

Los Angeles police arrest work-soliciting immigrants

Complaints against groups in suburbs lead cities to grapple with laborers

BY BEN FOX
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

REDONDO BEACH, Calif. — Looking back, Braulio Gonzalez says, the man who drove up and offered him \$10 an hour to break up a concrete driveway did seem suspicious. The man's truck didn't have license plates and he wouldn't say where the job was, telling the day laborer to follow in his car.

Sure enough, a few minutes later, police from this Los Angeles suburb arrested Gonzalez and three other laborers as they turned into a dead-end street.

"I've been working on that corner for years," says the 48-year-old Guatemala native. "Nothing like this has ever happened."

Gonzalez was caught up in an unusual — and critics say unconstitutional — sting that underscores the vastly different responses U.S. cities have offered to the growing number of men, often Hispanic immigrants, who wait on street corners for a day's work.

Cities such as Thousand Oaks, another Los Angeles suburb, and Hoover, Ala., set aside space for workers to gather and even to take English classes. Other communities, from Prince William County, Va., to Redondo Beach, have decided the best way to handle public complaints about the pick-up spots is to move the men along with citations and arrests.

Conflicts are happening more often as temporary laborers become a permanent fixture of the U.S. labor market, particularly in construction, landscaping and do-it-yourself home improvement, according to researchers who study the issue.

"The notion of looking for work in this manner annoys a lot of people," said Abel Valenzuela, a University of California Los Angeles sociologist who has surveyed day laborers around the country. "Most cities react negatively."

In Redondo Beach, police said they acted after getting numerous complaints about laborers at the city's two corner gathering spots being drunk, urinating in public, loitering, trespassing, blocking traffic and harassing customers entering businesses.

About 60 day laborers were arrested in a series of stings last month. They were charged with violating an until-now rarely enforced 1987 ordinance that prohibits soliciting employment in a public place. The maximum penalty is a \$100 fine and three years' probation.

"We applaud their desire to work, but our job is to maintain order," said City Councilman Gerard Bisignano.

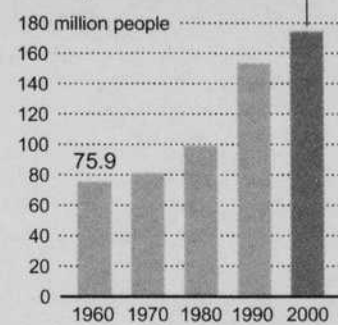
Immigrant advocates have challenged the arrests as a First Amendment violation. Laborers call the crackdown harassment.

"We're not criminals. We go where we have to go to get work," said Gonzalez, a legal U.S. resident and former

A century of migration

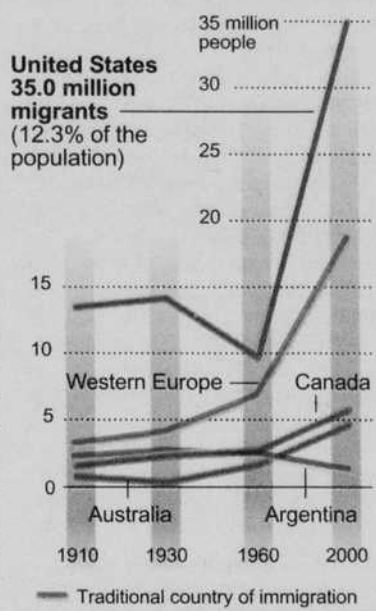
More people live outside their country of origin today than at any other time in history and the surge in migration is playing a significant role in the changing demographics of many countries.

In 2000, 175 million people were living outside their country of birth



Main destination for international migrants

United States 35.0 million migrants (12.3% of the population)



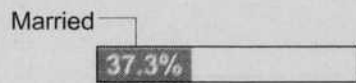
SOURCE: United Nations

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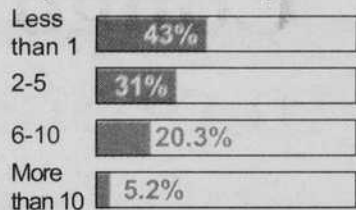
Day laborer profile in Southern California

One in four day laborers worked as a laborer for over six years, with about 5 percent doing so for more than 10 years. Most were Hispanic, young and not married.

