

## International Migrations from Chiapas (2000-2007). Socio-spatial Differentiation of the Ejection Contexts

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**Abstract:** Regarding migration changes between Mexico and the USA, this study focuses on the increase and diversification of migration between Chiapas and the USA during the period 2000-2007. This paper argues that not only economic conditions are the explanation to these migrations but also, in certain regions, political processes and impacts of natural disasters were important drivers for migration –a combination of causes in the context of migration–. Based on different sources (indicators of migration intensity, index on the remittance reception, migratory censuses, demographic surveys, quantitative and qualitative migratory studies), the increase in migration is shown at a state and regional level. Furthermore, the increase of migration in certain regions is assessed in relation with its causes (social, environmental, political and economic) showing that, migrations are multi-causal processes spatially differentiated on the basis of the migrants' place of origin.

**Key words:** international migration, Chiapas, migration contexts, migrants, development.

**Resumen:** En el marco de las transformaciones de la migración México-Estados Unidos (EU) en el cambio de siglo, este artículo tiene como objetivo abordar el crecimiento y diversificación de las migraciones chiapanecas a EU (2000-2007). El aporte del trabajo es mostrar que si bien las condiciones económicas son relevantes para explicar las migraciones, también en ciertas regiones chiapanecas hubo procesos políticos y de impactos de desastres naturales para el surgimiento de estas migraciones –una articulación de causas en los contextos de expulsión–. Utilizando diversas fuentes (censos, índices de recepción de remesas, encuestas, estudios migratorios cualitativos y cuantitativos), se muestra el aumento de la migración a nivel estatal y regional. Posteriormente, se indaga cómo la migración se intensificó en ciertas regiones chiapanecas y cuáles fueron las causas –socioambientales, políticas y económicas–. Esto muestra que las migraciones son procesos espacialmente diferenciados y multicausales en relación con los lugares de origen.

**Palabras clave:** migración internacional, Chiapas, contextos de expulsión, migrantes, desarrollo.

## Introduction

For centuries, international migrations, as mobility and relocation dynamics (Gregory et al., 2009), have been linked to socioeconomic and political processes of the modern world. Migrations have been related to the European colonization, Industrial Revolution, and to the development and strengthening of the global capitalist market, but also to the emerging of national States, urbanization, industrialization, and global armed conflicts (Castles and Miller, 1998: 283). However, in the context of globalization –as dynamics of goods, information and capital circulation– (Márquez and Delgado, 2012) and of the neoliberal structural reforms in developed and developing countries (Castles, 2003 and 2008) international labor migration processes have increased during the last decades of the 20th century (Márquez and Delgado, 2012; Castillo, 2016; Sassen, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

One of the most evident examples was the historical Mexico-US migration –legal and illegal– which had already been one of the greatest in the world between the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21th century (1994-2007) and increased steadily (Delgado et al., 2009; Aragón and Salgado, 2015; Durand and Massey, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2014a and 2014b). In the quinquennium 2000-2005, Mexico was the first exporter of migrants in the world –with an average flow of half million of people per year–, and the second recipient of remittances worldwide (Márquez and Delgado, 2012).

The objective of this article, in the context of Mexico-US migration, specifically in the frame of studies on migration of people from Chiapas to the North American country (Jáuregui and Ávila, 2007; Villafuerte and García, 2014; Burke, 2004; Aquino, 2012a; Rus and Rus, 2008; Nájera and López, 2012; Castillo, 2017; López et al., 2009), is to address the rapid increase and expansion of migration of people from Chiapas to the US –to a state level and to the level of the local regions of Chiapas– at the beginning of this century (2000-2007). With this it is shown the diversification and expansion of such migrations and of the places where they emerged. One of the main points is to address migrations by means of stressing the variety of reasons that formed migration contexts –in the places of origin–.

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1 In 2000, there were 172 million international migrants –who were 2.8% of the global population–, fifteen years later, in 2015, this number reached 243.7m –who were 3.3% of the global population– (Conapo, 2015b and 2017).

The questions of research at the heart of this work are: 1) how did migrations of people from Chiapas to the US change/increase in the last decade at a state level and at the level of the different regions of Chiapas? 2) In the frame of heterogeneous and contextual relationships between migrations and development processes, which things caused the rapid growth of such migration and how migratory behaviors were differentiated among the different migrants' regions of origin of Chiapas? This question refers to how the combinations of different causes -economic, socio-environmental, of political conflict, among others- were related to the selective and differentiated incorporation of certain regions of Chiapas -as "new" places of expulsion/origin of migrants- to US international migration.

It is argued that although there are determining economic processes to explain the migration of people from Chiapas -fall of coffee and corn prices, agricultural crisis, rise in the costs of life, etc.-, there were also regions and municipalities where the political dynamics -of conflict- and the impacts of natural disasters played a key role in these migrations. This is addressed in the context of proposals which indicate that, on occasion, migration cannot be attributed to a single cause and/or condition (Castles and Miller, 1998: 27; Castles, 2003 and 2008; De Haas, 2010).

In this sense and as De Haas (2010) indicates, the explanation of the causes of international migration processes does not come only from a deterministic and rigid conceptual framework (De Haas, 2010: 240). Not being constrained to a mechanical mono-causal scheme allows us to see how there was a concatenation and mutual determination among the various causes of migration in the places of origin. This makes clear the fact that sometimes the origin of migration processes has a spatially differentiated nature and is caused by various reasons -in relation to the migrants' conditions of expulsion in the places of origin-.

