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A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts

In

Latin American Studies

By

Jovana Martín

Committee in charge:

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University of California San Diego

2023

EPIGRAPH

*Every being
Will have the right
To land and life
And that will be the bread of tomorrow.*

— Pablo Neruda

“Ode to Bread”

As I stare out my window every morning, the first thing I notice is the view of a thirty foot fence that surrounds the small city of Mexicali. I notice how the maroon colored fence, which was once a bright red color, has faded over time and how the numerous bars that make up the fence stretch on for miles and miles without end. Not many people get to witness this scene as I do and I strongly believe that this view has become a part of me. My tale is a tale of two countries, two cultures, two languages, and two very different ways of approaching life.

— Jovana Martín

“A Tale of my two Border Cities”

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CDC	Center for Disease Control
CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos
CURP	Clave Única de Registro de Población
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía
INM	Instituto Nacional de Migración
INMUJER	Instituto de la Mujer
MMFRP	Mexican Migration Field Research Program
MPP	Migrant Protection Protocols
RFC	Registro Federal de Contribuyentes
SAM	Subsecretaria de Asuntos Migratorios
TRT	Tarjetas de Residente Temporal
TVRH	Tarjetas de Visitante por Razones Humanitarias
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia
UPMRIP	Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas
WHO	World Health Organization

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DEDICATIONS

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Abstract Of The Thesis

Migrant Resettlement in Mexican Border City - Mexicali, Baja California

By

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Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor David Fitzgerald, chair

While there has been a steady increase in the number of migrants who have started entering the U.S. in order to begin their asylum cases with approximately 200 migrants per day entering through the Tijuana port of entry and 20 migrants entering

through Mexicali, the population of foreign migrants continues to increase in the Mexican border cities causing the shelters to be crowded and leaving numerous migrants without housing and other essential resources in the cities (Strauss Center, 2023). For the migrants awaiting their asylum process and living in Baja California's capital, Mexicali, the future might look unclear and for those migrants who are unable to cross the border into the U.S. and ultimately, decide to settle in México, it is beneficial to understand what their resettlement process entails and how that transition looks different depending on the migrants' profiles or demographics.

Is local integration even possible for such a large population of foreign migrants, from whom a majority initially intended to stay in the city temporarily, in a small border city such as Mexicali, Baja California? If so, is local integration possible for every migrant demographic and how does the transition differ based on the migrants' demographic and experiences? Drawing on the forty-five in-depth interviews conducted in Mexicali during the summer of 2022 in two specific migrant shelters, the research findings analyze the resettlement process of migrants in the city and demonstrate the divergent experiences of migrants based on their different demographics and whether they are considered "highly vulnerable".

Introduction

Introduction

Located in the U.S.-Mexico international border, the city of Mexicali, Baja California, has become home to the newcomer migrants, primarily from Central America and Haiti, who first viewed Mexico solely as a transit country before arriving at their intended destination in the United States. As the migrants arrived at the U.S. - Mexico border and attempted to seek asylum in the United States, the migrants were blocked by the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP). The Migrant Protection Protocols, which are referred to as the "Remain in México Policy, were created by the Trump administration in 2019 and as a result of the policy, the migrants seeking asylum at the U.S. southern border were forced to await their claims in the northern Mexican border cities for indefinite periods of time, which could range from months to years. In March 2020, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the asylum cases under MPP were placed on hold and were said to resume once the Mexican government declared that the northern border states were at a medium level risk of infection (US embassy in MX, 2020). As of August 8, 2022, the current administration lifted the Migrant Protection Protocols and allowed the migrants who were enrolled in the program to await their asylum cases in the U.S. and the program stopped accepting more migrants into the program (Migrant Protection Protocols, 2021). After the migrants seeking asylum at the U.S. - Mexico border started entering the United States and the current administration ended the former Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), there were still numerous foreign migrants stranded at the border.

The data collected in the summer of 2022 (August - September) demonstrates that there continues to be an increasing number of migrants arriving at the border. The fieldwork interviews commenced days after the termination of MPP was announced on August 8, 2022. For the migrants who were not enrolled in MPP, Title 42 exceptions is another pathway that allows migrants categorized as most vulnerable to enroll in waiting lists and seek asylum in the U.S. is Title 42 exceptions. However, since the number of migrants seeking asylum has surpassed the number of CBP's daily slot allowance, the groups facilitating the Title 42 exceptions asylum claims have created waitlists that are managed at the shelters or organizations in the Mexican border cities (Asylum Processing at the U.S. - Mexico border 2022)

In response to the increasing flow of migrants arriving in Mexicali, the city has attempted to prepare for the arrival of migrants by expanding its only city funded shelter, Albergue Peregrino, and continuing to issue residence permits at the city's women-serving shelter, Albergue del desierto. In late 2022, Mexicali's city funded shelter, Albergue Peregrino, only held a maximum capacity of 150 migrants, however, after being awarded funding, began an expansion project that will be completed in April 2023 and will allow the shelter to house a maximum of 435 migrants. Albergue del desierto is the only shelter in the city that exclusively offers housing to women and children, however has a psychiatrist, social worker, and two lawyers on site who serve both women and men and assist them with medical, employment, and legal aid resources. Despite being the capital of Baja California, Mexicali currently lacks enough shelters and other resources to assist the arriving migrants and ease their transition into the city,

whether the city becomes their temporary or permanent home. Therefore, the city of Mexicali was specifically chosen as the research-site in order to analyze how the migrants are adjusting into the city, in spite of the lack of resources and whether they will continue to reside in México in the near future, in the case that they are not able to cross into the U.S.

Existing Literature

Throughout the classical period of immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century, scholars believed that the immigrants and the second-generation children of immigrants would become assimilated into mainstream American society based on what scholars coined the Classic Assimilation Theory. American Sociology scholars Robert Park and Ernest Burgess defined "assimilation" as an inevitable, linear process where immigrants and their future generations would adopt the culture, customs, and sentiments of the host society and thus, become integrated into the core society (Park, 1950). Park and Burgess distinguish between four types of interaction in the assimilation model - competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation and mention that it is unlikely for the first generation immigrants to fully experience all the stages of the assimilation process, but will encounter accommodation which, Rumbaut explains when writing, "accommodation most closely reflects the modal adaptation of first-generation adult immigrants, while assimilation can become a modal outcome ultimately only for the malleable young and for the second generation (Rumbaut, 2005).

In 1964, sociologist Milton Gordon expanded the theory of assimilation and agreed with the previous model of assimilation as a straight-line process, where each future generation would display more similarities with the core culture than its previous generations. Gordon organizes the assimilation process into seven different stages that start with acculturation, which Gordon defined as a change in the immigrant's native culture to adopt the culture of the host society. Cultural assimilation is followed by structural assimilation and Gordon writes that after structural assimilation is complete, the other stages of assimilation will inevitably follow (Gordon, 1964). There are various critiques to Gordon's refined assimilation theory as the theory solely defines assimilation as a one-way process where the migrant groups are the only groups who are becoming assimilated into the host society and fails to acknowledge that it is, instead, a two-way process where the receiving, native-born population also assimilates into the migrant groups' cultures.

Portes and Zhou further critique the classic models of assimilation by introducing the segmented theory of assimilation, which contradicts the assimilation process as a linear convergence and redefines the theory by emphasizing that different migrant groups assimilate into distinct segments of American society as a consequence of factors such as race, socioeconomic status, skills, and education level (Portes and Zhou, 1993). The new segmented theory of assimilation also accepts that the outcome of assimilation does not necessarily result in upward mobility or a positive incorporation process. Instead, based on structural characteristics, the second generation's pathways might lead to either downward or upward assimilation.

The theory stresses the importance of the modes of incorporation into the core culture and acknowledges that the receiving country's government and society play an imperative role as actors in the immigrants' incorporation process (Portes and Zhou, 1993). Zhou moves away from both the assimilationism and multiculturalism scholars by introducing the segmented assimilation theory as a middle-range theory that helps explain the divergent outcomes of different immigrant groups and their adaptation processes by outlining three possible pathways - "upward mobility dictating the acculturation and economic integration into the normative structures of middle-class America, the downward-mobility pattern dictating the acculturation and parallel integration into the under-class, and economic integration into middle-class America with lagged acculturation and preservation of the immigrants' native culture" (Zhou 1997). However, one of the critiques of the segmented assimilation theory and the case-studies provided is that the theory does not include gender or sex as one of the influential factors that hinder the migrants' ability to access the different segments of the host society. Therefore, the model does not provide insight into the migrants' different experiences of assimilation based on gender or portray how just like race, capital, or skill, gender also plays an important role in the way in which the migrants will go through the assimilation process into the mainstream society.

Adding to the debate between assimilationism and transnationalism, Michael Bommes argues that instead of viewing each as an entirely different approach of understanding migration research, it is more useful to understand them as competing

theories surrounding international migration (Bommes, 2012). Bommes contradicts both theories when stating that it is not plausible to use the concepts "groups" and "society" as reference points in the migrants' assimilation processes since migrants do not address either during the process. Instead, Bommes clarifies that when seeking resources such as employment, medical, or legal aid, the process of assimilation occurs through organizations (hospitals, shelters, schools) when the migrants seek out these resources. Therefore, the migrants become assimilated the moment they begin their role in any of these organizations and fulfill the expectations of each role. Bommes agrees with previous scholars in writing that assimilation is inevitable and necessary for the migrants to succeed in their host country. The literature emphasizes that not only is assimilation necessary, but that migrants in modern societies are expected to participate and fulfill certain organizational roles as Bommes clarifies that the migrants first declare their need for assimilation, the moment they migrate to the host country.

When discussing integration policies, Entzinger and Scholten refute Castles and Miller's three models of integration included in the book *The Age of Migration*, which are organized into the exclusionary, assimilationist, and multiculturalist models of integration. In their book, the scholars argue that even though they explain the models using three countries in Europe, every other country follows either one of these integration models or one in-between (Castles and Miller 2020). Entzinger and Scholten disprove the argument by writing that while the integration models might be useful to follow in the previous waves of migration, it is no longer the best approach to understand the current immigration integration realities. Moreover, the scholars believe

that although states might provide necessary resources for integration such as housing and employment, integration is better understood as an autonomous process for immigrants (Entzinger and Scholten, 2014). Rather than through states, the scholars highlight that the migrants' integration process occurs more actively at the local level and that it is difficult to categorize a country's integration model into one of the three models as they state countries might adopt a mix of all models or might switch from one to another throughout time (Entzinger and Scholten, 2014).

In conversation with the idea of states and the public framing the idea of "integration" as a responsibility solely of the migrants, Maja Cederberg examines how emphasizing the migrants' agency to integrate impacts the way migrants present and view themselves (Cederberg, 2014). Cederberg provides context on how Sweden's integration policy continues to be debated and viewed as a failing policy, therefore, the public discourse affects the way migrants in Sweden view their own efforts at integrating into Swedish society. Both migrants presented in the case studies criticize other migrants' "decisions" of isolating themselves and taking advantage of social welfare, making connections to Sweden's multicultural policies (Cederberg, 2014). Therefore, Cederberg's article provides insight on how framing "integration" as an autonomous responsibility of migrants has effects on how migrants present themselves.

In the context of the Finnish integration policies, the Finnish Integration Act of 2010 stresses the importance of being an employable refugee and equates becoming employed as the best indicator of a successful integration (Masoud, Kurki, Brunila

2020). Other European union states have adopted similar notions of “employable refugee subjectivity” and as a result, also implemented integration training and programs that would facilitate migrants’ entry into the labor market. In their chapter “Learn Skills and Get Employed”, the scholars prove how despite the Finnish government’s promise to expedite the migrants’ employment process through educational and vocational training, it continues to be extremely difficult for migrants to obtain employment (Maoud, Kukri, Brunila 2020). The chapter sheds light on the the problems of the receiving countries’ “employable refugee subjectivity” as the only definition of a successful integration of immigrants since becoming employable through skills does not guarantee immediate entrance into the countries’ labor market.

