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## URBAN MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAS: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE AMERICAS PROJECT 2008

### INTRODUCTION

Global, economic, and social adjustments in the Americas are prompting increased migration flows into and out of urban regions. Immigrant families, seeking to establish a more permanent residence in these regions, face the difficult task of mastering the social, educational, and economic realities of their new sites. Cities are faced with the challenge of providing services to the new immigrants.

These trends in urban migration motivated us to reflect on the global environment in the Americas that is currently based on economic competition and remains closed to the notion of universal citizenship. Even though immigrants have different backgrounds and come from different experiences, there is a common need to ensure that their personal, cultural, and productive wealth is capitalized through policies that promote their inclusion, not exclusion. We believe that doing this will create a positive perception of immigrants in many countries of the Americas that now have a problematic view of this population.

Urban migration has led to the generation of a new economic geography of globalization. As the urbanist Saskia Sassen asserts, “The ascendance of information industries and the growth of a global economy, both inextricably linked, have contributed to a new geography of centrality and marginality. This new geography partly reproduces existing inequalities but is also the outcome of a dynamic specific to the current forms of economic growth” (Sassen, 2002). The theoretical analysis of migration suggests different explanations like the ones established by Todaro (1969) and Harris and Todaro (1970) that frame the decision to migrate

within the theory of human capital. It proposes that migration is a function of the income differential between the region of origin and the destination of the migrant, adjusted to the probability of obtaining employment in the final destination. Other authors, like Bentivogli and Pagano (1989), introduce in the analysis of theories regarding the decision to migrate, conditions of uncertainty, specifically the variability of salaries. A higher relative variation in the salary of final destination—compared to the place of origin—will reduce the percentage of populations that wish to migrate. This response will be stronger if the aversion to risk is also higher.

The phenomenon of migration is a global challenge, which provides an opportunity to create and sustain public policies that capitalize on migration flows for optimal urban outcomes. These public policies can exist at a national level (migration law), at a state level (housing programs), or even at the local level (a modification to the transportation system). Thus, the responsibility and political will of national governments to provide adequate attention and satisfaction to the basic needs of its citizens—as well as to new arrivals—is of paramount importance. At the same time, these policies should also provide opportunities that lead to sustainable development and therefore mitigate the constant need to migrate internally and to other countries.

The challenge for the fellows of the 2008 Americas Project “Urban Migration in the Americas: Planning for the Future” was to analyze and debate the impact that this phenomenon is having at the local level—while evaluating the policies that the countries and cities of the Americas have developed in response. This framework was adequate to discuss important and sensitive subjects such as public policy, education,

and affordable housing. This exercise allowed us to learn about others' experiences, to exchange and debate ideas, and to propose recommendations. With this positive starting point, it is now our task to promote and continue to discuss and implement these proposals to find sustainable elements and opportunities for human development—regardless of the country of origin, migration status, or ethnic background. Our discussions were focused on three subthemes: public education and immigrant youth; affordable housing; and sustainability and public policy.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION AND IMMIGRANT YOUTH**

Public education is of critical importance for every country in the Americas. At the core of this issue is a demand to ensure that citizens are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to positively contribute to their country's social stability and progress. Public education also helps sustain a country's economic stability and national security.

Countries in the Americas grapple with very difficult questions surrounding the particulars of how to create and deliver high-quality programs, and to whom to make these programs accessible. Many advocates and public policy leaders identify the strength of public education as the single most important factor in breaking the cycle of poverty in any country. This assertion strikes a particular chord in the Americas, given the high density of low-income populations in many underdeveloped, and even developed, countries. The powerful implications of public education are precisely what have fueled a long-standing and passionate debate around educational policy in almost every country. While most leaders agree on the urgency of educational reform and success, there are wide variations of policies in differing stages of implementation with mixed degrees of success across the Americas.

