

Dominican Migration to USA

(Destination Countries)

- **Beginning and evolution of Dominican migration to the United States**

The first waves of Dominican migration to the United States began in 1960. This migratory flow increased in volume during the 1970s and 80s, until reaching its highest level and slightly decline in the mid 90s. Dominican migration to the United States can be explained by historical, structural and political factors. From a historical perspective, the relationship between Dominican Republic and the United States dates back to the nineteenth century, when the option of annexing the island to the United States was considered. The United States also occupied Dominican Republic between 1916 and 1924 and later returned in a context of military intervention in 1965. These historical connections facilitated information flows and allowed for migration when relations changed between the two countries.

It is important to note that during the dictatorship of Trujillo the possibilities of leaving the island were limited and required special permission. For this reason, migration was highly selective and restricted during this period. Nevertheless, it was the opening up of the Dominican economy in 1961 that contributed to a massive growth in migration. In a context of high unemployment and political unrest, migration was an escape valve for the Dominican population. The modification of the economic model that followed the change of regime also encouraged migration, since with the development of the sectors of tourism and free trade zones, people employed in the productive sector have been excluded from the model of services in expansion. This unemployment has increased their perception of vulnerability. In addition to these internal difficulties, migration increases due to attraction to the destination country, which can be seen amongst young people who want to leave the country to measure the value of their skills and work experience in destination countries' labor markets (1). According to data from the 2000 Census, 65.9% of Dominican residents arrived to the U.S. prior to 1989, while 37.5% entered the country between 1990 and 2000.

- **Number of Dominicans residing in the United States**

According to the 2000 Census, 799,768 Dominicans lived in the United States during that year.

- **Feminization of Dominican migration to the United States**

The 2000 Census reveals that most of the Dominican population living in the United States at that time was female (53.8%). These women earned on average 25% less than Dominican men. The average annual income of a Dominican woman in the New York area was \$11,371 USD, while that of a Dominican man was \$15,139 USD.

- **Distribution by age**

Annual surveys conducted between 1997 and 2000 reveal that the Dominican population is young.

- **Level of education**

According to a study conducted by Ramona Hernandez and Francisco L. Creek-Batiz (2000) (2), Dominican people in the United States have lower education levels compared to the national average. In 2000, 10% of Dominicans over the age of 25 had completed university studies, compared to 24.4% of the total American population. Nevertheless, 21.9% of Dominican people born in the United States had finished university in 2000. That means that Dominican people born in the United States have a higher academic level than Dominican immigrants and than the “second generation” Hispanic community in the United States. In New York, this proportion reached 55.1% in that same year. Dominican people also have a high rate of scholastic insertion compared to other minorities in the United States.

- **Labor Insertion**

Among different studies there is little agreement about the social origin of the Dominican migration to the U.S. Initial studies described the first migrants as farmers and villagers. Later studies highlighted an urban middle-class migration. The most recent studies say that, although the Dominican group has varied origins, it is mostly comprised by a working-class, concentrated in the such activities as industrial operators and service workers. The 1990 Census described most of the Dominican community as unskilled workers due to their low education level.

Annual surveys conducted between 1997 and 2000 reveal that 33.2% of the Dominican population works in the services sector and 30.4% works as operators and manufacturers. Also, 10.9% are managers and professionals and 25.4% are technicians, sales personnel and administrative support.

The groups that migrated in the 1960s found work in sectors that were declining in terms of employment and remuneration. These jobs were poorly paid, but they were better remunerated than many positions in the services sector. In 1989, 25.7% of the Dominican population worked in the manufacturing sector. Dominicans have become known for opening retail stores called bodegas. Some analysts point out that the activity of small entrepreneurs and owners of commercial establishments allows them to have employment and financial independence in a context where well paid employment is difficult to come by and survival strategies are needed. Other authors interpret the phenomenon as an enclave of the transnational economy where the savings are not invested in the U.S., but in the country of origin.

According to Ramona Hernandez and Francisco L. Creek-Batiz (2000), the Dominican community has good possibilities for social mobility, as an increase in education level has been observed, mainly in the “second generation.” This could be a way to access better paid jobs of greater prestige.

According to Max J. Castro and Thomas D. Boswell (2002) (3), 67% of the Dominican diaspora is concentrated in New York-Northern New Jersey-, 7.7% are in Miami-Fort-Lauderdale and 4.1% in Boston-Worcester-Lawrence. Low income sectors of this population seem to be more concentrated in New York, while middle-class Dominicans are common in the other destinations.

- **Income**

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the average annual income of a Dominican woman working in the New York City Area was \$11,371 USD, while Dominican men earned an average of \$15,139 USD.

- **Sending and utilization of remittances**

According to a 2004 survey conducted by the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) on the senders and receivers of remittance flows from the United States to Dominican Republic, 45% of senders have resided in the U.S. for more than 10 years. The senders' education levels are different, as well as their ages, although many are of a working age: 17% are between the ages of 25 and 35, 34% between the ages of 36 and 49 and 26% between 50 and 64 years of age. Of the senders, 58% are women. Also, 57% have their legal residence and 35% their citizenship.

Of the total number of adult Dominican immigrants in the U.S., 71% send remittances on a regular basis. According to the 2004 MIF study, some 710,000 immigrants send close to \$1.6 million dollars to their relatives annually. Although, the average amount of each remittance is \$150 USD, amounts do vary: 20% send less than \$50 USD, 46% send between \$51 and \$100 USD and 18% between \$101 -\$200 USD. On average, remittances are sent 15 times per year and 69% of those who send remittances have been doing so for over 5 years. The most common channels through which to send these funds include the remesadora (remittance) companies (84%) and the post office (10%). Among those who send money, 46% send it to a single person, 23% to two people and 16% to three people.

Senders' incorporation into the banking system is a partially reached goal. Data from the 2004 MIF survey reveals that 51% of senders do not have a bank account. Migratory status can be one explanation for this, since those Dominicans who do have a bank account (49%), either have U.S. citizenship (59%) or legal residence (41%). If we observe the same variable in the Dominican Republic, we calculate that 27% of the total Dominican population in the United States has an account in their country of origin.

Households that receive remittances use 60% of them to cover basic living expenses and 17% to pay for education, while 5% is invested in businesses, 5% in savings and 4% in real estate.

1. UNDP, Informe de Desarrollo Humano de República Dominicana, 2005
2. "Dominicanos en los Estados Unidos: Un perfil socioeconómico, 2000", realizado por la directora del Instituto de Estudios Dominicanos de City College de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York, Ramona Hernández, y el profesor de Economía y Educación del Teachers College, de Columbia University, Francisco L. Rivera-Batiz.
3. Castro Max J., Boswell Thomas D., The Dominican Diaspora Revisited: Dominicans and Dominican-Americans in a New Century, The North-South Agenda, Enero del 2002