



## Migrant Farm Workers in Mexico: State of Knowledge

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### Abstract

This article presents the results of a scientific social-pedagogical research, which goal was displaying an overview of the current situation of migrant farm workers in Mexico, from a first approach to the state of knowledge on this issue through a documentary-bibliographic study. The study showed that the most researchers approach the issues of migrant farm workers from economic theory, however, is not enough to analyze the economic and social status of this group of people, it is necessary to place it in a multidisciplinary level (including economics, sociology, political science, psychology, education, etc.), study it from the theory of marginality and qualitative approach.

**Keywords:** Migrant Farm Workers; State of Knowledge of Issue of Migrant Farm Workers in Mexico; Socio-Economic Studies; Mechanisms for Integration into Social and Working Life; Socio-Educational Programs for Migrant Farm Workers.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Review of Literature

Systematic research on migrant farm workers in Mexico and its multiple problems became the target of interest in the Mexican social science in the late sixties - early seventies of the twentieth century.

The problems associated with this type of labor migration and the new form of incorporation of agricultural work involving large family groups, were approached from different perspectives by Bartra, 1974; Arizpe, 1976; 1985; 1986; Paré, 1977; 1991; 1997; Anguiano, 1991; Lara, 1991; Barrón, 1992; 1994; 2007; Torres, 1997; Sánchez, 2000; 2001; 2003; 2005; Cos, 2001; López, 2002; Morett y Cosío, 2004; Palacios, 2004; Seefoó, 2005; Olimón, 2005; Granados, 2005; Talavera, 2005; Lara, 2005; 2006; 2007; Reyes, 2006; Sepúlveda y Miranda, 2006; Rojas, 2006; 2009; Díaz y Salinas, 2007; Durán, 2007; Ortega, 2007; Galindo y Landa, 2007; Sánchez, Rodríguez, 2008; Guerra, 2008; Jiménez, 2010, Paleta, 2011; 2012, among others.

Several investigations are devoted to the experiences and living conditions of laborers in the fields and in their communities of origin, they record and display the fragile and intense exploitation conditions experienced by working agricultural laborers, adults and children; others address issues of gender relations, power and labor exploitation along with testimonials and pictures (Torres, 1997, Talavera, 2005; Galindo, Landa, 2007; Sánchez, Rodríguez, 2008; Paleta, 2011; Paleta, 2012, among others).

Many studies (Palacios, 2004; Seefoó, 2005; Olimon, 2005, among others) are interested in the health of laborers affected by the application of pesticides and agrochemicals in various crops.

The researchers (Sánchez, 2005; Palacios, 2004; Rojas, 2009; Sánchez, Rodríguez, 2008; Jiménez, 2010, Paleta, 2012, among others) assert, that average income of indigenous migrant farm workers is about half that of non-indigenous workers. Indigenous peoples<sup>1</sup> tend to face greater obstacles, sometimes of legal nature, in the capacity building, decision making and claiming of their rights, the support and protection in case of adverse events.

## 1.2. The Aim of the Research and Methodology

The aim of the research which results are presented in this article, was displaying an overview of the current situation of migrant farm workers in Mexico, from a first approach to the state of knowledge on this issue through a documentary-bibliographic study. This work was performed under the critical-dialectical approach, using research methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison and generalization that were necessary to study the original texts and official documents; organization of the studied material and its exposure.

## 2. Data Analysis

The documentary-bibliographic study showed that on the issue of migrant farm workers, several sociological and economical studies with different methodological and conceptual orientations have been performed. Most research documented the difficulty for identifying agricultural laborers as being migrant groups with high spatial mobility and characterized them as heterogeneous groups with different ethnic affiliations and groups which demand educational and governmental attention.

So, Lara (1991) argues that the movement of migrant laborers stands out as an expanded core in a way that resembles the “strategy” to bring more work to the decline in revenues adult male laborer [1]. In turn, Sanchez (2000) resembles this phenomenon with ways to reduce the costs of maintaining the family group during the migration period and/or as a way to avoid family separation, especially when migration lasts for long periods of time [2].