The period to be addressed is from 2000 to 2007, when the largest growth of migration of people from Chiapas to the US was observed – especially in terms of migrant flows and reception of remittances.<sup>2</sup> Such historical/temporal delimitation is justified by two criteria. On the one

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2 In around twelve years (1995-2007) and according to data from the Consejo Nacional de Población (Conapo, 2014) and Banco de México, the number of remittances received in Chiapas was multiplied forty times. There was a process of increase in the number of migrants from Chiapas who had the intention to cross to the US, especially in the period 2000-2007 (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013). Likewise, the number of deported people from Chiapas increased during these periods (Villafuerte and García, 2014: 29).

hand, and concerning the beginning of the period, even though some effects of structural reforms were observed in the rural field since the late 1980s, it was not until the mid-1990s –with the signing and entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement– when the effects of neoliberalism in the countryside, the breaking up of Chiapas agricultural production system and the effects of neoliberalism on the fall of coffee and corn prices were clearly shown.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, concerning the end of the period that is to be addressed, due to the US economic crisis of 2008 there was an evident decrease of Mexican migrant flows in general (Ley and Peña, 2016) and particularly of people from Chiapas (Villafuerte and García, 2014). A reduction in the reception of remittances was clearly observed as well –nationally and in the State of Chiapas–; thus, it began a new stage in the Mexico-US migration (Ley and Peña, 2016: 4-19).<sup>4</sup> Particularly and as a result of such crisis, the decrease in illegal Mexican and Chiapas migration to the US was largely determined by the reduction of the diverse labor places of the US economy -construction, manufacturing, services and agriculture- and consequently, by the lack/scarcity of jobs people from Chiapas obtained in that country.

Concerning the case of Chiapas, data from the Encuesta sobre migración en la Frontera Norte de México (EMIF-Norte) (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) reaffirm what has been found in other studies by El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Colef) at a national scale (Ley and Peña, 2016: 4-19). In this way, researches as the EMIF-Norte show that from 2008 a drastic and maintained decrease was recorded in the number of people from Chiapas who tried to cross the Mexico-US border without migration documents.

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3 It is not until the late 1990s when a rapid increase of migration of people from Chiapas to the US was recorded.

4 Some of the features of the new stage of Mexico-US migration, which began as a result of the US economic crisis of 2008, are: decrease in migration (especially illegal); decrease in deportations (because of the low number of migrants trying to cross the border); duration of stays in the US of the deported Mexican migrants has been extended; family separation derived from deportations has increased as well as the number of migrant women; the destination places of Mexicans in the US have been diversified; and the service sector is gathering the labor insertion of Mexican migrants (Ley and Peña, 2016: 4-19).

## Methodological strategy, revised sources and data

When considering that the main points of research of the article are the migration of people from Chiapas to the US (2000-2007) and the diversity of contexts and causes of expulsion of migrants, two types of sources and data were used in the development of the methodological strategy: 1) the official researches and information of quantitative nature (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) and 2) qualitative studies of socioeconomic, demographic and anthropological nature (Burke, 2004; Rus and Rus, 2008; Aquino, 2012a and 2012b; Cruz and Barrios, 2009; Castillo, 2015 and 2017; Villafuerte and García, 2008a, 2014; Villafuerte, 2015; López *et al.*, 2009; Escobar *et al.*, 2006). Regarding the former, information and data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) and from the Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD) are also considered to account for the socioeconomic and demographical context of Chiapas at the beginning of this century – when a rapid increase in the migration of people from Chiapas to the US was observed–.

Regarding information which allow to reconstruct the migration of people from Chiapas and its rapid growth at the beginning of this century, data from the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) about migrants from Chiapas who tried to cross to the US –from the mid-1990s and until 2007– were used.<sup>5</sup> Within the vast amount of data from the EMIF-Norte, information on migration of people from Chiapas was also used to a smaller scale, at the level of the socioeconomic regions which are part of this southern State of Mexico. This allowed for a defined socio-spatial monitoring of the increase of Chiapas international migration according to the region of origin, which redirected the point

5 The EMIF-Norte has been carried out since the mid-1990s with the support and help of various official departments of the Mexican government: Secretaría de Gobernación (Segob), Consejo Nacional de Población (Conapo), Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM), Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE), Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS) and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Colef). The EMIF-Norte provides all kinds of information on internal and international migration processes to the US; from the migrants by State of origin who head for the border and have the intention to cross to the northern neighboring country as well as migrants who only think of staying at the northern Mexican border, to the numbers of deported Mexicans who do not have migration documents issued by the US government, as well as information of return migrants who return from the US to Mexico (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013).

towards the idea of different contexts of expulsion determined by different causes, as well as the dissimilar tendencies of migration growth among the different regions of Chiapas.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, this information was complemented with the Índice de Intensidad Migratoria (IIM) to a municipality and state level of the Consejo Nacional de Población (Conapo, 2014)<sup>7</sup> as well as with the historical relationships of Chiapas' reception of remittances (Banco de México, 2016) of the studied period.

Concerning the spatial differentiation of the processes of exit of migrants in different municipalities, related to the various contexts of expulsion, information by the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) on migrants and deported people by region of origin of Chiapas was useful. Different socioeconomic and anthropological studies on the causes of international migration processes originated in different regions of Chiapas were also used, from Los Altos (Burke, 2004; Rus and Rus, 2008) and La Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal (Aquino, 2012a and 2012b; Cruz and Barrios, 2009; Castillo, 2015 and 2017), to La Frailesca, La Sierra and El Soconusco (Villafuerte and García, 2008a, 2014; Villafuerte, 2015; López *et al.*, 2009; Escobar *et al.*, 2006).

### **Theoretical framework, migration as human mobility with structural causes**

It should be noted that in this article international migration is understood as diverse dynamics of spatial mobility of human population (individuals and groups) which, looking to meet (economic, social, political, etc.)

6 Chiapas, with 118 municipalities, is divided in 15 regions: Metropolitana, Valles Zoque, Mezcalapa, De los Llanos, Altos Tzeltal Tzotzil, Frailesca, De los Bosques, Norte, Istmo Costa, Soconusco, Sierra Mariscal, Selva Lacandona, Maya, Tulijá Tzeltal Chol, Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal.

7 The IIM was designed by Conapo in order to distinguish the regions and micro-regions of the country where migration processes were more important (Conapo, 2010 and 2000: 9). For that, two work scales were established: one at the level of each state, and another for the various municipalities of each state. The IIM is obtained by establishing a relationship among the total number of households, the percentage of households which receive remittances, the percentage of households with emigrants in the US from the previous five years, the percentage of households with circular migrants from the previous five years, and the percentage of households with return migrants from the previous five years (Conapo, 2000: 35 and 2010: 35). Thus, we have socially and spatially differentiated information on migration processes by municipality and state.

needs and moving to national and international spaces and borders, involve processes of relocation and change of residence (Gregory *et al.*, 2009: 462). Migration processes bring different kinds of changes (socioeconomic, territorial, cultural and political) in the migrants' places of origin, transit and destination (Castillo, 2016 and 2017). Some authors (Massey, 2015; Duran and Massey, 2009) consider that an appropriate theoretical approach of migration would mean taking into consideration several points: a) the forces which promote migration in the migrants' countries of origin; b) the processes of attraction which lead migrants to certain countries; c) migrants' motivations and desires; d) networks and structures which connect the countries of origin and destination and which allow migration to take place.

