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FEATURED Q&A

Will the Pandemic Increase Migration in Latin America?



Countries in Latin America are bracing for higher levels of migration due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Migrants in Mexico are pictured above. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

Q Chilean senators on June 8 reopened debate over legislation to increase restrictions on migration given concerns that the country could see an influx of migrants after the coronavirus pandemic eases. A report by the Department of Migration predicted that, without new restrictions, as many as 250,000 migrants could enter Chile annually as the country's economy is expected to have a quicker rebound than those of its neighbors. How likely are Chile and other countries in the region to see a sharp rise in immigration levels, and what factors will drive those flows? What pressures will an increase in migrants put on the receiving nations? What should countries in the region be doing now in order to prepare?

A Manuel Orozco, director of the Migration, Remittances and Development Program at the Inter-American Dialogue: "The Chilean government's reactions are not accidental, particularly because over the past five years, several South American countries have faced a significant wave of immigration amounting to at least five million people from fragile states such as Venezuela, Haiti, Nicaragua and other Central American countries. Hence, they expect mobility to occur from other countries, but the severity of the economic impact of the pandemic is such that people won't consider emigrating until the economic recovery begins. Other countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panama and Colombia were already exploring ways to restrict migration prior to the pandemic, and their fears have now heightened. The timing to restrict migration may serve to quiet populist adventures, but

Continued on page 2

TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Controversial New Penal Code Takes Effect in Honduras

A new code, which has provisions that include shortening sentences for some corruption-related crimes, took effect in Honduras despite opposition lawmakers' last-minute attempts to scrap it.

Page 2

BUSINESS

Chile Regulator Files Charges Against Codelco

Chile's environmental regulator said it had filed charges against state mining company Codelco over a spill and contamination.

Page 2

POLITICAL

Mexico's Covid Death Toll Exceeds 25,000, Finance Minister Positive

Mexico's confirmed death toll from Covid-19 has risen past 25,000, and its number of confirmed cases surpassed 200,000. Finance Minister Arturo Herrera said he tested positive with "minor" symptoms.

Page 2



Herrera // File Photo: Mexican Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Mexico's Covid Death Toll Surpasses 25,000, Finance Chief Positive

Mexico's confirmed death toll from Covid-19 surpassed 25,000, and its number of confirmed cases of the disease exceeded 200,000 on Thursday, the Associated Press reported. The country's health department reported 6,104 new infections in the previous 24 hours, one of the highest daily increases so far during

“From this moment, I will be in quarantine...”

— Arturo Herrera

the pandemic. Mexico also recorded 736 new deaths on Thursday. In the Americas, only the United States and Brazil have higher total death tolls. Also on Thursday, Mexican Finance Minister Arturo Herrera confirmed that he had tested positive for the disease, Reuters reported. In a posting on Twitter, Herrera said he had only “minor” symptoms. “From this moment, I will be in quarantine and continue working from my house,” said Herrera. It is unclear how recently

Herrera was in contact with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has refused to wear a face mask, the Associated Press reported. So far, Herrera is Mexico's highest-level cabinet member to have tested positive for the novel coronavirus. The head of Mexico's Social Security Institute previously tested positive but later returned to work.

Controversial New Penal Code Takes Effect in Honduras

A controversial new penal code, which among other things shortens sentences for some corruption-related crimes, took effect in Honduras on Thursday despite last-minute efforts by opposition lawmakers to repeal it, the Associated Press reported. The new code sparked public debate in the Central American country, with some arguing it's a needed modernization while critics blast as it a step backward in the fight against corruption, EFE reported. The previous penal code had been in place for 30 years, and although Congress had amended it several times, those additions had created more problems, including disproportional penalties and clashes with existing legislation, according to some lawmakers, El Heraldo reported. Civic groups and interna-

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazilian University in Talks to Test Potential Coronavirus Vaccine

Brazil's Federal University of São Paulo is in talks to test a possible Covid-19 vaccine developed by researchers in Italy, Reuters reported Thursday. Brazil, which has the world's second-highest number of confirmed cases and deaths from the disease, after the United States, has become a main front in the race for a vaccine. The researchers from Italy's Lazzaro Spallanzani National Institute want to conduct midstage trials and Phase III studies that would involve thousands of Brazilians, said the Brazilian university's president, Soraya Smaili.

