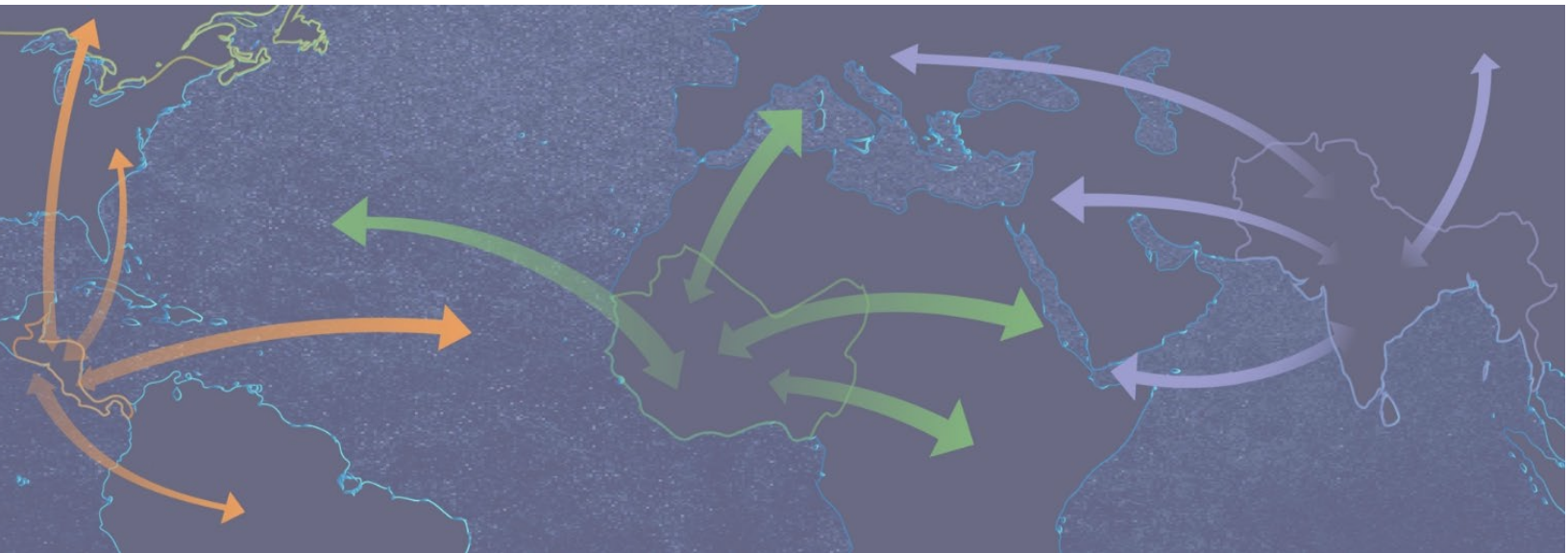


MEMO

Complex Migration Flows and Multiple Drivers in Comparative Perspective



Background country report on Mexico within the migration system of Americas

The MEMO research partnership is led by:



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The MEMO Research Project

MEMO is a **multidisciplinary project** to develop a socio-ecological system framework that integrates drivers (main contextual factors) and individual determinants of migration; its primary objectives are:

To map the links between internal, intra-regional and intercontinental migration along complex population dynamics and migration systems;

- To describe and interpret the interplay among migration drivers (environmental conditions, demographic and health factors, economic development dynamics, socio-political issues), accounting for cultural and emotional processes that can shape individual decisions to migrate;
- To provide evidence to inform policy and support an efficient and rights-based governance of international migration.

Differences and analogies of migration drivers and determinants are comparatively established across (and within) the following regional migration systems:

- **The Americas**– focusing on migration flows from the northern countries of *Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador) to Mexico and further North to the USA and Canada.*
- **West Africa** – focusing on Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Ivory Coast and their inter-related flows to each other, to neighbouring countries in West Africa and towards Europe and Canada.
- **South Asia** – focusing on Nepal and Bangladesh, internal and cross-border flows within South Asia, as well as to Malaysia and Canada. The migration system and population dynamics are described and modelled to capture the plurality of (multi-directional) population flows.

MEMO will contribute innovative analytical tools to support a rights-based governance of migration and related drivers.

Research partner organizations



Background country report on Mexico within the migration system of Americas and Mexico

**Isabel Gil Everaert (El Colegio de México) and
Claudia Masferrer (El Colegio de México)**

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1.0 Introduction

Mexico is located in North America, sharing its northern border with the United States (3,152 km), its southern border with Guatemala (956 km) and Belize (193 km), and bordering with the Pacific Ocean in the west and the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico in the east. Mexico is the fifth largest country in terms of territorial extension in the Americas, with 1,964,375 square kilometers. The Mexican territory is divided into 32 states and 2,469 municipalities. While it may be confusing, one of its states is the State of Mexico (Estado de México, in Spanish), and another is called Mexico City (Ciudad de México, in Spanish), also known as the capital.

Map 1. Mexico and its borders



Source: Wikimedia Commons available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blank_map_of_Mexico_with_states_names.svg

According to the most recent census data from 2020, Mexico had a total population of 126,014,024. This estimate places Mexico in the 11th place globally in terms of population size, and third in the Americas. The latest population growth rate is 0.9%, a rate that has shown a steady decline since the 1970s when population growth rate reached its highest level (3.4%) since the beginning of the 20th century (CONAPO 2023). According to census data, 48.8% of the population in Mexico is male, and 51.2% female. The Mexican population is aging, as observed in the changes in the age-sex distribution from 2000 and 2020 (see Appendix Figure A1). In 2020, the median age was 29, three years older than in 2010, and seven years more than in 2000. The

median age, however, varies by state: Mexico City has the highest (35 years), which is eleven years older than the youngest median age, estimated for Chiapas (24 years). The share of population that is 65 or older increased 2 percentage points between 2010 and 2020, from 6.3% to 8.2%.

Mexico's total fertility rate is below replacement level at 1.9 births per woman, but also heterogeneous among Mexican states: 1.4 in Mexico City and 2.9 in Chiapas. Life expectancy has stagnated since 2005 at around 72 years for men and 77 years for women (CONAPO 2023), partially as a result of increased homicides in younger age groups and an increase of endocrine diseases in older groups (Canudas-Romo, García-Guerrero, and Echarri-Cánovas 2015). Close to half of the total population in Mexico (48.4%) lives in cities or communities with 100,000 inhabitants or more. Nevertheless, 21.4% still live in communities of less than 2,500 inhabitants.

While Mexico's official language is Spanish, 68 indigenous languages are spoken making it one of the ten most diverse countries in terms of linguistic diversity in the world (Secretaría de Cultura 2018). According to 2020 census data, close to eight million people in Mexico speak an indigenous language, which represents 6.1% of the total population; 11.8% of these eight million do not speak Spanish. In 2020, 11.8 million people in Mexico were part of an indigenous household, defined as a having a household head or his/her partner who speaks an indigenous language. The indigenous language most spoken in Mexico is Náhuatl, followed by Mayan, Tzeltal and Tsotsil. The indigenous population is unevenly distributed throughout the Mexican territory: six out of every ten indigenous-speaking persons live in small communities of less than 2,500 inhabitants and 83% of the total indigenous-speaking population are concentrated in only three states: Oaxaca (31.2%), Chiapas (28.2%) and Yucatán (23.7%). Also, according to the 2020 census, 2% of the Mexican population self identifies as Afro-Mexican or of African descent.

In terms of economic indicators, Mexico is an unequal country. In 2022, its GDP was U.S.\$ 1,414 billion, and U.S.\$9,755.62 per capita (World Bank 2022). In the 2021-2022 Human Development Report, Mexico ranked 86th in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), with an overall HDI value of 0.758 (UNDP 2022). In 2020, Mexico's GINI Index was 45.4 (World Bank, 2022).

2.0 Migration dynamics

In large part due to its geographic location, the Mexico-United States migration corridor is one of the largest in the world, and Mexico is a key actor in regional corridors of South–North migration. Although for many years Mexico was considered a country of emigration—mainly to the United States – in recent decades it has become evident that Mexico is a country with mixed migration and displacement dynamics.

By far, the United States has historically been the traditional destination for Mexican emigrants. Today, 11 million Mexicans live in the United States, less than one-hundred thousand in Canada,

and around sixty thousand in Spain – the three main destinations today (Instituto Nacional de Estadística de España 2020; Statistics Canada 2023). This is the result of sustained emigration to the United States since the 1980s, when net migration was negative around five-hundred thousand emigrants leaving every year. In the 1990s, and until 2009, net migration was also negative around three-hundred thousand (see Appendix Figure A2). Following the 2008 Great Recession, flows from Mexico to the United States experienced a sharp decline, while return migration from the United States and immigration of the U.S.-born increased, coupled with the arrival of U.S.-born immigrants to Mexico. As a result, the Mexico-U.S. net migration rate changed dramatically to negative values fluctuating around zero; in other words, more people arrived from the United States than left Mexico (Passel, Cohn, and González-Barrera 2012).

Most of the U.S.-born immigrant population in Mexico is under age 18 and arrived in Mexico accompanying family members upon return or joining family members who were deported (Hamilton, Masferrer, and Langer 2023). Between 2005 and 2014, the number of Mexicans who left the U.S. outpaced the number of new arrivals, and, between 2010 and 2021, the Mexican immigrant population in the United States decreased 9% from 11.7 million to 10.7 million. To a certain extent, the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down this trend, and Mexicans returned to be the top nationality for new arrivals in the U.S. (Rosenbloom and Batalova 2022).

Mexico is increasingly becoming a destination country for a wide array of nationalities. In 2000, the international migration stock in Mexico was 0.5% of the total population with 538,000 foreign-born (see Appendix Figure A3). Fifteen years later, in 2015, this number more than doubled to 1.19 million, reaching 0.95% of the population. International immigrants in Mexico come from a wide array of countries (see Table 1), the result of migration from other countries in the Americas, and extra-continental flows. But the majority are born in the United States. According to the most recent census data, with almost eight-hundred thousand in 2020, the U.S.-born are the largest immigrant group in terms of country of birth and account for a very large share of the foreign-born population: seven in ten in 2000 (343,000), three-quarters in 2010 (742,000) and two-thirds in 2020. The share of immigrants from its neighboring country, Guatemala, remained constant between 3% and 5% of the foreign-born population, but grew from almost thirty thousand in 2000 to almost forty-six thousand in 2020. In 2020, the share of *foreign-born population from other countries* accounted for three out of every ten immigrants in Mexico (INEGI 2020b).

Table 1: Foreign-born population in Mexico by country of origin, 2000-2020

Country of origin	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
United States *	198,230	272,472	358,399	520,171	742,050	728,502	799,248
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	1,460	2,194	3,024	6,528	10,788	16,491	70,377
Guatemala	72,343	49,676	29,156	29,329	32,894	42,221	46,318
Honduras	1,990	3,031	4,203	6,704	9,982	14,623	38,764
Spain*	24,620	22,491	21,334	19,883	20,731	22,544	24,731
Colombia	4,660	5,530	6,639	9,406	13,262	18,461	20,253
El Salvador	301,106	4,931	5,786	6,925	8,866	10,427	16,807
Argentina	4,340	5,366	6,625	9,831	14,174	15,214	16,688
Cuba	2,660	4,858	7,267	9,024	11,825	12,348	13,546
France*	4,190	4,851	5,723	6,739	8,535	9,635	10,569
Canada	3,100	5,063	7,245	8,250	10,210	9,475	10,394
China*	1,240	1,911	2,665	4,698	7,274	8,849	9,706
Germany	4,560	4,988	5,632	5,987	7,035	6,630	7,272
Brazil	1,682	2,482	3,391	3,745	4,533	6,350	6,964
Chile	2,783	4,144	5,685	5,177	5,268	6,121	6,714
Italy	3,503	4,434	5,558	4,974	4,965	5,806	6,368
Haiti	475	395	334	603	941	570	5,787
Other countries	62,732	59,732	59,385	54,674	56,377	79,424	87,118
TOTAL	695,674	458,549	538,051	712,648	969,710	1,013,691	1,197,624

Source: Prepared by the authors with data from (UNDESA 2020a)

2.1 Key events for international migration dynamics since 2000

Since the early 2000s, several key events have transformed migration dynamics in Mexico (see Appendix Table A1), and have contributed to shape policy responses not only in the country but also throughout the region.

First, in 2010 a mass grave with the bodies of 72 migrants—mainly Central Americans—was found in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, in northern Mexico. This discovery was evidence for rising violence against migrants in transit through Mexico, and the increasing control of migratory routes by criminal organizations. In the following years, more mass graves with bodies of migrants were discovered in Cadereyta, Nuevo León (2012) and again in Tamaulipas (2011). These events triggered widespread indignation among human rights activists, international organizations, media outlets and the general public (CNDH n.d.). They also put increased pressure on the Mexican government to take actions to safeguard migrants' rights and properly address the migratory reality in the country. In 2011, Mexico published its new Migration Law as well as the Law on Refugees, Complimentary Protection and Political Asylum; a year later the Bylaws were

published, and the new legal framework was implemented. This normative change was a turning point for Mexican migratory policy, with a focus on human rights, and a clear turn to update policy responses to the contemporary migratory flows in the country.

Second, there was an increase in the number of children and teenagers migrating to Mexico and through Mexico to the United States most of which originate from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (Rosenblum 2015). The number of unaccompanied minors apprehended by U.S. authorities along its southern border increased from 1,000 to 3,000 between Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 and 2011, then to 8,000 in FY 2013, and reached record high numbers in FY 2014, between 16,000 and 18,000 (Giorguli-Saucedo, García-Guerrero, and Masferrer 2016). This event, sometimes referred to as the “unaccompanied minors’ crisis” led to widespread media coverage and policy reactions from both the U.S. and Mexican governments. Months later, in July 2014, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto and his Guatemalan counterpart, Otto Perez Molina, presented a strategy to strengthen migratory surveillance in the border between the two countries: *Programa Frontera Sur* (Southern Border Program). The Southern Border program involved changes to strengthen border security, migratory regulation and management that led to a substantial increase in migrant apprehensions in Mexico. A year after its implementation, migrant apprehensions in Mexico and deportations increased 73%; ninety-seven percent of those deportations were of people from Central American origin (Knippen, Boggs, and Meyer 2015). In fact, during 2016, Mexico deported twice as many Central American migrants than did the United States (150,000¹ and 76,000², respectively) (Gil Everaert 2020a).