Lopez (2002) states that the first massive flows of families (predominantly indigenous) who came from Oaxaca and Guerrero and were incorporated into the agricultural work in Sinaloa, Baja California and other states in the north, began in the seventies of the twentieth century. In terms of their job profile, these workers' families were incorporated into various crops to less specialized agricultural tasks, such as cutting, collecting, drag, packaging, clean, selection, etc. In the middle of the decade of the seventies of the twentieth century, there were approximately 405,712 families in permanent mobility between regions of origin and regions receiving farm worker [3].

According to Sanchez (2000), the social profile of the laborers is strongly associated with the processes of impoverishment and marginalization. They are families involved in some form of agricultural exploration in their hometowns (small landowners, commoners or sharecroppers), which already include family work; from very small and marginalized communities engaged in subsistence agriculture; 70% belongs to municipalities speaking an indigenous language or high concentration of indigenous people [2].

It is worth emphasizing that there is no accurate figure for the total number of indigenous of different ethnicities who work as laborers in the fields of various states. However, Mexican researchers (Sánchez, Rodríguez, 2008; Guerra, 2008; Jiménez, 2010, Paleta, 2011; 2012, among others) estimate that the migrant indigenous farmworkers represent heterogeneous groups with different ethnic affiliations demonstrating a mosaic of 13 indigenous ethnic groups from 16 states of the Republic: Cora, Huichol, Zapotec, Mixtec, Triqui, Mazatec, Mixe, Chinantec, Amuzgo, Chatino, Wixarika, Tepehuan, Tlapanec. Three of these groups (Tlapanec, Tepehuan and Huichol) constitute 69% of a total population of laborers, who in 82% migrate for work on nuclear and extended families. The total number would be about 5.2 million people (53% are male and 47% female).

Often whole families are moved. In agricultural fields they are completely outside of social benefits: without job security, living in homes without services and being subject to human rights abuses. In the places where they stay there's no basic services like electricity, water and drainage; they live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

The composition, origin and economic status of migrant farm workers was also studied by Rojas (2006), who suggests that on average, families have an age of 30 years, and 40% of these migrants are under 14 years. They are attracted to develop intensive farming regions in the use of labor during the harvest in the autumn-winter cycle [5].

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most vulnerable regions in the world is Latin America, where 204 million people live in poverty, 78 million of them in rural areas; one fifth of the population works the land with low productivity agricultural methods and lives in precarious economic situations. 15% of people with low income and 30% of people living in extreme poverty in rural areas are the indigenous people, who tend to have low levels of education, inequality of opportunities and inequality of access to land and other productive assets (PNUD, 2014).

On the other hand, the research of Jimenez (2010) showed that from the perspective of the workers' families, temporary migrant labor is a flexible alternative to the use of their resources devoted to family farming in its own plot and the incorporation of revenues during the time of migrant labor. Therefore, their schedules are often designed to meet their commitments within a community. In the migration season, the social interaction of these families takes place in a framework in which a common geographical origin is shared with many other families, so that relations are established on the basis of kinship, peasantry and community identity, in addition to linguistics [6].

According to the analyzed works, in Mexico, the use of cheap labor of indigenous migrant farm workers is a common practice. Men and women working as agricultural laborers in the Mexican states, form the so called "agricultural cycle of the Northwest". 90% of them work for large agricultural enterprises engaged in the export of products. These industries find in migrants a flexible workforce, which performs the arduous and exhausting work without any contract or labor rights. Transnational agribusiness (crop and cut snuff, cane, beans, chili, vegetables, etc.), hire them in inhumane conditions, in both places: within agricultural fields and settlements outside these.

In the fields of Nayarit, Michoacán, Sonora, Baja California Sur, Zacatecas arrive annually 5 million of laborers, of whom 70% are indigenous people of Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Sierra de Nayarit and Veracruz. In Michoacan, 120,000 laborers come from Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas. In Sonora, 85,000 workers reach Caborca, Pesqueira, Empalme, Guaymas, Hermosillo. In Baja California Sur, arrive each year 25,000 Indian laborers from the south (Oaxaca, Guerrero, Veracruz). In 2006, a total of 40,207 indigenous farmworkers from the state of Guerrero were counted, of which 25,448 were displaced to Sinaloa [7].