The migration of families into and out of urban regions has only heightened the complexities of this already delicate arena. Given that urban migration across the Americas shows no sign of slowing down in the near future, we are faced with the challenging opportunity to assess how our countries can help their educational systems adapt to the changing demographic landscape of their communities and

classrooms. Educational policy for the immigrant community is, and will remain, an area of focus for regional governments, including school systems and social services.

### ***Accessibility to the Classroom***

One notable consistency throughout the Americas is the current accessibility of public education for all youth. The degree to which this accessibility is made "explicit" through public policy does vary, however. In some countries, such as Colombia, Jamaica, and Uruguay, there is not a large influx of immigrant youth into public schools; thus, there is no strong demand to develop a national policy regarding the educational rights of immigrants. While there is no explicit policy granting immigrant youth the right to an education, they are not denied this right—they are treated and served as all other children are. In other countries, such as the Dominican Republic and the United States, a larger influx of immigrants has prompted the government to develop public policies that explicitly grant equal education rights to immigrant youth. In the Dominican Republic, this is referred to as Law 66-97. In the United States this was established in the 1982 Supreme Court case, *Plyler vs. Doe*.

Policy aside, all of the countries represented at this year's Americas Project openly provide at least a primary level of public education to immigrant youth, regardless of whether or not they are considered legal citizens. In some countries, however, it becomes increasingly difficult for immigrants to pursue higher levels of education, primarily because of increased registration requirements and costs. In Bolivia, the costs of accessing higher levels of public education are higher for international immigrants. Immigrant youth in the United States have free access to education from kindergarten to grade 12. However, access to higher education involves hefty tuition fees which, given their economic background, many immigrants cannot afford.

This widespread accessibility to public education has presented a sweeping trend where the educational prospects for immigrant youth mirror those for low-income native-born youth in most, if not all, countries of the Americas. That is to say, the challenges that pervade the educational systems in the lowest-income communities are the same

for those with higher percentages of immigrant youth. This is primarily because the large influx of immigrants into a country typically results in a surge in that region's low-income or poverty-stricken socioeconomic group. For example, in countries such as Canada, Costa Rica, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, and the United States, the influx of immigrants from nearby poverty-stricken countries results in an increase of children needing educational services, most of them centered in the poorest neighborhoods. In countries with high rates of migration of indigenous populations from rural areas to large urban metropolises, there is a similar pattern. In Argentina, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Bolivia, and Uruguay, children of indigenous families suddenly fill the classrooms of urban public schools, many of which serve low-income children. In short, in our discussion, we recognized that the status of public education for immigrant youth across the Americas is the same as the status of public education for low-income youth, *regardless* of origin.

### ***Recognizing Different Languages and Dialects, and Classroom Implications***

An especially critical education issue in the Americas is how to educate a society that represents a growing number of native languages and dialects, especially in urban areas. Where there used to be one predominant language (such as English in the United States, Spanish in Argentina, or Dutch in Suriname), there are now increasing populations of children that speak other languages.

The manner in which countries respond to the need for multilingual education varies greatly. In some countries where an alternative language would serve the need of very large groups of immigrants, governments have embraced bilingual education programs. An obvious example is the widespread existence of English-Spanish bilingual programs in the United States. In Argentina, there are educational programs that include Portuguese—a reflection of the relations that exist between cities close to the Brazilian border. Guatemala assigns teachers by region or linguistic community in order to educate students in their mother tongue (Maya, Xinka, Garifuna, and Spanish).

In other countries, immigrants present less of a need for bilingual education, either because they

know enough of the native language to “get by” or because they meet their language needs through private educational systems. In Jamaica, for example, some immigrant children may have difficulty speaking English, but they understand most of it and rely on their listening comprehension skills to learn the language and assimilate as quickly as possible. Immigrant children in Colombia who present a need for bilingual education and can afford it simply attend private schools in order to get the services they need.

