



NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF LATIN AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES
ALIANZA NACIONAL DE COMUNIDADES LATINO AMERICANAS Y CARIBEÑAS

A Transnational Vision, Rooted in Latin American and Caribbean Migrant Communities
Una visión transnacional, con raíces en la comunidad migrante latinoamericana y caribeña

NALACC Position on the Rights of Immigrants and the Need for a Brand New Immigration Policy.

The National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities, NALACC, reiterates its position on the obsolete and inefficient immigration policies currently in force.

PRINCIPLES:

1. Immigrants of today represent an invaluable asset for the wellbeing and progress of the United States of America. They are also the most generous contributors to the alleviation of poverty in their countries of origin. The public policies about immigrants and immigration have to reflect the highly positive value of immigrants to the United States of America, as well as to their home countries.
2. The presence of about 12 million immigrants in the U.S., who are not legal permanent residents or naturalized U.S. citizens, represents most of all a failure by our federal policy makers to keep our immigration law in sync with today's global labor market dynamics and with the nation's demographic dynamics.
3. Migration in today's world is driven by powerful push and pull factors, as well as by the very nature of the global system of interdependence that links the nations of the world, particularly within the Western Hemisphere. Therefore, to develop effective policies to humanely and wisely manage migration, it is imperative to understand migration as a public policy challenge that requires measures in the countries of destination of migration, as well as in the countries of origin and transit.
4. Contrary to flows of financial capital and goods, the social subjects behind migration are human beings. Therefore, the search for solutions to human migration in today's global reality must begin and end with recognition that we are not dealing with commodities but with human beings with inalienable social, economic, political and cultural rights.
5. Racism and xenophobia have become the dominant lenses through which the national debate about immigrants and immigration policy has taken place thus far. As a nation we must reject these and other forms of prejudice if we are to find the best policy solutions.
6. The social and economic insecurity that wide segments of our society have been experiencing over the past two decades, reaching a crisis level over the past year, has nothing to do with immigrants or immigration policy. Instead this insecurity results from the economic doctrine and policies that have been put into effect at home and abroad over the last three decades. The vast majority of people in our society, citizens and immigrants alike, have been the victims of these policies. Instead of making immigrants the scapegoats for this crisis, we all must work together to come up with lasting solutions beneficial to everyone.

OUR PROPOSALS

There is almost universal agreement that our current immigration law is broken and obsolete. We would add it is also profoundly inhumane and outright unfair. The enactment in 1996 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) largely institutionalized a punitive regime based on the notion that today's immigrants are a threat to the nation. While a truly rational immigration policy framework would require reversing entirely or profoundly reforming such a framework, it is possible to begin to take a series of steps in this direction.

The newly incoming Obama Administration can take important administrative step (see enclosed list of these measures) intended to immediately ameliorate the disproportional hardship to which immigrant communities have been subjected to as a result of a misguided and mean-spirited law enforcement logic used over the past few years to punish immigrant communities, particularly those from Mexico, Central American and Caribbean countries and the rest of Latin America. Top in our list of administrative steps that should be taken immediately are the halting of all residential and workplace immigration related raids, as well as the postponement in the sending of all new "No Match Letters."

Besides administrative measures, a truly new immigration policy reform intended to equip our nation with a 21st century, just and functional, immigration law; should include the following measures:

