

For Some Immigrants, a Balancing Act

Funds Sent to Needy Families Back Home Exact a Price

By MICHELLE GARCIA
Special to The Washington Post

NEW YORK—Lilliam Perez remembers the frantic calls from the Dominican Republic to her home in the Bronx. A medical emergency, an unforeseen crisis or a problem paying for food—and her aunts, uncles and grandmother turned to her mother for help. Without fail, Perez's mother rushed to Rivas Travel, a neighborhood one-stop shop for immigrants where she often wired money to the Caribbean island.

"Even if she had to borrow, she had to provide," said Perez, 28, who immigrated to the United States when she was 12 years old. Memories of her island relatives remained vivid, but she could not help but feel slighted by her mother's role as family heroine. "At that age, I just didn't understand why they couldn't provide for themselves."

Millions of immigrants make weekly or monthly pilgrimages to money-transfer storefronts where they send small fortunes—called remittances—to families in places from Eastern Europe to the tip of the Americas. Modern technology and a global economy have tethered immigrants more closely than ever before to their distant homelands. But as parents send money back to their homelands, their U.S.-raised children grow up balancing an allegiance to a distant family with immediate wants and needs.

"You feel jealous that you don't get 100 percent attention," Perez said. The money diverted did not bother Perez; her mother owned a successful beauty salon in Manhattan. But she struggled to understand the tangled human bonds with people who were becoming lost to childhood memory.

"My mother calls the Dominican Republic every night. Even today, I feel like [my parents] live a double life," Perez said.

In fact, many immigrants do—working here and worrying about relatives back home. The bulk of the money sent to homelands—pegged at more than \$38 billion by the Inter-American Development Bank—comes from Latino immigrants in the United States. Wired south in small installments, this money amounts to a vast income transfer that feeds families in Oaxaca, Mexico, helps to bury the dead in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and starts businesses and fixes schools in the highlands of the Dominican Republic.

Remittances are "more than just sending money," said Donald Terry, director of the Multilateral Investment Fund, which tracks remittance patterns among immigrants. "It has to do with human bonds."

Earlier waves of immigrants arrived in the United States bound by the same promise to never abandon families left behind. Today's technology, however, makes it easier with affordable phone cards and the Web redefining the immigrant experience. Still, the comfort and obligation of staying in touch with distant relatives can be lost on im-



Daisy Chavez, left, mother Margarita and brother Daniel make do in New York, while sending funds to Mexico.

migrant children. Many describe growing up wondering why their parents must sacrifice to provide for two families.

Daniel Chavez, 24, looks around the cramped tenement apartment where he grew up on Manhattan's Upper West Side. "Until I went to college," he said, "there was always a need for something."

The rent and Catholic school tuition stretched the limits of the wages his parents earned sewing and working in restaurants. When he began playing soccer, he turned to his parents for help.

"I needed the money for a uniform," said Daniel Chavez, but that was considered a luxury and he had to earn the money himself doing odd jobs. "We needed the money here, and they still sent it back."

He said he remembered thinking, "I have more pressing needs here."

At her parent's kitchen table, Daisy Chavez, 18, prints the name of her grandmother onto a money-transfer slip. In her stiff handwriting, Daisy Chavez writes the Mexican address, a place called Chila de la Sal. But she barely remembers the faraway village or the grandmother whose face she has seen only once.

Daisy Chavez's mother takes the slip and a wad of cash and wires the monthly gift of \$100 to the elderly woman who relies on the money to survive.

Each time Daisy Chavez's mother, Margarita, sends that money, the teenager knows it is money that could be spent on clothes, a book or a weekend

trip.