The policy brief “Labor Inclusion of Migrants in Mexico” demonstrates Mexico’s response to the drastic increase in Central American migrants living in the Northern Mexican border cities with the implementation of the visitor cards for humanitarian visas “Tarjetas de visitante por razones humanitarias” (TVRH) beginning in November 2018 by the National Migration Institute (INM) (Migration Policy Centre, 2019). Even though the migrant integration process through employment should be reliable, in theory, due to Mexico’s 32,000 available employment positions nation-wide, Mexico’s labor integration policies have failed for multiple reasons. The brief explains that the issuance of the visitor cards was not practical as many of the employers did not accept the migrants’ documentation and also the country did not have the proper infrastructure to handle the immense backlog of migrants applying for visitor cards. The policy brief describes the policies’ failure as Mexico failing to comply as a “safe third country”, however, it is

important to note that it is also difficult to implement labor integration policies for a population that does not intend to reside in the country long-term or who still view the country as a transit country.

Adding to the literature on the topic of humanitarian visas, the book *Latin America and Refugee Protection* discusses how regarding humanitarian visas, Latin America can be seen as a global champion of complementary protection (Feline and Luzes, 2021). In order to aid displaced migrants throughout Latin America, the countries adopted the use of humanitarian visas and each country implemented different measures or eligibility criteria for their humanitarian visas. For example, Mexico established the 2011 Mexican Migration Law, which explicitly states that migrants who are granted complementary protection are also “ granted permanent residence in the country” (Feline and Luzes, 2021). Other Latin American countries, however, have looser stipulation on their humanitarian visas and it is not clarified whether the humanitarian visa also allows the migrants to live in the country. The scholars Feline and Luzes criticize the use of humanitarian visas throughout Latin America as they believe that the humanitarian visas and programs are often used as a means to filter and decrease the number of migrants entering the countries. The eligibility criteria of such humanitarian visas and the ambiguity around the migrants’ length of residence in the countries issuing the humanitarian visas make it difficult to consider the measure as a viable solution of the displacement of migrants throughout Latin America.

The book *Migration and Integration in Flanders* proposes the idea of incorporating fundamental rights into the states' integration policies as a better method of integration for both migrants and receiving societies. The book adds to the literature by examining how the recent integration policies in European states have slowly added policies such as a civic integration program, but even such programs lack fundamental rights for migrants (Van de Pol, Vanheule, and Clycq 2018). In integration discourse, migrant integration is often viewed as a duty of the immigrant population instead of framing it as a duty of both the migrants and the receiving societies. Citizenship rights, which differ from fundamental rights as they are by definition exclusive, are deemed as the ultimate compensation for the successful integration of the immigrant groups (Van de Pol, Vanheule, and Clycq 2018). Therefore, the literature imagines a solution where the integration is redefined as a two-way process between both the immigrant group and the host countries, however, the literature remains ambiguous as to how the fundamental rights can be implemented into practice in integration policies.

Empirical Background

The report "Mexico's Southern Border" explains how despite the U.S. government's attempts at categorizing Mexico as a "safe third country", México continues to be a dangerous destination for refugees and lacks the proper infrastructure to resettle the migrants in the country (International Crisis Group, 2018). The report adds to the literature by outlining some of the system failures in México such as only allowing the migrants a total of thirty days to apply for refugee status upon arrival to the country when COMAR lacks resources such as offices in the southern border cities or

throughout the country, forcing the migrants to travel to the nearest offices in Mexico City or Tapachula. Regarding the high levels of organized crime that migrants are more susceptible to while living in Mexico, the report proposes that Mexico should implement measures such as prioritizing migrants according to “gender-specific or age-appropriate needs” (International Crisis Group, 2018). The lack of immigration infrastructure and the high levels of organized crime that target migrants in Mexico are enough to prove that Mexico could not currently be considered a “safe third country” for foreign migrants.

A more recent shift in the migration flows from Central America and other Latin American countries is the shift from migration being a primarily masculine phenomenon, where the people migrating were mostly men, to now there being an increase of women migrating to México and the northern border in order to resettle or seek asylum in the United States. Olivera and Garcia highlight how it is important to acknowledge and create more research around the migration of single women or women with children since these migrant women are more prone to experiencing violence and discrimination in their journey in transit (Olivera and Garcia, 2019). Garcia and Olivera’s literature cautions against not studying the phenomenon of migrant women in transit in Mexico when stating that if gender violence is not seen as a violation of human rights, in the same light that femicides are also not given enough importance in Mexico, then the state will fail to protect the migrant women as well.

Almudena Cortes adds to the discussion about gender-based violence and the different experiences that men and women face throughout their journey in transit to the

U.S. by emphasizing the need to approach the issue through a border feminist lens. Cortes describes the migrant women's journey through border spaces as a "continuous of violence" and lists the different precautions or threats that migrant women must be hyper aware of throughout their journey in transit (Cortes, 2018). The journal article mentions how migrant women must take different routes in transit in order to avoid encounters with organized crime groups and it is known that while the migrant men are vulnerable to organized crime violence, the migrant women are in addition, more susceptible to gender-based violence and sexual assaults. In order to survive the journey in transit, Cortes's research demonstrates that migrant women will find partners in men who are also traveling northwards or Mexican nationals they meet in transit.

Scholars highlight the shift in migratory flows from Mexico when explaining that Mexico shifted from being a country of emigration to the U.S. to now becoming a destination country for migrants, primarily from the Northern Triangle. While it is clear that Mexico was not prepared for the drastic increase in migration, it is an opportunity for the state to create policy that reflects their *interculturalidad* law (multiculturalism law) that aims to resettle migrants through formal integration programs (Runde, Yayboke, and Garcia, 2019). One of the social programs that the government tried to implement was an employment recruitment program that would send migrants to cities that had a high demand for labor, however, the program was not successful due to the lack of resources and funding required for labor matching. The scholars offer policy recommendations when suggesting that Mexico creates policy that addresses issues of resettlement, integration, short-term transit assistance, and also develops more

south-south cooperation with the Northern Triangle countries. While the solutions offered in the literature are helpful, it is still unclear as to how a country like Mexico, that lacks immigration infrastructure, can practically execute the policies without international aid or resources.

While Mexico claims to be a country with liberal migration laws, in reality, its cooperation with the United States in externalizing the U.S. border and becoming a “buffer zone” demonstrates otherwise. Menjivas explains how the global north countries now rely heavily on the transit countries to limit and deter the migratory flows before they reach their own borders by involving themselves in policy and increasing security in the transit countries such as Mexico, demonstrating reliance on interstate relations (Menjivar, 2014). Scholars such as Sarabia add to the migration literature on border externalization by discussing how the U.S. effectively creates a transnational regime of illegality and how Mexico cooperates by policing illegality within the state (Sarabia, 2019). The global north countries such as the U.S have exported the idea of illegality and its discourse on working-class migrants to Mexico through its collaborative initiatives such as the Merida Initiative. Other efforts implemented with U.S. funding include Mexico’s own Southern Border Plan, which was a way to prevent migrants from even entering “the beast”, one of the most common train routes migrants use to travel northwards to the northern Mexican border (Sarabia, 2019). However, it was not as successful in deterring migrants from traveling northwards, as new routes were then used to travel in transit to the border, exposing the migrants to more violence and crime throughout their journey and resulting in more deaths.

When explaining the use of the increasing remote control, Fitzgerald explains the use of Mexico as a buffer zone and as a “vertical frontier” where “governments reach beyond their territories in extensive, routine collaboration to track and deter millions of individuals and particular groups trying to cross the border” (Fitzgerald 2020). By doing so, Mexico now has deported more Central American migrants than the United States, which demonstrates that the use of border externalization has become more effective at deterring migrants than the U.S. southern border wall.

The use of border externalization became more prominent after the U.S. realized how the use of border militarization and border enforcement only increased the flow of undocumented migration and reduced a circular migration flow. The border militarization plan was implemented using a neoclassical economic model where in theory, the increase in border enforcement would deter the migrants by increasing the cost of migration drastically which would result in a lower probability of migrants attempting to cross the border (Massey, Durand, Pren, 2016) However, the scholars demonstrate that basing the theory on a “cost-benefit-decision” analysis that solely focuses on expected gains in terms of economic gain failed since the state failed to consider that migrants cross the border for more than economic gain and that fleeing violence is a stronger factor than economic gain.

Methodology

The city of Mexicali, Baja California was specifically chosen as the research-site due to the lack of resources it currently has for the growing number of arriving migrants. In comparison to other Mexican border cities like Tijuana, Mexicali does not have the same amount of non-profit organizations that serve non-Mexican migrants, legal aid resources, shelters or food banks, and employment opportunities. This is important to state since the fact that this particular city currently has a lack of resources for international migrants has implications on the way that the migrants are able to adapt and integrate into the city.

The partner organizations chosen in order to conduct the fieldwork in Mexicali were the non-profit organizations Albergue del desierto and Albergue Peregrino. Albergue Peregrino is a city funded shelter and is one of the only government shelters in the state of Baja California. The other partner organization, Albergue del desierto, is a private NGO that only offers housing for women and children, but has a psychiatrist, social worker, and two lawyers present at the site five days a week to assist all migrants, regardless of gender, who are seeking medical, employment, and legal aid resources. Both NGO's serve migrants from different backgrounds such as Haitians, Central Americans, and Mexican nationals as well. In order to select the migrants for the semi-structured interviews, the organizations advertised the research study to the international migrants in order to obtain the list of migrants for the study and filter out the Mexican migrants. The migrant sample population was selected based on the criteria

such as age, gender, country of origin, and also the period of time since their arrival to the city. The sample consists of 25 women and twenty men and the migrants originate from the countries of Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Venezuela, Haiti, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Brasil. The migrants reported arriving in Mexicali from 2017 to 2022, with an outlier who arrived in 2010.

The research draws on the 45 in-depth interviews conducted in Mexicali, Baja California in the summer of 2022 during the months of August-September in person at the two research sites, Albergue del desierto and Albergue Peregrino. The semi-structured interviews consist of a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative questions. The first part of the semi-structured interview consisted of quantitative questions, which were multiple choice questions that asked about the migrants' demographic profile (country of origin, race, ethnicity, gender, religión, family, age, etc.). For the quantitative section of the interviews, the survey responses were recorded using the software Qualtrics. The qualitative portion of the semi-structured interviews were recorded in person and included open-ended questions about the migrants' experiences since they arrived in the city and their ability to obtain resources such as education, housing, employment, and food resources. The semi-structured interviews also included questions about their experiences with violence and crime in the city and about their future decision-making process regarding whether they plan to settle in Mexicali. The semi-structured interview questionnaire included around forty questions in total and the interviews ranged from thirty to fifty minutes in length.

What gaps does the research aim to fill?

Located at the U.S.-Mexico international border, the city of Mexicali, Baja California, has become home to the newcomer migrants from Central America and Haitian migrants, who first viewed Mexico solely as a transit country before arriving at their intended destination in the United States. Through the research conducted over the summer in Mexicali, I intend to contribute to further knowledge about the resettlement processes and experiences of foreign migrants in the transit country of México. There is existing literature about the migrants' experiences while trying to seek asylum in the United States, however, for a majority of the migrants residing in Mexico due to the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), it can be predicted that their stay in Mexico will be prolonged, causing the migrants to integrate into the northern Mexican border city. Therefore, I intend to add to the existing literature by researching whether the migrants who have arrived in the city in the last few years plan to settle in the city and what their resettlement process will entail in a city that lacks resources for foreign migrants. I intend to build more knowledge about how the migrants in Mexicali are able to obtain resources such as housing, education, employment, medical, and legal services in a small border city that lacks resources for migrants in comparison to a larger city like Tijuana.

By comparing the data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with migrants residing in Tijuana to the findings that were made from the interviews done in Mexicali, I conclude that the migrants' resettlement processes vary by the border city in which they are currently residing as the migrants living in Mexicali demonstrated a more successful resettlement in comparison to the migrants living in Tijuana. Another comparison I investigate is whether the resettlement process varies by the migrants' country of origin since migrants who originated from the Northern Triangle portrayed a more difficult transition compared to the migrants from other countries in Central and South America. Through the interviews, I draw comparisons between the migrants' demographic profiles in order to conclude whether their integration process into Mexicali varies and then further draw comparisons by gender as well. By analyzing the migrants' demographic profiles, the findings suggest that migrant women in the age group of their thirties, who identify racially as white and who speak Spanish as their first language are the demographic who convey the most successful resettlement, while the migrant women in the age group of 19-27 with a median age of 23, who do not have a partner, and who reported having children are the demographic who portray an unsuccessful resettlement process after arriving in Mexicali.