From a wider and unifying viewpoint, addressing migration not only implies describing the spaces of transit and trajectories but its different causes and consequences as well (Gregory *et al.*, 2009: 462). In the context of economic-political asymmetries and of a marked wage difference between developed and developing countries (Bustamante, 1997), the proposed international migration contemplates the consideration of structural frameworks of a socioeconomic nature in the countries of origin and destination (Márquez and Delgado, 2012; Delgado *et al.*, 2009; Gregory *et al.*, 2009); determining conditions that motivate migrants to leave their places of origin in Mexico/Chiapas and which guide them/direct them to certain labor markets in the US which require contingents of precarious and flexible workforce (Márquez and Delgado, 2012).

In this framework of ideas, it is worth mentioning that authors such as De Haas (2010: 228) and Castles (2003 and 2008) have underscored that beyond conceptual, linear and determining schemes, the relationships and interactions between migrants and development are problematic, complex and heterogeneous. Particularly, for De Haas (2010), migration should be conceived as a dynamic of spatial population mobility, which is an important part of a wider process of change related to development in the countries of origin and destination. Yet migration, once has been consolidated, has its own internal logics of reproduction and change, and it can have an impact on development (De Haas, 2010: 228). De Haas (2010: 228) maintains that migration cannot be understood as an exogenous and external process to the contexts of origin, but as an important component of processes of development of social life –of the migrants' contexts of origin–.

In this article, the historical and structural conditions in the country of origin (specifically the State of Chiapas and some of its regions) which

gave rise to international migration processes to the US at the beginning of the 21st century are addressed in a critical way and with special stress. Conditions which imply, among other things, the hard socio-material situations of life and the precarious levels of socioeconomic development in rural communities from different parts of this State.

As the main argument, it is maintained that Chiapas migrants' various and diverse contexts of expulsion are not always linked to a single factor/cause. Contexts of expulsion may be linked to multiple causes –economic causes, natural disasters, internal conflicts, political violence, among others– which are linked and determined with one another.

It is true that some socioeconomic processes linked to the change and decline of the agricultural sector played an important role in order to understand the rapid growth of migration of people from Chiapas to the US in most of the last decade (2000-2007). However, in certain municipalities and regions of Chiapas international migration was linked and determined by contexts of social conflicts and the impact of natural disasters as well as by the precarious material and economic conditions of life.

### **Studies on international migration from Chiapas to the US**

In Mexico, within the works by social sciences that address migration of people from Chiapas to the US during this century, we find disciplinary and themed areas, from economics and demography (Jáuregui and Ávila, 2007; Villafuerte and García, 2006 and 2014; Nájera and López, 2012; López *et al.*, 2009) to anthropology and sociology (Burke, 2004; Cruz and Barrios, 2009; Aquino, 2012b; Rus and Rus, 2008; Angulo, 2008; Castillo, 2017).

It should be mentioned that studies on this migration are relatively recent, around 15 years. This may be linked to the fact that the flows of people from Chiapas, which had already begun since the last two decades of the 20th century (Nájera and López, 2012: 465), were considerably abundant and visible to the academy until the beginning of 2000. Based on the disciplinary perspective of analysis and in the scale in which the migration places of origin are considered, two groups in the bibliography on Chiapas international migration may be identified.

1) On the one hand, there are researches which, from perspectives of economic and socio-demographic nature, work in the places of origin at a state scale –without differentiating the different regions of Chiapas–, considering the whole State in relation to demographic dimensions, to economic causes of the contexts of expulsion and to the demographic and

socioeconomic features of the migration of people from Chiapas (Jáuregui and Ávila, 2007; Villafuerte and García, 2006, 2008a, 2008b and 2014; Villafuerte, 2015; Nájera and López, 2012; López *et al.*, 2009).

2) On the other hand, there is a varied set of works with anthropological and sociological approaches that, from the various reflections upon the socioeconomic and cultural changes of rural and indigenous communities of origin, focus on the migration processes of ethnic nature as well as on the origin of such flows in certain regions of Chiapas (Los Altos, La Frontera, El Soconusco, La Sierra, etc.) (Burke, 2004; Cruz and Barrios, 2009; Aquino, 2012a and 2012b; Rus and Rus, 2008; Angulo, 2008; Castillo, 2014 and 2015).

### **Chiapas, from the transit of internal migration to international migration**

By 2000 –when a considerable increase in the reception of remittances begins– 3,911,529 people inhabited Chiapas (Conapo, 2015a: 1); 54.3% of them lived in rural areas (communities with no more than 2,500 people) (Conapo, 2015a: 5). In this sense and by the same year, the most working sector and with more workers of 12 years of age was the agricultural sector with 47.9%, followed by commerce and services with 37.4%, and construction and industry with 12.4% (Conapo, 2015a: 56). Chiapas had one of the highest records of poverty and extreme poverty in the country; it had the highest levels of maternal and infant mortality and had the lowest life expectancy in the nation (UNDP, 2010). Poverty and extreme poverty were concentrated in the countryside and were related to the agricultural economic crises linked to the socio-environmental instability of production and fall in the national and international prices of coffee and corn (Villafuerte and García, 2006: 104-107)

Such scenario of historical-structural marginalization was expressed in the precarious material conditions of life of a large part of the population (PNUD, 2010; Conapo, 2015a). This situation was reflected in the very low levels of education, health and income of Chiapas, the lowest in Mexico (PNUD, 2010: 41). This was linked to two dynamics: 1) the socio-ethnic exclusion processes of farmers and indigenous people; and 2) the marked and historical inequality of Chiapas, which resulted in very low levels of socioeconomic development among large groups of the population (especially in the countryside) (Villafuerte, 2015, Castillo, 2014 and 2015). In the midst of this unfavorable and complex scenario there is a rapid growth of US illegal migration; which in this State was greater than the national average (Castillo, 2016).