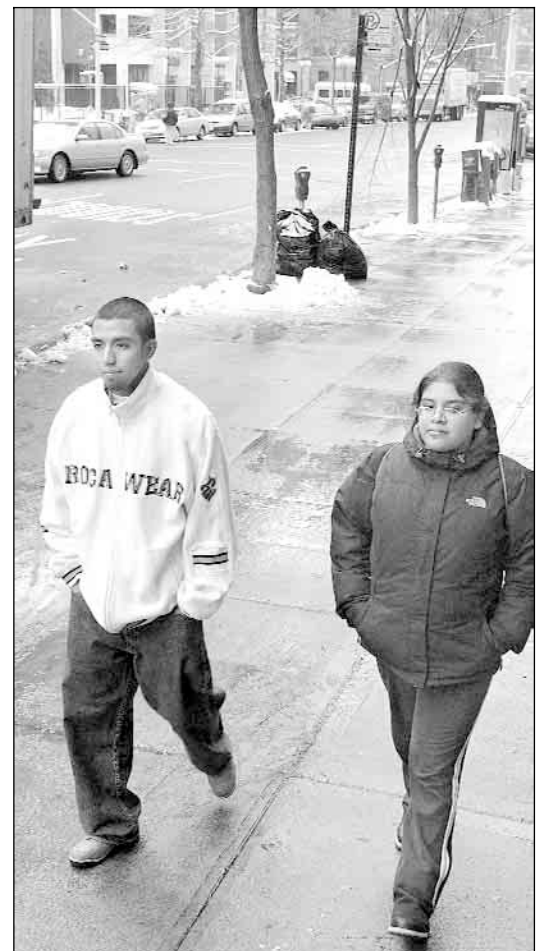
"Sometimes [my mother] says she's sorry that she didn't give me everything I wanted, but I understood," said Daisy Chavez, an aspiring chef. Years earlier she traveled to Mexico and witnessed the dire poverty her mother escaped and that persists around her grandmother. "I learned to accept that they need the money more than I do."

Manuel Orozco, a researcher at the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University said that as the younger generation matures, they develop an "amazement" for their parents' sense of duty that transcends borders.

"You develop a sense of respect and you see them as a role model in a heroic sense," he said. "In turn, it gives them a sense of belonging to a community that values family bonding."

Beverly Solorzano, 14, can quote the latest currency-exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the Honduran lempira. She knows that her three siblings and grandmother can eat and live comfortably because of the \$100 her mother sends every month. "That's family, and family comes first," Solorzano said.

At times, her mother, Susana Nunez, feels guilty about dividing her modest income as a caregiver for the elderly. She says after the bills are paid here and money sent back, she sometimes has to put off special requests for new sneakers or outings.



Daniel and Daisy take a walk outside their Manhattan apartment. The family wires a monthly gift of \$100 to the siblings' grandmother, who relies on the money to survive. Of growing up in New York, Daniel says, "We needed the money here, and they still sent it back."

"You feel sad because they depend on you," she said. "But they have learned to wait for when I do have extra money."

Dilip Ratha, an economist at the World Bank, said it is difficult to predict the future of this multi-billion-dollar economy or whether the next generation will assume the financial ties.

But New York's ethnic neighborhoods offer a glimpse of the future. The Irish and Polish associations, and Indian and Colombian collectives founded by immigrants, have survived for generations and are evolving into vehicles for policy advocacy and philanthropy. "Ties never go away," Ratha said. "In fact, second- and third-generation migrants continue to send money, maybe not to families, but through charities."

Lilliam Perez does not send remittances, except for holidays and birthdays. But she has inherited her mother's promise to remember the relatives she left behind. She became a community liaison for a New York state senator whose district includes a sizable Dominican American constituency, and she belongs to numerous advocacy groups that work to improve the economic conditions of Dominicans in the United States and in the island.

"Different events in our lives determine where we are and what we care about," she said. Her mother's devotion to maintaining the family connection "kept me in touch with how much people here and in the D.R. still need."

Hey Washington, D.C., take The AT&T Wireless 30-day Challenge and hear the difference.

BETTER COVERAGE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.
THE MOST COVERAGE IN NORTH AMERICA.

We're so confident about the improved coverage with our GSM service, we invite you to try us for 30 days risk-free. If for any reason you're not totally satisfied, just return your phone and pay only for usage.

Already a customer? Upgrade your AT&T Wireless service and equipment and discover what our improved coverage can do for you.

OUR BEST DEAL EVER

1000 ANYTIME MINUTES

- Unlimited night & weekend minutes
- Unlimited mobile-to-mobile calling
- Nationwide long distance included

All with the AT&T Wireless Local plan from your applicable Service Area with a 2-year agreement. See below for activation fee and other monthly charges.

NOW YOU CAN ADD UP TO 3 EXTRA LINES FOR \$9.99 PER MONTH EACH.

OFFER ENDS APRIL 17TH

LIMITED TIME OFFER
\$39.99
/MO.

ADDED BONUS
BUY ONE FOR \$49.99
GET ONE FREE.