### ***Providing a Social Network***

A final aspect we discussed was the degree to which our current education systems provide a social network or support system for immigrants. Again, there was wide variation, though, in most countries, social services are not provided for immigrants through the schools. Instead, they are provided through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and churches. This is the case in countries such as Brazil and Suriname. In other countries, including the Dominican Republic, there is some social service support for immigrants from the private sector, but not from the public education sector. On the other hand, countries such as Canada and the United States have financial and human resources dedicated to providing social support networks for immigrant students. In Canada, some schools have multicultural committees, programs, and celebrations, as well as English-language training for parents and settlement workers in schools to work with students and their families regarding settlement issues. In the United States, some schools offer social support services for refugee students, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for parents, free or reduced meals, health care assistance, and more. Most of these services are available to any qualifying low-income child, regardless of origin. However, immigrant students and families are more likely to tap into them.

A great part of our discussion focused around the natural progression of informal social support networks amongst immigrants in the education system. For example, in the urban regions of Bolivia, such as La Paz, the universities have become social spaces for the expression of rural immigrant youth. In Guatemala, the lack of positive and productive spaces for social development and inclusion for migrant youth has resulted in youth participation in gang-like

groups known as “maras.” These groups initially formed in immigrant urban zones in the United States and then transferred to Guatemala through migration and deportation.

Ultimately, the amount of time it takes immigrant families to assimilate via the education system varies based on how segregated immigrants are in the schools themselves as well as within the community. In the end—structured social support networks or not—countries in the Americas attest that the school system is certainly the public institution through which almost all immigrant youth face the challenge and need of assimilating to their new place of residence, be it a new country or a new urban region. In the Bahamas, for example, second-generation immigrant youth are typically fully integrated into the Bahamian culture through their participation in the public education system. A similar dynamic exists in practically all countries of the Americas.

### **Opportunities**

The current state of public education in the Americas suggests three key opportunities and challenges to be tackled moving forward. The first is the need for a proactive, rather than a reactive, approach to integrating immigrant students into the education system. In this sense, there is a need to engage leaders from a variety of sectors (education, government, business, law, etc.) to establish a clear mission and a long-term vision for how public education systems can position immigrants for success in society.

Questions to consider include:

- Do we want immigrant students to remain in urban regions to strengthen the local economies?
- Do we want to empower immigrant students to return to their native countries or rural regions to strengthen those economies?
- What are our educational goals for immigrant students? Should we prepare them to be able to compete in the “information age” and participate in global trade?

By defining on the front end exactly what we want our educational efforts to result in, we position our countries to make more strategic decisions. The challenge that exists with a proactive approach to public education for immigrants is that it demands

time and accurate data regarding our current state of education for immigrant youth, as well as planning resources—all of which seem to be lacking in most countries of the Americas, or at least are not being utilized effectively. Much of what the countries of the Americas have done, and continue to do, is react to the migration of children into urban schools. Since the demographics of our schools have already changed (and will continue to do so), much of our efforts and resources are concentrated on “dealing” with the problems and issues that have presented themselves, without necessarily addressing longer-term, more proactive goals. Resolving this tension is essential if the public education systems of the Americas are to move forward on this issue.

A second opportunity and challenge is an immense increase in multilingual educational needs across the Americas. Undoubtedly, multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual societies are ones that are rich with diversity and strong in their ability to embrace an ever-increasing global economy. There is an amazing opportunity for the Americas to tackle multilingual education programs, so that immigrant youth are empowered to sustain the richness and utility of their native tongues, yet at the same time adopt and master new languages so that they can assimilate into their new places of residence and beyond. There is a great opportunity here to capitalize on the wide range of languages already present in urban cities across the Americas where, in some cases, hundreds of languages and dialects are spoken. The challenge is figuring out how to make multilingual education operational and effective in public education. Questions regarding timing (how long to educate children in their native tongue and when to transition them to an official state language), funding (literature and resources in multiple languages), and personnel (finding educators who speak the languages) continue to flummox even the leading researchers of education reform. Additionally, the issue of language taps into a very deep and complex debate surrounding nationalism, patriotism, and how promoting languages different from the official one challenges the unity of a country. Indeed, this is a topic that sets off a wide range of opinions from all members of a society. While there is a great opportunity for countries to have productive and honest dialogue to confront this issue, there is also

a great challenge to agree on a set of policies, given how extensive the divergent views are.