Mexican researchers classified the causes of migration of agricultural laborers in: financial need (absolute lack of job opportunities); poverty in their places of origin; family dependence; domestic violence; demand for labor; trafficking. They distinguish three migratory patterns developing: pendulum (go and return to the communities of origin), swallow (moving in several regions); seated in work zones.

It is important to note that the power structure in agricultural fields is a pyramid having atop the owner of the land, beneath him is the foreman contractor responsible for recruiting gang workers and his duties include often providing housing and food.

At the base of the pyramid are workers or farm laborers, who have only their labor and have more social disadvantages as well as all other policies. They have no right to organize unions and sometimes they are not employed throughout the year or are outsourced; if there is an oversupply of labor, they have to work longer hours without rest; they are not remunerated for the overtime, they suffer from pesticides and do not have health institutions, they lack of paid vacation and do not have a pension. The housing situation is deplorable: they live in reed huts and wood (8-10 people) or wine (for 60 people), with no minimum sanitation, always saturated, paying rent of 10-40 Mexican pesos<sup>2</sup> daily [8].

The working conditions of migrant farm laborers are deplorable, considering that there is no job security, they face days of strenuous work without protection of their health and safety and a misuse of agrochemicals, without training or proper equipment, they cannot ban out of the agricultural fields without the authorization of the caciques-entrepreneurs, they are not paid the agreed wages and they lack of the most basic labor rights.

Agricultural laborers, in addition to low wages, suffer humiliation and abuse in everyday life; they are discriminated because of race and poverty, not only by their direct employers, contractors, but also by locals. Living in crowds and at the same time, alone, away from their family, people and culture, coupled with the constant risk status at work (pesticide poisonings, bites of poisonous animals, respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses caused by climate change, etc.), working up to 16 hours a day, having poor quality food offered, featuring extremely inappropriate sites to stay, all of these provoke the migrants frustration and distrust of others. It is proper to indigenous isolated in their misery, depressed.

The precarious situation of this group of marginalized, requires a development of mechanisms for their integration into productive life, one of which is education. Among Mexican researchers (Attanacio, Székely, 1999; Bueno, 2001; Filgueira, 2001; Katzman, 2001; Boltvinik, 2004; Juárez, 2006; Cervantes, 2011, among others) increases concern about the social situation in which indigenous peoples live, concerns are increased by the consequences that trigger reproduction of phenomena of exclusion, marginalization and vulnerability in this population. They carried out numerous studies to understand the root causes, why persist, and propose solutions to the problems in question.

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<sup>2</sup> 18 Mexican pesos equals \$ 1 USA dollar.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the main mechanism of integration of indigenous people in the western world, especially in urban areas, wage labor is because it allows the person to get the income to meet their needs, grow professionally, located in a place in society and participate in a field of relationships. The shrinking of the formal labor market, the loss of rights and guarantees and social insecurity demonstrate the weakening of the bonds of social integration and vulnerable situation faced by individuals. Needs overlap, and unemployment or precarious employment poverty falling incomes, indebtedness, the deterioration in the quality of housing is short, the crisis in the daily lives of families [9].

So, since the seventies of the twentieth century the Mexican government improves the system of special programs to support the underserved rural and urban areas (including native people) with material resources, support for health, education, housing, etc.: Public Investment Program for Rural Development (PIDER), General Coordination of the National Plan for Depressed Zones and Marginal Groups (COPLAMAR), Mexican Food System (SAM), National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), Program of Education, Health and Nutrition (PROGRESA), Fund Contributions for Social Infrastructure (FAIS), etc.

