



No One Should Be Forced from Home

Corporate Trade Deals, Climate Change, and Mass Deportation

In the debate over immigration, one critical question is often missing: Why? Why do people decide to leave their family, friends, and community; embark on a long and life-threatening journey; and start over in a country that may treat them as second-class citizens?

Among the many answers is one underreported fact: U.S. trade deals have contributed to the economic instability that has forced so many immigrants to leave home. Corporate deals like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) have eliminated jobs, exacerbated climate change, and destabilized communities in the U.S., Mexico, and Central America. These impacts, along with other root causes, have fed increasing insecurity, displacement, and violence, forcing many to leave their homes, communities, and families. We need a new trade approach that allows immigration to be a true, free choice.

*you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.*

–Warsan Shire, “[Home](#)”

After resettling in the U.S., many immigrants must live with the daily risk of their lives being torn apart once again, this time by a knock on the door from immigration agents seeking to deport them. Indeed, mass deportation currently threatens to tear apart millions of families across the U.S. Meanwhile, many immigrants also must endure the risks and harms that come with living in pollution hotspots, such as dangerous levels of air and water pollution.

No one should be forced to leave home and family, whether by an unfair trade deal, climate change, or deportation.

We need a fundamentally new approach to trade – one that supports workers, healthy communities, and climate justice *in all countries*. To achieve this vision of trade justice built on solidarity, we must reject the xenophobic approach of Donald Trump, which is rooted in border walls, attacks on immigrants, and climate change denial.

Forced from Home by Corporate Trade Deals

NAFTA: Flood of Corn, Wave of Forced Migration

NAFTA – the 1994 trade deal between Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. – was written for one primary purpose: to boost the profits of multinational corporations. NAFTA rules allowed large agribusinesses to consolidate power across all three countries, often at the expense of family farmers.¹ Indeed, NAFTA forced millions of low-income family farmers in Mexico to compete directly with highly subsidized, high-tech U.S. agribusiness giants. The deal, for example, enabled U.S. agribusinesses to effectively “dump” corn, a staple crop, on the Mexican market. In just the first five years of NAFTA, U.S. exports to Mexico of cheap corn doubled.²

The impact on Mexico’s family farmers was devastating. The NAFTA-enabled flood of cheap corn into Mexico contributed to a 66 percent drop in the price that Mexico’s corn farmers received,³ helping to drive one million farmers out of corn production.⁴ Poverty deepened for millions of people across Mexico’s countryside. In NAFTA’s first three years, extreme poverty spread to more than half of the rural population.⁵

¹ Karen Hansen-Kuhn, “[NAFTA and US Farmers – 20 Years Later](#),” Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Nov. 22, 2013.

² Comparison between average volume of U.S. exports to Mexico of HS 1005 (corn) in the five years before and after NAFTA took effect. [Global Agricultural Trade System](#), Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, retrieved Feb. 9, 2017.

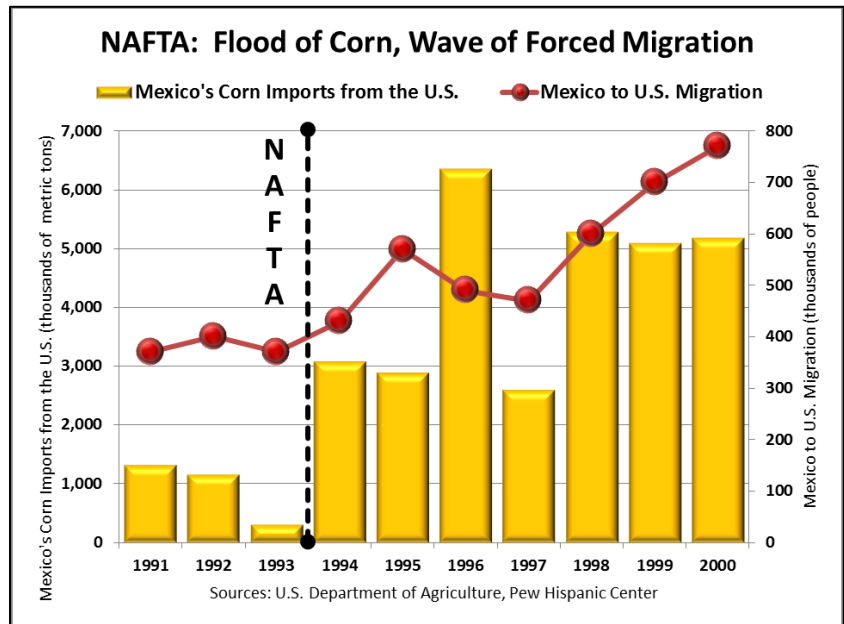
³ Timothy Wise, “[Agricultural Dumping Under NAFTA](#),” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2010, p. 3.