Finally, a great opportunity and challenge that exists for public education in the Americas is innovating on traditional approaches to education, and embracing the reality of our changing urban schools. With an increase in ethnic and linguistic diversity in schools, updated and alternative approaches could and should be perceived as “must haves.” This approach requires strategic planning to avoid a “trial-and-error” approach that might fall short of meeting fiscal responsibilities and ensuring outcomes. On another level, there is a risky assumption that all people of our societies share the same values and beliefs regarding education for immigrant youth. In the Americas there are deeply rooted biases regarding the important role that indigenous and all too often uneducated groups play in our society and even our economies. To suggest that our governments go above and beyond to try and break what has been an unspoken cycle of maintaining consistent manual labor forces in our countries opens up a truly complex debate that taps into delicate questions regarding elitism and racism. The fundamental belief that every child should have the right to a quality education, regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnic origin, is something most people in the Americas would agree with in theory, but the extent to which our actions and advocacy follow that belief varies extensively, and raises questions.

In the end, it is important to recognize that urban schools in the Americas have changed, and will continue to do so, given urban migration within and amongst our countries. The extent to which our public education systems create an opportunity for all youth to succeed, regardless of origin, will have grave implications for the long-term stability of our countries. If we don’t contribute the necessary amount of time, highly qualified personnel, and the most advanced resources now to address how we educate and empower immigrant youth at the school level, we will pay for it later—in the form of an uneducated workforce, higher state-sponsored welfare and health care costs, among other problems.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing is one of the most visible challenges in the Americas, made more complex by the mass movement of people to urban centers. The connections between adequate affordable housing, crime, health, education, and economic growth are apparent throughout the region, and it will take innovative solutions to deal with all of these issues together. This section of the report seeks to explore some of the challenges and opportunities regarding affordable housing for the immigrant community in the Americas.

By definition, affordable housing is a term used to describe dwellings whose total cost is deemed affordable to a group of people in a specified income bracket. Although the term is often used as a reference to rental units, the idea has been expanded to include home ownership as well. In the United States and Canada, which have highly developed affordable housing agencies, a commonly accepted guideline to determine affordable housing is that its monthly costs should not exceed 30 to 35 percent of monthly household income. This range is greater in other countries depending on the government’s ability to and interest in offering subsidies.

Our discussion also included a focus on social and public housing strategies as solutions to some of the challenges faced in the region. Social housing is an umbrella term used to describe rental units that might be owned by government agencies, nonprofits, or private entities. Public housing is owned by government and allocated on an income and need basis.

### Challenges

While all the countries in the Americas are unique, affordable housing policy and planning are consistent throughout the region with slight variations on the overriding conditions. One such factor is the link between affordable housing policy and politics. In the Americas, affordable housing—particularly for immigrants to urban areas, referred to as urban migrants—remains a politically charged issue. Another common strain throughout the region is the large deficit in availability of housing in the urban centers.

The absence of affordable housing creates slums in and around most cities, resulting in poverty belts, which have the potential of becoming a breeding ground for crime, vagrancy, and other social ills.

In many cases, urban migrants are moving to large cities in search of jobs and opportunity. The transition is difficult for multiple reasons. In rural areas, land is readily available and extended family often forms a key support structure. Particularly in countries like Jamaica, Brazil, and the Bahamas, people are accustomed to building their own dwellings. By contrast, in larger cities, land is not readily available and housing is rarely conveniently located near jobs. Also, the support structure of the extended family is absent. This does not make it as easy in the urban area to build a home, or have the safety net of living with family members in a comfortable environment.