Nokia 3100 with color screen. After \$190 in instant activation credits. Sugg. retail price \$119.99 ea. Sales tax applies.

AT&T Wireless

CALL 1 800 SWITCHME CLICK attwireless.com VISIT any AT&T Wireless store

AT&T Wireless Stores

Gift Cards now available at most AT&T Wireless stores - perfect for any occasion!

ANNAPOLIS
2285-B Forest Ave.
410 571-8222

COLUMBIA
6490 Dobbin Center Way
410 992-0223

GAITHERSBURG
538 North Fredrick Ave.
240 631-1591

POTOMAC MILLS MALL
Woodbridge, VA
703 492-0927

ROCKVILLE
11832 Rockville Pike
301 881-7188

STERLING
Borders Plaza
703 404-4088

TYSON'S CORNER CTR I
2nd level
703 633-0775

WASHINGTON SQUARE
1050 Conn. Ave. N.W.
202 822-1350

ARUNDEL MILLS
Arundel, Mills Mall
443 755-8855

F. ST., NW
1201 F St.
202 783-4999

GEORGETOWN
3307 M St. NW
202 333-4449

POTOMAC YARD
3725-C Jeff. Davis Hwy.
703 706-9503

SPRINGFIELD
6699 Frontier Drive
703 822-0923

TAVERN SQUARE
417 King Street
703 684-1812

WALDORF
3650 Crain Hwy
301 932-4446

WESTFIELD SHOPPING TOWN
7101 Democracy Blvd
301 365-7692

BOWIE TOWN CENTER
3921 Town Ctr Plz Blvd.
301 860-1623

FAIR OAKS KIOSK
11750 Fair Oaks Mall
703 691-8553

MANASSAS
10980 Bulloch Dr.
703 361-6772

RESTON
11869 Market St.
571 203-9589

STATE DEPARTMENT
320 21st St. NW
202 861-0197

TYSON'S CORNER
8365 C Leesburg Pike
703 905-9770

WASHINGTON D.C.
1300 Pennsylvania Ave.
202 326-9844

WHITE FLINT MALL
Rockville
301 881-0849

AT&T Wireless Authorized Dealers

Wireless service also available at the following locations. Availability and pricing of equipment will vary. Call ahead for details.

WIGO WIRELESS
Falls Church • 703 241-9446

Falls Church • 703 241-9446

Important Information

An additional monthly \$1.75 Regulatory Programs Fee applies to help fund our compliance with various government mandated programs which may not yet be available in your area. This is not a tax or gov't. required charge.

Network improvements only available to customers with GSM/GPRS devices with 850 MHz. Requires qualified plan of \$39.99 or above, two-year agreement, compatible device and \$175 cancellation fee. New activations also require credit approval and \$36 activation fee. Not available for purchase or use in all areas. Portability eligibility varies. Usage is rounded up to the next full minute. Unused monthly allowances lost. Availability and reliability of service are subject to transmission limitations. All minutes available from applicable Service Area. Different rates apply when outside each applicable Service Area. Roaming, additional minute, and long distance charges apply. Various taxes, surcharges, fees and other assessments (e.g., universal connectivity charge) apply. Not available with other offers. Limited time offer. Other restrictions apply. Subject to Service Agreement and printed materials. **Night and Weekend Minutes:** Only available on calls placed from the Service Area. Applicable long distance charges additional. Available from 9 p.m. - 5:59 a.m. Mon. - Fri. and Fri. 9 p.m. - Mon. 5:59 a.m. **Nationwide Long Distance:** No wireless long distance charges apply to calls placed from your Local Service Area to anywhere in the 50 United States. Standard airtime charges apply. **Reachout Unlimited:** Applies to calls placed to or received while in your applicable Mobile-to-Mobile Service Area to or from another AT&T Wireless subscriber when both are on our domestic network. **Instant Activation Credits:** Only available at AT&T Wireless stores, attwireless.com and 1 800 SWITCHME. **Additional Lines Promotion:** Additional lines 2-4 available for \$9.99 per line, per month, with a two-year agreement if activated during the promotional period. See other printed materials for details. **30-Day Challenge:** Purchase a wireless phone and activate service at an AT&T Wireless store or at attwireless.com. Return undamaged phone for refund in first 30 days and pay only for prorated monthly service charges and other usage charges. ©2004 AT&T Wireless. All Rights Reserved.