After 2014, growth in asylum requests became another trend increasingly visible in mobility dynamics in Mexico: from slightly more than two thousand in 2014 to almost thirty thousand in 2018, a 124% increase over five years. This growth has continued to 2023, with more than one-hundred thousand requests received each year in 2021 and 2022, turning Mexico into the third country worldwide for the number of asylum requests received yearly, after the United States and Germany (Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez 2023). As the number of migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico grew, it also became increasingly harder to enter the country, transit through it, and reach the United States (Meyer and Brewer 2010; Vogt 2013; 2018; Animal Político 2015; Boggs 2015). In 2018, large groups of migrants started assembling in countries of origin (mainly in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador), deciding to start their migratory journeys together. This migrant mobilizing, which would become later known as the “migrant caravans,” was a strategic response to the difficulties in the journey, a way of gaining visibility, protection and increasing the possibilities of successfully reaching their intended destinations (Bravo Regidor and Délano Alonso 2019; Gandini, Fernández de la Reguera, and Narvárez Gutiérrez 2020).

¹ According to data released by the *Unidad de Política Migratoria of the Secretaría de Gobernación* (Ministry of the Interior).

² Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2016.

The arrival of these caravans to the U.S.–Mexico border was met with stronger border protection and stricter migratory controls. Many of these migrants intended to request asylum in the U.S., which led to rising tensions between the two governments. After months of bilateral negotiation, a new set of policies were designed in response to these events. First came the implementation of “metering”, a measure that had been implemented since 2016 in some border cities. Metering involved the implementation of waiting lists obliging asylum seekers to sign up to wait for their turn to enter the U.S. and start the asylum process. Lists were implemented in several cities and by May 2021, more than 20,000 people remained on waiting lists (Arvey and Yates 2021). Parallel to metering, 2019 brought the implementation of the Migrant Migration Protocols (MPP), a bilateral strategy in which migrants were returned to wait in Mexico and undergo the initial steps of their asylum processes there. During its implementation, around seventy-five thousand people were returned to Mexico under MPP (CBP 2019; Gil Everaert 2021; Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez 2023).

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in 2020, many countries implemented restrictions to local and international mobility. In the Mexico–U.S. border, a policy known as Title 42 was enacted. This policy entailed the almost total closure of land border crossings, including asylum seekers. Returns under Title 42 were express removals which did not involve a deportation order nor history in migrants’ record, which led to many people attempting to cross the border several times. Since its implementation, more than 2 million events of express return took place in the U.S.–Mexico border, leaving thousands stranded in northern cities waiting for the possibility to enter the U.S. and access their right to asylum (AIC 2022, 42; Singer 2022; Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez 2023). Title 42 expired in May 2023, returning policy in the border to Title 8, the usual legal framework for asylum processes.

3.0 Internal and cross-border migration

3.1 Internal migration within Mexico

Internal migration has a long history in Mexico. Internal movement of people responded to individual and family economic motivations as well as broader structural economic changes in the country, such as demand for labour in some regions undergoing industrialization. Moreover, urbanization led many to migrate from rural areas to urban centers, while increasing mobility between cities. In some cases, internal migration was a first step towards future international migration journeys, especially as industrialization occurred in northern Mexico (Sobrino 2022).

With changes to U.S. migratory policies since the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, crossing the border became harder and costlier, and seasonal or circular migration became nearly impossible (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003). Added to heightened migratory restrictions, the 2008 financial crisis discouraged many from emigrating to the United States and

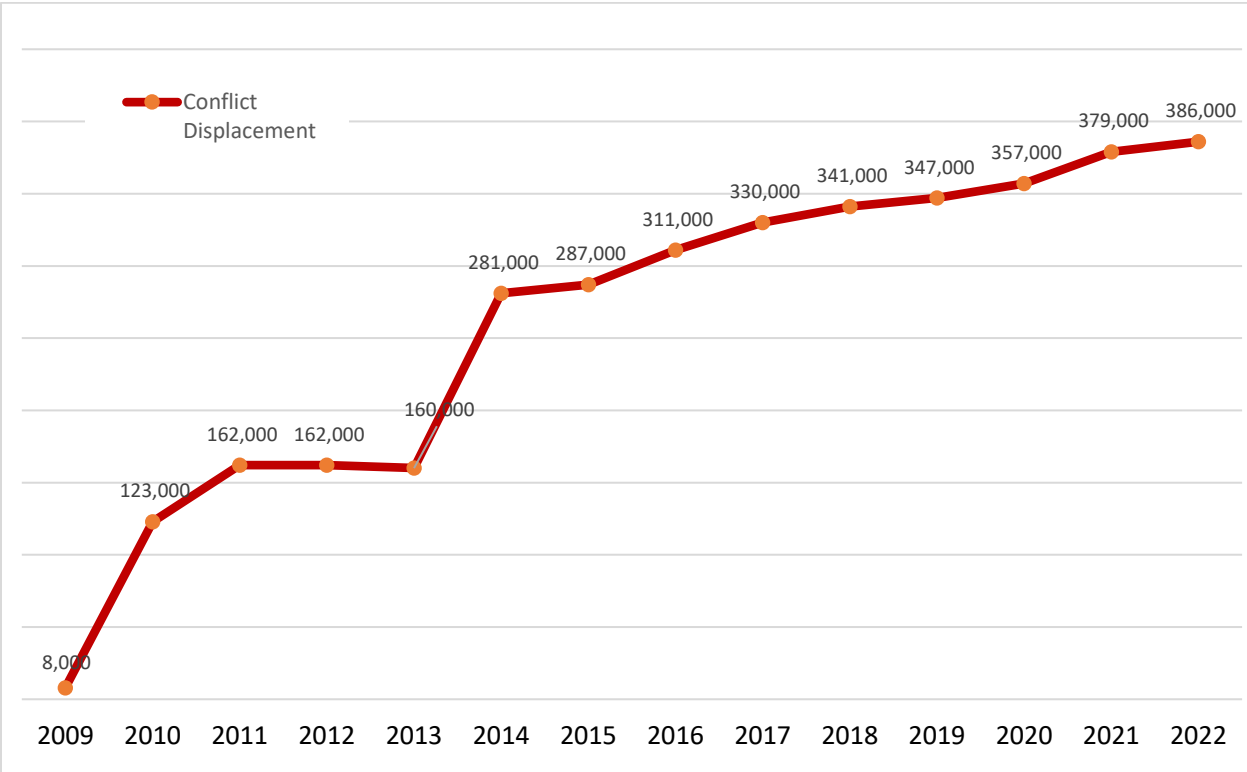
may have increased the likelihood of internally migrating. As Cornelius (2018) argues, these factors contribute to more positive views on internal migration among Mexicans who intend to leave their home communities in search for better life opportunities. Migrating within Mexico is less costly, does not require dealing with smugglers and migration authorities, and is less disruptive to family and community life (Cornelius 2018).

The number of migrants who move internally within Mexico exceeds those of international migrants. Internal migration, according to some scholars, is the main mechanism of demographic distribution in the country (Sobrinho 2018; 2020). Between 1930 and 1990, the number of internal migrants in Mexico doubled every 20 years, and since 2010, close to 20 million Mexicans report living in a place different to where they were born. But one fifth of these 20 million (close to 4 million) are people who moved within the Mexico City Metropolitan region, which includes municipalities from other states (Sobrinho 2018). While in the 1970s half of the internal migration movements took place from rural to urban areas, in 2010 two thirds were from one urban area to another (Sobrinho 2018). Still, even today, regional patterns of internal emigration and immigration persist (see Appendix Figure A4). Northern states, (mainly Baja California, Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León), the State of Mexico, and Quintana Roo are the main states of destination of recent internal migrants with larger net internal migration, whereas the main states of origin are located in central and southern Mexico (Mexico City, Veracruz, Michoacan, Oaxaca, and Chiapas have largest negative net internal migration).

Since the declaration of the so-called war on drugs in 2006, internal migration due to violence and insecurity has been gaining importance in Mexico; in other words, forced internal displacement coexists with other forms of internal migration. This forced nature of internal displacement responds mainly to two sets of factors: (1) criminal violence, disputes between different drug cartels, violations to human rights and communitarian conflict and political unrest; and (2) natural disasters, implementation of large-scale development projects, and climate change (CNDH 2016; CONAPO 2021). Since 2006, violence and insecurity have significantly risen in the country and national homicide rates in 2019 reached the highest level in two decades (27.83 homicides per 100,000) (Rodríguez-Chávez 2020). This rate, however, varies widely across Mexico, affecting particularly the northwest, northeast, and western regions of the country. Most of those internally displaced come from the states of Guerrero, Chiapas, Michoacán, Sinaloa, Sonora, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, and Oaxaca (Rodríguez-Chávez 2020; 2022; Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez 2023).

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) estimated that by 2022, 386,000 people had been internally displaced due to conflict and violence in Mexico (IDMC 2023a). The number of internally displaced persons due to violence and conflict have risen steadily since 2010, as shown in Figure 1. On the other hand, the number of internally displaced due to disasters by the end of 2022 is less than a tenth of the total number of internally displaced due to conflict (3,600 vs. 386,000) (IDMC 2023b).

Figure 1. Internally displaced people due to conflict and violence in Mexico, 2009-2022



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from the IDMC, available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>

Acknowledging the importance of this phenomenon, for the first time, the 2020 Census included violence, insecurity, and natural disasters as a cause for migration, both for internal (at the state and municipality level) and international moves. According to its estimates, 274,000 people stated that insecurity and/or violence had caused them to migrate within the country in the past five years. Half of the people migrated from the State of Mexico (24.1%), Mexico City (20.8%) and Guerrero (8.1%), and the most mentioned destinations were the State of Mexico (16.5%), Mexico City (9.9%), Querétaro (8.2%), Yucatán (6.8%) and Hidalgo (6.6%).

In 2021 and 2022, around 30% of forced internally displaced persons were younger than 18, and 17% were between 15 and 25 years old (IDMC 2023a). For the 20-29 age-groups, the 2020 Census data confirm the trend, with 37% of internal migrants due to violence and insecurity; among them 34 out of 100 are men. (CONAPO 2021). These statistics point to the prevalence of young men and women being internally displaced due to violence, insecurity, and conflict. In terms of sex profiles, women of all ages accounted for slightly more than half of the forced internally displaced (51%) in the same period (2021-2022) according to the IDMC. In 2020, women account for 52% of the almost 300,000 internal migrants due to violence and insecurity, according to 2020 Census data. This confirms previous studies showing how women tend to be internally displaced by violence and insecurity at a higher rate than their male counterparts do (Mercado Mondragón

2013; CONAPO 2019). This gender difference might be associated with the forced recruitment of young men by criminal organizations, as a trigger of family displacement; and violence as a reality faced by women before, during, and after episodes of displacement (Borzacchiello et al. 2022).

3.2 Cross-border migration: Mexico-US

Since the 19th century, Mexican migrants have been a key supply of workers for the U.S. labour force. Two government-initiated programs implemented between 1917-1921 and 1942-1964 supplied the United States with approximately two million Mexican workers, who mostly migrated under temporal labour arrangements, returned to Mexico seasonally, and then went back to the United States to work. The Bracero program (1942-1964) involved the regular migration of male temporary migrant workers and reached its peak in 1956, when 445,000 Mexican workers arrived in the United States (Cornelius 2018). However, the working and migratory conditions stipulated in this bilateral agreement were continuously violated, which led to widespread criticism and a rise in the undocumented population in the U.S. One of the responses to this situation was the implementation of Operation Wetback in 1954, when more than one million apprehensions took place. After the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, the undocumented population in the United States increased significantly due to three factors. First, the boom in U.S. employment provided an opportunity for migrant workers to find jobs. Second, the economic crisis in Mexico became an motivation for many to leave. Third, the tightening in migratory restrictions and complications to enter and leave the U.S. regularly led many to overstay their temporary migratory permissions and settle indefinitely, abandoning previous cyclical migratory dynamics (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003; Durand 2016).

In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) led to the legalization of over two million undocumented Mexican migrants. Yet the U.S.–Mexico border remained relatively porous until the 1990s, when Operation Hold-the-Line and Operation Gatekeeper were implemented (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2003; Cornelius 2005). Despite these efforts, the Mexican-born population in the United States continued to grow, and reached its peak in 2007, at 12.8 million, of which 57% were undocumented (Passel and Cohn 2017). Since then, Mexican migration to the United States started to decrease (Villarreal 2014); in fact, from 2005 to 2010 estimations found that net migration between Mexico and the U.S. dropped to zero (Passel, Cohn, and González-Barrera 2012). While this does not mean that migration stopped, it has materialized into a decrease in the size of the Mexican-born population as well as the number of undocumented Mexicans in the U.S. (from 6.9 million in 2007 to 5.6 million in 2016). This decline resulted in Mexicans no longer being the majority of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. (Passel and Cohn 2017).