Peru Bans Mass Gatherings at Least Until Fourth Quarter

Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra said Thursday that mass gatherings in the Andean nation will remain prohibited until at least the last quarter of this year, state-run news agency Andina reported. Vizcarra also announced that the government's Council of Ministers is to meet today to discuss the measures that will be implemented starting July 1, as the country's state of national emergency is set to end on June 30.

Chile Environmental Regulator Files Charges Against Codelco

Chile's environmental regulator on Thursday said it had filed charges against state mining company Codelco over a 2016 tailing spill as well as river and estuary contamination at its Andina mine in an area near Santiago, Reuters reported. The Environmental Superintendent, or SMA, said it had received several public complaints over a tailings or mining waste spill in April 2016 and of alleged contamination in estuary and river water by waste that the company had discharged.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

the main challenge is to focus on cooperation among countries to address the root causes of migration in those fragile states while also recognizing that migrant integration in the Americas is a necessary step to address many of the vulnerabilities these migrants face. The countries hit hardest by the pandemic are also those most affected by the macroeconomic impact, and migrant host countries, including Chile, are in a position to deal in an organized fashion with the foreign labor force to prevent massive outflows in the years to come. Cooperation includes greater engagement of international development institutions to devise

programs on migrant economic and social integration, accompanied by economic stabilization plans in the migrant host countries, leveraging remittances, nostalgic trade, and investment as a means to mitigate and break the cycles of fragility in the region.”



Liliana Meza, professor in the masters in migration studies program at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City:

“The financial crisis of 2009-2010 can help us understand the probable consequences of the current health crisis on migration flows that enter and leave Mexico, although

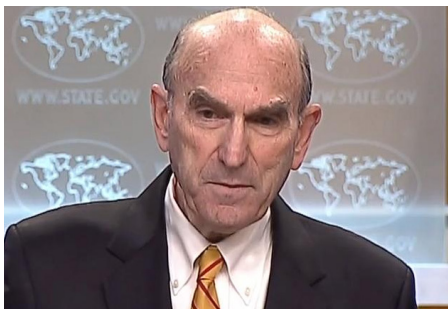
Continued on page 4

tional watchdogs have criticized the reforms as they were passed while a number of current and former legislators were under investigation for alleged corruption. Criminal attorney and former federal lawmaker Rasel Tomé said all of the crimes that the new penal code lowers the sentences for are those committed by corrupt officials, the AP reported. Among the crimes with reduced sentences are those involving the misuse of public funds, abuse of authority, influence trafficking, fraud and illicit enrichment. The government of President Juan Orlando Hernández earlier this year did not renew an OAS-sponsored anti-corruption mission's mandate, effectively ousting the agency, known as MACCIH.

ECONOMIC NEWS

U.S. Says Venezuela Allies Should Boost Humanitarian Aid

The United States on Thursday called on Russia and China to provide more humanitarian aid to Venezuela in its fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, Reuters reported. The Andean nation has so far reported more than 4,000 cases of the novel coronavirus and 35 deaths. The United States' special envoy to Venezuela,



Abrams // File Photo: U.S. State Department.

Elliott Abrams, said Thursday that Venezuela had also jailed doctors and journalists for trying to expose the true extent of infections. "We do think the numbers are tragically a good deal higher," Abrams said during a diplomatic event by the U.S. mission to the United Nations in Geneva. Referring to China and Russia, Abrams said the United States "would like to see them

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

Will the USMCA Function Well Amid the Pandemic?

Q **The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, is set to enter into force on July 1, prompting automakers in Mexico to rush to meet new regional content rules while facing additional challenges brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. How well will the USMCA function in the present regional economic context? How prepared are different sectors in the three countries, including Mexico's auto industry, for changes under the new trade deal given the current circumstances? To what extent does the USMCA provide an opportunity to help the three North American economies recover quickly from the aftermath of the Covid-19 health crisis?**