Moreover, there were implemented the social-educational programs for life and work for marginalized groups including farm laborers. It consists of programs, centers and short courses aimed at improving household economy, with content linked to domestic life, domestic consumption and paid work, which are offered through the Cultural Missions, Centers for Adult Basic Education (CEBAS) and the Centers for School Education (CEDEX), with the support of civil society organizations, trade unions, chambers, secretaries of state, private training agencies.

In fact, it is noteworthy that the Cultural Missions have been launched from the twenties of the twentieth century, providing different supports, including educational services in rural areas for migrant farm workers.

The socio-educational programs for marginalized, encourage investment in capacity building by expanding opportunities for families in poverty to succeed through their own efforts, raise education for life and work considering the multiethnic population. One of these is Human Development Program Opportunities, an instrument of the Federal Government to combat poverty developing intersectional actions for education, health and nutrition, which was created in 2002.

The objective of this project is to expand access of families living in poverty, through a cash transfer and food supplements conditional on the attendance of children to school and monitoring their health, also contributing to reduce extreme poverty; create equal opportunities for the poor and vulnerable groups; support the development of skills of people in poverty; strengthen the social fabric and promoting participation and community development. In 2002-2007 Opportunities benefited 5 million families. Approximately 30% of the families were in the states of Veracruz, Chiapas and Oaxaca (major states which export labor of migrant farm workers) [10].

### 3. Results and Discussion

However, research on the results of the socio-educational programs for marginalized (Adler-de-Lomnitz, 1993; Attanacio, Székely, 1999; Filgueira, 2001; Katzman, 2001; Boltvinik, Damian, 2004; Juarez-Bolaños, 2005, Alonso, 2007, among others) has shown that government projects not only have not resolved the problem of poverty, but deepened it. This was primarily due not so much because the supports for rural zones were very symbolic, and many times these small amounts of money have failed to reach their recipients due to corruption, but also because these small amounts have been spent by farmers for various other purposes (move to USA, alcoholism, family parties, buying expensive items, etc.), except the indicated: investment in field production. In addition, adverse weather conditions (especially in the semi-desert areas and high drought-prone regions and on the coast because of floods and tropical storms, etc.) contribute in making farmer's work very heavy and counterproductive. This adds to ensure that the work doesn't provide the elemental level of life and renders it meaningless. Therefore, people seek employment outside their communities.

As Damian (2004) points out, Mexico has been for decades an experimental laboratory for programs imposed by international agencies like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, both in economic and social matters for structural adjustment. These programs emerged as a mechanism to offset adjustment costs that the implementation of the enabling neoliberal model had. However, history has shown that its results have been disastrous. This has resulted in poverty rates in Mexico in the early twenty-first century, in excess of the ones in the eighties [11].

Therefore, it can be argued that social policies served a fragmented problem of designing social issues. This situation highlighted the exclusion of all those stakeholders who are not favored by these policies and also it is a considerable evidence of the denial of the rights inherent to all human beings.

On the other hand, regardless of the existence at international and national levels, of a broad and advanced legal framework aimed at protecting the rights of migrant workers (International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers, Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 of the ILO (on the prohibition of the worst forms of work); Mexican Constitution (Article 4, last paragraph); federal labor Law (Title V bis, Articles 173-180), general Act of health, etc.) in many parts of flows of agricultural workers is avoided fulfill responsibilities and the recommendation of the ECHR (infrastructure and basic services to improve working conditions), which seeks to end the discrimination and mistreatment of workers; economic, social and cultural rights are violated, not the labor contract that marks the benefits to which they are entitled (for example, the case of indigenous workers in the south in Jimenez (Chihuahua); Culiacan, Navolato, Los Mochis, Angostura, Elota, Guasave, Las Palmas, La Cruz (Sinaloa); Nayarit, etc. analyzed by Olimon (2005) [12]).

Abuses of employers towards migrants explained, among other factors, illiteracy past, lack of basic education, ignorance of their rights, etc.

Taking into account the above, one of the Mexican government's action to promote education of vulnerable groups, was the incorporation in the National Education Program 2000-2006 of a subsector program Education for Life and Work. Being both: an approach and a policy, it is proposed to give an education that not only compensates for the delays caused by inequity in access to school education, but also provides a quality education considering various areas of the lives of people and not just academic [13].