Chapter One - Integration Policy and the Process of Resettlement

1.1 Introduction

The migrants who are not able to cross the border into the United States and find themselves residing at the northern border city of Mexicali, Baja California, face the decision of where they will settle in the case that they are not able to migrate northwards. For the migrants who decide to settle in México, whether that is in Mexicali or another city in México, I analyze their resettlement process in México and what that process entails. Since it is believed that the migrants who are residing in the Mexican northern border cities are living in a "limbo state", it is important to study how the migrants' transition can be facilitated in order for the migrants to begin resettling and ultimately, improving their quality of life.

Throughout the chapter, I analyze what is the migrants' early decision-making process in regard to where they plan to resettle in the case that they are not able to cross into the U.S. , whether it is through asylum, without documentation, or another method. I also examine how the migrants go through the process of resettlement or integration in México, focusing specifically on the border city of Mexicali, Baja California. Using the data findings from the fieldwork conducted, I analyze the migrants' resettlement process based on their access to resources in Mexicali and in transit. I then define what is a successful and unsuccessful resettlement process based on a

series of criteria and demonstrate case studies of migrant profiles that demonstrate each process. Drawing on the data findings, I also analyze the factors that hinder or facilitate migrants from experiencing a successful transition into the city such as access to employment, housing, legal aid, exposure to violence and insecurity, lack of childcare services, among others.

In order to understand the migrants' resettlement process, it is worthwhile to revisit the literature on the theories of assimilation and different integration models that have been used to study migration both in the global north and south. Based on the migration literature on assimilation and integration, migration scholars Zhou and Portes critically examine the previous definitions of assimilation models and add to the literature by introducing the segmented theory of assimilation, which differs from the classical model of assimilation in various characteristics. One of Portes and Zhou's redefining characteristics in the segmented theory of assimilation is how the assimilation process is not always positive, instead, based on structural characteristics of the receiving society and characteristics of the migrants' demographic profiles, it can either lead to an upwards or downwards assimilation (Portes and Zhou, 1993). Through my own research, I also highlight how depending on the migrants' demographic profiles and characteristics such as race, gender, country of origin, skill set, and level of education, these factors play a role in how the migrants can access resources such as employment, which can lead to a successful resettlement transition in México.

Even though Portes and Zhou's theory of segmented assimilation focuses on the second generation children of immigrants, I believe certain approaches of the theory can be applied to further understand how the migrants living in the northern Mexican border cities access resources and eventually integrate or resettle into the new country. However, the segmented theory of assimilation fails to include the factor of gender and how the migrants' gender also impacts their access to crucial resources such as employment. Through my research, I found that men were more likely to go through a successful transition at a drastically higher rate than the migrant women in my sample due to factors such as access to employment, but also other factors such as exposure to violence and insecurity or lack of childcare services. Therefore, by applying the segmented theory of assimilation to the research findings, the divergent resettlement experiences of the migrant women and men demonstrate that assimilation into the new host society is not always positive as it can also lead to a downwards assimilation. In the case of the research findings, it is imperative to analyze the factor of gender when applying the theory of segmented assimilation as the findings demonstrate a more drastic difference across genders than across nationalities or countries of origin as it is studied in Portes and Zhou's literature.

Through analyzing the history of integration policies for migrants that have been incorporated in the global north countries and in the global south, specifically focusing on México, it serves as a canvas to think about future integration policies that can be implemented in Mexico in the near future in order to aid migrants who plan to reside in the northern Mexican border cities, whether it is long-term or short-term before arriving

at their intended destination. In this chapter, I include integration policies that have been established in European countries such as Sweden and Finland and also critique three integration models that have been thought of as the three models that are followed in every country. After presenting a few integration policies in the global north, I include Mexico's history with resettling migrants and their more current policies on integration to demonstrate what are some recommendations in policy based on the fieldwork findings.

Using the fieldwork findings from the interviews conducted in the summer of 2022, I define a successful resettlement and present the migrant demographic profiles that portray the migrants that go through a successful migration based on a specific criteria that includes a variety of factors as a whole such as employability, access to housing, length of stay, decrease in exposure to violence, increase in quality of life, community, and a sense of well-being in the new home. Moreover, I present the migrant profiles that demonstrate a downwards or unsuccessful integration also based on that criteria and factors as a holistic analysis.

1.2 Assimilation Models and Integration Policies

By examining the literature on the integration policies that have been incorporated in several countries, it allows for a comparison and serves as a potential canvas that can be used to create future policy for migrant resettlement. I begin by including a critique on the three integration models outlined in the book *The Age of Migration* as the integration models are said to be an outline that most countries follow when resettling migrants upon their arrival. In earlier editions of the book, the scholars

stated that integration policies in destination or receiving countries could be organized into three integration policy models outlined as the differential exclusionary, assimilationist, and multiculturalism models.

Due to the widespread criticism on assimilation theories or models first introduced by scholars Park and Burgess as the Classical Assimilation theory in 1950, where assimilation was understood as a one-sided process of assimilation into the mainstream host society, discourse on assimilation was later replaced by integration models and official integration policies implemented by global north countries (Park 1950). Castles, Haas, and Miller's contribution of the three models of integration can be described as follows:

- 1) ***differential exclusionary***: where the migrants are incorporated into a few sectors of society, primarily the labor sector, but widely excluded from other sectors such as citizenship and political participation (Castles, Haas, Miller 2020 :326)
- 2) ***Assimilationist***: understood as a more gradual form of assimilation, but implies that while there is a "degree of mutual accommodation" from the host society, the ultimate step is to become absorbed into the dominant society (Castles, Haas, Miller 2020:327).
- 3) ***Multiculturalism***: exists as both an ideology and at the policy level, argues that immigrants should be allowed to enter the different sectors of society whether it is the labor market, political participation, or others without ever giving up their own

culture, language, religion, etc. However, it also implies that there must be a certain level of incorporation into the host society. (Castles, Haas, Miller 2020:327)

In earlier editions, the scholars presented the integration models by stating that countries would all follow either one of the three models or forms of an in-between model of integration, which led to controversy among migration scholars such as Entzinger and Scholten who view the ideology as limited and outdated to the current immigration realities. Instead, the scholars believe that all three models are better understood as being used together or that states might go from one model to another in a certain period of time (Entzinger and Scholten 2014). Moreover, while the scholars agree that the states are very much required in the integration process to aid migrants with resources such as employment, housing, education, and others, the literature must address the autonomous role that migrants hold in their own resettlement or integration process (Entzinger and Scholten 2014).

From the three integration models outlined above, various countries have implemented their own forms of integration policies following the multiculturalist model. However, just like the other two integration models that the scholars explain in their book *The Age of Migration*, multicultural integration policies are controversial from both sides of the discourse spectrum. Using the case of Sweden as an example, Cederberg finds that multicultural policies in the country place a great responsibility on the migrants to integrate into the mainstream society, which consequently has a negative effect on

how the migrants present themselves to the society (Cederberg, 2014). Cederberg's use of biographical narratives from migrants who have been residing in Sweden for an extended period of time provide valuable insight into how viewing the resettlement process as exclusively an autonomous process for the migrants can also produce negative outcomes the same way in which viewing the migrants as having zero agency on their own process of adaptation has been found.

Therefore, a different approach that can be taken in order to avoid both negative outcomes in the migrants' resettlement process is to create programs that not only aid the migrants in their transition into the receiving country, but also engage the general population of the host country to learn from their experiences and culture. Such programs can be implemented in the form of language teaching programs or vocational workshops where migrants can learn the host language, if they do not know the language yet, and the native instructors can also learn from the migrant students as well. Since critics of multiculturalism and multicultural policies argue that such policies that are currently in place do not embody the definition of multicultural, the programs and policies can be altered to better portray a two-way process between the migrants and host society.

On the other hand, supporters of multicultural policies that have been created in various countries, maintain that multicultural policies are necessary to decrease the public controversy that follows the migrants' arrival in receiving countries and ease the migrants' resettlement process into the new country. Banting and Kymlicka's text based

on the multiculturalism policy index adds to the literature of the immigration policies in the global north since it shows the way in which the European countries have been able to adopt both multiculturalism and civic integration policies simultaneously, despite the way in which both terms and definitions seem to contradict each other (Banting and Kymlicka, 2013). Through the extensive data provided in the text, the authors argue that there has not been a retreat from multiculturalism policies at the policy level and this argument can provide insight into how modern states such as in the global south would be able to integrate both forms of policies in order to help the migrants “adapt” into the mainstream society. Therefore, studying these policies or implementing such multicultural policies into the current immigration policies can help the migrants combat discrimination in the host society, while also helping make their transition into the destination country easier.

1.3 Global South and Integration Policies in México

When it comes to the studies of international migration and the existing literature on the topic, the approaches to international migration and the theories of migration tend to be analyzed in a Western context that centers international migration from the global south to the global north or what is understood as a South-North migration. Therefore, it is necessary to also analyze the conditions of international migration by incorporating migration data within the other global south countries to determine which policies will produce successful outcomes. In other words, not only emphasizing South-North migration, but also including South-South migration literature into the

discourse of international migration might prove beneficial. To support the claim that it is necessary to examine the immigration policies in the global south, the text *The Refugee System* offers insight into how global south states also adopt similar discriminatory immigration policies such as those from the global north states. Since the existing literature on immigration policies is dominated not only by the research on U.S. immigration, but also by the other western states such as the EU, I argue that there needs to be more literature on the immigration policies in the global south states as most refugees and asylum seekers are concentrated in the global south states due to geographical proximity. As Arar and Fitzgerald's text explain, the global north refugee regime is not only dependent but exists due to the global south states' control of migration flows into the global north's borders (Arar and Fitzgerald, 2023). Therefore, it can be said that the global south's immigration policies mirror those of the global north and also implement methods such as vetting and filtering unwanted migration that is done through a racialization of migration.

Drawing on the integration policies or programs that México has created to aid the migrants in their arrival into the country, the National Migration Institute (INM) implemented humanitarian cards that are known as "tarjetas de visitante por razones humanitarias" (TVRH) in November 2018 (Migration Policy Centre, 2019). While the issuance of the humanitarian cards was said to ease the migrants' resettlement process in México, whether the migrants planned to reside in the country short or long term, the humanitarian cards were difficult to implement for a variety of reasons. As the brief mentions, there was a lack of communication between the INM and a great number of

the Mexican employers where the migrants were seeking employment since those employers were not accepting the humanitarian visas as valid documentation to become hired (Migration Policy Centre, 2019). Therefore, the migrants were not able to obtain employment and finance their stay in México, which consequently hindered their ability to resettle either temporarily or permanently.

Moreover, the policy brief explains that another reason that led to the failure of the humanitarian visas is due to México's lack of proper infrastructure to keep up with the demand of the visas by such a large population of migrants. However, a factor that impacts the success of such a policy can be attributed to the difficulty of issuing humanitarian visas in a timely manner when a great amount of the population does not intend to reside in the country for an extended period of time. While the issuance of the humanitarian visas did not prove to be as successful, there is still room to improve the program and the way in which the visas are distributed to the migrants, so that they are able to begin seeking employment upon arrival and not become stranded in a limbo state while in transit or as they begin their resettlement process.

However, in the conversation about humanitarian visas and utilizing such programs to help ease the transition for the migrants' resettlement process in México, given that they decide to settle in the country either temporarily or permanently, Feline and Luzes caution on the perils of the use of humanitarian visas since the scholars state that in recent years, a few Latin American countries such as Peru and Ecuador have implemented such programs in order to filter the amount of Venezuelan refugees that

can enter the countries (Feline and Luzes, 2021). Specifically analyzing the case of México, under the state's 2011 Mexican Migration Law, it is stipulated that the refugees living in México who currently have their humanitarian visas are granted complementary protection and with this protection are allowed permanent residence in the country.