It is convenient to remember that Mexico-US migration has been generated in a framework of regional contexts with noticeable political-economic and wage asymmetries between these two countries (Bustamante, 1997; Kearney, 1986; Verduzco, 2000; Santibáñez, 2000; Zúñiga *et al.*, 2005; Delgado *et al.*, 2009; Márquez and Delgado, 2012; Tuirán, 2000; Lozano *et al.*, 2010; Ariza and Velasco, 2012; Castillo, 2016; Conapo, 2000 and 2010; Pew Hispanic Center, 2014a and 2014b), between which there is a noticeable inequality in the levels of development (Delgado *et al.*, 2009; Márquez and Delgado, 2012).

In a large part of the last century not only were the massiveness and historicity the remarkable features of these migration flows (Durand and Massey, 2009) but also their eminent male and illegal nature (Durand, 2000 and 2007) of economic laboral type (Aragonés and Salgado, 2015) as well as the strong geographical concentration of the places of origin/expulsion of Mexican migrants in a group of central-western States of the country (Durand, 2000); the so-called “historical region of migration,” from where roughly half of Mexican migrants in the US come and which is formed by the States of Aguascalientes, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí and Zacatecas (Durand and Massey, 2009).

However, almost during all the 20th century and similarly to other southern States of the country (such as Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tabasco and Yucatán) the participation of Chiapas in the illegal Mexico-US migration was very low (Durand and Massey, 2009; Villafuerte and García, 2006). Even by 2000, the IIM of Chiapas was one of the lowest, with negative records of -1.27065, which placed it in the next-to-last position nationally (just before Tabasco) (Conapo, 2000: 35). Besides, only 0.76% of households from Chiapas received remittances and only 0.79% had migrants in the US (Conapo, 2000: 35). Likewise, in the records of reception of remittances of 1995, Chiapas held one of the last places nationally (Conapo, 2000 and 2014; Banco de México, 2016).

From a historical-geographical approach of the Mexico-US migration, some authors (Durand and Massey, 2009; Durand, 2000) have said that, during the 20th century illegal international labor migration did not take place or was scarcely linked to States with high rates of marginalization and marked poverty conditions –such as Chiapas–. According to these scholars, such non-binding relationship between migration and poverty stemmed from the high economic and social costs that migration to the northern neighbor implied (Durand and Massey, 2009: 78-87). In this way, almost in all the last century, several southern States of Mexico (such as Veracruz,

Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo and Chiapas) practically did not witness US migration (Durand and Massey, 2009: 78-87).

Nevertheless, by the last century Chiapas witnessed interstate migration processes among different regions and intrastate flows with other States of the country (Villafuerte and García, 2014: 3-20). Concerning internal migration, the population mobility within Chiapas was present in most of the 20th century and it was determined by a highly concentrated agricultural structure as well as by the development of plantations which required knowledgeable workforce on agriculture (agricultural workers) (Villafuerte and García, 2014: 7). While several municipalities, highly populated and with strong needs for productive resources, of the Altos de Chiapas region expelled some of their people, the processes of colonization of the Selva region during the 20th century appealed a considerable demographical volume of people from different sociocultural groups from various places of this southern Mexican State (Villafuerte and García, 2014: 14-15).

Subsequently, from 1970 migration processes from Chiapas to southern and central zones of the country (Veracruz, Tabasco, Quintana Roo and Mexico City) emerged and were consolidated. These migrations to other States were related to the temporal labor insertion to particular productive activities of certain labor markets, such as the construction industry. Such was the case of farmers from Chiapas who responded to the great demand for workers for the development of Cancún's touristic megaproject and for Tabasco's exploitation of oil and gas fields (Villafuerte and García, 2014: 16-17).

By the end of the last century, there were records of illegal migration to the US by people from Chiapas of rural origin (Nájera and López, 2012: 465; Villafuerte and García, 2008b). Soon after that, from the mid-1990s, the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) recorded this international migration of people from Chiapas and also Banco de México (Banco de México, 2016) documented the sending of remittances to Chiapas. However, it was until the beginning of the 21th century that an evident increase in this international migration was observed (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013; Conapo, 2014). Thus, in less than a century and taking into account internal migration within Chiapas as the origin of various processes of people's rearrangement and relocation, a third system of mobility of people from Chiapas was formed, mainly with economic and labor purposes, but now internationally.

## International migration of people from Chiapas at the beginning of the 21st century

### *Characteristics and growth of migration of people from Chiapas (2000-2007)*

Some authors suggest that international migration of people from Chiapas began in the penultimate decade of the 20th century (Nájera and López, 2012: 465). Yet, given the enclosed dimension of the number of people involved, by the 1990s Chiapas was still not one of the main Mexican States senders of migrants to the US (Durand and Massey: 2009). On the contrary, given its low IIM, even by 2000 Chiapas ranked low nationally (Conapo, 2000: 35). However, in the early years of the last decade (2000-2007) and according to the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) and to reports from Conapo (2000, 2010 and 2014) this laboral migration of people from Chiapas grew rapidly and took significant proportions (see Chart 1 and 2<sup>8</sup>).

In relative terms and by the period we are referring to, Chiapas was among the States that stood out for its noticeable processes of expulsion of migrants to the US (Villafuerte and García, 2014; Castillo, 2016; Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) as well as for the rapid growth of reception of remittances (see Graph 2). This period of rapid growth of international migration of people from Chiapas concluded in 2008 with the US financial crisis resulting in the reduction of jobs for migrants.

It was a labor and economic migration, mainly illegal, and for the most part migrants were young men between 20 and 40 years of age and with low levels of education –there were migrant women too, however– (Nájera and López, 2012: 485; Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013). Places of origin of migrants from Chiapas were strongly distributed in certain rural zones: Soconusco, Los Altos de Chiapas and Centro de Chiapas (Nájera and López, 2012: 489). In contrast, Tuxtla Gutiérrez and the metropolitan area were some with the lowest IIM in Chiapas at the municipal level (Conapo, 2000 and 2010).

Regarding the social and labor insertion processes of migrants, during most of the first decade of the 21st century some of the main destinations of migrants from Chiapas were Los Angeles, California, Atlanta, Georgia and Raleigh, North Carolina, among others, including Washington, Philadelphia and New York (Villafuerte and García, 2008 a:

<sup>8</sup> All graphs and Table 1 are attached in Appendix at the bottom of this article (Editor's note).