⁴ Carlos Salas, et al., “[Revisiting NAFTA](#),” Economic Policy Institute, Briefing Paper #173, Sept. 28, 2006, p. 43.

⁵ “[Poverty in Mexico](#),” The World Bank, Report No. 28612-ME, June 2004, p. 57.

Meanwhile, the NAFTA trade model also failed Mexico's manufacturing workers, just as it had failed their counterparts in the U.S. The trade deal made it easier for U.S. corporations to move factories to Mexico, spelling major job losses from Michigan to North Carolina.⁶ But those jobs didn't stay in Mexico. The corporate trade model gives corporations – but not humans – the freedom to cross borders, allowing them to continually move from country to country in search of the lowest wages and weakest labor and environmental standards.

This “race to the bottom” erodes job security and undercuts environmental protections everywhere, from Michigan to Mexico. Indeed, factories and jobs in Mexico started leaving in earnest in 2001, when China, which had lower wages than Mexico,⁷ joined the World Trade Organization.⁸ The factories that stayed were able to use threats of offshoring to keep wages down, just as they do in the U.S.



While wages in Mexico have barely budged since NAFTA took effect, the cost of living has soared.⁹ The cost of tortillas, for example, more than tripled in NAFTA's first decade,¹⁰ in part because NAFTA helped a few large agribusiness corporations solidify control of the tortilla market.¹¹ In NAFTA's first 10 years, the number of basic goods that could be bought on Mexico's minimum wage fell by a third.¹²

Whether they lost their farm, job, or ability to make ends meet, many people in Mexico had to confront a difficult reality: Staying at home was no longer a viable option. Millions headed north. In NAFTA's first seven years, immigration from Mexico to the U.S. more than doubled.¹³

CAFTA: Fanning the Flames of Violence

In recent years, tens of thousands of people from Central America, many of them children, have been making the dangerous trek to the U.S.¹⁴ Most are fleeing a surge in lethal violence in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that CAFTA, passed by the U.S. Congress in 2005, has done more to inflame than to reduce the violence.

The corporate trade model gives corporations – but not humans – the freedom to cross borders.

⁶ Robert E. Scott, “[Heading South](#),” Economic Policy Institute, Briefing Paper #308, May 3, 2011.

⁷ “[Statutory Nominal Gross Monthly Minimum Wage Effective December 31st \(Local Currency\)](#),” International Labour Organization, accessed Feb. 15, 2017.

⁸ Carlos Salas, et al., “[Revisiting NAFTA](#),” Economic Policy Institute, Briefing Paper #173, Sept. 28, 2006, p. 40.

⁹ Gordon H. Hanson, “[What Has Happened to Wages in Mexico since NAFTA? Implications for Hemispheric Free Trade](#),” National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 9563, March 2003, p. 38.

¹⁰ Gisele Henriques and Raj Patel, “[NAFTA, Corn, and Mexico's Agricultural Trade Liberalization](#),” Interhemispheric Resource Center, Feb. 13, 2004, p. 6.

¹¹ William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 88-89.

¹² “[Cuadro Histórico de los Salarios Mínimos \(1982 - 2017\)](#),” Servicio de Administración Tributaria, accessed Feb. 10, 2017. “[Canasta Básica Mexicana 2017](#),” Financial Red, accessed Feb. 10, 2017.

¹³ Jeffrey Passel, D’Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, “[Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero – and Perhaps Less](#),” Pew Hispanic Center, April 23, 2012, p. 45.

¹⁴ Kirk Semple, “[Fleeing Gangs, Central American Families Surge toward U.S.](#),” *The New York Times*, Nov. 12, 2016.

¹⁵ Jonathan T. Hiskey, et al., “[Understanding the Central American Refugee Crisis](#),” American Immigration Council, Feb. 2016.