Drawing on my own research and the survey conducted, 30% of the interviewees have a current or past humanitarian visa, which as stated in the policy brief from the Migration Policy Centre and the Mexican Migration Law, should grant them certain protections and rights such as being able to reside and work in the country. However, my research demonstrates that some of the migrants who have their current humanitarian visa are not able to obtain employment since they lack the RFC work permit documentation and other migrants reported being thrown in jail for not carrying their humanitarian visa with them during the encounter with the police officers. To demonstrate how the migrants currently living in Mexicali experience the resettlement or integration process, I analyze the data findings from the quantitative survey and include a few case studies from the interviews conducted in the summer of 2022 of specific migrant profiles in order to demonstrate their divergent experiences.

1.4 How do the migrants go through the resettlement process and their decision-making process in regard to their future plans for themselves and their families?

To demonstrate how the migrants living in Mexicali go through the process of resettlement in Mexicali and their decision-making process, I present the findings from the data collected on their family status (whether they have children and if they brought their children with them), their demographic profile, whether they had the intention of crossing to the U.S. when they left their country of origin, and their access to resources upon arrival to the city.

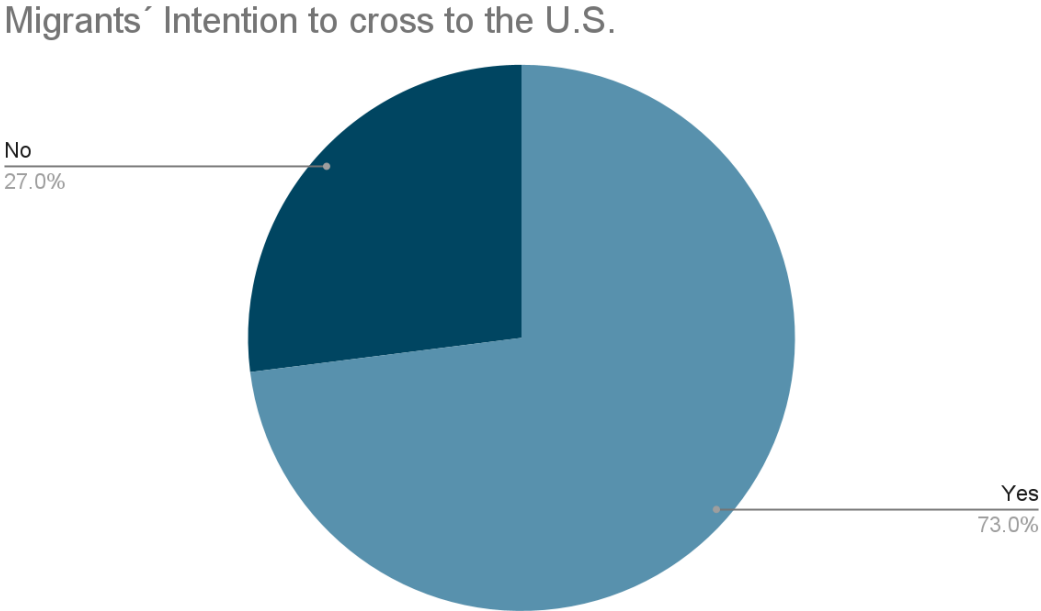


Figure 1: Migrants' intention to cross into the U.S.

In order to understand the migrants' decision-making process after they arrive in Mexicali, we must begin by analyzing whether they intended to cross the border when

they arrived in Mexicali. The migrants represented in the survey sample presented in the graphs are migrants who have either lived in one of the two shelters, Albergue Peregrino or Albergue del Desierto, or have received legal or psychological services from either shelter. Drawing on the results in the questionnaire, the findings show that 73% of people had the intention of crossing to the U.S. when they left their country of origin. This means that a majority of the people interviewed arrived in Mexicali with the intention of only staying temporarily before reaching their true destination. The migrants were also asked where would they go in the case that they are not able to cross into the United States and 86% responded that they would remain in México, while 80% specifically mentioned that they would stay and reside in Mexicali, a finding that drastically differs from the findings collected with migrants in Tijuana in the Winter of 2021 when asked the same question (MMFRP, 2021).

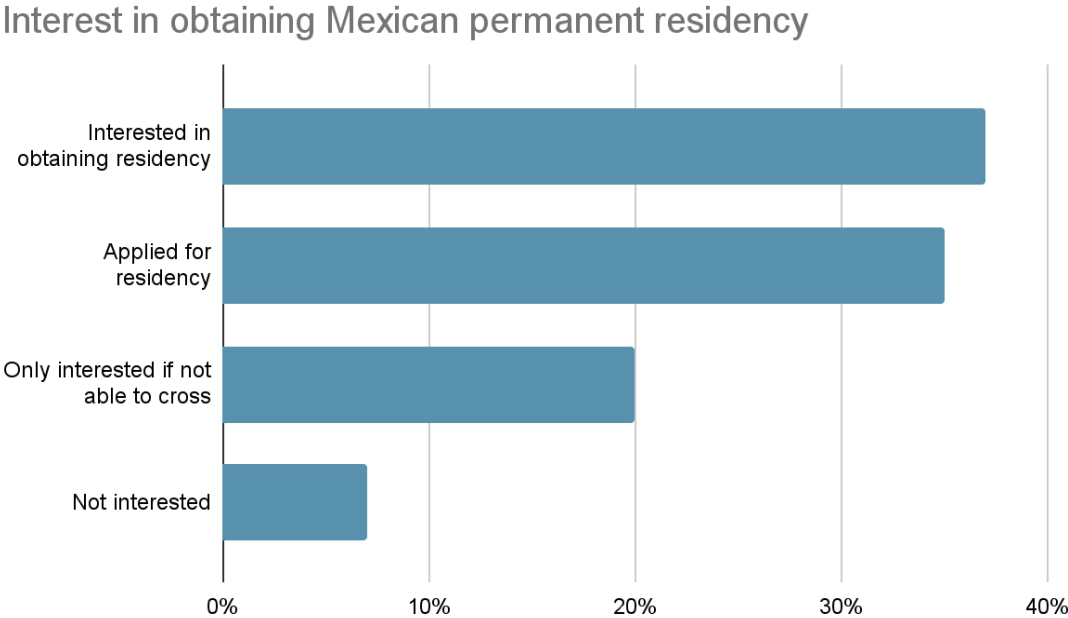


Figure 2: Interest in obtaining Mexican permanent residency

In order to analyze the migrants' process of resettlement, I analyzed the early decision-making process by understanding who are the migrants who now have the intention to reside in Mexicali whether it is indefinitely or for an extended period of time, when did the decision occur, and how was the decision made to understand the actual process of resettlement in Mexicali. The responses to the question about whether they are interested in obtaining Mexican residency might also help shed light on the question as 37% of the respondents stated that they are interested in obtaining residency, 35% already applied for residency, 20% stated they would consider Mexican residency only in the case that they cannot cross to the United States, and only 7% stated that they would not consider Mexican residency. Towards the end of the qualitative portion of the questionnaire, the interviewees were also asked whether they are considering residing in México and what are the conditions that México would need to have in order to ease their transition or for them to stay. Therefore, I analyze the responses to those questions as well, in order to better understand the migrants' early decision-making process before or during their resettlement process in Mexicali.

Another factor that would help understand the migrants' early decision-making process is whether the migrants have children and whether the children are with them in Mexicali. Therefore, I would like to propose the question of whether having children and bringing the children with them to Mexicali would affect both their decision-making process and their resettlement process. Drawing on the data collected in the survey, 82% of the respondents have children and when asked about where their children currently live, 49% of the respondents with children stated that the children are in their country of origin either with the other parent or the migrants' family members, 37% of

them stated that the children are in Mexicali with them, and 14% of the respondents stated that their children are currently living in the United States. This is another finding that drastically differs from the findings collected in Tijuana last year as most (77%) of the respondents with children reported bringing their children with them to Tijuana (MMFRP, 2021).

With this information about where the respondents' children are currently living, I analyze whether it plays a significant role in the process of integration in Mexicali. Therefore, are the respondents who have children back in their country of origin able to speed their resettlement process as most of the respondents stated that they intend to bring their family and children to Mexicali or would the process be quicker for the respondents who have brought their families and children with them to Mexicali?

I first examined the cases of respondents whose families and children are back in their country of origin and who intend to bring their families to Mexicali in the near future. Two cases who demonstrate "successful" cases of resettlement and whose families stayed behind in their country of origin are Javier and Eliezer. Both Javier and Eliezer arrived in Mexicali in early 2022, have a partner and children who live in their countries of origin, and both mentioned that they are in the process of obtaining their Mexican residency in order to bring their family with them to Mexicali to settle permanently. Aside from this key information, their cases share other information about their demographic profiles that might help understand their success in their resettlement process. For these reasons, examining these two specific cases to determine if it influences their integration process and decision-making process when it comes to obtaining their Mexican residency will help answer the initial question.

Javier's Case:

Looking into Javier's case, he is a 28 year-old man from El Salvador who identifies racially as Black and has a wife and two children who are living in El Salvador. Javier left El Salvador in early 2022 and arrived in Mexicali in April 2022. Back in El Salvador, Javier worked as a driver for driving applications such as Uber and his last level of education completed was middle school. Javier started working immediately after arriving in Mexicali by selling food items in a cart he rented from a man and he learned about this employment opportunity at the church where he started living after his arrival. Javier currently earns 30 pesos an hour and works 6 days a week for an average of ten hours a day. Javier has just applied for Mexican residency and his goal is to bring his family to Mexicali right after obtaining his Mexican residency, which he hopes can happen in approximately four months as that was the timeline that his lawyer gave him for obtaining his residency. Javier has been living at a church where he has established a community, but is currently in the process of looking for a room to rent where he can live with his family in the near future. Javier shares his future plans in the following excerpt where he explains how he plans to bring his family to Mexicali:

"Sí sí de hecho esa es mi mentalidad porque mi mentalidad es tener mi residencia aquí en México y poder traer a mi esposa y a mí dos hijos y ya sí con el tiempo se me abriera la oportunidad del asilo o de algún tipo de ayuda de poder pasar a Estados Unidos, sí me fuera pero junto con mi familia, no solo. Ahorita no tengo la intención de pasar porque digamos que se me dificulta más tener a mi familia a mi lado y es lo que no quiero, estar separado de ellos. Entonces lo primero es traerlos para acá y ya si se me presentara la oportunidad

de poder cruzar sin problema de estar batallando con la migración ilegalmente o sin ningún permiso no pasaría pero si se me dieron la oportunidad de pasar con algún permiso o unos trámites y así sí pero con mi familia, solo no. "

During the qualitative interview, when Javier was asked whether he plans to stay to live in Mexicali after he receives his Mexican residency, Javier responded that it is in his current plans to bring his family to Mexicali as soon as he receives his permanent residency. Javier mentioned that he does not plan to cross to the United States since he is well aware that it would complicate his chances of being reunited with his family. Javier also adds that he would only consider crossing into the U.S., if he is able to cross with his family legally, either by seeking asylum or with documentation that allows them to stay together.

Eliezer's Case:

Eliezer is a 34 year-old man from Haiti who identifies racially as Black and who also has a wife and two children in his country of origin. Eliezer left Haiti in 2021 and arrived in Mexicali in May of 2022, having spent about six months living and working in Brasil before moving to Mexico. Eliezer's last level of education is higher education as he holds a degree in administration. Eliezer also started working in Mexicali immediately after his arrival at a factory where he works five days a week for nine hours and earns 70 pesos an hour. Eliezer is in the process of obtaining his humanitarian visa and expressed an interest in applying for his Mexican residency in order to bring his family from Haiti to Mexicali to live indefinitely.

Through these two cases that demonstrate a successful resettlement into the city, I was able to observe similarities in their profiles and also the fact that, just like 49% of the respondents who have children, their children and partners currently reside in their country of origin. Both Javier and Eliezer expressed that their motivation to acquire their Mexican residency is to be able to bring their family from their country of origin to Mexicali. In Javier's interview and the excerpt included in the description of his case, Javier explains that he has no current intention to cross to the U.S. since he understands that it would be more difficult to reunite and live with his family if he were to do that, in comparison to his current plan of obtaining his Mexican residency and bringing his family to live with him in Mexicali. Therefore, Javier's case and responses demonstrate how his family situation directly influences his decision-making process.