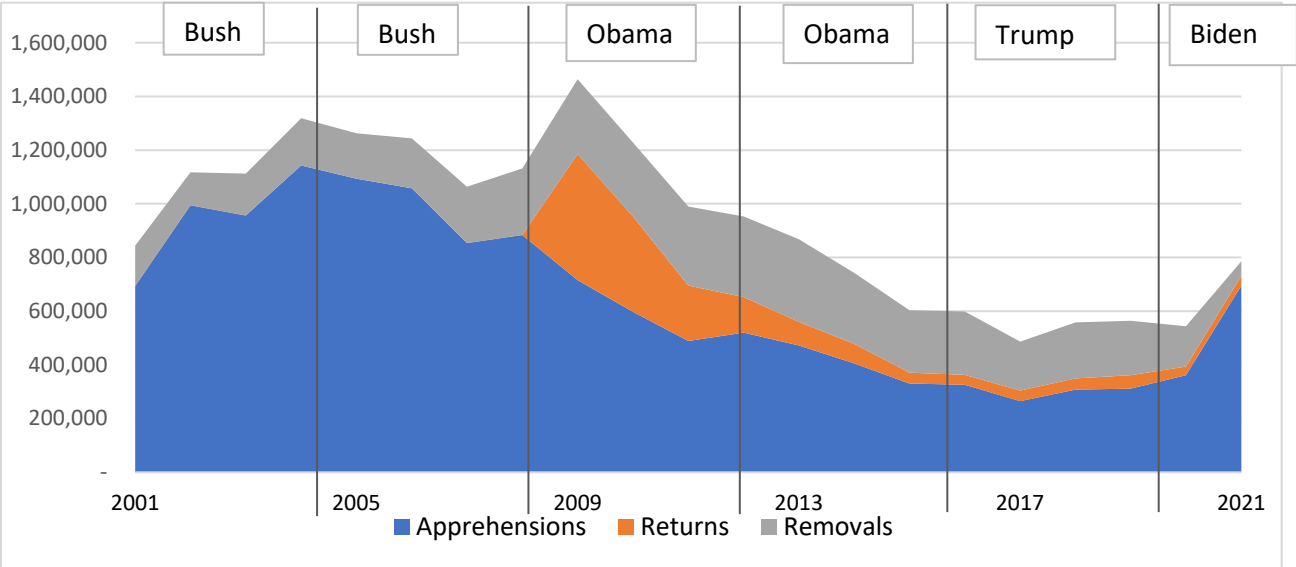
Other factors have shaped this decline in Mexico–U.S. migration. After the 2008 economic crisis, the perception of a weak labour market in the U.S. translated into people thinking that it will be hard to get and maintain employment. But this perception diluted as years passed. Moreover, stricter border controls have led to an increase in the danger and costs of irregular migration.

According to a study by Spener (2009), smugglers charge eight to ten times more than what they did in the 1990s, before stricter migratory controls were implemented. Irregular migration is now almost impossible without the help of smugglers, whose fees range between USD 3,000 and USD 6,000 (Cornelius 2018). Finally, demographic changes within Mexico (mainly fertility decline) arguably also contributed to the decline in U.S.-bound emigration, as well as the reduction in labour demand and weak economic conditions in the United States (Villarreal 2014).

Meanwhile, there has been an increase in US–Mexico flows. Between 2000 and 2020, there was an increase in the foreign-born population in Mexico, which grew from about half a million to 1.2 million (INEGI 2021). This increase is explained by the return of Mexicans and the immigration of U.S.-born minors (Masferrer, Hamilton, and Denier 2019). According to 2020 Census data, the foreign-born population from the U.S. more than doubled in the past 20 years, going from 343,591 in 2000 to 751,011 in 2020 (INEGI 2021). A small share (around 16%) of the U.S.-born minors arrived to Mexico due to the deportation of a parent, or because they were de facto deported to Mexico (Hamilton, Masferrer, and Langer 2023).

As discussed earlier, the reasons behind this growth in U.S.-born population in Mexico are manifold. There has been an increase in voluntary returns due to the economic crises in the United States as well as family reunification, both of returnees going back to families left behind and others that return together with family members. In addition, tighter migratory surveillance of undocumented populations in the United States implied an increase, both in the number of deportations (removals) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) returns (expulsions without a removal order), (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Removals and DHS returns of Mexican nationals by U.S. President Administration, 2001-2020



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from DHS (Sohn et al. 2023)

The socio-demographic characteristics of Mexican returnees³ vary by state and region (Masferrer 2021). Reflecting historical migration patterns, returnees are predominantly male. But, although around two-thirds of returnees are men at the national level, the share of female returnees varies. Mexico City, for example, has a similar share of returnees who are male and female. In terms of age, returnees are concentrated in working-age groups of 30-49 years old. Although the median age of returnees has increased as Mexican migrants age in the United States, the share of older returnees that retire in Mexico is small.

3.3 Cross-border migration: Mexico-Guatemala

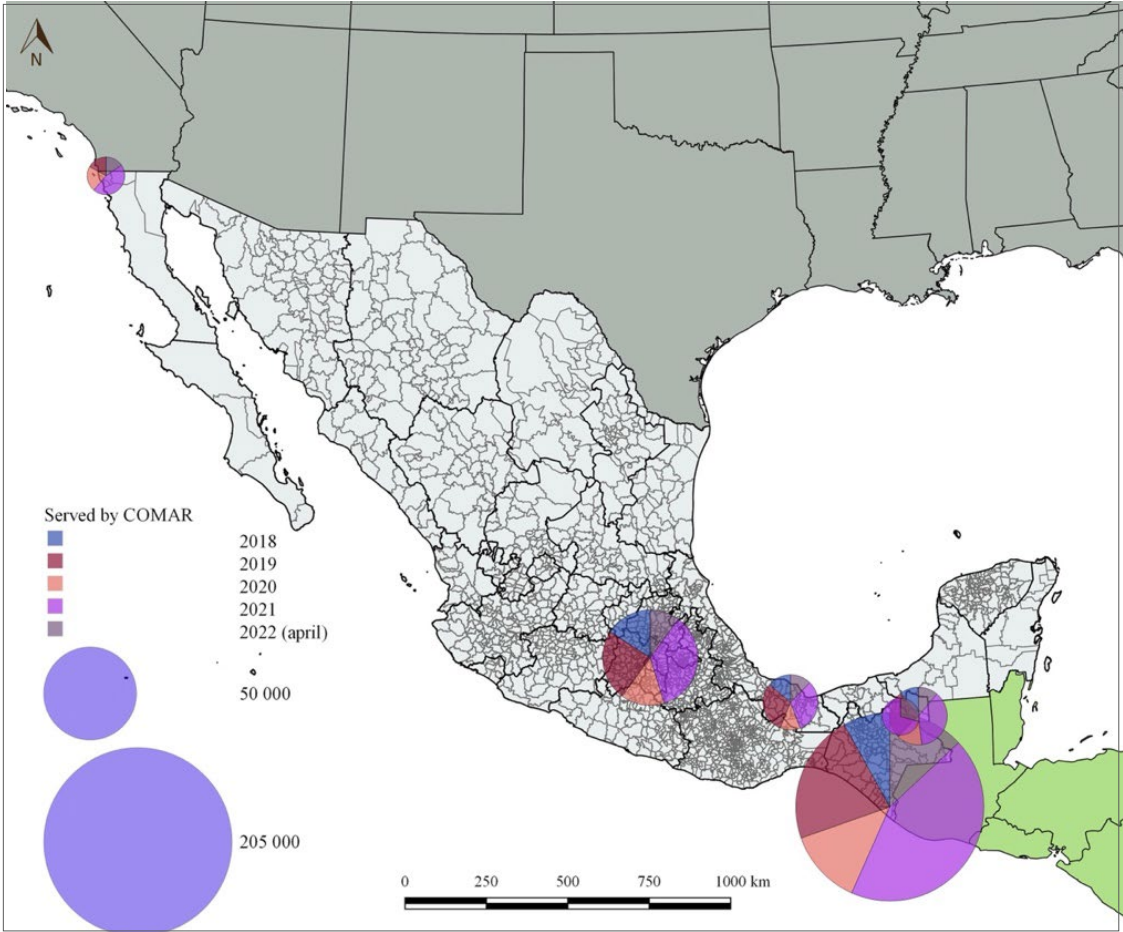
The Mexican border with Guatemala has historically witnessed an almost steady flow of temporary migrants. Most of these enter Mexico to work in agriculture or service jobs within the southern region (Cornelius 2018). According to census data, the foreign-born population in Chiapas almost doubled between 2010 and 2020, from 32,000 to 60,000. More than half are from Guatemala, a population that has also grown steadily since 2000. Between 2015 and 2020, more than 18,000 people moved to Chiapas from another country. Almost half (42%) state searching for work as their motive for migration, followed by insecurity and violence (27%) (INEGI 2020b).

In the past decades, Mexico's southern border has also witnessed a transformation in migratory dynamics. Alongside the Guatemalan temporary migrant workers or the flow of cross-border migrants who travel for shopping or employment and then return daily, there has been a growing number of asylum seekers from different countries who enter Mexico through its southern border. Since 2018, seven out of every ten asylum requests in Mexico are started in Chiapas and Tabasco, states that border Guatemala (see Figure 3). The fact that asylum is claimed in these places has implications beyond a statistical pattern. According to Mexican Refugee Law, asylum seekers must remain within the state where their asylum claim was started for the entire length of the asylum process. Thus, whoever starts an asylum claim in Chiapas must remain there for the time it takes to get a resolution from the Mexican state. This legal disposition, paired with the increasing length of asylum processing, has materialized into a growing population of asylum seekers with precarious migratory status⁴ forced to temporarily settle in Mexico's southern states (Gil Everaert 2020b; Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez 2023).

³ Note that here returnees are defined as Mexican-born emigrants who returned to Mexico. U.S. born from Mexican parents are defined as immigrants, and here considered as foreign-born

⁴ Asylum seekers have a temporary humanitarian permit that allows them to work, with the obligation to remain in the state where they applied.

Figure 3. Spatial distribution of asylum requests received by the Mexican Commission for Refugees (COMAR), 2018-2022



Source: Prepared by authors with data from Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez (2023).

4.0 Intra-regional migration dynamics

Mexico’s role in the migration system of the Americas is significant and diverse. On the one hand, as explained above, historically Mexico has been a country of origin, with millions of Mexicans leaving their homes to go to the United States for work and to reunite with family, settling there for long periods. On the other hand, Mexico also is a destination country for people from many countries, mostly the United States, as well as increasingly Central America, some countries in South America (such as Venezuela and Colombia), the Caribbean (mainly Haiti and Cuba), and other parts of the world. For these reasons, it can be argued that Mexico is a key actor, part of both the North American and the Central American and Caribbean corridors. In this section we outline three key migratory dynamics that place Mexico frontstage as a regional key actor.

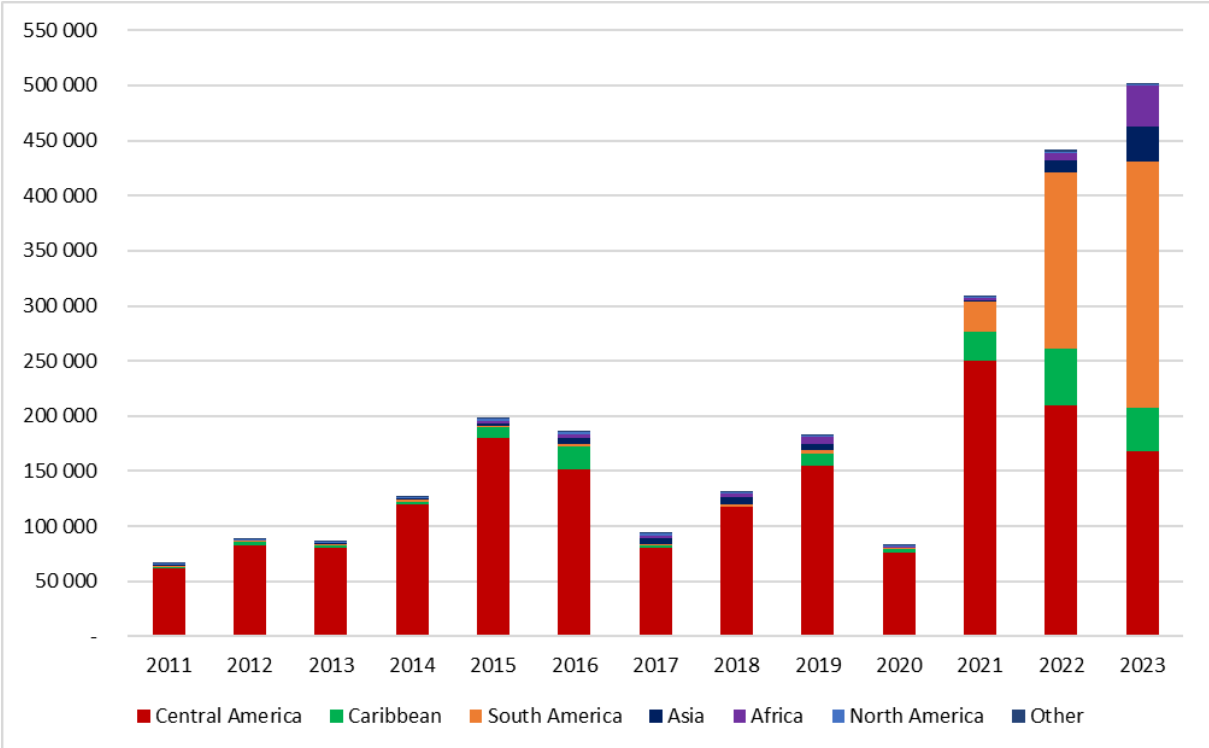
4.1 Mexico as a space of transit

Because of its geographic location between the United States and Central America, Mexico has been a country of transit for hundreds of thousands of migrants seeking to travel north and reach the United States, especially since the 1980s. Since the late 20th century, millions of Central Americans have left their countries of origin seeking better life opportunities, fleeing political persecution, extreme poverty, insecurity and widespread crisis. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, around 1.5 million people entered Mexico through its southern border (González-Murphy and Koslowski 2011) most of whom had the intention of reaching the United States⁵. An important number of these migrants, however, fail to reach the United States, as originally intended. According to Canales and Rojas Weisner (2018), between 2005 and 2015, only 24 percent of Central American migrants made it to the United States (2018, 73). Many are detained and deported either by Mexican or U.S. authorities, and many others fall prey to criminal groups, or encounter obstacles that force them to reformulate their mobility plans (Gil Everaert 2020a).