The reality that many urban migrants are undocumented and documentation of legal status is required for housing access is another challenge. In several urban centers, these undocumented workers make up substantial parts of the workforce, but without a formal way to access housing, they squat or illegally settle on land in the city, preferably close to employment sources. For example, while the government of Brazil is building 5,000 new houses a year, the demand is over 100,000 units annually just in the city of São Paulo. This demand puts tremendous pressure on outlying areas of the city and on the environment, as immigrants tend to settle in land that is undeveloped, unstable, or environmentally protected. In most cases this is also the least desirable land. In other countries, like Jamaica, Honduras, and Guatemala, this is becoming an increasingly important issue—so much so that Jamaica, leading the way, has established an office to help deal with the issues associated with illegal land settlements, squatters' rights, and rampant land speculation.

Housing is also a political issue in the region. Many politicians use the urban migrants to help shift the political base of constituencies. Urban migrants tend to be at or near the poverty line and face similar challenges so they can serve as a fairly solid voting block. Politicians leverage this reality, encouraging migrants to settle in places that have the potential to alter the voting demographics in cities.

The reverse of this is also true. Affordable housing can change the cultural and socioeconomic makeup of cities and neighborhoods, sometime eliciting xenophobic reactions from locals and traditionalists. Balancing what is best for a city and what is politically acceptable to the traditional power structure continues to be a challenge in the region.

The region also has to deal with the lack of understanding of the procedures and costs associated with providing housing. Many citizens, particularly the urban poor, do not fully understand what it takes to develop land for housing. Access to and availability of suitable land, located near urban centers or close to public transit, reinforces the cost issue. As a result, housing is unaffordable for many immigrants without government intervention. In the Dominican Republic, as in most countries in the region, the monthly payments for a standard single family house, without subsidies, would be 10 times the average household income of the intended occupants, instead of the targeted range of 30 to 35 percent of the monthly household income.

Financing and adequate lending policies continue to be a major challenge in the region. Investments in Latin America and the Caribbean tend to be riskier than those in North America. Factors include the status of legislative rights for the private sector, the maturity of banking and lending laws policy, and the stability of governments. As a result, the cost of borrowing money is prohibitive for most private ventures—effectively reducing the number of private companies producing affordable housing without large government subsidies.

Instead, most urban migrants rely on relatives living abroad for resources to build homes. Much of Guatemala's housing is produced thanks to the remittances sent by family members living in the United States or Europe, which account for 40 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Additionally, with interest rates ranging between 10 and 30 percent in Guatemala, it is almost impossible for most urban migrants to afford to finance their homes on their own.

### ***Opportunities***

Although the challenges of affordable housing in the region are great, so are the opportunities. First, we can more fully educate urban migrants and the

community at large about the benefits of sustainable housing policy. The appropriate housing policy can alleviate and minimize the poverty belts and squalor that surround most of our urban centers and contribute to crime, drug abuse, prostitution, and many more social ills.

Furthermore, the intended residents of any government-provided or subsidized housing must also be educated on the responsibility that comes along with ownership and use. The government is not, and cannot be, held accountable for all the basic functions of owning and occupying a home. Future residents must understand that the taxes they pay are not arbitrary, but part of the expense of home ownership. A cultural shift around mortgages, taxation, and supporting services must happen to have truly functioning and sustainable affordable housing in this region.

In our region there is also a great opportunity to completely reshape the participation of the private sector in the production of affordable housing. In many developed nations, governments recognize that they are not the most efficient builders, owners or operators of social housing, and they do not and cannot be in this business long term. The solution has been to promote smart, sustainable, public-private joint ventures that delegate the building, ownership, and operation of affordable housing without abdicating responsibility. In this venture, the government offers various incentives to encourage the private sector to get involved. This model is prevalent in the United States and Canada. In Mexico, the federal government has undertaken a similar initiative regarding health care, and has also formed joint partnerships with the chambers of commerce and construction to help with housing. The chambers partner with the government to provide housing, and they also hold and administer the mortgages. Throughout the Americas, there is a tremendous opportunity to accomplish similar partnerships and incentives so the government is invested, but not the only institution responsible for providing housing. This kind of partnership can be effective and critical to the future success of affordable housing in the region.