Another common point between both of these profiles that might have a direct impact on the success of their resettlement process would be the fact that both men started working in the city almost immediately after their arrival and their employment allowed them to ease their transition into the city. The respondents' answers regarding their access to different resources in the city shows a correlation between their access to employment and their resettlement process. The following link demonstrates the correlation:

Access to employment → stable income → access to housing → safe living conditions → decrease in exposure to violence and crime → increase in quality of life → better conditions to integrate into the city

Therefore, since the migrants' access to employment upon arrival to the city plays such a crucial role in the resettlement process, analyzing how the migrants are able to obtain access to employment opportunities and also who are the migrants who are able to obtain employment immediately after arriving in the city will shed light on the migrants' resettlement process in the city. . Out of the forty-five respondents, 38% stated that they are currently employed and when asked how long they had been working in the city, the responses ranged from as early as two weeks to six years, with the average response being three months. Out of the 38% of respondents who are currently employed, 41% were women and 59% were men and when asked where they learned about their current employment, the responses differed from learning about it from a friend/acquaintance, from a church member, going to the site and seeking employment, and most people mentioned that they were connected to their employment through the shelter where they were residing, either Albergue Peregrino or Albergue del desierto.

Access to employment and obtaining steady employment is one of the key factors that sets in motion the resettlement process for the migrants who recently arrived in Mexicali. My findings prove that the migrants who were able to obtain employment upon arrival to the city are the migrants that demonstrate the most successful resettlements, while the migrants without employment make up most of the migrants whose profile shows a downwards mobility or unsuccessful transition. However, even with these findings, it is important to note that placing a strong emphasis on "refugee employability" can also prove to be unsuccessful as that is not the only factor to consider when analyzing the migrants' resettlement process. To support this

idea, scholars Masoud, Kurki, and Bonila examine the Finnish Integration Act of 2010 that stresses the importance of the “employable refugee subjectivity” as the state uses migrant employability as the best measure to determine a successful integration (Masoud, Kurki, and Bonila, 2020). The scholars explain how other European countries have followed this approach and also implemented similar integration programs that emphasize employable refugee subjectivity (Masoud, Kurki, and Bonila, 2020).

However, the scholars disagree with the idea of using employability as the only factor to determine a successful transition since learning certain skills through vocational training programs does not necessarily guarantee that the migrants will be able to enter the labor market in the new country they are residing in. Drawing on the findings, even though some of the migrants interviewed already have valuable skill sets that would categorize them as “high skilled” migrants, they are still unable to obtain employment that matches their skill set or education level attainment and hinders them from experiencing upward mobility in the host country. Moreover, in my definition of a successful resettlement process that I define in the next section, I explain that while employment is one of the factors that leads to a successful transition, there are other imperative factors that also play a role in the migrants’ resettlement process such as decreasing their exposure to violence and establishing community in the new host society.

1.5 Defining a Successful and Unsuccessful Resettlement Process in México

After analyzing the survey and interview responses to determine what is the profile or demographic of the migrants whose resettlement process into the city of

Mexicali was the most successful, the findings demonstrate that it is the migrants who are men of an average age of thirty-three, who identify racially as White, and who began working in the city shortly after their arrival. These migrants represent the demographic who were able to increase their income, relocate to a better home, decrease their exposure to violence and crime, and therefore adapt into the new country and society. Throughout the research, I define a **successful resettlement** as a transition that represents upward mobility and who is able to increase their quality of life in comparison to their previous quality of life in their country of origin by increasing their income, decreasing their exposure to violence, and establishing community in their new home that can be analyzed in the form of ethnic enclaves. For instance, the migrants that reported having a community of other migrants from their country of origins whether they were family members or friends, reported having more access to resources such as housing and employment and consequently, led to the migrants experiencing a positive difference in their quality of lives. However, I define an **unsuccessful integration** as being unable to attain employment and a stable income within the first few months of their arrival, living in precarious conditions that mirror the violence in their countries of origin, and not being able to socially adapt into the new environment. When determining who are the migrants whose transition seems to be more successful or unsuccessful, it is important to note different factors such as gender, race, education levels, employment both in country of origin and current employment in Mexicali, experiences of violence, housing, and family.

The first criteria that was taken into consideration was employment as the migrants' income heavily influences the type of housing they would be able to afford

and consequently, the type of neighborhood they will reside in. The neighborhood also comes into play as it might also determine the migrants' exposure to crime and violence in the city, which is the main reason reported in the findings as to why the migrants left their country of origin.

After taking all of these factors into consideration, one specific profile that accurately depicts the migrant whose resettlement process was most successful is that of David, a thirty-three year old man from Honduras who left in 2019 and arrived in Mexicali that same year. Back in Honduras, David owned his own barber shop and had a stable income that supported his family of three, his wife, young daughter, and himself until the organized crime groups in Honduras started forcing him to pay a monthly tax that eventually became too high for him to pay. After being unable to pay the tax, he received several death threats to the point where he did not leave his home for weeks-long periods of time. After the last death threat, David fled Honduras with the intention of reaching the border and crossing to the United States. His goal after reaching the U.S. was to send for his family in Honduras, so that they could reunite in the United States.

After unsuccessfully trying to cross into the U.S. without documentation, David decided to stay in Mexicali for a while and obtain a job at a barber shop. Due to his experience working at his own barber shop in his country of origin, David was able to quickly obtain a job at different barber shops simultaneously where he continues to work for six days a week. His stable income allowed him to afford housing and rent an apartment when he moved to Mexicali and since his arrival in 2019, he has been able to relocate three times. In comparison to most of the migrants interviewed, David has been

able to make certain decisions about his housing and living conditions that most of the other migrants have not been able to do. The three times that David changed his residence, he cited reasons such as neighborhood security and distance from work. When asked how he was able to find his current home, David mentions that he became aware of his current apartment vacancy through one of his clients at work.

When solely looking at the factors that indicate upwards mobility and integration such as employment and income, decrease in exposure to violence, and housing, David exemplifies the profile of the ideal candidate. However, David's case might also help to contradict the previous hypothesis /provisional answer as his familial relationships might weigh heavier in his integration process. In the span of the last three years, David fled Honduras with the intention of crossing to the United States and later bringing his wife and two young children. In 2019 when he left Honduras, his daughter was around five years-old and his newborn son was a month old. In the last three years, David lost contact with his wife and children and now his wife has a different partner back in Honduras. David recounted how his family were once the reason why he decided to flee Honduras and try to obtain a better life in the U.S, but now as he has lost his family he says that he feels, "he made the wrong decision by leaving his family behind". As David described his story, he stated:

" Cuando yo decidí venirme, me vine conociendo a mí hijo de un mes. Ahora actualmente, ya tiene tres años mi hijo y no me conoce, ya no soy su papá. Esa familia que yo tenía se perdió. Ósea, por lo que yo salí, lo que me dio fuerza, desapareció. Ahora es otra meta, otros planes pero no se como explicarlo, siempre voy a querer regresar al pasado. Ahora, más que nada, deseo los papeles de Mexico porque deseo ir a ver a mis hijos y como que culminar el viaje y establecer."

David shared that his new goal in the present is to finish his paperwork to receive his Mexican citizenship and once he becomes a Mexican citizen, he plans to return to Honduras to mend his relationship with his children and have the opportunity to explain his reasons for leaving. When asked if he plans to settle in Mexicali, David responded that he does envision himself living and working in Mexicali for the next years throughout his life. At the end of the interview, David mentioned that what gives him hope for the future is his child that will be born in the next months. In the last year, David met his current partner in Mexicali who is a Mexican national and they are now expecting their first son together. However, towards the end of the interview, David also expressed his anxieties around the birth of his son since he has not been able to reunite with his young children back in Honduras.

“En ese momento, sentí que valía la pena pero ya no vale más. Me importa más lo que no se puede ver ni tocar como los sentimientos de mis hijos. Ahora que viene en camino mi otro hijo, me siento mal. Es un varoncito y me hace pensar que como puedo ser un padre si prácticamente tengo otro niño y a él nunca le he podido dar ni un abrazo ni un beso. Yo se que el va a crecer y el mundo en donde vivía en mi tierra, si el crece sin un padre y con remordimiento, me da miedo que vaya a crecer a ser una de esas personas malas, que se me vaya a perder.”

While in theory David fits the profile of a migrant who was able to successfully integrate into the city based on the criteria of accessing employment, housing, decreasing his exposure to violence, and therefore, increasing his quality of life regarding those aspects, the fact that he has been separated from his family for over three years and that he expressed how he feels deep regret for the situation, might

contradict whether he exemplifies the ideal candidate. Based on the findings, David is not the only migrant with children who decided to leave their families back in their countries of origin. In fact, David falls in the 49% of the migrants who reported having children back in their home countries. Most of the respondents with children in their countries of origin have recently arrived in the city this year and just like with the cases of Javier and Eliezer presented earlier, also intend to bring their families to Mexicali.

Before including the migrant profile that demonstrates an unsuccessful resettlement process in Mexico, it is important to consider the change in migration flows to México and the United States as what was once a masculine phenomenon has now shifted to migrant units as a whole, unaccompanied minors, and in various cases demonstrated through the findings, single women with or without their children (Olivera and Garcia, 2019). The findings from the fieldwork in Mexicali also prove that the women in the population sample are the most vulnerable demographic as the women reported more cases of violence and out of the 25% of the total respondents who reported feeling unsafe in Mexicali, 82% were women with a median age of twenty-three who stated that they have children and do not currently have a partner. This finding is further discussed in chapter three when examining Mexicali's crime statistics and the respondents' feelings of insecurity while residing in the city.

Therefore, the migrant profile that demonstrates an unsuccessful resettlement process in México follows the criteria I use to define an unsuccessful resettlement which includes the inability to 1.) attain employment and a stable income after months of arriving in México, 2.) decrease their exposure to violence and insecurity, and 3.) not being able to establish community or socially adapt into the new host society.

Yahaira´s case:

Yahaira is a 23 year-old woman from Honduras who left her country of origin in the middle of 2021 and has spent over a year in different states in México before finally arriving in Mexicali in August 2022. After fleeing from Honduras alone with her young child at the beginning of 2021, Yahaira spent about four to five months living in the three cities of Tapachula, Queretaro, and Tijuana, until she arrived in Mexicali with the intention of crossing to the United States through the border in Algodones after unsuccessfully seeking asylum or crossing the border through Tijuana. Yahaira reported that her citizenship status in Mexico is permanent resident, but after living in México for over a year, does not intend to remain and settle in the country as she feels unsafe in México as well.

Yahaira fled from Honduras due to fear of being murdered by the organized crime groups after being threatened multiple times since she was unable to pay the organized crime groups the weekly tax quotas that they were demanding. In Honduras, Yahaira had a small food stand where she would sell tamales and other food products and her small business was how she managed to make a living for herself and her son. Yahaira mentioned that she would also support her other family members with the earnings of her food stand, but the weekly quotas from the crime groups took most of her earnings and made it extremely difficult to continue making a living for her son and herself. After covid-19, Yahaira´s business was impacted and she was unable to keep up with the weekly quotas, so the crime groups started threatening her with killing both her and her son if she did not make the payments once again. Yahaira shares her story

and describes the last instance where she was threatened and abused in front of her son by the organized crime groups in Honduras.