53). Regarding the dynamics of laboral insertion in the US, the agricultural sector, construction sector and services were the main areas where migrants from Chiapas looked for a job (López et al., 2009: 47).

As mentioned above, the growth of such international migration was striking at the beginning of the 21st century (2000-2007). According to data from the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) in roughly 7 years the number of migrants from Chiapas who tried to cross the Mexico-US border increased 30 times more, from 3,446 in 2000 to 105,419 by 2007.

Even though such illegal US migration increased rapidly between 2000 and 2007, it was neither constant nor homogenous, in fact in certain years such increase was more noticeable than in others (see Graph 1). By 2000, the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013) recorded 3,446 people from Chiapas who tried to cross the border; in 2002 there was an important increase, 36,307 migrants; in 2003 another one, 53,827 and such growth was repeated in 2005 with 60,427 migrants and in 2006 with 118,50 (see Table 1). Other two processes related to population mobility which show the growth of this international migration between 2000 and 2007 are the increase in the dynamics of voluntary return and deportations of people from Chiapas, as well as the increase in transfers of dead migrants from Chiapas found in the Mexico-US border (López et al., 2009: 50).<sup>9</sup>

As detailed in the following section, the growth of international migration processes to the US was neither similar nor homogenous in all Chiapas regions. On the contrary, differentiated processes of migration growth were presented throughout the period we are referring to, there was an increase in US migration flows in almost all regions but especially in four (Altos Tzeltal Tzotzil, Soconusco, Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal and Sierra Mariscal), from where roughly half of all Chiapas migrants who tried to cross the border came (see Table 1).

Regarding the reception of remittances in Chiapas, a similar growth tendency was observed, from 20 million dollars in 1995 to 921m in 2007, with that, the amount of money by means of remittances during 12 years (1995-2007) was multiplied 40 times more (see Graph 2). After holding

<sup>9</sup> Based on data from the Dirección General de Protección y Asuntos Consulares, experts on the subject of international migration of people from Chiapas document how between 2003 and 2005 the number of transfers of dead migrants from Chiapas increased –from 79 in 2003 to 157 in 2005– as well as transfers of remains of people from Chiapas who tried to cross the border illegally –from 13 in 2003 to 17 in 2005– (López et al., 2009: 50).

the place 27 in 1995, Chiapas ranked 11 in 2011 in the list of States which received remittances. The increase in reception of remittances in Chiapas was one of the highest in all the country, and even more than the national average<sup>10</sup> and more than the growth tendencies shown by States with a long migration tradition such as Zacatecas, Michoacán and Guanajuato (Conapo, 2014). As for other southeast States –such as Yucatán, Campeche, Tabasco and Quintana Roo– with recent records of US migration showed, in a smaller scale, an increase in the reception of remittances similar to those of Chiapas (Conapo, 2014; Castillo, 2016).

However, the growth of reception of remittances in Chiapas was not temporarily homogenous during this period. The most dramatic and rapid increase was experienced during a period of 8 years, at the beginning of the new century, when 20 million in 1995 increased to 435m by 2003 –during this period the amount was multiplied 20 times more– (Conapo, 2014; Banco de México, 2016). Later on, in a shorter period of time (2003-2007), the increase was not very substantial, yet a growth tendency was maintained when from 435 millions of dollars in 2003 increased to 921m in 2007, with that the number of remittances was hardly doubled (see Graph 2).

### *Contexts and causes of US international migration of people from Chiapas*

Following this line, and as various authors from economic and political perspectives have addressed the relationship between international migration and development (Delgado *et al.*, 2009; Márquez and Delgado, 2012; De Haas, 2010 and 2012), the origin/genesis of international migration –illegal and of economic nature– lead to two great socioeconomic and political processes interrelated between each other.

On the one hand, to consider the historical and structural causes in the contexts of the country of origin which make migrants leave their communities (in Mexico) in order to meet different needs: obtain better paid jobs, money to improve their household, financial resources to have access to medical services, increase and maintain the productive infrastructure, etc (Delgado *et al.*, 2009; Márquez and Delgado, 2012; Castillo, 2016).

10 At national balance the reception of remittances increased from 3,673 million dollars in 1995 to 26,059m in 2007; which meant that the former amount was multiplied 8 times more by 2007. Despite the evident increase this meant nationally, such percentage is smaller than the percentage of reception of remittances in Chiapas, State that by 2007 had multiplied more than 40 times the amount of remittances received in 1995 (Conapo, 2014; Castillo, 2016).

On the other hand, to the forces that appeal migrants –generally illegal– to certain places and jobs in the developed country of destination (Delgado *et al.*, 2009), such as the constant demand of cheap, flexible and precarious workforce in certain niches of the US economy (agriculture, construction, manufacture and services) (Márquez and Delgado, 2012). However, the former are particularly important for this article, those which refer to the unfavorable socio-material conditions of life –in the contexts of origin– that compel migrants to leave their communities in order to obtain financial resources in other places/countries, and thus, meet their multiple needs.

Concerning Chiapas, the relationship between international migration and –a scarce– development in the contexts of origin has been studied from various perspectives of social sciences and humanities. Thus, various authors, from economic and socio-demographic viewpoints, have suggested that Chiapas international migration is linked to the poverty and structural marginalization of this State, to its great financial crisis –especially in the agricultural sector– from the 1980s and to the drastic effects of the structural reforms and the stoppage of support for agricultural productivity and commercialization of small and medium-sized Mexican agricultural producers in the last decades (Villafuerte and García, 2008: 42; López *et al.*, 2009: 51; Jáuregui and Ávila, 2007).

Different works have explained that poverty, in its structural aspect of historical nature –such as the recent dynamics of pauperization derived from the impacts of neoliberal policies and the entry into force of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)– was one of the fundamental explanatory frameworks for understanding Chiapas international migration (Villafuerte and García, 2008a: 42). Chiapas' economy had a considerable agricultural sector characterized by its farming subsector largely of peasant nature in its production rather than mercantile and with low levels of productivity in generalized pauperization contexts.