Effective housing policy must also include local government. Too often it is only the national or federal government involved in policymaking. Local

governments, because of their proximity to the intended recipients of these types of programs, are more prepared to deal with the allocation of housing and the appropriateness of solutions to housing challenges. Furthermore, governments need to consider the appropriate financial infrastructure to encourage private sector involvement in affordable housing, ensuring that it makes good business sense to invest in this type of housing.

The integration of migrants into the culture and community will be a long-term factor influencing the success and the viability of our cities, countries, and region at large. We must also recognize the deep connection between social, migration, and housing issues, and understand that solving these challenges will take a fully integrated approach in all areas. These problems cannot be solved in a vacuum; it will take a collaborative approach across various sections of multiple governments.

## **SUSTAINABILITY AND PUBLIC POLICY**

The goal of public policy should seek to mitigate the negative effects of migration for countries on both the receiving as well as the sending end. Any strategy must consider the challenge of constructing diverse multicultural societies, which are the basis of competitive cities, and contemplate the design of social policies that integrate migration into the education, housing, health, employment, and public services agendas.

Public policy must also seek to address the causes that lead to migration. Due to economic factors, economies that rely on their natural resources need a sustainable development model in order to retain their population. Strengthening agricultural investment, improving education, and fostering a better administration of economic resources may provide incentives for people to remain in their places of origin. This may reduce the loss of human capital (“brain drain”) and avoid urban sprawl in the great cities.

### ***Strengthening Local Government***

Although strengthening local governments is key, a debate at the national level is important to establish the general objectives of migration policy—to define whether the country wishes to be more open and

more of a global community, or to accentuate the aspects of national identity.

In Mexico, for example, the concentration of power is in the cities. Therefore, people in the rural areas gravitate toward them, particularly to Mexico City. This demographic shift has been so significant it has allowed the political party that controls the capital to consolidate the country's power. This population density has also led to deterioration in the quality of life, prompting many to live in the surrounding cities and towns, such as Puebla, and commute to work in Mexico City—creating, among other things, a challenge for transportation infrastructure.

The city of Buenos Aires, as well as the larger metropolitan area of Argentina, has pockets of poverty caused mainly by immigrants (local and international) that cannot integrate fully into the urban area. Security services and police services have a tough time reaching these areas, which are mostly illegal settlements. Local administration, state, and federal governments are not coordinated and therefore lack the ability to engage with these areas and produce synchronized policies.

Similar to Buenos Aires, the majority of São Paulo's immigrants come from rural areas, in particular from the northern part of the country. Close to 100,000 people live in illegal settlements in outlying areas of the city, surrounding the spring areas around the river. The settlements pressure this natural resource, contaminating it at its source, resulting in a negative environmental impact for the entire city. However, many politicians support this illegal situation in order to garner power and electoral backing. Providing access to financial services, employment, housing, education, and health is an important challenge, together with economic development. Similar to the situation in Mexico City, another problem is related to the long distances that people must commute in order to work in São Paulo, which lacks an effective public transportation system.

### ***Receiving Countries and Cities***

The countries primarily receiving the migration flows are Canada and the United States. While the United States receives people from all over the world, most of the immigrants are from Latin America. Some cities, including Houston, are now multiethnic with

school districts in which students speak up to 40 different languages.

Other countries in the Americas experience rural-to-urban migration flows—movement that is a result of economic, social, or environmental impacts. Some serve as “transit countries,” in which people move through their territory to reach a final destination like the United States or Canada. In the past, Latin America was a final destination, but in recent decades, it has shifted to a sending region, both to North America and to Europe. Additionally, it is now experiencing significant internal migration, from the countryside to the cities and towns.

For example, in Colombia the international immigrant population is less than 0.4 percent of the total population; however, since 1950, there has been a significant movement of people from rural areas to the cities, especially to the four cities that concentrate most of the economic power: Cali, Bogotá, Medellín, and Barranquilla. Most of these urban migrants are young people. Those that migrate to Bogotá, a city that is becoming very urbanized, tend to settle there and do not return to their place of origin. Colombia also suffers from forced migration, where people have to move because of violence and internal conflicts. This situation has generated unexpected movements to the cities, where the local governments are strained to offer public services and educational services.