In CAFTA's first decade, family farmers in these three countries endured a near doubling of agricultural imports from the U.S., much as happened in Mexico under NAFTA.¹⁹ In all three countries, rural poverty has persisted or increased since CAFTA took effect.²⁰

Meanwhile, workers in the region's apparel factories have lost jobs as corporations, enabled by the global march of "free trade," have decided to offshore production and jobs to lower-wage countries. Contrary to the predictions of CAFTA advocates that the region's sweatshop production would grow, apparel exports to the U.S. from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala *dropped* 23 percent in CAFTA's first year, and are even lower today.²¹ Such loss of jobs and livelihoods under CAFTA has fed economic instability in the region, contributing to the desperation and violence that is driving so many people to leave their homes.

Forced Migration Is an Environmental Injustice

Forced migration not only has torn apart families and divided communities – for millions of immigrants, it also has meant greater exposure to pollution and toxins, resulting in increased sickness. Among immigrants driven to the U.S. by economic instability, many find themselves living in areas with high vehicle exhaust or lead exposure, and working in jobs with environmental risks such as construction dust and pesticides.¹⁶ One recent study finds that low-income, non-English-speaking Latino immigrants are more likely than any other demographic group in U.S. cities to live with high levels of cancer-causing air pollution.¹⁷ Compounding this high exposure to toxins, immigrants in the U.S. face disproportionately low rates of health insurance,¹⁸ due in part to policies that intentionally exclude them. By pushing people to cross borders and endure such environmental threats in effort to make ends meet, corporate trade deals not only undermine community cohesion, but also environmental justice.

Forced from Home by Climate Change

Climate change is emerging as another factor that is pushing people to migrate. Evidence suggests that droughts – which are becoming more frequent with climate change – may have played a role, alongside NAFTA, in pushing Mexico's family farmers to migrate north during the 1990s. One study finds that states in Mexico that endured drought-related declines in corn harvests tended to see more migration to the U.S. than other states.²² A multi-year drought, likely exacerbated by climate change,²³ also has contributed to the recent wave of immigration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.²⁴ The drought has devastated harvests in the region, causing more than 3 million people to need humanitarian aid.²⁵ In a United Nations survey of the three countries, families repeatedly cited the drought as a reason that their family members had decided to leave home and migrate north.²⁶

While climate change is contributing to forced migration, corporate trade deals like NAFTA and CAFTA are contributing to climate change. Such deals have empowered corporations to attack climate protections in private tribunals, while encouraging increased dependency on climate-polluting industrial agriculture and fossil fuels.²⁷ The struggles to transform trade, tackle climate change, and achieve justice for immigrant workers cannot be separated.

¹⁶ Pracha P. Eamranond and Howard Hu, "[Environmental and Occupational Exposures in Immigrant Health](#)," *Environmental Health Insights*, 2008.

¹⁷ Raoul S. Liévanos, "[Race, Deprivation, and Immigrant Isolation](#)," *Social Science Research*, June 24, 2015, p. 64.

¹⁸ "[Health Insurance Coverage Status and Type by Citizenship Status](#)," 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau, retrieved Feb. 14, 2017.

¹⁹ Comparison between the inflation-adjusted value of U.S. total agricultural exports to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in 2015 and 2005. [Global Agricultural Trade System](#), Foreign Agricultural Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, retrieved Feb. 10, 2017.

²⁰ "[World Development Indicators](#)," The World Bank, retrieved Feb. 15, 2017.

²¹ Data reflect U.S. apparel imports for consumption (HS 62). "[Interactive Tariff and Trade Dataweb](#)," U.S. International Trade Commission, retrieved Feb. 14, 2017.

²² Shuaizhang Feng, Alan B. Krueger, and Michael Oppenheimer, "[Linkages among Climate Change, Crop Yields and Mexico-US Cross-Border Migration](#)," *PNAS*, 107:32, Aug. 10, 2010.

²³ "[To Reduce El Niño's Impact on Central America's Dry Corridor, Build Resilience and Invest in Sustainable Agriculture](#)," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, June 30, 2016.

²⁴ Gabriel Stargardt, "[Mexico Braces for Fresh Flood of Central American Asylum Seekers](#)," *Reuters*, Dec. 15, 2016.

²⁵ "[Dry Corridor](#)," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, June 2016.

²⁶ "[Hunger without Borders](#)," United Nations World Food Programme and International Organization for Migration, Sept. 2015, p. 24.

²⁷ For more information on NAFTA's climate and environmental impacts, see Quentin Karpilow, et al.; "[NAFTA: 20 Years of Costs to Communities and the Environment](#)," The Sierra Club, The Council of Canadians, Red Mexicana de Acción frente al Libre Comercio, Institute for Policy Studies, and Sierra Club Canada; March 2014.

