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## Billions from immigrants

### Arizona ninth in amount sent to Latin relatives

**By Ignacio Ibarra**  
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The money that immigrant workers send back home in dribbles of about \$200 a month, grows into a \$30 billion torrent of cash so big it surpasses all other forms of foreign capital exchange in Mexico and Latin America, a new study shows.

At \$9.1 billion, immigrant workers in California, with 5.3 million Latin American adults, send the most money back home, according to the Inter American Development Bank, which released a state-by-state breakdown Monday.

Rounding up the top five were: New York at \$3.6 billion; Texas at \$3.2 billion; Florida at \$2.4 billion; and Illinois at \$1.5 billion.

Arizona, with just more than 533,000 Latin American adults living in the state, ranked ninth in the study. It showed that about 42 percent of immigrant workers here sent \$606 million back home.

The money is primarily spent on helping families survive in harsh economic times. But a small portion, up to 15 percent, is saved and invested. That's helping to build "economic democracy" in nations where, until recently, only the wealthy had access to bank accounts, said Donald Terry, manager of the Multilateral Investment Fund, a part of the Inter American Development Bank.

"We now have what is essentially an integrated labor market in which money flows south and people flow north," Terry said of the study findings. "Whether it's bad or it's good, it's reality.

"People are going to move to where the jobs are."

The benefit of better-paying jobs for the immigrant community in the United States is obvious, but the economic value of the combined \$450 billion in earnings provides an invaluable spark to the nation's economic engine, he said.

While the growing volume of remittances from the U.S. to Latin America provides some relief to those left behind, it also is a symptom of the failure of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the economic globalization that is forcing people off their land and across the U.S. border, said John Fife. Fife is pastor of the Tucson's Southside Presbyterian Church and co-founder of the nationwide Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s.

"It is clear that without that remittance from migrant workers there would be tremendous social and political upheaval in Mexico and Central America," he said.

About 60 percent of the nearly 10 million Latin American immigrants in the U.S. send money to relatives back home, the study said.

For the immigrants in the U.S., the money represents about 10 percent of their annual income. The money sent home, however, represents more than 80 percent of the recipients' total household income, according to the study that was based on 3,800 phone interviews conducted in 37 states with large Hispanic populations.

The study is the first to quantify the remittance from individual states.

The study found that some of the most recent immigrants to the U.S. from Latin American countries are settling in states not traditionally seen as immigrant destinations - like Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. More than 1 million immigrants living in those states sent more than \$2.2 billion back to Latin America in 2003.

The recent immigrants in those Southern states averaged more than \$2,600 in remittances per year while older, more established immigrants sent about \$1,132 a year back home.

Terry said one of the reasons for the lesser amount going back home from more established immigrants is that families usually are reunited in the United States.

Last year, the flow of remittances from Mexicans living in the U.S. to relatives in Mexico totaled more than \$13 billion, said Florencio Zaragoza, president of Fundacion Mexico, a Tucson-based organization that promotes the interests of Mexican citizens living in the U.S.

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