Yo en Honduras tenía un puesto de tamales. Yo allá vendía tamales, jugos y entonces los mareros me cobraban mucha cuota. Y yo les daba (dinero) porque si uno no les da la cuota a ellos, los corren de ahí. Pues si no lo pelan, si no lo matan. Entonces como yo no tenía dónde irme en lo que vivía ahí, entonces ya como ellos piden semana tras semana, entonces yo ya no podía pagarles porque con lo de la enfermedad del Covid-19 pues ya casi no vendía. Y ellos a fuerza querían que uno pagará la cuota. Entonces yo un día, entonces como ya no podía ya darle la cuota porque yo de ahí vivía con mi hijo en ese negocio que yo tenía. Entonces yo decidí cerrar el negocio porque yo ya no podía darle a ellos la cuota, casi no vendía nada, entonces cerré el negocio y un día ellos hasta las 4 de la mañana llegaron a mi casa y me dijeron que si yo no les daba la cuota me iban a matar junto con mi hijo e incluso me abusaron en frente de mi hijo y el niño estaba llorando, llorando, llorando, llorando y pues yo ya el siguiente día ya salí. Ya huyendo con mi niño porque me dijeron que si no le pagaba la cuota me iban a pelar junto con mi hijo. Entonces decidí venirme para aca a Mexico. Y no le dije a nadie, solo me vine corriendo. Solo agarre unas cositas y me vine corriendo.

When asked whether she would decide to settle in the country in the case that she is unable to cross into the U.S., she firmly stated that she does not wish to remain in México and after being asked about whether she feels safe while living in Mexicali, Yahaira responded:

“ Bueno no lo sé la verdad porque yo no salgo de aquí. Yo solo paso aquí dentro del albergue. Entonces no se como es aquí pero dicen que también es muy peligroso, que aquí hay muchos carteles. ”

Even though Yahaira had only lived in Mexicali about two weeks before the interview, she had been living in Mexico for over a year and moved around to three different states and cities before attempting to cross through Algodones. In her response about whether she feels safe in Mexicali, Yahaira mentioned that she does not leave the shelter due to fear and is aware of the perils outside of the shelter. Throughout her time in transit, Yahaira has not been able to obtain steady employment or earn a living wage. Therefore, Yahaira's living conditions in México demonstrate that she has not been able to improve her quality of life and spends her time inside of a shelter due to fear of the violent conditions that she might be exposed to in México. Yahaira's profile demonstrates an unsuccessful resettlement process in México and also highlights the way in which migrant women who travel with their children are the demographic in this study whose transition is most difficult.

Chapter Two - Mexicali, Baja California

2.1 Mexicali - Waiting Room or Permanent Home?

For context on the demographics of Baja California and its capital, Mexicali, the state is home to the largest population of foreign migrants in the country, with over 150,000 foreign migrants residing inside the state and from the total population of foreigners in México, Tijuana is home to 7.6% and Mexicali 2.9% of the total foreign population (Unidad de Política Migratoria, 2022). According to the report on "Human Mobility in Baja California" and the census conducted in 2020, 54% of the foreigner population was male while 46% was female of the median ages 20 and 19 respectively (Unidad de Política Migratoria, 2022). Due to the growing number of foreign migrants in the state, it has been represented in the increase of temporary residence cards issued in Baja California from the years 2019 to 2021.

The state has issued over 5,000 Tarjetas de Residente Temporal (TRT) and the top three nationalities who have obtained the temporary residence cards are from the U.S. (25%), Haiti (23%), and Colombia (8%) (Boletín Mensual de Estadísticas Migratorias, UPMRIP, 2022). Looking into the demographic and statistic of Haitian migrants obtaining residence permits in the state of Baja California, the Haitian population represents a population that has transitioned from viewing the city as a transit city to becoming incorporated into the state economically and socially, as seven out of ten people who obtained residence permits from 2019 to 2021 were from Haiti

(Unidad de Política Migratoria, 2022). However, the same theory cannot be applied to the current migrants from the Northern Triangle or other countries in Latin America as their populations do not make up a high percentage of migrants receiving residence permits.

In comparison to other northern Mexican border cities, Mexicali lacks the number of resources and shelters for the growing migrant population as the city currently has thirteen shelters, just two more than in 2021 when there were eleven shelters (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021). These thirteen shelters have become home to the migrants living in the city who are in different stages of their decision-making process in terms of their future plans or who have had to remain in México until their asylum case is heard due to MPP or Title 42. The shelters operate under an “assistance model” where the migrants residing at the shelters are provided with housing, daily meals, medical assistance, and passage back to their country of origin if they decide to return (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021). Some of the thirteen shelters offer additional services such as legal assistance to apply for their work permits or residence documentation such as the RFC or CURP. Most of the shelters offer their services completely free of charge, however, a few of the shelters in Mexicali that have a higher capacity do have a weekly charge per person of approximately 150 pesos, which makes it difficult for a large amount of the migrants to pay every week.

However, Ramirez and Moreno highlight that the difficulties that come with operating the shelters in Mexicali are how some of the shelters are run by volunteers or

other part-time social workers since there is much constant rotation that affects the daily operations of the shelters (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021). Moreover, in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic the city had proposed to build a “mega albergue” that would be able to house the hundreds of homeless migrants who had recently arrived in the city, but the plan was then not carried out since the citizens who lived in the neighboring communities were opposed to creating the shelter (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021). Fortunately, around the same time the only city-funded shelter that is managed by DIF, Albergue Peregrino, was able to obtain funding from the government to expand its shelter and meet the growing demand.

Currently as of the beginning of 2023, the thirteen shelters that are still open in Mexicali are at maximum capacity as the migrant population continues to arrive and grow in the city, with around 1,500 migrants of the total 6,000 migrants in Baja California living in Mexicali (Jiménez and Jove, 2023). In an interview with the mayor of Mexicali, Norma Bustamante, the mayor declared that even though the city’s shelters are at maximum capacity, there is not a need to create and open another shelter, but there has been a proposal to use the Centro de Convenciones del Centro Estatal de las Artes (CEART) as a migrant center in the future if required (Jiménez and Jove, 2023). However, when looking at the number of migrants living in some of the larger shelters in comparison to their maximum capacity, it is evident that the city currently lacks enough migrant centers or shelters to meet the needs of the growing population.

The numbers provided by Jimenez and Jove's article states that as of late March 2023, the larger shelters such as Hijo Prodigio is housing 775 migrants when their maximum capacity is of 400 people, "Cobina Posada del Migrante" is housing 455 migrants with a capacity of 300 people, "El Camino" is housing 280 migrants under a capacity of 200 migrants, and "El Refugio" is at maximum capacity housing a total of 120 migrants (Jiménez and Jove, 2023). Therefore, the number of migrants currently residing in the city without housing due to the shelters being overcrowded demonstrates that there is a clear need for additional resources in the city and that Mexicali, as other cities in the state, are not necessarily prepared for the amount of refugees arriving. If the city continues to be set as a "waiting room" or transit city for migrants waiting for their case to be heard in the United States, there needs to be additional funding and resources designated to the city in order to aid the migrant population in their transition, whether it is a transition to the United States or to México.

2.2 Title 42 Exceptions

One of the methods that has allowed some of the migrants to apply for asylum in the United States earlier is through the Title 42 exceptions. At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, Title 42 was issued and blocked asylum seekers from entering the United States and processing their asylum applications. Two years later in April 2022, the CDC announced that Title 42 would be terminated the following month and that asylum processing would resume in the U.S. ports of entry, however, a Louisiana federal judge then blocked the termination of Title 42 and to this day a year

later, the health order remains (Strauss Center, 2022). Under Title 42 exceptions, the asylum seekers in México, who are categorized as “highly vulnerable” are allowed to cross to the U.S. to begin their asylum process. Since the number of asylum seekers classified as highly vulnerable has exceeded the CBP’S daily slot allowance, the migrants now have to be added to waiting lists that are managed by the shelters or migrant centers in the city (Strauss Center, 2022). The Title 42 exceptions waiting lists differ from previous waiting lists previously created since the waiting lists are handled at the discretion of the managers and some lists are ordered by registration date while other lists might be in order of migrants’ vulnerability.

According to the report published by the Strauss Center in November 2022, the number of migrants in the waiting lists had decreased by 19% from August 2022 as the documented migrants in the waiting lists across ten Mexican border cities was 55,445 and in November the number decreased to 44,700 making August the highest documented month from November 2018 to November 2022 (Strauss Center, 2022). The fieldwork in Mexicali was conducted from mid-August to mid-September during the months with the highest number of migrants enrolled in the waiting lists across Mexico, however, the Title 42 exceptions processing had not begun in Mexicali until towards the end of September 2022.

In November 2022, there was a network of eight migrant shelters handling the Title 42 exceptions waitlists and they reported a total of 2,000 migrants enrolled in the waitlists across the eight shelters (Strauss Center, 2022). Since Mexicali began

processing the Title 42 exceptions in September, the migrant shelters became completely full and some of the shelters were over capacity. In the month of January 2023, a total of 668 migrants were able to cross and begin their asylum process as Title 42 exceptions and in February 2023, there were about 20 migrants per day who were able to cross to the U.S. for their CBP One Appointment, while there were approximately 1,800 migrants living in the city (Strauss Center, 2023).

CBP One was introduced in January of 2023 and is an internet application portal where the asylum seekers are then instructed to start their asylum application as a way to "expedite" their asylum processing in the U.S. However, there have been several reported failures with the CBP One app, such as malfunctioning, failure to obtain appointments, language barriers, migrants with darker complexions whom are unable to upload their profile pictures, and migrants who have reported being sent thousands of miles away for their CBP One appointment across the country in a short period of time, among other failures (Ardrey, 2023). In order to aid migrants with the CBP One app, the Subsecretaria de Asuntos Migratorios (SAM), started workshops in February 2023 to help the migrants navigate the application process through the app (Gobierno de Mexicali, 2023). The instructional workshops are held in some of the migrant shelters in Mexicali that handle the Title 42 exceptions waitlists.

2.3 How is the city of Mexicali aiding the foreign migrants in their process of reintegration?

On the first day that I arrived at Albergue Peregrino to meet with the director of the shelter, Aaron Gomez, the first thing I noticed in the patio were the pink party decorations and giant neon lights that spelled out "Mis XV Años". As I waited for Aaron, I noticed that in front of his office, there was the clinic room filled with medicines and other medical supplies, but also a teenage girl surrounded by a group of women who were all working on a different part of the young girl's hair, nails, or make-up. I was standing a few feet away from the group of women mesmerized by the scene as I remembered my own quinceañera party years ago, although I acknowledged that the setting where I got ready before my party was entirely different. I stood frozen in the background until I heard a man behind me say, "*We try to celebrate the children's birthdays here to bring a sense of normalcy into their lives. That is why we are throwing her a quinceañera party here tonight.*"

Throughout the three weeks I spent at Albergue Peregrino conducting interviews from morning to evening, I was able to witness a quinceañera and two young children's birthday parties that always featured brincolinas (bounce house), a group of women decorating the patio with colorful banners and balloons, and giant pots of food coming from the small kitchen where the chef, who was a Mexican deportee from the U.S., worked with his crew of men who were residents at the shelter. I remember seeing the men and women come back to the shelter everyday in small buses at 5:30 pm holding

their helmets and construction gear. I remember everyone's faces, their individual stories, and the people telling me how they had just been interviewed by a Spanish author a few weeks ago who sported Hawaiian-style buttoned shirts and flip flops.

Both shelters I worked with during the fieldwork, Albergue del desierto and Albergue Peregrino, offer different programs and resources to aid the migrants in their transition after arriving in the city from psychological services, health services such as an on-site clinic, legal aid, housing, food services, and employment services. I would like to first emphasize the employment services as I found that both shelters stress what the director of the shelter Albergue Peregrino called "programa de vinculo laboral" where they actively bring in recruiters from different companies to the shelter or link the migrants to employment opportunities. The shelter Albergue del desierto also offers resources to link the migrants to employment services as they have a social worker on-site who also provides a similar service where the migrants that the shelter serves can schedule a meeting with the social worker and be linked to different employment agencies such as the fire department, maquiladora industry, or hospitality services.

Drawing on the interviews, most of the respondents who currently work stated that they were linked to their current employment as a result of the employment resources at Albergue Peregrino. A reason that might explain this correlation is sampling bias, as 64% of the respondents were recruited for the study at Albergue Peregrino and reported currently living in the shelter. In the interview done with the director of the shelter Albergue Peregrino, Aaron Gomez elaborates on the program of

“vinculación laboral” he created at the shelter and what his objectives are for that program.