In this context, changes in Mexican agriculture linked to policies of neoliberal structural change and to the fluctuating behavior of international markets of agricultural products in the last decades have had a negative impact on the main field products from Chiapas –especially coffee and corn production– (López *et al.*, 2009: 51) and on the devaluation of the agricultural work of people from Chiapas (Nájera and López, 2012: 465-472).<sup>11</sup> Before this precarious situation in the rural communities, one of the

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11 Some authors have indicated that Chiapas' economy has had more than 30 years of loss (Nájera and López, 2012: 271; López *et al.*, 2009). In this context, hundreds of people from Chiapas have experienced reduction in their income. Such situation was linked to two

main strategies people from Chiapas used to solve their difficult contexts and meet their various socioeconomic needs and their need to have access to basic social services –such as health care– in a large part of the first decade of the 21st century (2000-2007), was US migration (Villafuerte y García, 2008a: 42) and consequently, sending remittances.

It is true that in the studies on Chiapas international migration there are some who have stressed the importance and centrality of economic causes in order to understand why people from Chiapas go to the US, making reference to the dynamics linked to the decline and devaluation of agricultural productive processes and to the sale of crops such as coffee and corn (Villafuerte and García, 2008b; Jáuregui and Ávila, 2007). However, other studies have suggested the role of the impacts of natural disasters in the rural communities (of Soconusco and Sierra regions) (Villafuerte and García, 2014) and the effects of political conflicts and official violence, which stemmed from the armed uprising in Chiapas, as factors to understand such international migration (Cruz and Barrios, 2009; Aquino, 2012a; Castillo, 2017).

### **Diversity of migration processes and heterogeneity of contexts of origin**

As previously shown, at the beginning of this century (2000-2007), international migration of people from Chiapas to the US increased rapidly yet unequally and in a varied way in terms of the migrants from Chiapas per year –there were years with remarkable growths– (see Graph 1). In the historical context of the studied period and according to data from the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS y Colef, 2006 y 2013), a similar tendency was reported in terms of socio-spatial processes of differentiation of the places/contexts of origin within Chiapas .

Despite the growth of US migration in all the State of Chiapas, its 15 regions did not show a homogenous and similar tendency with regard to the number of migrants coming from each (see Graph 3). Conversely, while certain regions had a clear increase in the number of migrants from Chiapas who went to the US –and together gathered roughly half of all US migrants coming from Chiapas–, other regions did not experience rapid growth processes in the number of migrants. There were also regions in the middle of these two sides (see Table 1).

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socioeconomic processes. On the one hand, to the devaluation of agricultural work and production (of crops such as corn and beans). On the other hand, reduction of real wage (Nájera and López, 2012: 472).

By the 2000-2007 period and according to information from the EMIF-Norte, the four regions of Chiapas which sent the smaller number of migrants to the US were Maya, Tulijá Tzeltal Chol, De los Llanos and Frailesca<sup>12</sup> (see Table 1). By 2000, these four regions sent 270 migrants out from the 3,446 migrants from Chiapas who tried to cross the Mexico-US border, which was roughly 7.8% of all migrants from Chiapas. By 2004, out from the 33,786 migrants from Chiapas these four regions had 2,786 migrants, which was 8.2% from all people from Chiapas who tried to cross the border. Finally, in 2007 such tendency had not change too much and showed little increase: all four regions only had 8.6% from the total of migrants; together they gathered 9,074 out from the 105,480 people from Chiapas who tried to cross the border that same year (see Graph 3 and Table 1).

On the other side, by the same period (2000-2007), the four regions which gathered an important number of people from Chiapas who tried to cross the Mexico-US border were: Altos Tzotzil Tzeltal, Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal, Sierra Mariscal and Soconusco<sup>13</sup> This group of four regions has

12 The Maya region, located in northeast Chiapas, is composed of 5 municipalities: Catazajá, La Libertad, Palenque, Benemérito de las Américas and Marqués de Comillas. The Tulijá Tzeltal Chol region is also located northwest next to the Maya region and it is composed of 7 municipalities: Salto del Agua, Sitalá, Tumbalá, Chilón, Sabanilla, Tila and Yajalón. The De los Llanos region is located in central Chiapas and it is composed of 7 municipalities: Nicolás Ruiz, Acalá, Totolapa, Venustiano Carranza, San Lucas, Chiapilla and Socoltenango. The Frailesca region, next to De los Llanos, is located in central Chiapas and it is composed of 5 municipalities: La Concordia, Villaflores, Montecristo de Guerrero, Ángel Albino Corzo and Villa Corzo. From the 112 municipalities of Chiapas, the four regions encompass 24 municipalities, distributed in two great zones, northwest and central-west.

13 The Altos Tzotzil Tzeltal region is located in central Chiapas, its southern neighbor is Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal and it is composed of 17 municipalities: Amatenango del Valle, Chalchihuitán, Larráinzar, Mitontic, Oxchuc, Aldama, Santiago El Pinar, Chanal, Chenalhó, Huixtán, Pantelhó, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Tenejapa, Teopisca, Zinacantán, San Juan Cancuc and Chamula. The Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal region, next to Guatemala in the south and next to the Altos Tzotzil Tzeltal region in the north, is composed of 7 municipalities: Las Rosas, Maravilla Tenejapa, Las Margaritas, La Trinitaria, Tzimol, Comitán de Domínguez, La Independencia. The Sierra Mariscal region is composed of 10 municipalities: Frontera Comalapa, La Grandeza, Motozintla, El Porvenir, Amatenango de la Frontera, Bella Vista, Bejucal de Ocampo, Chicomuselo, Mazapa de Madero and Siltepec. Lastly, the Soconusco region is composed of 17 municipalities: Frontera Hidalgo, Cacahoatán, Metapa, Suchiate, Tapachula, Tuxtla Chico, Unión Juárez, Acacoyagua, Acapetahua, Escuintla, Huehuetán, Huixtla, Mazatlán, Villa Comaltitlán and Tuzantán. These four regions encompass 49 municipalities out from the 118 municipalities of Chiapas.

various socio-ethnic, economic and geographical characteristics, some of which are linked to the international migration processes to the US.<sup>14</sup>

However, despite having much less territory than half of the State of Chiapas and less than half of its population, this group of four regions sent approximately little more than half of all migrants who headed for the US. According to data from the EMIF-Norte (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013), in 2000 these four regions had 2,072 out from the 3,446 migrants from Chiapas, which represented a contribution of little more than 60.1%. By 2004 a similar tendency was maintained with a small reduction, these regions sent 17,377 migrants, which was slightly more than 51.4% out from the 33,786 people from Chiapas who headed for the US (see Table 1). Lastly, by 2007 there was an increase and this group of four regions contributed with almost 61.7% of migrants, that is, 65,145 out from the total of 105,480 migrants from all the State of Chiapas (see Table 1).