As a condition for the implementation of the approach of education for life and work and access to education for disadvantaged sectors are considered actions around lifelong learning. One of the key strategies for the proper functioning of Education for life and work was the creation of the National Council for Life and Work (CONEVyT) and National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) as coordination mechanisms with reasonable base resources and sufficient management capacity. The CONEVyT's objectives are to support and coordinate activities among the various agencies that offer this service, promote the implementation of new programs and define national policies in this area by promoting social participation through the use of technology and telecommunications allocating resources to priority programs [14].

The CONEVyT's projects are operated by the National Institute of Adult Education through the State Institutes for Adult Education and delegations of INEA in the states. Considering the education of vulnerable groups, INEA developed the Care Program for Demand of Adult Education with Education Model for Life and Work (MEVyT). Its variants are the Care Program for Migrant Farm Workers and Bilingual Indigenous Program.

The Care Program for Migrant Farm Workers develops from a consideration about the migrant agricultural day laborers as a disadvantaged group. It also provides resources for training, updating and gratification service providers in camps, hostels, informal settlements and communities of origin of the ejector locations in this population. It is a project that performs actions with the support of other agencies through the project Foster and Improve Intercultural Education for Migrants which began operations in 2003. It uses the pedagogical model MEVyT and is accompanied by actions for teaching Spanish as a second language. Another variation of MEVyT serving to migrant farm workers, who speak an indigenous language, whether in the home communities or agricultural or urban concentration, is the Bilingual Indigenous Program (MIB). Since it is possible that the agricultural or urban concentrations don't count with speaker advisors specific for the languages required, regular educational consultants can improve care by incorporating beside the figure of an interpreter a solidarity auxiliary indigenous language speaker and in the localities of origin they can support learning assistants with an interpreter who speaks fluent Spanish [15].

Notwithstanding the existence of several socio-educational programs for migrant farm workers allegedly implemented by the government since 2005 in all states of the republic, these projects only work in some municipalities.

On the other hand, it's important to note, that the education of migrant agricultural laborers, as well as the whole adults' educational sector, has a marginal character in the Mexican educational system (this is seen through their budgets: 0,92% of the whole educational budget); but despite this, it has developed various actions. Another problem is that the participation of government agencies in educational activities is shrinking. As a counterpart, civil society organizations develop actions, mainly non-formal and oriented to impoverished urban, rural and indigenous areas. An important player is also the private sector, which has a policy of job training for their workers. In the 2012-2013 school year, the total number of adults who received educational services, has reached 76.8% of public sector institutions and 23.2% of private agencies [16].

#### 4. Conclusion

According to the realized analysis, it can be argued, that the most researchers approach the issues of migrant farm workers from economic theory, however, is not enough to analyze the economic and social status of this group of people, it is necessary to place it in a multidisciplinary level (including economics, sociology, political science, psychology, education, etc.), in other words, study it from the theory of marginality and qualitative approach. From this perspective, the study of migrant farm workers is part of the overall problem of marginalization, which rises from the fifties of the twentieth century, as one of the research priorities in the field of economics, sociology, political science, education and others.

The study of migrant farm workers from the perspective of the multidisciplinary qualitative approach, can realizes that the situation of marginalization experienced by this social group not only extends to the whole human person and all aspects of marginalized sectors' life, but its effects affect the entire society. This allows stop viewing it as a phenomenon of the third world (although it is much deeper), since as a global problem.

Undoubtedly, micro and macroeconomic quantitative analysis are important, but so far it have been preparing the fragmented public policies, highlighting the exclusion of all those stakeholders who were not favored by these policies and settling of evidence denial of the rights inherent to all human beings.

Notably, the analysis of the problems of migrant farm workers from the multidisciplinary qualitative approach and design of mechanisms for its inclusion in the productive life, is indispensable, since diffusion including the attributes of modern life creates expectations that they cannot channel properly in its current condition, which lead to the generation of tensions and conflicts that make up a potentially explosive situation.

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