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## Executive Summary: Growing Up in North America

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If they were any other group, they would be a powerful political force. Their leaders would be on the national stage and they would have organizations that reached across borders to make common cause on major issues of concern.

But because children don't have access to political influence, they must rely on adults to listen to them, to encourage and support their participation in issues that affect them, to advocate for them, and to act in their best interests by passing laws to protect them and by putting policies and programs in place to help them reach their full potential.

When we do—when we get it right for kids—we do more than support children's healthy and happy development. We help to make our societies stronger.

Concern about the well-being of children and families and an understanding of supporting children as a social as well as a parental responsibility brought together organizations in three countries to partner in developing a unique view of children growing up in North America.

The premise of the *Children in North America Project* lies in the kind of world we live in today, an increasingly interdependent, complex, and connected world. It is a small world where school children living in a desert state or a prairie province know all about a *tsunami* because of images of wreckage from a giant wave half a world away.

As the globe shrinks, so too does North America. The continent that is shared by three nations, each with its own proud history, is becoming more economically, socially, and culturally integrated—through trade, investment, communications, human migration, education, travel, and cultural exchange.

Children in the three nations are increasingly being exposed to similar consumer goods, media messages, and social trends. Moreover, for some children, increased economic ties imply drastic changes to their immediate surroundings and prospects—whether it is a child living in an American family without work because the local employer moved its operations to Mexico or a child living without a father in a Mexican town because many working-age men have left to seek jobs in the United States or Canada.

The sheer scale of migration from Mexico to the United States and, to a lesser extent, to Canada is changing the face of the region and the lives of countless children. The Mexican-born population in the United States more than doubled between 1990 and 2000, going to over 9 million people, according to U.S. Census data. Remittances from Mexicans working in the United States to families back home amounted to over 16 billion U.S. dollars in 2004 (as estimated by the Central Bank of Mexico), roughly 1.5 percent of the country's GDP. Added together, the sums that migrants send back home surpass Mexico's revenues from tourism, foreign aid, and foreign direct investment.

The *Children in North America Project* is exploring these new realities. It is building a new knowledge base about children across the continent. That knowledge base includes measures of child well-being and the local, national, and tri-national contexts or environments in which families live.

These data tell the story of a diverse population of children characterized by profound differences in their well-being and security—both within countries and across the region.

Through this project, we hope to build a better understanding of how our children are faring and the opportunities and challenges that they face looking to the future. Our goal is to inspire and mobilize action to make the lives of all children in North America better, to ensure that no child is left behind.