1. Fast-Track to Permanent Residency Every Relative of a U.S. Citizen or a Legal Permanent Resident Who Has Been Waiting More Than a Year for Resolution of His or Her Application. In the future, a maximum six-month limit should be mandatory for all immigration benefits applications. Family unity should remain a central consideration in our overall immigration policy. We must correct, once and for all, the long, painful waiting periods that break up immigrant families.
2. Grant People Residing in the U.S. Without Proper Authorization the Opportunity to Become Legal Permanent Residents and Open the Pathway to Pursue Future U.S. Citizenship. The incoming President should work with Congress to grant people who are residing in the U.S. without the proper authorization, the opportunity to become legal permanent residents. As a matter of general rule, foreign born persons have the option to apply for U.S. citizenship after five years in the country as a legal permanent resident.
3. Create a National Immigrant Integration Program. Since its founding in 2004, NALACC has repeatedly called for a national immigrant integration program to be created with the purpose of supporting immigrants and local communities to fully integrate newcomers harmoniously into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of our nation. Such a program should go far beyond the current assimilationist rhetoric that emphasizes, almost exclusively, English-language learning. To be truly successful, an integration program should include efforts to stimulate local dialogue and cultural exchange, civic participation programs, youth programs—including efforts to increase educational success—and workforce development programs that would benefit both immigrants and U.S.-born workers.
4. To Undo the Border Walls at the U.S. Southern Border; Restore Civil Rights within Border Communities, and End Military-style Southern Border Control Operations. The emphasis on militaristic solutions to border control strategies have led to an increasing number of deaths along the U.S. border over the past 20 years. Another casualty resulting from this emphasis has been a constant erosion of the civil rights of communities located in border regions. Legitimate concerns with border control should not come at the expense of human and civil rights of residents of border communities. The best way to reduce illegal border crossing over time is to ensure the enactment of a realistic, humane and forward looking U.S. immigration policy, and to work with Mexico and Central America to enact policies that offer meaningful economic opportunity in migrant-sending countries.

5. Consider the Creation of a Foreign Worker Program to Match Available Workers Outside the U.S., with U.S. Labor Market Needs as Appropriate. A temporary work program for foreign workers should not be the keystone of immigration reform. However, if after enacting the above reforms, the economy continues to need workers, a foreign worker program should be created, intended to match available workers outside the U.S., with the needs of the U.S. labor market. Such a program should enable foreign workers to come in with equal labor rights to those of U.S. citizens and residents. If within a reasonable period of time, a worker has maintained good standing under this program and wishes to remain in the United States, there should be a pathway for pursuing legal permanent residency and citizenship. Given the horrible abuses of temporary workers by private recruiters over the years, the practice of outsourcing temporary worker recruitment should cease. Any temporary worker program should be administered directly by the sending and receiving countries' governments.
6. Humanitarian protection programs for refugees and asylum seekers should be strengthened in line with the highest international standards. Unfortunately, the number of refugees admitted since 2001, as well as the number of asylum applicants that have received a positive response; have both been reduced significantly compared to pre 2001 levels. The U.S. must reclaim its role as a beacon of hope and protection for everyone who seek refuge or political asylum in the U.S.

While outside from the traditional boundaries of immigration policy reform, we believe it is imperative to take a series of bold measures in the area of U.S. foreign policy, particularly international economic policy; if our national efforts on reforming our immigration systems and policy are to produce lasting solutions. Minimally, we consider the following two measures as essential to the success in the area of U.S. immigration policy:

Substantially Elevate the Social and Economic Standards of Living in Migrant-Sending Countries. In order to address the root causes of migration, we must engage in a thorough revamping of our economic and development policies with the urgent goal of substantially elevating social and economic standards of living in migrant-sending countries. Economic policies in place since at least the mid-1980s have proven to be a dismal failure in achieving these goals. Unless we significantly reduce the current asymmetries between the U.S. and its neighbors in the South, not even the most generous immigration policy will provide lasting solutions.

Modify the Trade and Development Policies the U.S. Has Pursued in Latin America. Current policies have largely failed to lift the majority of people out of poverty and have deepened economic inequality in the region. Instead of moving forward with more ill-conceived trade agreements, American development assistance policies should support strengthening local economies and laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable development. The collapse of rural economies is one factor driving people to migrate. Given the importance of local agricultural production in the livelihood of many Latin Americans, we should give priority to building strong local and regional markets and to environmental sustainability by revising American subsidies to agricultural production.

We do not believe in the premise that any change is better than nothing. We can and must do better. These proposals deal with our national policy failures as relates to immigrant communities and would lead us to enacting immigration law that truly reflects our best traditions and hopes for the future.