“El objetivo de este albergue es ayudar pero no solo ayudar, si no que se cumpla un ciclo. A que voy con esto, llega la persona sin trabajo, sin dinero, sin nada. Se le da un lugar donde dormir, alimentación, atención médica primaria, atención psicológica. Se le dan talleres gratuitos de Informática, de aire acondicionado, como tipo oficio. Después de que le aportamos todo esto a las personas, aparte de eventos culturales, vienen iglesias también a aportar bastante, les damos lo que es la vinculación laboral. Teniendo la vinculación laboral, quiere decir que hay un gran reto, el tema de los RFC. Por la situación de los trámites, muchos de ellos no tienen su residencia, su visa humanitaria y actualmente no te dan empleo si no tienes el documento que lo expide COMAR. Pero hay mucho trabajo informal que a fin de cuentas el objetivo es, si hay que llegar a un trabajo formal ese es nuestro objetivo principal, pero antes de llegar a ese objetivo pueden tener un trabajo informal donde puedan ganar dinero mientras se les da este trámite. Ya junto con esta vinculación laboral se cumple el proyecto de la reintegración social efectiva porque después de que pasen tres meses esta persona va a salir con empleo, va a tener dinero para reintegrarse en Mexicali o en Tijuana o Monterrey, que es a donde más se van, o va tener dinero para regresarse si es su decisión pues.”

Aaron describes how the shelter’s objective for this program of employment resources is to help the migrants be connected to employment opportunities and learn a different skill set through the workshops provided that will help them acquire a job in the city during their three months stay in the shelter. Therefore, Aaron expressed how he wishes that through linking the migrants to employment opportunities, they will be able to save money, so that after their three months stay at the shelter, they can afford to rent their own housing and be able to live independently. However, some challenges to this employment program would be the lack of documentation and how that limits the

employability of the newly arrived migrants. When discussing the challenge of lack of documentation or work permits, the solution that Aaron suggested would be for the migrants to work in “informal labor” while they receive their RFC to be able to obtain formal employment. In the interview, Aaron simplifies the challenge by providing the solution of working in informal labor, however, it is important to note that working in an “informal” job where the migrants do not need the RFC documentation might subject them to exploitation or unfair working conditions where their income might not allow them to live independently outside of living at the shelter.

In the interview, I also asked Aaron what companies he partnered with in order to offer the migrants at the shelter employment. Aaron mentions a few companies in Mexicali when he says:

“Las que yo he podido conseguir son por ejemplo la empresa Cumbres (Agroproductos Las Cumbres), una empresa que se dedica 100% al tema agrario, al campo. Las empresas que nos dan más trabajo son las empresas de seguridad porque tienen mucha rotación. Por ejemplo el grupo águila es el que más nos da empleo de guardias de seguridad. También se anexó a la empresa SuKarne, pero cómo es una empresa muy estricta en sus perfiles de ingreso, el año pasado les mandamos a diez prospectos y solamente se quedaron dos. Entonces si está la opción esa pero yo prefiero tener una empresa que no sea tan difícil de entrar porque ese es el objetivo. ”

In the interview, Aaron mentioned how since he became director of the shelter two years ago, he set out to establish a relationship with the companies in the city in order to have them recruit the people living in the shelter, so that they can begin earning

an income. As Aaron understands the difficulties of finding a job in Mexicali without the work documentation (RFC), he has partnered with different companies that hire employees with and without the documentation. However, one of the difficulties that Aaron has found while creating this program of employment networks is that certain companies such as SuKarne are stricter in the employee profiles they select. One of the employment opportunities that Aaron did not mention in his interview, but that most of the women staying in the shelter mentioned was their employment in services or hospitality. Most of the women who referenced Aaron's employment network as the reason they were able to obtain their employment stated that they work for a cleaning service company. The women mentioned that the company provides transportation services as the company transports the women in a shuttle from the shelter to the different schools where they have their work shifts.

From the respondents who were able to obtain their current employment with help from Aaron's employment network, most of the respondents (76%) stated that they began working almost immediately after arriving at the shelter, with some respondents (41%) having mentioned that they began working days after arriving. When the respondents were asked how long they had been working in the city, the answers ranged from two weeks to six years, with a median response of three months. As mentioned earlier in the answers about how the migrants can successfully integrate into the city, it was found that the migrants who are able to start working right after they migrate to the city are the migrants who demonstrate a quicker resettlement process. Therefore, the employment resources that the shelter Albergue Peregrino provides for

the migrants residing at the shelter has proven to be effective in helping the migrants transition into Mexicali, whether their goal is to stay in Mexicali temporarily or indefinitely. Out of the thirteen shelters currently open in Mexicali, Albergue Peregrino is the only shelter funded by the city and one of the only government owned shelters in Baja California. The shelter is currently being expanded and after the expansion project, the shelter will be able to house approximately over four-hundred people.

“ Este proyecto lo presenté hace 11 meses. Yo empiezo a ver el cambio de los flujos migratorios. Antes viajaba el papá , el hermano y el tío. Ahora vemos que hace más de un año, al menos aquí en Mexicali, empiezan a cambiar los flujos migratorios que cambia que emigran ya toda la familia, la esposa y los hijos. Entonces como el albergue nomás contaba con una área de hombres y mujeres, naturalmente ocupaba una tercera área para las familias migrantes. A base de esa necesidad, yo justifico un proyecto que presenté ante las agencias de la ONU, que es Acnur, UNICEF. La persona que se encarga de estos proyectos me dice, sabes que, te vamos a apoyar y me dice te damos hasta el viernes, y era Miércoles, entonces un día para conseguir una reunión con tu alcaldesa de Mexicali para ver si ella apoya porque necesitamos que todos estemos en sinergia. Entonces yo le presenté el proyecto a la alcaldesa en noviembre y le digo que los fondos van a venir de OIM y ya nos da la luz verde. Pero en eso, nos interrumpe el tema de los Haitianos que llegan aproximadamente 3 mil Haitianos aquí a Mexicali, lo cual como gobierno pues se lleva a cabo, se implementan los albergues para su gestión y demás. Se termina este proyecto para los haitianos el 24 de marzo del 2022 y ya se pausa este proyecto. Se lleva entre enero y marzo y después nos hablan de gobiernos federales y nos dicen sabes que, hay recurso en el cual pueden concursar proyectos estratégicos a nivel nacional para mitigar o apoyar el tema de la migración. Entonces concurso el proyecto, quedó en segundo lugar y nos otorgan 45 millones de pesos. Esos contemplan la construcción de la infraestructura que tiene fecha de caducidad, por cómo son recursos federales, tiene que estar listo para diciembre. Después concurso para otros fondos que ya concursamos. Pedimos otros 35 millones de pesos para el equipamiento y lo demás para la comida y limpieza para ejercer hasta el primer cuatrimestre del 2023. Si todo sale bien, para abril del 2023 ya va estar la primera etapa y vamos a atender alrededor de 300 personas, entre lo que ya existe son 140 del área nueva y 154 del área actual. Después ahí donde

interviene la OIM, que nos va construir un segundo piso para 140-146 personas, quiere decir que el albergue en su máxima capacidad va poder atender a 445 personas. Ahora, se que se puede decir que hay albergues que atienden más personas, pero el albergue va a estar evaluado por los manuales. Los manuales se crearon a finales de 1980 principios del 90 donde se reúnen todas las asociaciones y organizaciones que atienden el tema de la población en migración y este manual te indica como debes operar en cuestión de comunicación y de atención a las personas. Muchos albergues solamente tienen un baño para 50 personas y lo mínimo que te piden los manuales es un baño por cada 10 o 15 personas. Entonces este albergue no solamente va atender a 445 personas sino que va ser un albergue ecológico, seguro, autosustentable y va cumplir con las normas internacionales básicas y eso hace que sea uno de los mejores albergues del norte.”

Since the shelter’s employment network has shown to be effective in aiding the migrant population who are residing in the shelter, it will be interesting to see if the shelter will be able to continue providing the employment resources to a population double its current size. Towards the end of the interview with the director, I asked the director what he believes are some possible solutions to the topic of migration to Mexicali and the director mentioned that “replicating the structure of the shelter he runs and the employment resources they provide to other shelters in Mexicali and Baja California” would be a helpful solution.

In regards to the topic of employment and the concept of “employable refugee subjectivity” explained in the chapter “Learn Skills and get employed”, the same idea of creating employable refugees is also portrayed in the recent interview with the president of Index in Mexicali, Joaquin Jiménez. In the interview published by the newspaper La Voz de la Frontera in November of 2022, the Index president mentions the difficulties of

employing migrants in the industrial sector and makes distinctions between the Haitian migrants that arrived in Mexicali after 2010 and the new wave of migrants that have recently arrived in the city (Jiménez, 2022).

“Con los haitianos lamentablemente a muchos no los pudimos contratar, porque no tenían documentación necesaria para contratarlos de manera formal, entonces serían al mismo tema; esperemos que algunos vengan con intención de quedarse, y si es así, podemos ofrecerles trabajo” (La voz de la frontera, 2022).

In conversation with Masoud, Kurki, and Brunila’s chapter on the Finnish Integration Act, the concept of employability is also at play as filling the 4,000 employee slots in Mexicali’s industrial sector is in the president’s best interest. Drawing on the research findings from the summer in Mexicali, 35% of the migrants who reported being employed were working in the industrial sector and were linked to their employment through the shelter where they were currently residing.

2.4 Is Mexicali the safest Mexican border city?

Drawing on the interview responses, the primary reason why the migrants left their country of origin, was to escape the violence and insecurity they faced in their countries and when asked why they specifically chose to migrate northwards to Mexicali, 31% alluded in their statements that they chose the city since they believed or perceived the city to be safer. Right after the respondents were asked why they

specifically chose to migrate to Mexicali and not the other border cities, they were asked if they felt safe living in Mexicali. Out of the 45 migrants interviewed, 75% of the respondents claimed they felt safe in the city and the other 25% of the migrants who stated that they do not feel safe in Mexicali were all women, except for one male respondent. Looking closer at the demographics of the respondents who answered that they do not feel safe in Mexicali, 20% of the total respondents and 82% of those respondents who stated they feel unsafe, are women in the age group of their twenties. Therefore, the majority of the respondents who feel unsafe in Mexicali (82%) are women with a median age of twenty-three who in the survey reported having children and not having a partner.

Analyzing the demographic profile of the only male respondent who reported feeling unsafe in Mexicali, Walter is a 32 year-old man from Haiti who identifies as Black and who arrived in Mexicali three months prior to the interview. Walter has only been living in Mexicali for three months, but spent a year in Chiapas and four years before that migrating around different countries in South America and the Dominican Republic after leaving Haiti in 2017.

In order to demonstrate examples of responses from migrants who stated they feel safe and unsafe living in Mexicali, I will provide a testimonial demonstrating each of the responses. As most of the respondents who reported feeling unsafe are women in their early twenties, I will include a response from Emma who is a 23 year-old woman from Honduras stating that she feels unsafe while living in Mexicali. In her account, Emma says:

“ Quiero ir a Estados Unidos porque así como yo entre aquí, así puede entrar cualquiera. Segura no porque uno anda en las calles y cualquiera le puede hacer daño. Me siento segura solo acá adentro (del albergue). Entonces, afuera uno corre peligro como uno no es de aquí. Yo por eso no salgo de aquí. Yo cuando tengo que comprar, yo lo mando a comprar y no salgo de aquí.”

In her response, Emma mentions that since she does not feel safe in Mexicali, she does not leave the shelter for any reason and details how if she must purchase any groceries or supplies, she asks other people in the shelter to purchase them for her due to fear of the perils outside of the shelter. Emma also specifies that she feels that she is more vulnerable to experiencing violence outside of the shelter walls since she is a foreigner to the city and to Mexico.

Drawing on the interview responses to the question regarding whether they feel safe in Mexicali, 42% of the total respondents and 56% of the respondents who reported feeling safe in the city are men. One of the men who stated that he feels safe in Mexicali is Eriberto, a 61 year-old man from Honduras who had previously lived in the U.S. and who arrived in Mexicali with the initial intention of crossing the border once again. In his interview, Eriberto states:

“Me siento seguro. No, yo no siento miedo. Yo puedo caminar por cualquier lado. Es más, yo tengo más miedo perderme a que me vayan a hacer un daño.”