A **Nicolás Mariscal, member of the Advisor board and chairman of Grupo Marhnos in Mexico City:** "The change from NAFTA to the USMCA draws challenges that add to disruptions from the Covid-19 pandemic. Logistics and transportation companies have recently had to make adjustments to meet compliance standards and to adapt to the new reality brought by the virus. Regardless of the sector, various supply chains will be affected by shipping hindrances. On top of responding to the confinement measures and the economic struggle derived from the crisis, companies at the forefront of trilateral trade need to prepare for the modernized version of the deal. The agreement changes rules on auto manufacturing that will benefit U.S. job creation and increase salaries for

contribute more on the humanitarian side. There has been, I believe, some contributions of goods with respect to Covid-19 by Russia and China." However, he said "the scale, the dollar amount of this aid, is really quite low in comparison to the needs." The United Nations Children's Fund, or Unicef, earlier this month

some Mexican auto workers. In order to qualify for preferential tariff treatment, the threshold for materials sourced in North America increases from 62.7 percent under NAFTA to 75 percent in auto manufacturing. In addition, 70 percent of the steel and aluminum used in a vehicle must originate in the region. Perhaps a greater challenge might arise from rules of origin covering labor. The agreement demands that 40-45 percent of labor involved in producing vehicles must be paid more than \$16 per hour, as an attempt to reduce the wage gap between the United States and Mexico. In light of the coronavirus situation, automakers are likely to request an extension, as they have had to channel resources and efforts to buffer the economic impact and not necessarily toward preparing for USMCA. The deal will create more jobs, strengthen labor protections and increase trade flow among the three countries. New sectors such as e-commerce and some aspects such as intellectual property will benefit, and they happen to be key aspects in the new reality post-pandemic. The recovery showcases that now, more than ever, the region should strive to increase cooperation and collaboration toward prosperity and integration, and the USMCA might be the answer."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in Wednesday's issue of the Advisor.

sent a third shipment of humanitarian aid to help Venezuela deal with the health crisis, the Voice of America reported. The aid included 90 tons of medicine, sanitation and water supplies, bringing the total U.N. humanitarian aid to Venezuela to nearly 200 tons since the start of the coronavirus outbreak.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 2

we must recognize that the economic crisis associated with the coronavirus has hit the economies of the region more deeply. To begin, let us remember that, with the 2009 crisis, around one million Mexicans returned to their country of origin as one of the most affected groups in the United States. This return represented a huge challenge for Mexican authorities, who could hardly cope with the massive arrival of their compatriots. With Covid, we can foresee another exodus from the United States, and the consequent repercussions in Mexico. The effect of the Covid-19 crisis in Mexico is anticipated to be of incalculable proportions, so it is probable that this flow will exceed the economy's capacity to absorb it. However, I foresee that there will also be expelling pressures in Mexico, making it likely that emigration will once again become a topic on the national agenda. In this flow, I especially believe that less-educated Mexicans will be affected because they can hardly adapt to a new reality of advanced technology. Finally, I also think the closure of the borders in the United States and the economic pressures in Central America will drive the arrival of more immigrants to the country, which will exacerbate the challenge that Mexican authorities will face in coping with the flow of return migrants."

A **Anita Isaacs, professor of political science at Haverford College:** "The coronavirus is creating a countervailing set of pressures on migration from Central America. On the one hand, it is likely that the pandemic could induce a lull in migration from Central America. My research with undocumented Central Americans living in the United States and poorer Guatemalans

from sending communities reveals a shifting immigration calculus. Veteran immigrants with savings and few roots here are contemplating returning home, exhausted by living in the shadows, fearful of dying in the United States and increasingly unable to make ends meet. Prospective migrants are putting plans on hold, reluctant to risk everything to

“**The coronavirus is creating a countervailing set of pressures on migration from Central America.**”

— Anita Isaacs

arrive in a United States mired in a prolonged recession. On the other hand, the incentives to migrate are bound to increase. The virus is devastating poorer communities in the region. Lacking basic health care and unable to afford to quarantine, they are also reeling from a steep decline in remittances from belt-tightening migrant relatives and their traditional abandonment by a corrupt and indifferent state. Heightening the prospect of intensified violence, organized crime and gangs will step ever more clearly into the breach, seething popular frustration: anger could bubble over; and political leaders will flex their authoritarian muscles. Barring concerted action to address the economic, social and political impacts of the pandemic, it's just a question of time until the United States faces a new surge in undocumented migration from the region."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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