



# MIGRANTS & AN OPEN INTERNET

*"It is migrants, rather than geeks, who have emerged as the 'most aggressive' adopters of new communications tools. Dispersed families with strong ties and limited resources have taken to voice-over-internet services, IM and webcams, all of which are cheap or free. They also go online to get news or to download music from home."*

— Swisscom Anthropologist, Stefana Broadbent

## WHAT IS AN OPEN INTERNET?

The Internet is the most powerful and creative communications advancement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It connects millions of people to basic services, health care, education, employment and news – it also provides a platform for economic justice and social change. An Open Internet (also called Net Neutrality) ensures that Internet users can access any website, service, or application of their choice without interference or discrimination by the Internet Service Provider ("ISP"). This means that once a consumer buys an Internet service connection, he or she can choose to access any content without fear that the ISP will block or impair access to it. An Open Internet prevents ISPs from censoring content for any reason or giving preferential treatment to any specific website, service, or application based merely on its content, message, or ownership. This non-discrimination concept has been the guiding principle for the Internet since its inception, and is the foundation for the innovation, economic empowerment and democratic engagement that the Internet has made possible for communities at the margins.

**Ethnic, cultural, and linguistic links established between communities of origin and destination, help to maintain and strengthen a community's identity.**

## MIGRATION AND AN OPEN INTERNET

As of 2005, some 191 million people – 3% of the world's population – lived outside their country of origin.<sup>1</sup> Migration is not a new thing. "People have always left their homes in search of better economic opportunities, both within and outside of their own homeland. But economic globalization has put a new spin on global migration, causing global uprootedness and human displacement on an unprecedented scale."<sup>2</sup> Because economic globalization exacerbates the inequalities between nations, migration for many becomes not a choice, but an economic necessity.

As people move in search of work and a better life for themselves and their families, they retain their ties to their communities of origin. This desire for community is as crucial to survival as the need for work, or food and shelter.<sup>3</sup> "The experience of hundreds of years of history has taught us that economic and social survival depends on maintaining the identity, language, and traditions that hold a community together."<sup>4</sup> Communication technologies, like email and the Internet, lower the costs that migrants face to keep in touch with their relatives and friends, and help them to remain connected to their home country.<sup>5</sup>

1 <http://149.120.32.2/pds/migration.htm>

2 [http://www.unpac.ca/economy/g\\_migration.html](http://www.unpac.ca/economy/g_migration.html)

3 Bacon, D. (2006). *Communities Without Borders: Images and Voices from the World of Migration*; Carlos Muñoz Jr. (Foreword); Douglas Harper (Foreword). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

4 [http://www.truthout.org/docs\\_2005/101605E.shtml](http://www.truthout.org/docs_2005/101605E.shtml)

5 [http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/trade-negotiations/trade-negotiations\\_05.asp](http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/trade-negotiations/trade-negotiations_05.asp)

## WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR MIGRANT COMMUNITIES?

- Online/Mobile Activism
- Maintaining connections to home and family
- Small business development
- Ability to access relevant news and information
- Ability to financially support family and friends in your country of origin

## FACTS:

- More than 38 million adults in the United States were born in another country<sup>6</sup>
- In 2008, the World Bank estimated that migrants in the U.S. remitted approximately \$100 billion to their home countries<sup>7</sup>
- Immigrant women and men are 57% and 71% (respectively) more likely to start a business than U.S. born women and men<sup>8</sup>
- Immigrant business owners generate \$67 billion of the \$577 billion in U.S. business income<sup>9</sup>
- Over 51 million ethnic adults connect to each other, to home countries, and to America through 3000+ ethnic media<sup>10</sup>
- A Pew Research study on cell phone usage found that 54% of cell phone-owning Latinos use text messaging<sup>11</sup>
- According to the OECD, nearly 40% of new U.S. jobs – including those for software engineers – were filled by immigrants<sup>12</sup>

## WHY IS AN OPEN INTERNET A MIGRANT RIGHTS ISSUE?

- The neutral platform of the Internet ensures migrant voices are heard. This is a powerful tool for a historically disenfranchised community, and particularly important for a younger generation who expects constant connectivity as well as the freedom to express themselves and their culture
- Enabling remittance transfers and payments using technologies such as the Internet and mobile phone is a promising method for increasing access to faster and cheaper services for senders and receivers – including those in remote or under serviced areas
- Migrant communities depend on cheap phone cards to make long distance and international calls. Many of the calls made with these cards are routed over the Internet, using VOIP, or voice over Internet protocol

6 *Children of Immigrants: National and State Characteristics*; by Karina Fortuny, Randy Capps, Margaret Simms, and Ajay Chaudry

7 <http://international-financial-affairs.suite101.com/article.cfm/immigrant-remittances>

8 U.S. State Department

9 <http://www.google.com/search?q=%E2%80%A2%09Immigrant+business+owners+generate+%2467+billion+of+the+%24577+billion+in+U.S.+business+income&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a>

10 New American Media

11 [www.mobilevoter.org/press/110306%20New%20America%20Media.pdf](http://www.mobilevoter.org/press/110306%20New%20America%20Media.pdf)

12 [www.dni.gov/nic/PDF\\_GIF\\_otherprod/migration.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_GIF_otherprod/migration.pdf)



- The emergence of digital technologies has enabled the expansion of small media communications to a global scale – primarily through the Internet
- Online websites, radio, and social media provide accurate news, information, and cultural content to millions of migrant community members in their native languages on a daily, hourly and minute-by-minute basis
- Although broadband adoption among migrants is low, mobile usage is growing. As a result, many organizing, outreach, and communication strategies are targeted towards mobile device users
- Migrants must be able to trust network operators to be neutral, and not influenced by political or other agendas. It's crucial for users that the information disseminated and gathered remains confidential

#### HOW DOES AN OPEN INTERNET HELP MIGRANT COMMUNITIES?

- Migrants rely on an open Internet to find, receive, and share information that is meaningful and relevant to their lives
- Ethnic papers and blogs rely on online viewing; they need an Internet that is open and non-discriminatory to share information and resources with migrants in all parts of the world
- An open Internet is crucial for migrant small business owners, startups, and entrepreneurs who rely on the Internet to launch their businesses, create a market, advertise their products and services, and distribute products to customers
- On a daily basis, migrants send remittances home, much of it through e-remittance services such as G-Cash, Remithome.com, PayPal or WesternUnion.com
- An open Internet will help to foster job growth, competition and innovation
- An open Internet will spur economic growth, and make the Internet faster and more affordable for everyone

**There are serious social justice implications for migrant communities when they cannot connect affordably and openly in order to maintain relationships with their families and homelands.**

**TO DEFEND AN  
OPEN INTERNET,  
GO TO [MAG-NET.ORG](http://MAG-NET.ORG).**