Particularly, certain municipalities of the Altos Tzotzil Tzeltal and Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal regions –together with Las Margaritas– had important and massive processes of internal displacement related to the low-intensity war in the context of the armed uprising of 1994 (Cruz and Barrios, 2009). Regarding the case of Las Margaritas, anthropological and sociological studies have explained how the internal displaced people – because of the incursion of the army and of the containment and control policy of the Mexican government in face of the armed uprising of 1994– played an important role for the emergence, growth and rapid consolidation of US migration of farmers descendants of the Tojolabal group from the central part of Las Margaritas (Cruz and Barrios, 2009; Aquino, 2012b; Castillo, 2017).

By the this period (2000-2007), Las Margaritas was one of the municipalities with the greatest growth of US migration (Conapo, 2010; Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013); it was one of the two municipalities in the Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal region that sent more migrants and that showed one of the most rapid migration growths by the 2000-2007 period as well (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013).

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14 This group encompasses a significant zone of Chiapas –mainly in the southeast and central part–; it has an important indigenous population –gathered in Los Altos de Chiapas with Tzotzil and Tzeltal groups, and in Las Margaritas with the Tojolabal group–; in addition, it has low levels of socio-material development, and its productive activities are of agricultural nature, mainly farming.

Additionally, from a dimension of great magnitude linked to the impact of natural disasters, the infrastructure of production and of households from many rural communities from different municipalities of Sierra Mariscal, and especially of Soconusco, were structurally damaged by hurricane Mitch in 1998 and hurricane Stan in 2005 (López *et al.*, 2009; Villafuerte and García, 2014). Some studies suggest that around 40% rural communities in Soconusco lost almost all their belongings, and in the urban areas the impact was not smaller (Escobar *et al.*, 2006). The effects of such natural events clearly triggered US migration. This was directly linked to the fact that in seven from the eight years of the period (2000-2007) and within the group of these four regions with greater number of sent migrants, Soconusco was the region which clearly sent more migrants to the US (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS y Colef, 2006 and 2013).<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion, thinking migration and development critically and contextually**

International migrations, as diverse and complex processes of human mobility through various borders, in order to be approached they require socio-historical exercises of contextualization and the consideration of heterogeneous situations of life and socio-material development of the migrants' communities of origin (De Haas, 2010 and 2012; Castillo, 2017). This implies that when studying the emergence and spatial origins of international migration it is necessary that structural conditions and the complex combination of reasons that cause and define migration in the migrants' countries of origin be considered (Márquez and Delgado, 2010; Massey, 2015; De Haas, 2010). Now, concerning the causes and origins of international migration studied in this article it may be concluded that:

It was analyzed how the noticeable growth of US international migration processes, originated in certain regions of Chiapas at the beginning of this century (2000-2007), was not homogenous and it had irregular/discontinuous and spatially differentiated growth dynamics (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013). Likewise, studies and records show that Chiapas migration flows may be caused by different reasons and by

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<sup>15</sup> Except in 2006 –when the Altos Tzeltal Tzotzil region had greater records–, in the other years Soconusco was the region that sent more migrants from Chiapas to the US (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013). In 2000: 1,060 migrants; in 2001: 1,337; in 2002: 8,612; in 2003: 14,935; in 2004: 7,461; in 2005: 11,690; in 2006: 16,386; and by 2007: at most 23,159 (Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef, 2006 and 2013).

different contexts of origin (Villafuerte and García, 2014; Cruz and Barrios, 2009; López *et al.*, 2009; Castillo, 2017). In this sense, this work critically opposes those approaches which suppose that migrations are caused by one reason, in a linear and mechanical way. As De Haas says (2010), the relationships between specific migrations and the processes of development are heterogeneous and complex, they cannot “fit” in a deterministic and rigid theoretical model (De Haas, 2010: 240).

2) It is true that for certain regions of Chiapas –such as Metropolitana, Valles Zoque, Mezcalapa and Llanos–, the economic causes and structural conditions of scarce socio-material development were important to account for the illegal laboral international migration processes (Nájera and López, 2012; Villafuerte and García, 2008a). However, through the approach of what happened in other specific regions such as Soconusco, Sierra Mariscal and Meseta Comiteca Tojolabal –which had the greatest rates of migration growth in Chiapas–, it was demonstrated that it was not only a matter of economic determinism of a rigid and absolute nature. On the contrary, in these regions the processes linked to the impacts of natural disasters (Villafuerte and García, 2014; López *et al.*, 2009) and of social conflict and internal displacement (Cruz and Barrios, 2009; Castillo, 2017) played a very relevant role in understanding illegal migration of people from Chiapas to the US. Specifically in these regions there was a heterogeneity of diverse causes of migration, having thus, various causes and socio-spaces in the migrants’ contexts of origin.

In this framework of ideas, the case studied about the processes of socio-spatial and demographical differentiation in international migration originated in the regions of Chiapas, shows that, according to what has been suggested by authors such as De Haas (2010 and 2012) and Castles (2003 and 2008), the relationships and interactions between international migration and the processes of development (in the country of origin) are heterogeneous, contextual and historical. Likewise, for developing countries –as it is the case of Mexico– the diverse and specific structural restrictions of local contexts in the processes of development are decisive to account for migrations and their causes (Castillo, 2016).

Such structural restrictions are various and heterogeneous, from lack of employment, low salaries, and lack of diverse services (education, health care, decent housing) (Villafuerte and García, 2006), to various socio-environmental impacts of natural disasters (hurricanes, floods, draughts) or contexts of internal conflict and violence (Cruz and Barrios, 2009).

