

Necessary Elements for Just Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Element 5: Addressing Root Causes of Migration

Background: In examining the causes of immigrants' migration to the United States, it is important to understand the variety of "push" and "pull" factors which drive the global migration process. "Pull" factors¹, or factors that attract migrants to come to the United States, such as superior economic/employment opportunity in the United States versus a migrant's home or sending country and the hopes of family reunification with a family member currently residing in the United States are well documented and publicized factors. However, "push" factors², or root causes related to why migrants are sometimes compelled to leave their home countries seldom receive as much attention. There are many reasons why individuals are forced to migrate from their home country to the United States. Such reasons may include poverty, armed conflict, social strife, political turmoil, environmental degradation, and a lack of development in their home country. These factors are important policy and context elements that should be discussed when addressing any meaningful effort at comprehensive immigration reform.

Position of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: The USCCB feels it is important to examine the root causes of migration within home countries and seek to implement long-term solutions to these problems both in the sending/home country and in the United States. *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, the bishops' January 2003 pastoral statement provides a goal of migration flows driven not by necessity but by choice. The bishops believe that part of this goal can be attained by examining at length the root causes of migration and working to eliminate the unequal conditions existing in sending countries. On January 28, 2013, Archbishop Gomez, of Los Angeles, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, issued a statement welcoming the Bipartisan Senate Immigration Framework but specifically noted the Framework's need to include policies which address the root causes or push factors of irregular migration, such as the absence of living wage jobs in sending countries as well as persecution. As unequal social and economic conditions in sending countries are a contributing factor to irregular migration to the United States today, the USCCB supports a meaningful discussion of the root causes of migration into any comprehensive immigration reform debate.

¹ Key Migration Terms, IOM, available at <http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/about-migration/key-migration-terms-1.html#Push-pull-factors>

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