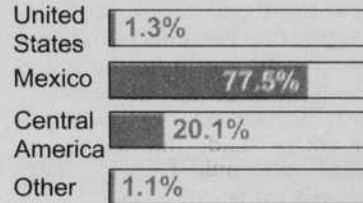
Marital status



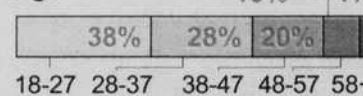
Day laborer tenure in years



Country of origin



Age



SOURCE: UCLA, Center for the Study of Urban Poverty, 1999 survey

AP

merchant seaman who supports a wife and young son on trickle-in wages that can be up to \$110 on a good day and nothing at all on a bad one.

The men were released on \$100 bail with a notice to appear in court. Police did not contact federal immigration authorities to determine whether any of the laborers were in this country illegally, as their counterparts did last month in Virginia when they arrested about two dozen immigrants for loitering outside a 7-Eleven.

Virginia Kice, a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokeswoman, said the agency sees little practical value in raiding gathering spots because many day laborers are legal residents.

In well-to-do Thousand Oaks, on the opposite side of downtown Los Angeles, officials fielded complaints about day laborers in one neighborhood for 15 years before they set aside space for workers in a grassy area beneath a freeway. The city installed portable toilets, benches and bike racks for the men, and also provides a meeting

room for English classes.

The city still gets scattered complaints about the laborers, said Assistant City Manager Scott Mitnick.

"You never really resolve the issue. You just move it from one neighborhood to another," Mitnick said. "The downside is it's a lot of people in one area, and nobody wants that near their home."

The city of Redondo Beach said it has considered giving workers their own space but could not afford it.

Activists said Redondo Beach simply chose to spend money on enforcement and fighting a lawsuit filed by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which has prevailed in court against similar laws in Los Angeles County.

In any case, the arrests may not be much of a deterrent.

"We're going back to the corner," said Angel Sanchez, a 50-year-old illegal immigrant laborer from Ecuador. "We need to eat. We need to pay the rent."

Congo: More than 3 million killed during five-year war

Continued from page 6

workers and from aid groups.

No clashes between Congolese and Rwandan forces had been reported, he said.

A ranger at Virunga National Park bordering Rwanda and Congo said he saw about 400 armed Rwandan troops cross into the park Sunday.

The troops were well-armed and traveled in a sport utility vehicle and on foot, the ranger said on condition of anonymity, adding they appeared to be heading north to remote volcanic mountains north of Goma.

The area is believed to hold some of the estimated 8,000-10,000 Rwandan Hutu rebels still in Congo.

In Goma, local chiefs also said their people reported seeing Rwandan troops in isolated hills since Friday.

In Kigali, Rwanda's capital, Rwandan special envoy Richard Sezibera said he would neither confirm nor deny that Rwandan troops have entered Congo. Sezibera said the Rwandan government would "do whatever is necessary to protect Rwanda's borders and people."

The Rwandan envoy specified the Rwandan Hutu rebels were "in the area" of the reported Rwandan incursions, including Virunga National Park and the small town of Rutshuru.

When asked directly about the reports coming from eastern Congo, he said, "I will not comment about rumors, reported sightings, innuendo, timelines or projections."

"To our knowledge, there's no Rwandan presence," said Jacqueline Chenard, a spokeswoman for the U.N. force in east Congo. "It's a rumor."

The United Nations has 11,000 troops in Congo, overseeing peace and power-sharing deals that mandated the withdrawal of foreign armies.

The force is building to 16,000 as the United Nations steps up disarmament efforts of Rwandan Hutu rebels and other militias in the east.

Some other Western diplomats in Congo's capital said they had no confirmation that Rwandan troops had entered.

Kabila met Monday with ambassadors of U.N. Security Council nations and leading African nations, Kasongo confirmed. Kabila informed them he would send troops to North Kivu province. The province, with Goma as its capital, encompasses the areas of the alleged incursions.

Rwanda has invaded Congo twice since 1996 on the grounds of flushing out Rwandan Hutu rebels responsible for the 1994 genocide of a half-million minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus in the nation.

Rwanda's second Congo invasion, in 1998, touched off a five-year war that drew in the armies of four other nations and split resource-rich Congo. An estimated 3.2 million people died in the Rwanda-controlled east alone, most through famine and disease.

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