While Mexico-U.S. migration showed a downward trend as a response to the 2008 economic crisis and to stricter migratory enforcement, migration from Central America, Venezuela and Haiti did not seem to be affected by these events (Giorguli-Saucedo, García-Guerrero, and Masferrer 2016). The rationale for emigration from Central America, Venezuela and Haiti continued, as economic and political instability continued driving migration flows. Also, in the case of recent Venezuelan and Haitian migration, many had left their birthplace many years ago, but arrive to Mexico after leaving in different Latin American countries.

⁵ According to some estimates, between 150,000 and 400,000 people cross Mexico's southern border each year with the intention of reaching the United States (Cabrera 2018).

Figure 4: Encounters (events) of detained migrants with irregular migratory status in Mexico, 2011-2023 (September)



Source: Prepared by authors with data from Unidad de Política Migratoria, 2023. Notes: These numbers refer to events of foreign-nationals that are detained by immigration authorities because they were not able to prove a regular migratory status in Mexico; as the number refers to events, it is possible that the same individual may be related to one or more events.

According to Mexican official migration statistics, from 2011 to 2022, there were almost two million events of detention and deportation of migrants in irregular status in Mexico (see Figure 4). Out of these two million, three in every four were people from Central America or the Caribbean, and one in ten from South America. Because of its clandestine nature, irregular migration is almost impossible to quantify with precision. However, some efforts have been made to estimate the number of people who transit irregularly through Mexico on their way to the United States. Rodríguez Chávez (2017) estimates that almost four-hundred thousand migrants from the northern countries of Central America transited through Mexico in 2014. According to 2014 data from the Mexican Border Survey on Migration (EMIF, from its name in Spanish), this transit was fairly quick, with 93 percent of the respondents spending less than one month in Mexico (Cornelius 2018).

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) recently published a set of estimations of transit migration in the region (IOM 2023). DTM data is based on 5,937 surveys collected in Mexico between 2022 and 2023 and provides an overview of recent characteristics of population in transit. First, it is important to highlight the change in the composition of the population by country of origin. According to this data, a third of those surveyed were from Honduras, followed by 22%

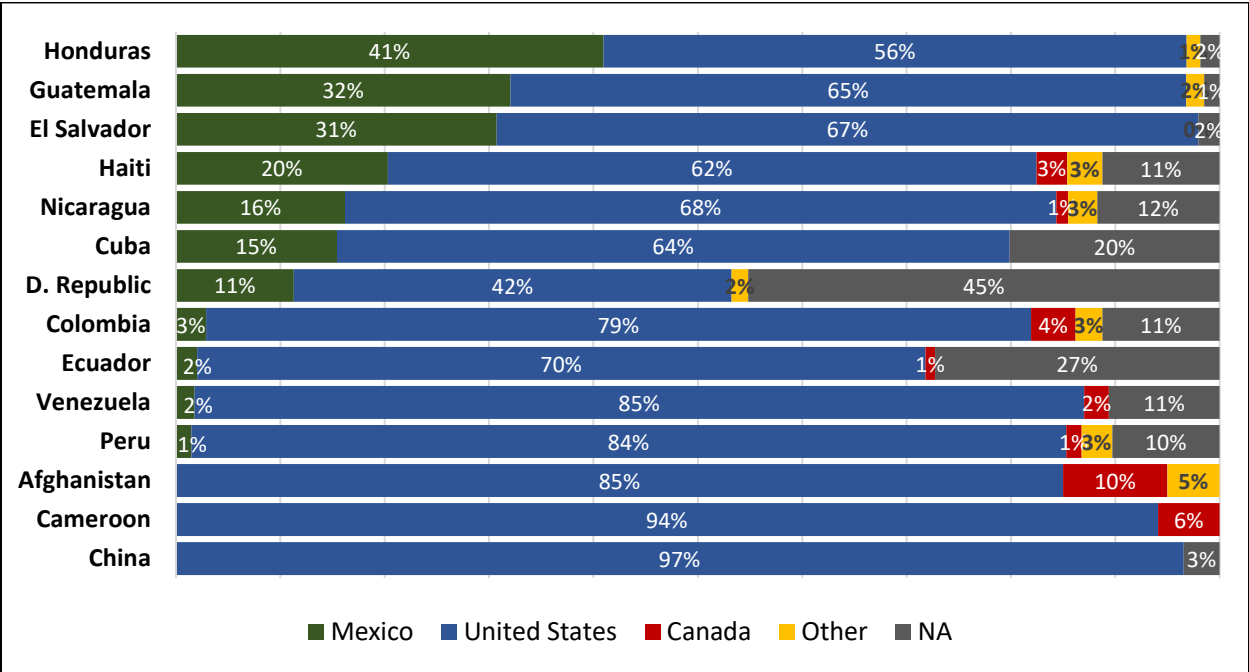
from Venezuela, 9% from Haiti, 8% from Guatemala and 6% from El Salvador. The average age was 32 years old, and more than half were single. Close to half (48%) travelled as part of a family group, and 47% travelled alone. On average, people had travelled through four countries by the time they were interviewed in Mexico, and their journey had taken more than a month. While most people came directly from their country of nationality, some had left their country-of-origin years prior and resided elsewhere. This is the case of Haitians, where nine out of ten resided in Chile and Brazil in the previous 12 months (IOM, 2023).

4.2 Mexico as a space of asylum, settlement, or entrapment

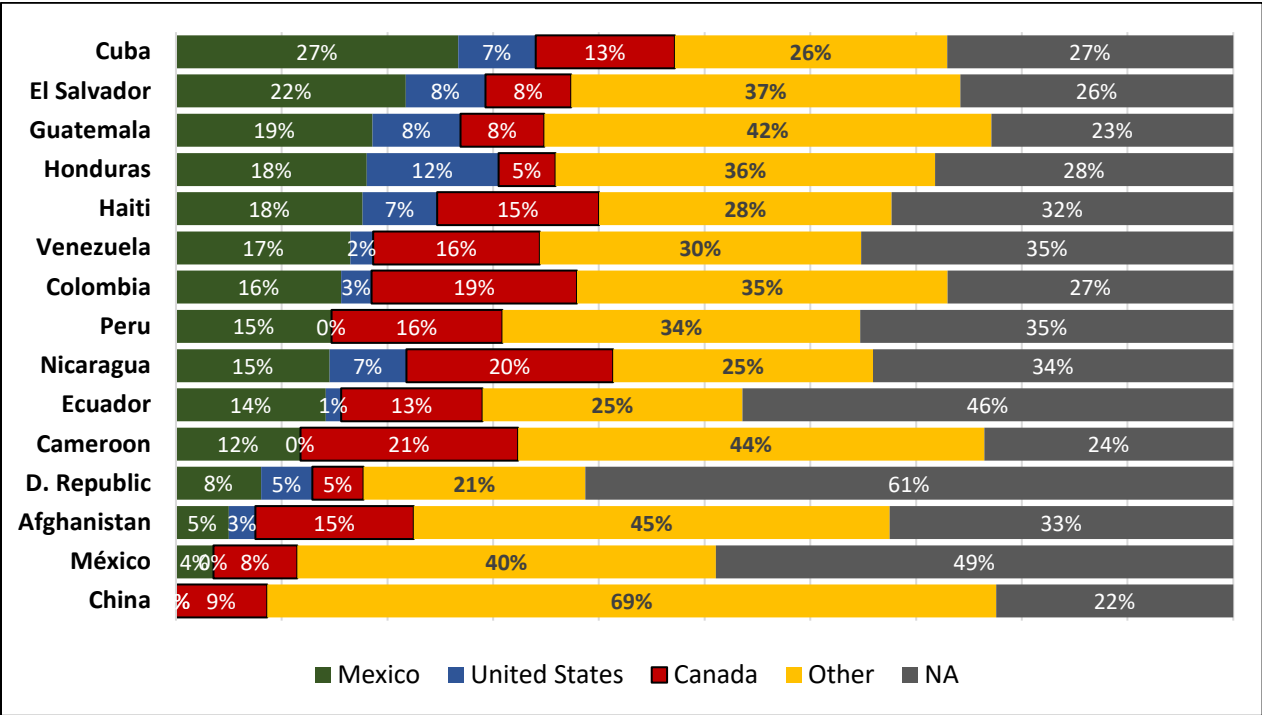
As previously outlined, Mexico is increasingly becoming a country of settlement for a growing number of migrants from diverse national origins. According to data from IOM’s (2023) DTM, seven out of every ten people surveyed in Mexico mentioned the United States as their intended destination, followed by Mexico for a quarter of respondents (26%), and Canada as an alternative option for slightly less than one in five (18%), although this varies by country of origin (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Intended and alternative destination countries for international migrants in Mexico by country of origin

Intended destination



Alternative destination

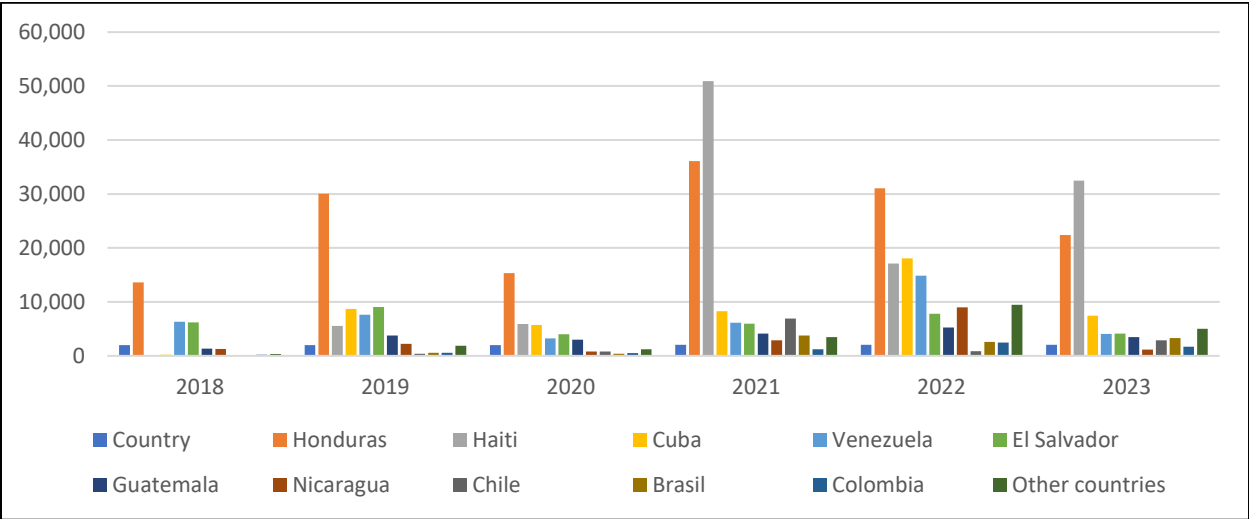


Source: Prepared by the authors with data from IOM’s DTM (2023); shares are ordered giving priority to Mexico, US, and Canada as intended and alternative destinations.

In other words, increasing number of migrants who enter Mexico through its southern border do not necessarily regard the United States as their final destination. This is consistent with the rising asylum claims and numbers of settled population. Since 2013, asylum requests in Mexico show a growing trend, with the exception of 2020 when limitations to international mobility were implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic in several parts of the world. Between 2018 and 2023, 40% of the total asylum requests received in Mexico were by women (See Appendix Figure A5).

There is a wide diversity of nationalities seeking asylum in Mexico, with people from 155 different countries between 2018-2022 only. Ten nationalities, however, make up for 95% of the total asylum requests in these past five years (see Figure 6). Recognition rates also vary widely across nationalities. From 2013 to 2023, nine out of every ten Venezuelans asylum seekers were recognized as refugees, while only two out of every ten Haitians, and around six out of every ten Central Americans (COMAR 2023). It is also worth noting that around 70% of the total asylum requests received by the Mexican government during the same period remain pending.

Figure 6. Total asylum requests by country of nationality, 2018-2023 (July)



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from COMAR

But settling in Mexico is not necessarily a voluntary choice for many. With the strengthening of U.S. migratory control measures, many migrants and asylum seekers whose original intention was to reach the United States have been left with no option but to stay in Mexico for increasingly longer periods of time.