4) Finally, comparative studies between what happened in Chiapas and other southeast States (such as Campeche, Yucatán, Tabasco and Quintana Roo) are still to be carried out; mainly under the consideration that such States had also important and rapid growth processes of migrations in a large part of the last decade (2000-2007).

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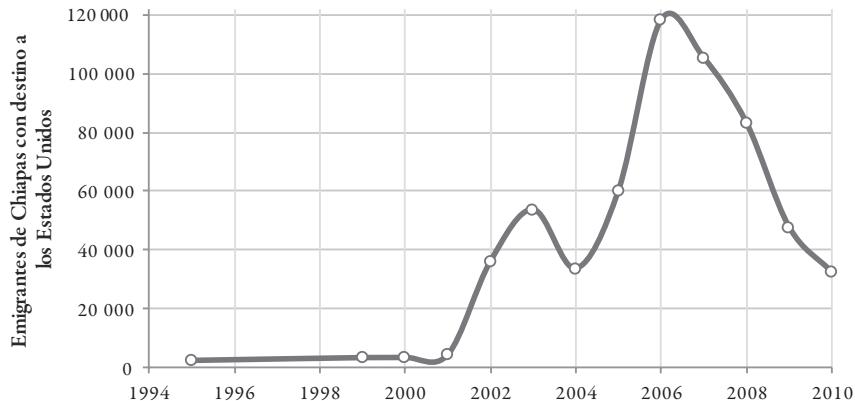
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## Appendix

Graph 1

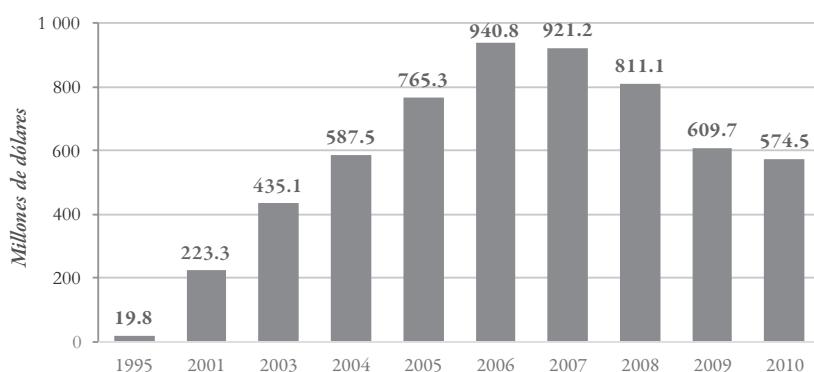
Emigrants from Chiapas to the US, 1995, 1999-2010. People per year



Source: Created based on information from Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef (2006 and 2013).

Graph 2

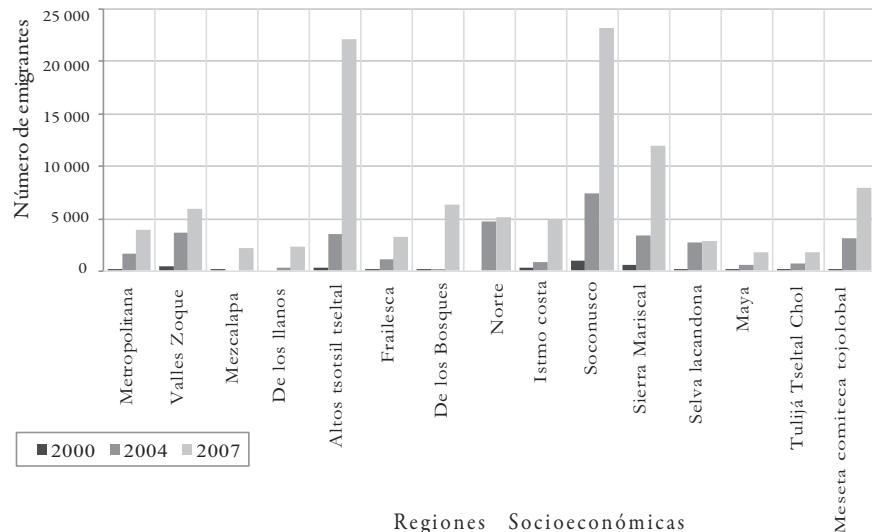
Income by remittances in Chiapas, 1995, 2001-2010.  
In million dollars per year



Source: Created based on information from Conapo (2014) and Banco de México (2016).

Graph 3

Emigrants from Chiapas to the US according to the socioeconomic region of origin, 2000, 2004 and 2007. Migrants per year



Source: Created based on information from Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef (2006 and 2013).

Table 1

Emigrants from Chiapas to the US according to the socioeconomic region of origin, from 2000 to 2007.  
Migrants per year

Socioeconomic regions	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Metropolitana	213	72	5 815	6 442	1 626	4 248	5 261	3 958
Váles Zoque	469	100	332	44	3 630	3 993	8 985	5 953
Mezcalapa	11	27	1 709	39	0	1 786	1 596	2 253
De los llanos	0	93	912	469	370	1 605	1 533	2 294
Altos Tzotzil Tzeltal	345	27	4 056	4 322	3 485	6 471	34 945	22 135
Frailesca	212	72	0	2 656	1 075	1 700	2 173	3 281
De los Bosques	46	238	2 261	146	68	1 409	12 332	6 280
Norte	0	14	902	2 203	4 715	2 530	4 846	5 121
Istmo costa	282	1 055	2 977	2 643	871	2 248	7 947	4 887
Soconusco	1 060	1 377	8 612	14 935	7 451	11 690	16 386	23 159
Sierra Mariscal	636	996	4 050	12 421	3 360	10 801	10 803	11 939
Selva lacandona	83	0	2 220	940	2 714	2 259	2 233	2 810
Maya	36	151	908	3 189	561	578	2 265	1 762
Tulijá Tzeltal Chol	22	0	0	350	780	1 698	3 189	1 737
Meseta Comiteca Tojolobal	31	249	1 551	2 880	3 081	7 410	4 016	7 912
No especificados	0	0	0	149	0	0	0	0
Total	3 446	4 472	36 307	53 828	33 786	60 427	118 510	105 480

Source: Created based on information from Segob, Conapo, INM, SRE, STPS and Colef (2006 and 2013).

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Reception: November 24th, 2017

Approval: May 24th, 2018