

Drawn by a \$7-a-day salary, thousands of Mexicans migrate north to border cities like Ciudad Acuña, looking for opportunities still unavailable in the southern states.

Mexico's struggling economy has attracted American companies like General Motors and Chrysler across the border, where they can pay Mexican workers a fraction of what American counterparts would demand.

The wages, however, are over twice as much as most Mexicans make — especially those from Coahuila, where the minimum wage is the lowest in the entire country.

While maquiladoras have been the target of much criticism, Mexico's underprivileged see the factories as an opportunity to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families. ...

"People came by the thousands," said Jacobo Rodriguez, chairman of the bilateral committee of Del Rio. "When the city would finish building one street the need for ten more arose. All this growth is credited to the maquiladoras. If the maquiladoras go people would probably cross the border north looking to escape the economic crisis in Mexico."

More than one third of Acuña's population is employed by maquiladoras, according to Rodriguez.

"Fifty thousand people are directly employed by the maquiladora industry and throughout the years," he said, "the maquiladoras have evolved into better facilities for their employees. These maquiladoras are considered first world establishments. They have top quality standards and quality services. They are not sweatshops — maybe in the initial phase of the maquiladora back in the eighties, but not anymore."

-Maria Elena Cruz, La Prensa, "Maquiladoras: A Mixed Blessing for Mexicanos" (March 14, 2004) excerpt