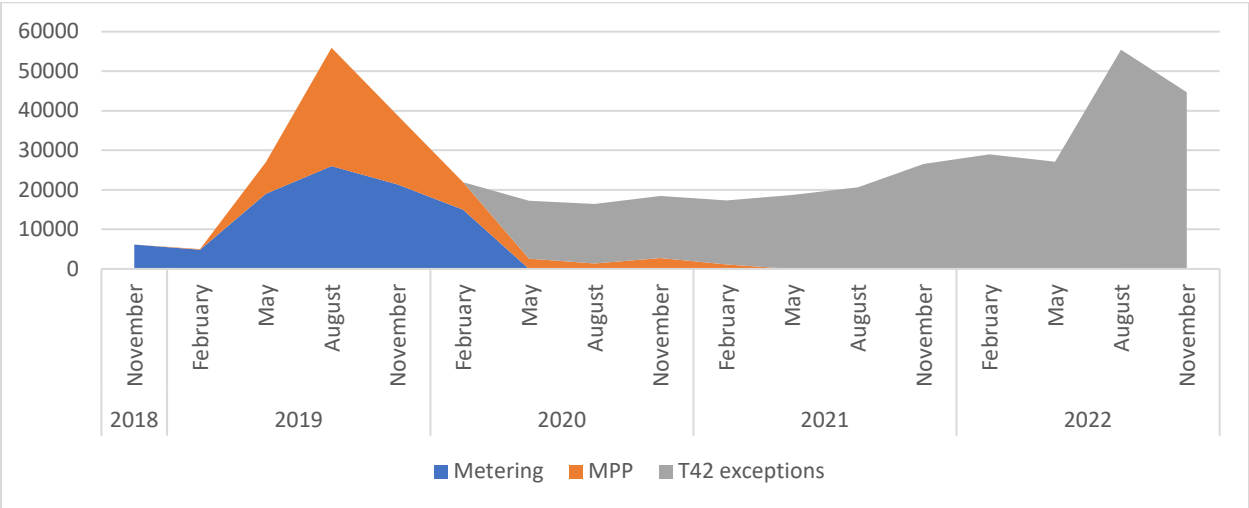
Since 2015, the U.S. government implemented a series of changes to the asylum process in response to the “unprecedented rise in asylum seekers” (Leutert et al. 2018) from Central American nationals to its southern border. The first of these measures is called “metering” and involved the creation of wait lists where potential asylum seekers had to sign up and wait for their turn to cross the border and start their asylum procedure. In 2018, DHS Secretary Nielsen signed a memo that authorized the expansion of metering to all points of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border (DHS 2020). There are no official statistics on the number of individuals who were “metered”, since most were not interviewed by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officials and the lists were administered by different agencies and organizations in Mexico (shelters, migration authorities, state population councils, among others). But according to internal CBP estimates around 650 asylum seekers were turned away daily from ports of entry during the implementation of metering (American Immigration Council 2021). By May 2020, close to 15,000 people remained in metering lists waiting for their turn to start their asylum claim (Leutert and Yates 2021).

In 2019, an additional restriction to asylum was implemented along the United States-Mexico border: the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPPs), also known as the “Remain in Mexico” policy. This policy, similarly to metering, involved the prohibition to enter the U.S. to seek asylum through land border crossing points. Instead, asylum seekers who stated they wanted protection were returned to Mexico to wait there for their assigned dates for credible fear interviews and court dates. This program further strengthened the turn towards restrictive asylum policies, violating the

non-refoulement principle established in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, complicating asylum procedures and shifting the burden of humanitarian attention and protection to Mexican border cities (Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez 2023). Between 2019 and 2021, close to 78,000 people were returned to Mexico under MPP and made to wait in dire conditions, staying for months in overcrowded shelter spaces, improvised refugee camps, and exposed to inclement weather, violence and criminal threat, and high degrees of uncertainty and unclarity regarding their asylum process (PHR 2019; Schrank 2019; Barrios de la O and García-Jiménez 2020).

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, asylum processing in the U.S.-Mexico border virtually came to halt. Title 42, an order to block all entries along the border, including asylum seekers, was put in place. An estimated 2.5 million events of expulsion took place under Title 42 since March 2020 and until the end of its implementation on May 2023 (Santana 2022). There were some exceptions to this policy, where certain conditions of vulnerability could allow entry to the U.S. and asylum process. However, the numbers allotted to these exceptions were low and a new set of Title 42 exception waitlists started emerging.

Figure 7. Number of people on metering lists, returned under MPP and on Title 42 exception waiting lists, Nov. 2019 – Nov. 2022



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from (TRAC Immigration 2022) and (Leutert and Yates 2022)

This set of policies has turned Mexico, especially the northern border, into a space of entrapment and chronic waiting (Gil Everaert 2020b; Silva and Miranda 2020). As they wait for the possibility of accessing their legal right to asylum, thousands of people from different countries remain trapped for months and even years in situations of precarious housing, employment, and facing a quotidian lack of access to basic services (Gil Everaert 2021; Gil-Everaert, Masferrer, and Rodríguez Chávez 2023; Gil Everaert, Rodriguez, and Masferrer 2023).

4.3 Mexico-Canada migration

Canada has one of the largest shares of immigrant populations in the Americas. According to the 2021 Census, more than 8 million people were foreign-born, representing 23% of the population. Recent immigrants, those who arrived between 2016 and 2021 make up almost 16% of the foreign-born population in Canada (Government of Canada 2022). Canada is the second destination for Mexican emigrants, but the number of Mexicans living in Canada is very small compared the population in the United States, and its history is much more recent (Villegas 2020; Van Haren and Masferrer 2021; Mueller 2005; Lara Flores, Pantaleón, and Sanchez Gomez 2015). According to the 2021 Census, there were 90,585 Mexicans in Canada, and seven in ten are relatively recent arrivals, since they arrived in the last two decades, between 2001 and 2021 (Statistics Canada 2023).

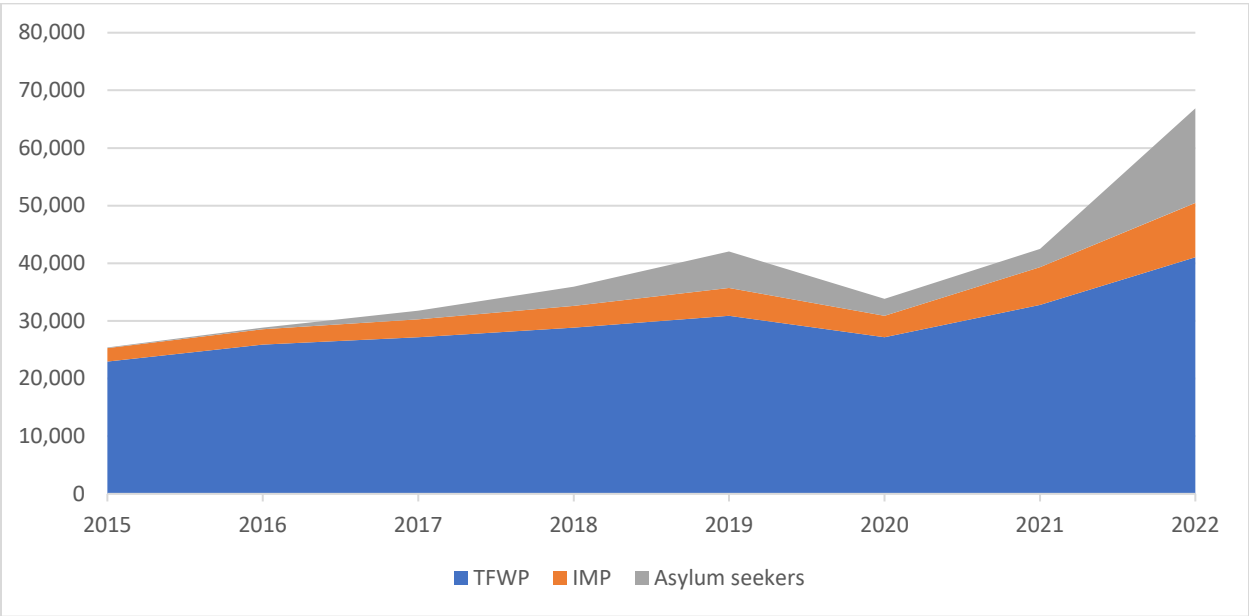
The Mexican-born population in Canada is quite diverse in terms of migration status, including permanent residents, and temporary residents with different permits (students, workers, and asylum seekers). According to 2021 Canadian Census data, 60,000 Mexicans had permanent residence and almost 32,000 with temporary residence status. Between 2015 and 2020 approximately 3,000 Mexicans were admitted as permanent residents in Canada every year; this number has almost doubled since 2021. In terms of the composition of the Mexican population with temporary residence status in Canada in 2021, more than one in three (12,000) are work permit holders only and asylum seekers (11,000), respectively, whereas one in three have either only study permit (3,600), study and work permits (2,400), or are temporary residents under other status (2,500), (see Figure A.6).

Since 2018, Mexicans have been the number one nationality requesting asylum in Canada. Since 2016, asylum claims filed by Mexicans in Canada have grown steadily – except for 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic – reaching an all-time high of 16,415 in 2022 (IRCC 2023a). But, Mexico had already been the top nationality of asylum requests in Canada. In 2009, the Conservative Canadian government imposed a visa to Mexican nationals since the number of requests for international protection had surpassed 10,000 over recent years. Then, in 2016 the visa requirement was eliminated for Mexicans and requests started to increase again, in a context of increased violence and insecurity in Mexico (Van Haren and Masferrer 2019; 2021).

Nevertheless, the largest share of Mexican migration to Canada takes place in the form of temporary work, mostly in agriculture. In 1974, Canada signed the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Program (SAWP) with Mexico and since then, thousands of workers have temporarily migrated to Canada to do seasonal work for eight to nine months per year. Most participate in the program recurrently year after year, but they are not eligible to applying for permanent residence. The largest number of temporary workers from Mexico under the SAWP occurred in 2019 when more than 26,000 Mexicans arriving under the program, and although the number declined in 2020, as many were unable to travel, in 2022, more than 25,000 Mexicans participated in the SAWP. Today, the SAWP has been extended to include temporary workers from Guatemala, Haiti, and

other countries. Temporary work is also available for work outside of agriculture, both for skilled and unskilled work. The number of Temporary Foreign Workers has increased since 2015, with the exception of 2020 (see Figure 8). In 2022, the number of TFWP permit holders surpassed 41,000. In addition, Figure 8 shows the growth in Mexican asylum seekers as well as International Mobility Program holders (e.g., international students or study permit holders), a number that increased from 2,335 in 2015 to 9,420 in 2022 (IRCC 2023b). According to Masferrer and Van Haren (2019), between 10% and 25% of the Mexican adults who enter Canada through a temporary work program eventually obtained permanent residency.

Figure 8. Total number of Mexican nationals in Canada under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the International Mobility Program, and seeking asylum, 2015-2022



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from IRCC.

5.0 Inter-continental migration dynamics

Recent studies show that the increasing securitization of borders and tightening of migratory control in Europe have triggered extra-continental migrations from Africa and Asia to the Americas (Kauffer 2002; Ángeles Cruz and Rojas Wiesner 2003; Kabunda 2006; Azuara 2010; Ángeles Cruz 2010; FLACSO 2011). Most of these migrants arrive in Mexico by land, through its southern border and enter the country irregularly through non-official crossing points (Villafuerte Solís and García Aguilar 2005). While a few state that Mexico is their final destination, most intend to reach the United States or Canada (Cinta Cruz 2020).

As official data from INAMI show (INAMI 2023), in the past 10 years there has been an increase in extra-continental migration flows in Mexico. For decades, migration to Mexico from Asia, Africa

and Europe comprised between 1% and 2% of total flows to the country. Since the end of the 2010s, however, this percentage has been growing, leading to almost one in every ten migrants originating from other continents. By mid-2023, 15% of the total migrants in irregular situation in Mexico came from either Africa or Asia. While the share of this flow remains small compared to regional flows, its increase merits attention.

In the first semester of 2023, Mexico has surpassed historical numbers in terms of arrivals of extra-continental migrants. By September, 69,890 encounters with migrants from Europe, Asia and Africa with irregular status were registered by Mexican migratory authorities. While the percentage of extra-continental migrants in irregular status in Mexico remains small (6%) compared with those of the Americas (87%) and the Caribbean (7%) (see Figure 4). Official numbers in 2023 show a significant increase in the number of extra-continental migrants in irregular situation in Mexico in the past five years. As an illustration, the number of migrants in an irregular situation from Europe went from 115 in 2018 to 1,900 in 2023, and in the same period, migrants from Asia went from 7,306 to 35,692; and from Africa went from 2,791 to 43,972 (Unidad de Política Migratoria, 2023). Table 3 offers a breakdown of the total encounters of Mexican immigration authorities with extra-continental migrants from Africa and Asia in irregular situation between 2011 and September 2023.

Table 3. Main nationalities of origin of extra-continental migrants in irregular migratory status* in Mexico, 2011-2023 (September)

Asia			Africa		
Country	Number	Total	Country	Number	Total
India	26,911	37%	Senegal	14,008	21%
China	11,101	15%	Cameroon	6,955	10%
Bangladesh	9,428	13%	Mauritania	6,862	10%
Uzbekistan	5,698	8%	Angola	6,065	9%
Nepal	4,986	7%	Guinea	5,796	9%
Afghanistan	2,761	4%	Dem. Rep of Congo	5,717	9%
Kirguistan	2,047	3%	Ghana	4,759	7%
Pakistan	1,888	3%	Somalia	3,920	6%
Sri Lanka	1,273	2%	Eritrea	3,455	5%
Turkey	1,060	1%	Ethiopia	1,427	2%
Other Countries	5,209	7%	Other Countries	7,763	12%
TOTAL	72,362	100%	TOTAL	66,727	100%

Source: (Unidad de Política Migratoria 2023) Notes: These numbers refer to events of foreign-nationals that are detained by immigration authorities because they were not able to prove a regular migratory status in Mexico.

An important challenge that extra-continental migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico face is language since they encounter both Mexican authorities and protection networks that do not

necessarily speak their languages. Furthermore, there is an important lack of consular and diplomatic representation of their countries of origin at the places of arrival (Murillo González 2010; FLACSO 2011).

6.0 Decision-making for migration

A number of factors shape decision-making processes of Mexican migrants and asylum seekers, including family and contextual characteristics in the communities of origin (Massey et al. 1993) and social networks (Poros 2011), as well as individual features and attitudes toward migration (Massey 1990; Tucker et al. 2013; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2020). A long history of migration from Mexico to the United States has created a “culture of migration,” especially within communities with high rates and long tradition of emigration. In these places, migrating is part of a common path toward economic well-being and a socially accepted and encouraged life decision (Cerrutti and Massey 2001; Kandel and Massey 2002). More recent studies at the state level also highlight how contextual characteristics, such as violence and insecurity shape outmigration and return migration flows (Chort and de la Rupelle 2016).

Analyzing contemporary decision-making processes for migration in Mexico requires an acknowledgment of the diversity in mobility patterns in the country. While it is undeniable that a large proportion of the Mexican population migrates both internally and internationally in search of better economic opportunities, there are rising numbers of people who are forcibly displaced by violence and insecurity, as well as an important number of Mexicans who return from the United States. In short, motivations and drivers for migration are diverse and so are decision-making processes.

