

## *Emigrant Communities as Global Citizens* *Workshop Report: World Social Forum, 2003*

About 20 people, including emigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Bolivia, Perú, Brazil, and Germany participated in the January 25 workshop. Although most of the participants are currently living in the United States, the group included an organization of Peruvians in Spain, a group of Bolivians in Argentina, and Uruguayans in Brazil. Despite the afternoon heat and the fact that the location of the workshop was changed several times in successive versions of the Forum Program, those who did manage to find the room arrived eager to share their experiences and learn from others. Participants were especially delighted to learn that similar immigrant-led organizations existed in many countries.

### Workshop Objective:

EnlacesAmérica convened the workshop to create a space for sharing the experiences of migrant populations with respect to how these communities are playing a transformative role, both in their countries of origin and in their adopted countries. The workshop also discussed the challenges or redefining civic participation in light of the bi-national experience that characterizes many immigrant communities. The workshop began with brief presentations from participants in the Enlaces América immigrant leader delegation, who described the organizing experiences of Mexican and Central American immigrant groups in the United States. The discussion then opened up to include the entire group. It became clear very quickly that the different groups of emigrants share many common experiences.

### Common Experiences Shared by Immigrant-led Organizations

1. The double burden of working under difficult conditions (low salaries, strenuous labor), while also suffering from the impacts of anti-immigrant policies.
2. Racism in the adopted country. Local residents often have the impression that migrants are stealing their jobs. This problem is made even worse when politicians capitalize on racism and xenophobia as part of their electoral campaigns.
3. The sense that their voices go unheard in public policy debates. Politicians and decision-makers do not see them as a constituency. Even traditional “pro-immigrant” organizations do not adequately represent the interests of organized migrants.

## Principal Conclusions

1. We live in a hemisphere of migrants. There are significant organized groups of migrants in almost all the countries of the Americas and even in Europe.
2. Emigrants are organizing themselves, more and more. Despite all their challenges, migrants are experimenting with diverse forms of organizing including mutual support organizations, hometown associations, coalitions of local hometown clubs, youth and church –based groups, etc.
3. These new organizations remain deeply engaged with their places of origin, even as they begin to seek avenues for civic and political participation in their adopted nation.
4. There is a growing understanding that local quality of life (both in the place of origin and in the place of residence) depends on global and regional processes. Immigrant-led organizations are beginning to seek mechanisms to engage and change these processes.

Nevertheless,

5. Immigrants' organizations need cogent, synthetic information and analysis to help them prioritize their actions. The World Wide Web, given the vast volume of information it accesses, can overwhelm local organizations with a flood of data that becomes paralyzing rather than enabling.
6. Migrants' organizations need to develop relationships in order to work together effectively. To this end, "virtual" spaces can be very useful, but face-to-face meetings are still critical for building trust.

## Follow-up Proposals

- No new networks (for now). "We can end up caught in our own nets"
- Do create spaces for discussion of common strategy and for exchange.
- We need to call attention to the fact that organized groups of migrants already exist throughout the hemisphere. Explore the possibility of convening an "Emigrant Summit of the Americas"
- Create a virtual space on the web for information exchange among groups in different countries and within the United States.