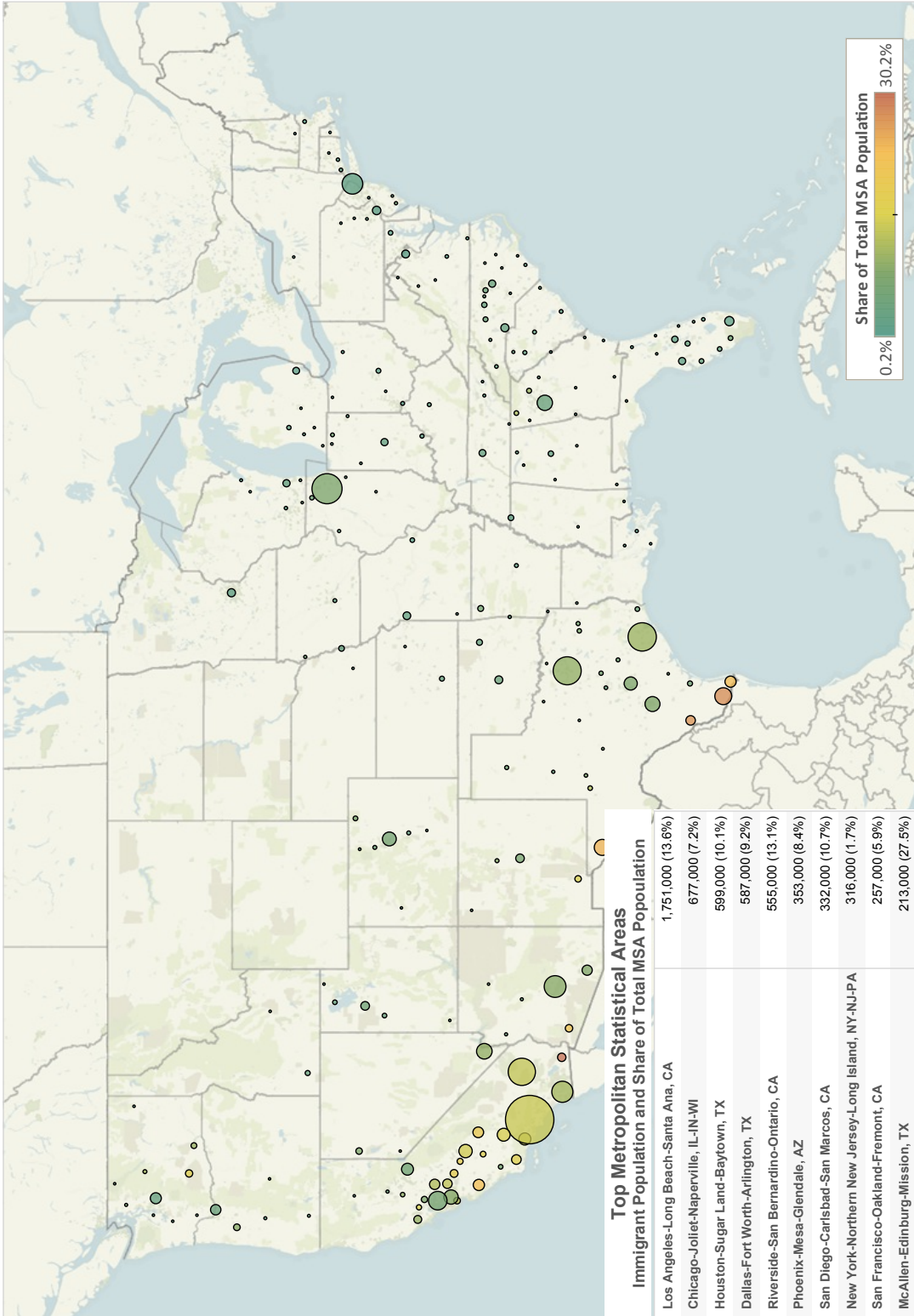
Source: All Census Bureau data were accessed from Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Katie Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database], Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

Remittance Inflows to Mexico by Sending Country and the Mexican Emigrant Population, 2012



Source: Migration Policy Institute analysis of World Bank Prospects Group tables for annual remittance inflows and outflows (October 2013 update) and the 2012 Bilateral Remittance Matrix, the World Bank's World Development Indicators, and the United Nations Population Division's Matrix of Total Migrant Stock by Origin and Destination (mid-2013).

Immigrant Population from Mexico
Displayed by Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)



Map based on Migration Policy Institute tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B05006.

Source: MPI analysis of 2010-12 ACS, pooled.