6.1 Decision-making processes among Mexican emigrants and internal migrants

In a study comparing migrants to non-migrants in two Mexican communities with different emigration rates, Tucker and colleagues (2013) find that individual, family, and community level factors shape the decision to migrate to the United States, as well as their return to the community of origin. At the individual level, financial motivations (better jobs and wages or wanting to save to build a house and gain financial independence) appear to be the most important factor when deciding to migrate. As for those who do not emigrate, education seems to be a motive for staying; many say they would rather postpone migration until completing school, or that they believe acquiring education in Mexico may provide opportunities for finding decent work and staying in their community. There is a gender component that is worth noting; fear is cited as a frequent discouragement of migration among females (Tucker et al. 2013).

Family dynamics also represent a central component in the migratory processes among Mexicans. Many migrate with their families as young children, without necessarily participating in the decision-making process. These young children arrive in the U.S. with their parents and come of age there, many times without knowing their undocumented status (Gonzales 2011; Galindo 2012; Gonzales and Chavez 2012; Gil Everaert 2014). They are sometimes referred to as “Dreamers” or DACA recipients, from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a policy enacted in 2012 that deferred deportation and made them eligible for work permits (see Appendix Table A1.). Having family members in the U.S. can be a driver for some, motivating them to migrate for family reunification. Yet, it dissuades others, since remittances may help alleviate some of the financial needs that may push them to migrate, while stories of the hardships associated with the journey and life in the U.S. become reasons to remain in Mexico (Tucker et al. 2013).

Finally, community-level factors also shape decision-making processes. In particular, communities with high emigration rates have a more consolidated migration industry (Hernandez-Leon 2005; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sorensen 2013), including easier access to “coyotes,” information on the routes, and networks that may facilitate migratory journeys. Moreover, family networks and transnational connections between people in the origin community and those in the United States foster close relationships that can become motivations to migrate (Smith 2006; Tucker et al. 2013; Chávez 2016).

6.2 Decision-making processes among Mexican returnees

Understanding the motivations behind coming back to communities of origin is another key dimension in decision-making processes of Mexican migrants, especially when this return is voluntary. According to Tucker and colleagues (2013), return may be motivated by either success or “failure.” In other words, some people return to Mexico because they perceived that their set goal behind migrating (saving, building a house, buying a plot of land, etc.) had been achieved. But some return precisely because of the opposite reason; after being in the U.S. for months or years, their economic situation deteriorated, they lacked networks of support and decided that going back would improve their life outcomes. Also, return may be motivated by events that either pushed people out of the U.S. (violent relationships, being fired from work, natural disasters, illness) or pulled people back home (e.g., death of a family member, birth of a child, changes in the community, etc.). Nevertheless, more recent studies on return migration highlight the increase of involuntariness upon return – in part due to rising trends in deportation and immigration enforcement – thus moving away from the explanation of return as a failure or success, and highlighting the importance of preparedness of return to understand post-return processes. While some return to Mexico after being deported, others join family members upon deportation and are de facto deported to Mexico. Among this last group, we find U.S.-born minors, who are children of Mexican parents (Hamilton, Masferrer, and Langer 2022). Still, the majority of returnees are

not deported but return for a wide variety of economic, social, family and community reasons, as reflected in recent census data from 2020 (Masferrer 2022).

6.3 Decision-making processes among internally displaced Mexicans

Internal displacement due to violence and criminality

In recent years, violence and criminality in Mexico have led to a rise in forced internal displacement. Data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) reveals that there were 386,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) due to conflict and violence in 2022 (IDMC 2023a). According to the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH), episodes of forced internal displacement in 2021 exceeded the total of the prior three years and almost doubled those that occurred during 2020, evidencing a growing trend of this phenomenon (CMDPDH 2022).

In 2006, the start of Felipe Calderón's presidency also marked the beginning of the so-called "War on Drugs" in Mexico. Turf battles between cartels led to a rise in levels of violence and an increase in internal migration and displacement. A study of municipalities with the highest homicide rates for the period of 1995-2015, reveals that these municipalities experienced high emigration and low immigration rates at the time (Rodríguez-Chávez 2022). Moreover, Rodríguez shows how this context of rising violence had an impact on the magnitude and destinations of internal migrants in Mexico, especially in regions particularly hit by violence.

The violence triggered by the "War on Drugs" has also been analyzed as a driver of international migration. Studies have found that drug-related violence significantly increased migration to the United States between 2000 and 2010 (Arceo-Gómez, 2012), and that civil violence is positively associated with undocumented migration from Central America to the United States (Massey, Durand, and Pren 2014).⁶ Based on data on outward and return migration flows between Mexico and the United States from 1995 to 2012, Chort and de la Rupelle (2016) find that the relationship between high rates of homicide and the likelihood of migrating is different in border states and non-border states. In other words, there is a greater likelihood of international migration as homicide rates increase for people living close to the border with the United States. These findings confirm what Alvarado and Massey (2010) found: that rising rates of lethal violence in Mexico tend to deter migration to the United States.

Nevertheless, it has been shown that the relationship between crime, violence, and migration is rather complex. Two studies using data from the Mexican Family Life Surveys (MFLS) in 2002 and 2005 offer insights into these complexities. According to Arenas et al. (2008), variations exist depending on conditions at the place of origin, where people are geographically located, and whether they live in urban or rural areas. In other words, violence is not necessarily an emigration factor in all communities. A recent study (South, Trent, and Han 2023), also based on the MFLS,

⁶ For their analysis, Massey, Durand, and Pren (2014) use data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) (1987 – 2013) and the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP) from 2000-2007.

assessed the relationship between crime and violence and the propensity to migrate from Mexico to the United States. during the period 2000-2005, prior to the so-called “War on drugs.” The authors found no significant associations between homicide rates and general perceptions or fear of crime and likelihood of migrating to the United States. But they did find that recent changes in perceptions of insecurity and risk proved to be more significant in the decision-making processes of migrants bound for the United States. Other studies (CMDPDH 2022; Borzacchiello et al. 2022; Mercado Mondragón 2013) reveal that the probability of migrating to the United States is higher among women than men when they perceived a degree of decline in their personal safety levels. South et al. (2023) also found that the likelihood of migrating to the United States is more sensitive to perceived changes in safety levels among residents of urban areas compared to those in non-urban areas.

Internal displacement and migration due to environmental factors and climate change

Interest in the impacts of environmental factors and climate change in migratory flows has been growing significantly for decades. Most analyses focus on whether and how climate change, climatic variability, and weather events (both rapid-onset occurrences such as hurricanes or floods, and slower-onset episodes like droughts) influence migratory dynamics. Some studies suggest that environmental/climate change has a more pronounced effect on internal and short-distance movements than international migration (Massey, Axinn, and Ghimire 2010; Henry, Schoumaker, and Beauchemin 2004). According to others, environmental factors, climate change and adverse climate conditions can instead “trap” populations under specific conditions, especially in highly marginalized areas with scarce resources to engage in the costs of relocation (Gray 2009; Gray and Mueller 2011).

Assessing the link between climate and environmental factors, and migration and displacement involves approaching these issues as global/regional processes than develop through time rather than an exclusive focus on them as local crises of limited temporal scope (Warner et al. 2009). Also, it is fruitful to analyze this interaction through a political ecology lens where areas are understood as “sites of power where competing, unequally situated actors contentiously co-produce ecologies, territories, knowledge and subjects” (Devine et al. 2020, 1034). In other words, changes in land use as well as in environmental and climate conditions are part of larger processes of human action and are related to political, economic and social dynamics.

In the case of Mexico, natural disasters have particularly damaged the agricultural sector, one that is largely dependent on weather phenomena. While agriculture accounts for only around 4% of national GDP (INEGI 2023), it continues to employ around 15% of Mexican economically active population (Gobierno de Mexico 2023).

Nevertheless, climate-related events do not necessarily lead to displacement, and less so to international migration. A study carried out in three rural communities in the southern state of Chiapas, found that while subsistence farmers tend to be those most affected by sudden weather changes, droughts, temperature rises and floods (Saldaña-Zorrilla 2008) low-income farmers with

no previous history of migration in their families tended to stay in place (Warner et al. 2009). The propensity to migrate – internally and internationally – in response to natural disasters or weather-related events has been found to be related with economic vulnerability at the individual, family and community level (Saldaña-Zorrilla 2006); the presence of relatives who migrated in the past due to disasters (39); the possibility of diversification of livelihood strategies (Eakin, Tucker, and Castellanos 2005); and the ways in which governments manage disaster risk and support after an event (Warner et al. 2009).

Using both the Mexican Census (2000 and 2010) and climate data, Riosmena et al. (2018) find that the nexus between climate variables and rural Mexico-to-U.S. migration varies in strength and direction according to several factors. While higher frequencies of severe climate conditions are associated with lower international migration rates in most rural areas of Mexico, international migration is more likely when there are both severe increases in rainfall and severe rises in temperatures. In this study, other factors are also found to explain a good proportion of the internal and international movement between 2000 and 2010 in Mexico. Among these are the possibilities of adaptability of each community, the migratory networks previously established, and the degree of marginalization which influences possibilities of response to adverse climate conditions and events (Riosmena, Nawrotzki, and Hunter 2018).

7.0 Discussion of findings of the literature review and setting a research agenda

This report discussed some of the major trends in terms of mobility dynamics in Mexico since 2000. Next, we outline some of the major takeaways of this analysis as well as a set of questions or themes that help outline a future research agenda for the country. Our analysis shows interesting gaps in the literature that are important for understanding mixed migration flows to Mexico. Some of these complement the research agenda recently proposed by (Masferrer et al. 2023; Masferrer and Pedroza 2021) to study mixed migration flows in the Americas.

I. Since the turn of the 21st century, Mexico's migration profile has changed.

At least three dynamics illuminate this transformation: an increase in transit migration (mainly towards the United States), declining emigration rates, increasing voluntary and involuntary return, rising immigration for family, economic, and humanitarian reasons, and a substantial growth in forced internal displacement due to violence and insecurity (Masferrer et al. 2023). We identify a few key moments in this transition. First, the declaration of the so-called “war on drugs” in 2006 led to an increase in internal displacement due to violence and insecurity that continues to date. As mentioned previously, internal displacement due to violence has impacted some regions of the country more than others. A couple of years later, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis marked the beginning of a downward trend in outmigration of Mexicans to the United States and

an increase both in the return of Mexican nationals and a rise in immigration of U.S.-born population to Mexico. As internal displacement grew, so did the number of Central American migrants in transit through Mexico towards the United States. In 2014 increased arrivals of Central Americans and a large share of unaccompanied minors marked a turning point in terms of transit migration and rising numbers of refugees seeking international protection in Mexico. Since then, the nationalities of origin of these populations diversified, albeit with a declining share of migrants from Central America and increased arrivals from other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as from outside the Americas. The rising numbers of asylum claims in Mexico and of forced displacement through Mexico to seek asylum in the United States have been met with increasingly restrictive policies throughout the region. On the one hand, in the summer of 2009 Canada imposed a visa to Mexican nationals thus reducing the possibility of fleeing there and applying for international protection. On the other, the United States implemented a series of policies such as metering and the Migrant Protection Protocols which made it virtually impossible to cross the Mexico–U.S. border to seek asylum, measures that have impacted both Mexicans and other nationals. Finally, in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic led to a series of restrictions that further complicated crossing the border and which have led to situations of prolonged waiting, entrapment, and immobility mainly along Mexico's northern border. This new reality involves thinking of Mexico as a country of settlement, both temporary and permanent and leads to rethink matters related to integration, inclusion and incorporation of migrant communities.

II. Mexico is increasingly becoming a place of settlement for a growing number of migrants from a range of different countries.

Some of the migrants arriving in Mexico are asylum seekers, while others seek family reunification or better employment opportunities. In other words, immigration flows are increasingly diversifying, in terms of both drivers and migratory trajectories prior to arriving to Mexico. This tendency is particularly evident when examining the characteristics of transit migrants and their first or alternative intended destination. What factors may serve to explain who intends to stay in Mexico and who intends to move forward? Considering the migration trajectory prior to arriving to Mexico, how do drivers differ at different stages of the journey, and how may they be linked? Given the increased levels of risk and vulnerability in transiting through Mexico, who decides to migrate or stay, why and how?

III. In spite of these changes, there is still an important number of Mexicans who leave their homes and cross international borders for different reasons.

It is unclear to what extent drivers to destinations different than the United States differ. An increasing number of studies on Mexican migration to Canada (Villegas 2020; Durand 2015; Simmons 2015; Martin, Lapalme, and Roffe Gutman 2015) or Spain (Domingo i Valls et al. 2022), for example, help explain how socio-demographic characteristics and education aspirations may be shaping the movement to destinations other than the United States. What are the considerations that Mexican migrants factor into their decision of where to and when to migrate?

What role do recent social networks play in these decisions? How will the diversification of countries of destination impact transnational networks, local integration processes and policy decisions in the recent future?

IV. U.S. nationals are the largest immigrant population in Mexico, an immigration flow that can be at least partially linked to return migration.

In terms of return migration, questions remain open regarding the mechanisms that explain how people decide whether to migrate back to Mexico together or alone. Although recent work shows de facto deportees join Mexican nationals deported to Mexico, it is unclear how families decide who and when others will join. The increase of return migration and immigration of those who are U.S.-born also raises questions that cannot yet be answered regarding the potential of remigration to the United States, both for Mexicans and the U.S.-born, and how these flows may be associated with integration issues in Mexico, or other processes in the United States or abroad. Given the important role that family plays in Mexico-U.S. migration, how can we study the mix of drivers for migration to and from Mexico among family members? How will this increase in return migration impact family dynamics, population projections? How can we assess the links between return migration, political participation, access to education, health, and other basic services?