Forced from Home by Deportation

In 1996, 14-year-old Guadalupe García de Rayos left the poor, rural town of Acámbaro,²⁸ Mexico with her family, crossed the U.S. border, and tried to make a new life in Phoenix, Arizona. Over the next two decades, she went to school, worked, married, raised two children, and deepened ties to her community. About two weeks after Donald Trump's inauguration, Guadalupe went to a routine check-in with federal immigration agents. The agents promptly deported her back to Mexico.²⁹ Within hours, Guadalupe was forced to leave the place she had called home for 21 years, suddenly separated from her family. Her 14-year-old daughter, the same age Guadalupe was when she left Mexico for the U.S., said, "We don't deserve to go through this. No family deserves to go through this."³⁰

Millions of undocumented immigrants like Guadalupe, having already been uprooted once, now live with the daily threat of being forced from their homes once more, this time by deportation. The Obama administration deported more than 2.5 million immigrants,³¹ and now the Trump administration is threatening to deport millions more to fulfill xenophobic campaign promises. In his first week, Trump signed an executive order giving federal agents wide discretion to use racial and ethnic profiling to round up people for deportation.³²

*We urgently need new approaches
to immigration and trade
that keep communities and families intact,
that support rather than destroy livelihoods,
and that allow people to stay, if they wish,
in whatever place they call home.*

Time to Transform Trade and Immigration

Mass deportation is separating parents from children, upending livelihoods, and destabilizing our communities with fear, loss, and isolation. Unfortunately, corporate trade deals have had the same effects on millions.

We urgently need new approaches to immigration and trade that keep communities and families intact, that support rather than destroy livelihoods, and that allow people to stay, if they wish, in whatever place they call home.

To stop tearing apart families and communities across the U.S., we urgently need a moratorium on deportations. Undocumented immigrants deserve a path to citizenship that allows them to come out of the shadows, gain the protection of labor and environmental standards, and be recognized as equals.

Meanwhile, to stop fueling the instability that forces people from home, we urgently need to transform trade. That means replacing trade rules that enable agricultural displacement with ones that support local family farmers.³³ It means stopping the corporate race to the bottom in wages, working conditions, and environmental protection by including strong and enforceable labor and environmental standards in our trade agreements.³⁴ It means tackling climate change rather than exacerbating it, by restricting fossil fuels trade, requiring the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies, and removing trade rules that allow corporations to attack our climate protections in private tribunals.³⁵

We now have a unique opportunity to push for such a trade transformation. A broad, cross-border movement of millions of people soundly defeated the latest effort to expand the NAFTA model – a deal called the Trans-Pacific Partnership that is now defunct. With the corporate trade model in retreat, we cannot let Trump fill the void with a xenophobic trade model. This is our moment to expand our intersectional movement and push for a new vision of trade that prioritizes people – regardless of where they live – and our shared planet, over corporate profits. Join us.

²⁸ ["Informe Anual Sobre la Situación de Pobreza y Rezago Social: Acámbaro, Guanajuato,"](#) Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, Government of Mexico, accessed Feb. 14, 2017.

²⁹ Fernanda Santos, ["She Showed Up Yearly to Meet Immigration Agents. Now They've Deported Her,"](#) *The New York Times*, Feb. 8, 2017.

³⁰ Steve Almasy, Emanuella Grinberg, and Ray Sanchez, ["I Did It for Love,' Says Mother Deported in Arizona Immigration Case,"](#) *CNN*, Feb. 10, 2017.

³¹ Serena Marshall, ["Obama Has Deported More People than Any Other President,"](#) *ABC News*, Aug. 29, 2016.

³² [Executive Order: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States,](#) The White House, Jan. 25, 2017.

³³ See proposals by U.S. family farmer groups: ["Principles of a New U.S. Trade Policy for North American Agriculture,"](#) Jan. 27, 2017.

³⁴ See proposals by U.S. environmental groups: ["Replacing NAFTA: Eight Essential Changes to an Environmentally Destructive Deal,"](#) April 2017; and by the AFL-CIO: ["AFL-CIO Releases Blueprint on Rewriting NAFTA to Benefit Working People,"](#) Dec. 20, 2016.

³⁵ See proposals by the Sierra Club: ["Discussion Paper: A New, Climate-Friendly Approach to Trade,"](#) Nov. 2016.