In Bolivia, rural migration has had critical effects on the power structure and on the choice of leadership. The internal and rural migrants have created their own city, El Alto, with its own laws and processes. In Honduras, migration to the capital city of Tegucigalpa has resulted in housing shortages and a strain on education resources. In some cases, rural families send one person to the city to earn money; in other cases, rural families choose to sell everything they own and move to the city where their money quickly runs out.

The situation in Guatemala reflects 30 years of armed conflict, generating forced migration due to violence. In Guatemala, 60 percent of the population is of indigenous descent, and have few employment opportunities in their places of origin. The United States houses 10 percent of the country's population, and remittances from those immigrants are Guatemala's biggest source of income. Within Guatemala, most immigrants are drawn to the capital,

which they consider the best place to live and access education and job opportunities. Additionally, Guatemala serves as one of the last frontiers for immigrants in transit to the United States through Mexico.

### ***International Understanding and Cooperation***

Migration must be considered as an opportunity to create plural societies. This requires the creation and implementation of suitable institutions and policies and, in this sense, there is still a significant deficit. Greater international cooperation and agreements are required for better understanding and management of the situation. Ignoring these needs only contributes to the creation of dual societies.

Countries in the Americas must establish cooperative systems to integrate their treatment of the migrant and immigrant population with policies that include a pathway to legal residential status within their countries. Without this alignment and cooperation between public policies and clear processes for securing legal residential status, there exists the potential for confusing ironies and double standards to exist between “competing” policies or laws, which would—in the end—limit immigrants’ rights.

### ***Sustainability of Public Policies***

Migration policy is critical to development policy and thus must be considered a top priority in countries’ national agendas. These policies must be designed taking into account views from civil society, the media, and the private sector. They need to be flexible in order to accommodate future changes without compromising opportunities and equality. Furthermore, these policies need to be based on a system of qualitative and quantitative indicators—allowing for the analysis of their impact after implementation.

The sustainability of the processes that mitigate the negative effects of migration can be obtained not only through focused programs, but also through the inclusion of the issue in diverse public policy agendas (education, housing, services). The design and implementation of public policies must therefore be directed toward an integration process. For example, a new housing policy should contemplate undocumented people. In this sense, governments

must consider the human rights dimension in their internal and international migration policies.

### **CONCLUSION**

The migratory phenomenon in the Americas is precisely one of the modern characteristics that make this world region unique in its mobility and circulation of people. This phenomenon generates incredibly complex challenges, but it also provides a great amount of opportunities, not only to those migrating, but also to those who live in regions that intercept the influx of new residents. The mitigation of the challenges could generate an increase of the positive effects of urban migration in the Americas.

For this to happen, constant monitoring and collection of accurate information of the number, origin, composition, and characteristics of the migratory populations of each country is essential. For most countries in the Americas, managing such data is a great challenge, but some attempts to collect such information are underway. In 2001, Argentina made its Complementary Survey of International Migrations (ECMI) part of the National Census of Population, Homes, and Houses. This information will be useful in designing public policies that take into account migratory variables.

Designing educational systems that lead to tight social cohesion benefits migratory populations as well as the native and general population of countries.

Finally, there must also be a presence of international cooperation, one in which multiple countries anticipate and coordinate the mechanisms to address migration across borders and to inform on the conditions and availability of public education, affordable housing, and employment conditions. Too often, immigrants make their moving decisions based on information from relatives or friends. Yet, this information can be incredibly subjective to the experience of those relatives or friends, and may not reflect the accurate realities of both promises and challenges that exist for new immigrants to a given country or urban region.

The 2008 Americas Project fellows fostered the discussion and integration of multiple perspectives from all of our countries regarding the topics mentioned in the report. While consensus among the participants was not an objective of the discussion

process, a shared vision about how to capitalize on the opportunities of urban migration in the Americas and tackle the challenges inherent in this phenomenon has been the result.

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