V. The assessment of the impact of climate related factors, natural disasters or other weather-related events in international migration and internal displacement in Mexico has only recently become a topic of interest given that internal displacement due to conflict and violence has been historically more prevalent in Mexico.

Existing literature suggests that the relationship between environmental factors and migration varies greatly in response to factors such as economic vulnerability, whether the areas hit by these phenomena are rural or urban, the previous existence of consolidated migratory networks, migratory policy, and the availability of resources that can be mobilized to cover the costs associated with displacement. In this sense, we believe that it is central to engage in studies which analyze the interaction of multiple factors that may be contributing to internal displacement and that may help elucidate what role climate related factors, natural disasters or other weather-related events have played and will play in future migratory dynamics in the country.

VI. Regional migration policy affects migration flows to and from Mexico by changing transit, settlement and waiting times, trends and patterns.

Due to its geographic location, policy changes in the United States impacts directly who can enter, who can apply for asylum in the United States, how migrants transit, as well as waiting times that also affect settlement patterns in Mexico. However, recent patterns show that migration flows to Mexico are also dependent on migration management in other countries and migration policy more broadly in the Americas. It is unclear how policies in different countries in the Americas shape migration flows and migration trajectories that also impact decision-making along the route. Therefore, understanding how the migration trajectory is dependent on intermediaries, policies and other institutional factors will also inform destination choice.

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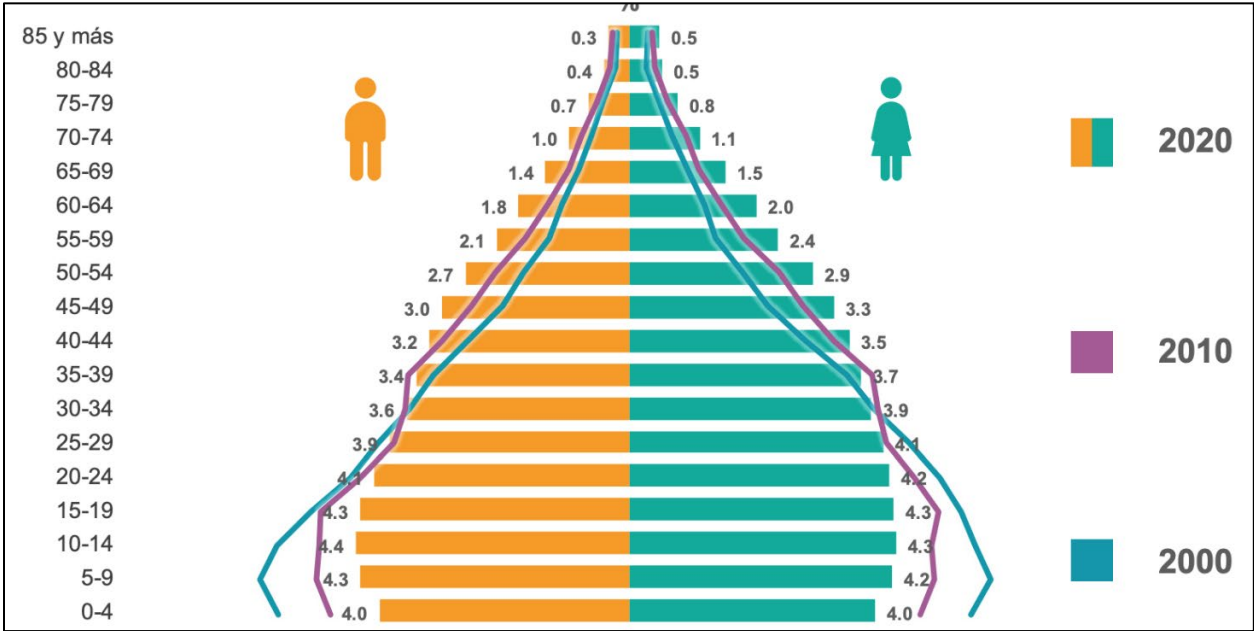
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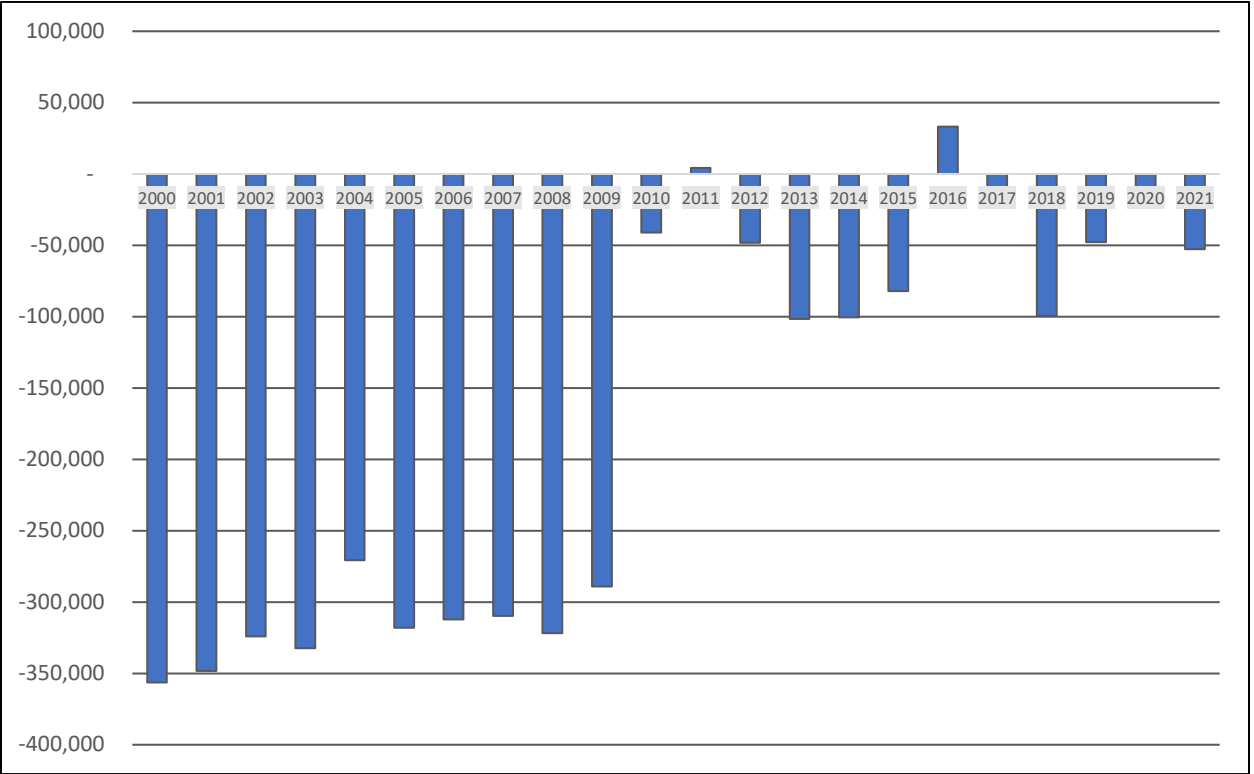
Appendix

Figure A1. Age and sex distribution of the Mexican population, 2010-2020



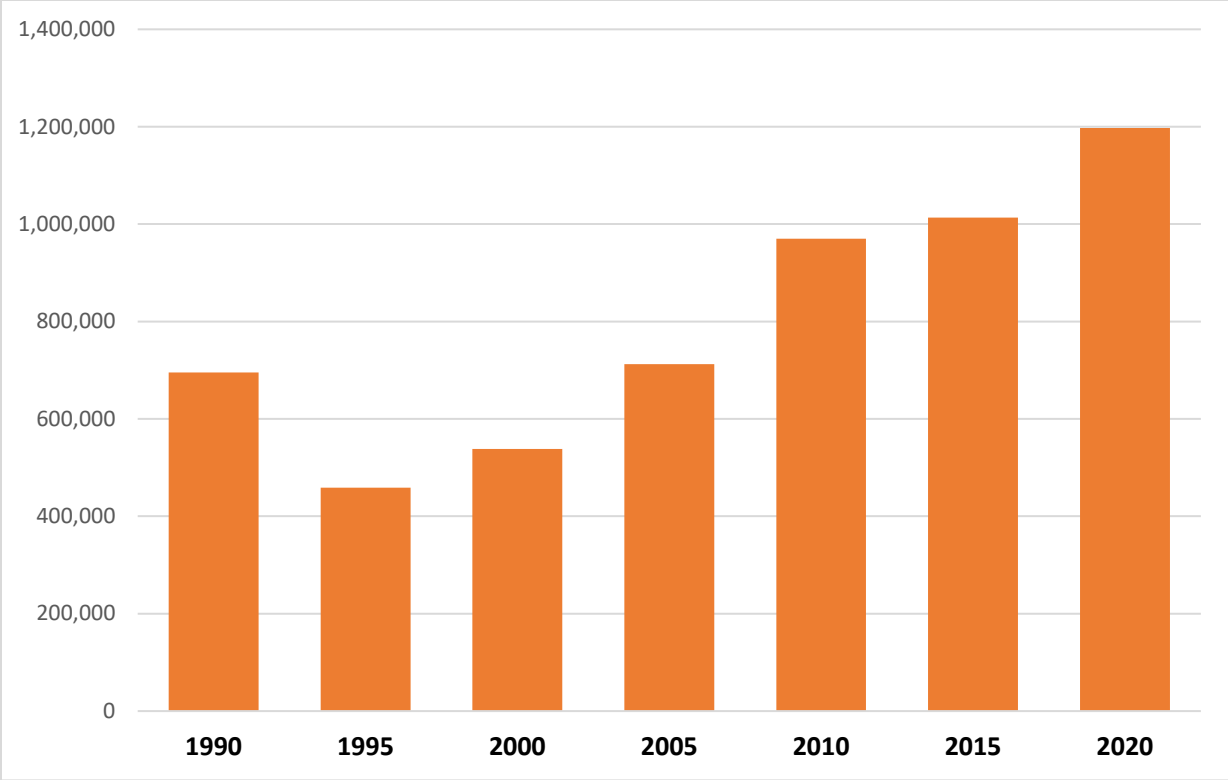
Source: (INEGI 2020a)

Figure A2. Net migration, Mexico 2000-2021



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from (World Bank 2020)

Figure A3. International migrant stock, Mexico 1990-2020



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from UNDESA 2020.

Table A1. Timeline of main events related to migration, asylum and displacement in Mexico, 1964-2022

Year/period	Country(ies) involved	Event/Policy	Description
1964	U.S.	End of the Bracero Program	The Bracero Program comprised a series of laws and diplomatic agreements. The United States signed the Mexican agricultural Labor Agreement with Mexico, which guaranteed decent living conditions (adequate sanitation, housing, and food) and a minimum wage of 30 cents an hour for agricultural workers.
1965	U.S.	Immigration and Nationality Act. Creation of permanent immigration preference system favoring family reunification and only allowing labour-related migration	The act formally removed de facto discrimination against Southern and Eastern Europeans as well as Asians, in addition to other non-Western and Northern European ethnic groups from the immigration policy of the United States.
1974	Canada and Mexico	Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP)	Canada and Mexico signed the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program signed to enable Canadian farmers to hire workers on temporary visas.

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Year/ period	Country(ies) involved	Event/Policy	Description
1980	Mexico	The Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR)	The Government of Mexico decided to establish a body to address the needs of the refugee population.
1982	Mexico	Economic crisis	Mexico entered a period of economic crisis.
1983	Guatemala	Return of democracy	General Óscar Humberto assumed the presidency.
1983	Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia	Meeting in Contadora Island	The foreign ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela met on Contadora Island, Panama, to draw up a regional peace plan.
1986	U.S.	Passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act	Passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (backbone of the current immigration enforcement system), 3 million migrants were regularized.
1989	Mexico	Short-term multiple-entry visitor visas	Short-term multiple-entry visitor visas put in place that allowed Guatemalans residing in border regions to enter Mexico's Southern border region.
1989	5 Central American countries, Mexico and Belize	International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA)	The rights of refugees, repatriation and integration, as well as assistance, were discussed.
1990	Mexico	Introduction of refugee status	Refugee status is introduced as an immigration category in the General Population Law.
1993	Mexico	Creation of the Mexican Office of Migration Affairs	The Office of Migration Affairs oversees managing and controlling migration in Mexico.
1993	Mexico	Creation of the National Migration Institute	The National Migration Institute is a decentralized administrative body of the Federal Public Administration, under the Ministry of the Interior, which applies the current migration legislation.
1994	Mexico, U.S., Canada	North American Free Trade Agreement	North American Free Trade Agreement came into force January 1 st , creating a trilateral trade block.
1996	U.S.	Passing of the Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act	The passing of this Act strengthened U.S. immigration laws, adding penalties for undocumented immigrants who commit crimes while in the United States or who stay in the U.S. for statutorily defined periods of time.
1997	Mexico	Expansion of the short-term multiple-entry visitor visas program	Short-term multiple-entry visitor visas program was expanded to include agricultural workers.

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Year/ period	Country(ies) involved	Event/Policy	Description
1998	Mexico	General Law for Internally Displaced Persons	The General Law for Internally Displaced Persons was rejected.
2006	Mexico	Mexican Drug War (security program)	The drug war in Mexico is a conflict between the Mexican government and various drug trafficking organizations; it was initiated by President Felipe Calderon.
2009	Canada and Mexico	Canada imposes visa to Mexican nationals	The Canadian government legitimized its decision to impose a visa condition on Mexican nationals based on the rising number of refugee claims in the previous years.
2011	Mexico	Migration and Refugee Laws	Migration and Refugee Laws signed in response to increasing settlement and transit migration.
2012	Mexico	Law for the Prevention and Assistance of Internal Displacement in the State of Chiapas	This law establishes the basis for the prevention of internal displacement, provides humanitarian assistance for the internally displaced and a framework that guarantees specific rights to IDPs.
2012	Mexico	Federal Law for the Prevention and Assistance of Internal Displacement	The Federal Law for the Prevention and Attention to Internal Displacement is proclaimed was rejected.
2012	U.S.	Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	DACA is a policy that delays the deportation of people who came to the U.S. as children if they do not have documentation.
2014	Mexico	Law to Prevent and Treat Internal Displacement in the State of Guerrero	On February 12, Decree No. 487, the Law for the Prevention and Attention to Internal Displacement in the State of Guerrero was published.
2014	Mexico	Southern Border Plan	Southern Border Plan is launched to protect migrants who enter Mexico and to manage the ports of entry.
2015	Venezuela	Mass migration	Shortages of basic necessities, inflation and unemployment provoke mass protests in Venezuela. The middle class begins to migrate out of the country.
2016	Canada and Mexico	End of visa for Mexicans	Canada announces end of visa requirement for Mexican nationals starting December 2016.
2017	Mexico	Reform to the General Law of Victims	The General Law of Victims was reformed.
2017	Mexico	Federal Law to Prevent, Treat, and Repair Internal Forced Displacement.	Federal Law to Prevent, Treat, and Repair Internal Forced Displacement was rejected.

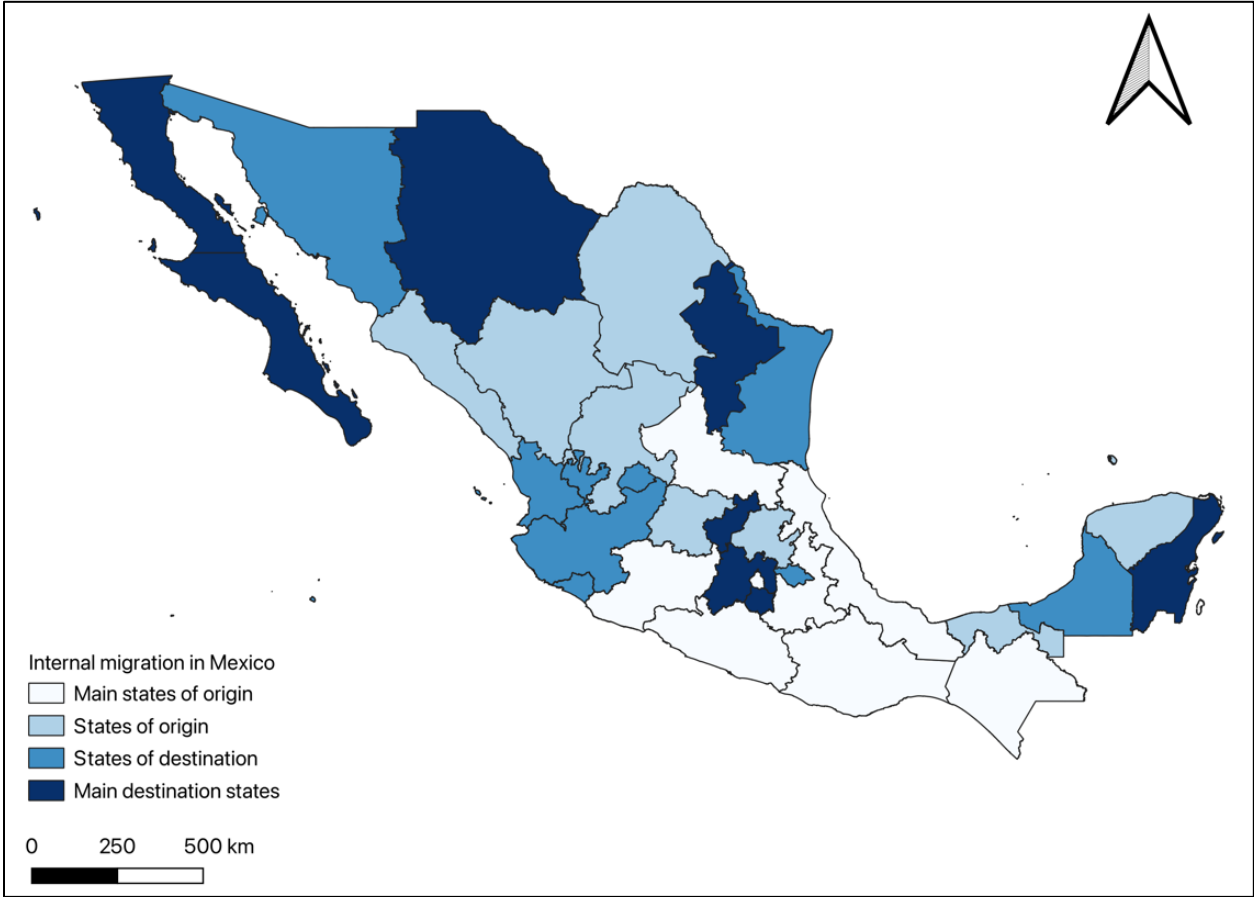
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Year/ period	Country(ies) involved	Event/Policy	Description
2018	Mexico	General Law for the Assistance of Victims of Internal Forced Displacement.	The General Law for the Assistance of Victims of Internal Forced Displacement, which was rejected.
2019	Mexico	General Law on Internal Forced Displacement	General Law on Internal Forced Displacement, which was rejected.
2019	Mexico	Recognition of Internal Forced Displacement in Mexico	The Recognition of Internal Forced Displacement in Mexico by the Ministry of Government of Mexico was rejected.
2019	Mexico	General Law to Prevent, Investigate, Punish and Repair Internal Forced Displacement	The General Law to Prevent, Investigate, Punish, and Repair Internal Forced Displacement was rejected.
2019	U.S.	Remain in Mexico/Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP)	The MPPs are a action whereby certain foreign individuals entering or seeking admission to the U.S. from Mexico – illegally or without proper documentation – may be returned to Mexico and wait outside of the U.S. for the duration of their immigration proceedings
2020	U.S.	Title 42	The order allowed authorities to swiftly remove immigrants at U.S. land borders, in addition to banning the entry of certain individuals who "potentially pose a health risk".
2020	Mexico	General Law to Prevent, Treat, and Comprehensively Repair Internal Forced Displacement	The General Law to Prevent, Treat, and Comprehensively Repair Internal Forced Displacement was rejected.
2020	Mexico	National Law for the Prevention, Protection, and Generation of Durable Solutions and Sanctions in the field of forced displacement	The National Law for the Prevention, Protection, and Generation of Durable Solutions and Sanctions in the field of forced displacement was rejected.
2020	Mexico	Law to Prevent, Treat, and Comprehensively Repair Internal Forced Displacement in the State of Sinaloa	On August 21, the Law to Prevent, Attend and Integrally Repair Forced Internal Displacement in the State of Sinaloa was published.
2020	Mexico	General Law to Prevent, Treat and Comprehensively Repair Internal Forced Displacement	On September 29, the Chamber of Deputies approved the General Law to Prevent, Treat, and Comprehensively Repair Internal Forced Displacement.
2020	U.S., Mexico, and Canada	The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA)	The USMCA replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Year/period	Country(ies) involved	Event/Policy	Description
2020	Mexico	Ratification by the Senate of the draft General Law to Prevent, Treat, and Comprehensively Repair Internal Forced Displacement	Ratification by the Senate of the draft General Law to Prevent, Treat, and Comprehensively Repair Internal Forced Displacement has not progressed.
2022	Mexico	Law for the Prevention and Assistance of Internal Forced Displacement in the State of Zacatecas	The Law for the Prevention and Assistance of Internal Forced Displacement in the State of Zacatecas was published in the Official Gazette of the State of Zacatecas Number 79, on October 1.

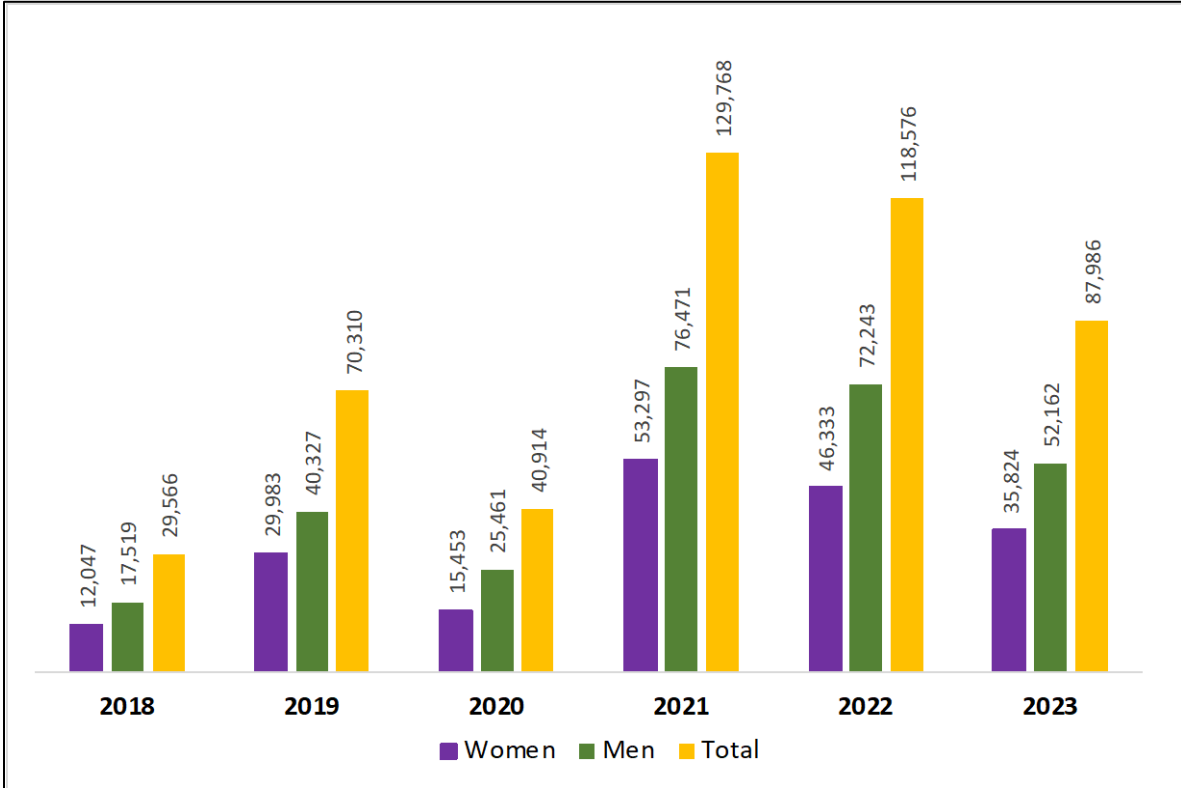
Source: Prepared by the authors with information from (Giorguli-Saucedo, García-Guerrero, and Masferrer 2016)

Figure A4. Map of net internal migration in Mexico by main states of origin and destination, 2020



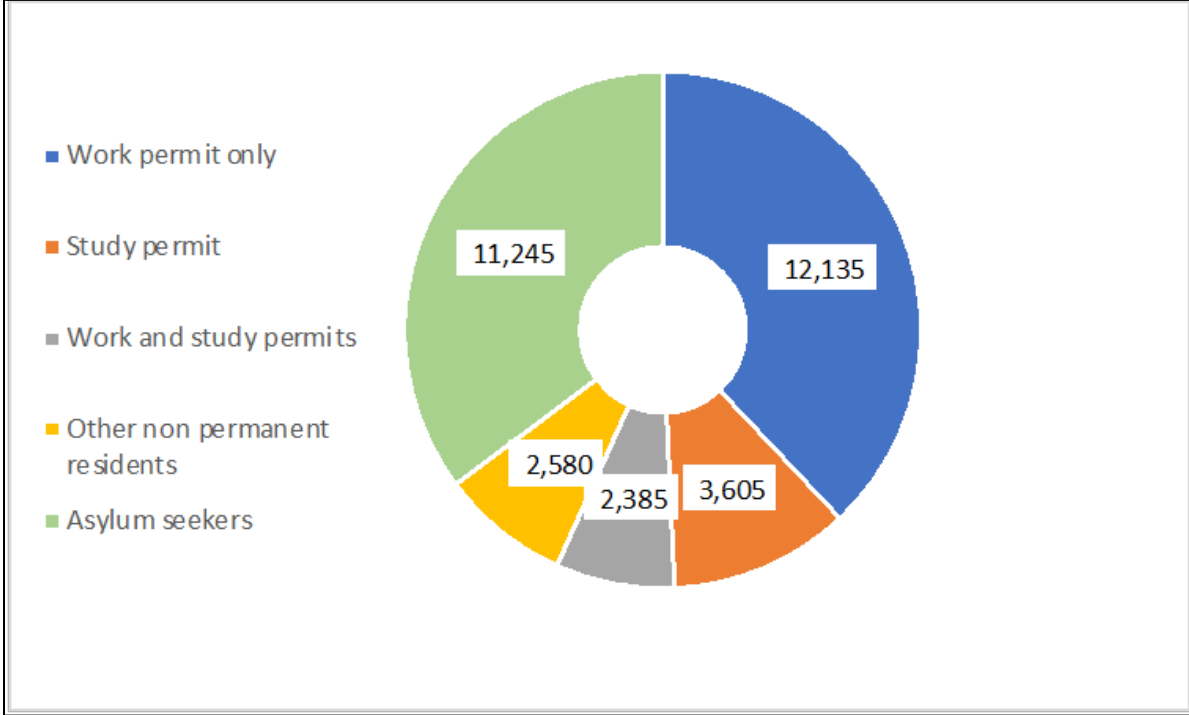
Source: Prepared by the authors with data from the 2020 Census (INEGI 2021). The four types of states are defined according to quartiles of state internal net migration rate/

Figure A5. Asylum requests in Mexico by sex, 2013-2023 (July)



Source: Prepared by the authors with data provided by the COMAR

Figure A6. Mexican Non-permanent residents in Canada in 2021



Source: Prepared by the authors with data from Statistics Canada.