Eriberto, who mentioned decided to migrate to Mexicali as he was told it was safer and more practical to cross the border through Mexicali, stated that after living in the city for the last months has felt safe. Eriberto jokingly responded that he is more afraid of getting lost in the city than of encountering any harm from someone in Mexicali.

As previously stated, when the respondents were asked why they specifically chose to migrate to Mexicali over the other border cities in México, 31% of the respondents mentioned that they believed Mexicali to be a safer border city and they believed that it could guarantee them a more successful crossing across the border into the U.S. The answer is reflected in Sandra's response when she says:

"Porque es la frontera menos peligrosa. Si, porque por Monterrey o Reynosa es muy peligroso y por aquí no. Aquí, no he visto casos de muerte o de carteles, aquí no."

Since this response is given by many other of the migrants and 75% of the migrants interviewed claimed to feel safe in Mexicali, I researched the Justice in México reports on homicides by municipality in order to prove whether Mexicali, Baja California is the "safest" Mexican border city or not.

According to table two taken from the Justice of México's third edition of *Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico* report released in late 2021, the table shows the homicide rate by state and municipality and demonstrates that the Municipality of Mexicali, Baja California is not actually the safest border municipality in México (Justice in México, 2021). The only other three border municipalities with less homicide rates are the municipalities of Sáric and Santa Cruz in the states of Sonora and the municipality of Manuel Benavides in Chihuahua. However, when looking into the borders in the three municipalities, a common denominator between them all is that they are located close to the municipalities of Nogales and Juárez. Moreover, the three municipalities with a less homicide rate than Mexicali's are not in close proximity to border cities in the U.S. and

the geographical locations and terrains across the borders make crossing the border into the U.S. extremely difficult.

One of the responses provided by the migrants for choosing to migrate northwards towards Mexicali, instead of the other border cities was that the other border cities are more dangerous and the Justice in Mexico reports demonstrate that out of México's total 2,450 municipalities, the top two municipalities with the highest homicide rates in 2020 were Tijuana in first and Juarez in second. As the report states, "In 2020, the top two municipalities accounted for nearly ten percent of Mexico's 34,608 homicide cases, with around 5% in Tijuana (1,846) and 4% in Ciudad Juárez (1,533)" (Justice in México, 2021). Therefore, the statistics in the Justice in México report released in late 2021 supports the migrants' reasoning for choosing to cross the border through Mexicali over the municipalities of Tijuana and Juarez. Moreover, while Mexicali is not the safest border municipality, it can be argued that out of the other border municipalities with the same or lower homicide rate, it is the largest border city which offers more resources for the migrant population such as migrant shelters and employment opportunities given that it is a larger, more established city.

From the fieldwork data collected and over 600 interviews conducted in the cities of Tijuana and Mexicali, Mexico from July to October 2019 by the U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UCSD, the findings make a few comparisons between the cities in regard to experiences of violence and homelessness. From the fieldwork conducted, the data demonstrates that the interviewees living in Tijuana were 14.8% more likely to receive threats of violence than the migrants living in Mexicali (USIPC, 2019). This significant difference was also represented by the findings in my research

findings gathered in the summer of 2022 as several of the respondents reported having arrived in Tijuana prior to Mexicali and decided to travel to Mexicali due to their experiences of violence and insecurity in the city. Wong's brief also makes a distinction between the homelessness rate in each of the two cities as the data findings show that the migrants living in Tijuana are 10 times more likely to experience homelessness than the respondents in Mexicali (USIPC, 2019).

2.5 Why have the migrants chosen to arrive in Mexicali and not in the other Mexican border cities?

During the qualitative interviews, the forty-five respondents were asked what their reason was for migrating specifically to Mexicali and not to another border city in Mexico such as Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, or Ciudad Juárez. Drawing on the forty-five in-depth interviews, the responses to that particular question ranged, but the majority of the migrants either stated that they did not have a set destination when they left their country of origin but they arrived to Mexicali by following the other people whom they met on the way or that they believed that the border in Mexicali and Algodones was the safest and most unsupervised borders which could guarantee the migrants a more successful crossing into the U.S. From the migrants interviewed, all of the forty-five migrants represent migrants who had contact with one of the two shelters upon their arrival to Mexicali and received resources such as housing, legal aid, psychological or health services.

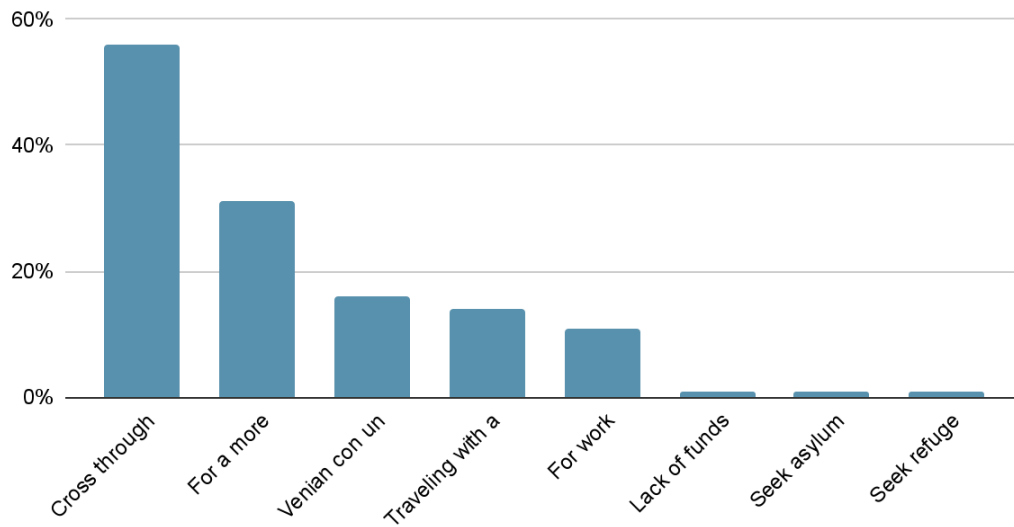


Figure 3: Reasons for Migrating to Mexicali

Going through the interviewees' responses to that question in the qualitative interviews, over half of the respondents, 56%, stated that they decided to migrate to Mexicali specifically with the intention of crossing without documentation either through Algodones or Mexicali, Baja California. Moreover, 31% of the total respondents explained in their statements that they chose to migrate to Mexicali with the intention of crossing since they believed that crossing the border through Algodones or Mexicali was "safer and easier due to there being less law enforcement present".

The other finding presented in the responses to the question was that 16% of the respondents mentioned that they migrated to Mexicali since when they began their journey in transit northwards, they did not know how to arrive to the border but through traveling with a group of other migrants, the other migrants in their group had Mexicali as their final destination. When describing their journey in transit with the group of

people who the migrants did not know prior, some of the migrants shared that when they arrived in Mexicali and attempted to cross the border, some of those other migrants were able to cross the border successfully and to their knowledge, now reside in the U.S.

The other responses given to this question were that 14% of the migrants arrived to Mexicali specifically since they had a family member or acquaintance living in the city, 11% of the respondents chose to migrate to Mexicali for employment opportunities, approximately 1% of the interviewees migrated northwards to Mexicali not with the intention of crossing the border but to seek refuge and escape an abusive partner with whom they were living in a different Mexican city, and lastly another 1% of the migrants chose Mexicali since they had heard that the migrants were receiving asylum at the border in Mexicali.

Since the findings from this question demonstrate that most of the migrants are choosing to migrate to Mexicali due to the proximity to the city of Algodones and since they believe that the borders in Mexicali and Algodones are safer and more unsupervised in comparison to the other border cities, I will present a few of the testimonials that describe and support the responses.

Leticia, who is a 34 year-old woman from Honduras, gave the following answer in her interview:

“ Un muchacho que venía para acá nos dijo que estaba buena la pasada para Estados Unidos por Mexicali y que es más seguro y más fácil. Me crucé dos

veces pero ya no quiero cruzarme porque me caí de la barda cuando me cruze. Me caí para abajo y me golpeé. Si, esta segunda vez me caí y me golpeé pero dicen que la tercera es la vencida. La primera vez no me golpeé pero la segunda vez si por las cosas que pusieron hizo que me raspara aquí. (says while she shows her bruised body) Si cruzamos hasta dentro pero ya nos agarró migración las dos veces. Los dos intentos fueron por acá. ”

Leticia is one of the migrants who explains that when she left Honduras, she did not have a clear destination or was unaware of which border city to arrive in and through where to attempt to cross, but while traveling northwards with a group of migrants was told that crossing to the U.S. through Mexicali was the safest option. In her account, Leticia mentions how she has attempted to cross the border without documentation twice already and detailed how the second attempt was dangerous as she hurt herself when falling down the fence. As Leticia pointed to her bruised arms, legs, and stomach, she stated that the reason she hurt and fell during her second attempt at crossing the border was due to the enhancements they added to the fence recently. Leticia crossed both times through Mexicali, but was shortly captured by the immigration officers and she said that she no longer plans to cross the border again.

Another respondent who chose to migrate to Mexicali instead of the other border cities is Venancio, a 22 year-old man from Honduras, who was initially headed to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon with his father in hopes of obtaining a job, but who later opted for attempting to cross the border through Mexicali under the impression that the border in Mexicali was less supervised. When asked why he chose to cross through Mexicali, Venancio stated:

“Porque bueno la verdad pues cuando sali con mi papá que o sea cuando salimos de Honduras teníamos planeado ir a Monterrey porque nosotros teníamos un amigo que nos había ofrecido un lugar y nos dijo que había empleo y que había una calidad de vida excelente allá pero optamos por venir acá porque dijeron que supuestamente aca estaba bien el paso y que no habia tanta migracion y eso para poder tirarse al otro lado pero ya ahorita cuando llegamos empezamos a ver la cosa, que las cosas fueron cambiando y por eso optamos nosotros con estar aquí y permanecer aquí mejor. ”

Just like the other migrants who decided to attempt to cross the border through Mexicali or Algodones thinking that their chances of crossing across were greater, Venancio mentioned that after attempting to cross with his father, he realized that crossing through these borders is not as successful as it is believed to be. Venancio described in his interview that both his father and him have given up the hope to cross into the U.S. after their failed attempts and have decided to now remain in Mexicali and start their new lives there. Both Venancio and his father arrived in Mexicali about four months before giving their interviews and Venancio has been working for the past months.

Romina, a 22 year-old woman from Honduras, has been living in Mexico for the last six years and after experiencing more violence and insecurity while living in Tamaulipas decided to pay someone who in exchange of the payment, had agreed to give her and her husband exact directions to be able to cross the border. Romina was told by the man that they will need to cross through the border in Mexicali since it is safer than the other borders and does not have the same cartel presence as the other border cities. However, Romina states that they were robbed and deceived by the man when she explains:

“Porque allá un muchacho nos cobraba una cantidad de dinero que era lo último que nos quedaba y nos dijo venganse por aca porque aca es mas tranquilo y que no hay carteles y entonces nos vinimos por aca pero prácticamente el trabajo lo hicimos mi esposo y yo solos. El muchacho nos dijo venganse por acá y caminen por allí y de haber sabido yo solita me vengo. Y el tipo nos robó. Ya llegamos con sus direcciones a un desierto y nos agarró migración. El tipo nos robó porque él sabía que no estaba nada fácil por aquí. De haber sabido, nos hubiera dicho no se muevan de allá (Tamaulipas). ”

Romina and her husband decided to spend the last of their money to pay a man they met in Tamaulipas who claimed could get them safely across the border into the U.S. However, after paying the man, Romina and her husband only received some instructions and directions that they were told to follow on their own across the border. After attempting to cross the border through Mexicali using the man’s directions, Romina and her family were immediately apprehended by the immigration officers and Romina firmly claims that they were robbed by the man since she mentions that he knew that crossing through the given location would not guarantee a successful crossing as he had promised before they payed him.

Another respondent who migrated northwards in an attempt to cross the border through Algodones, Baja California is Alberto, a 41 year-old man from Honduras. Alberto explains that he had heard that crossing the border through Algodones is easier than crossing through the other border cities when he states:

“ Porque según por aqui es mas facil y que no lo deportan a uno para Honduras y por eso yo me vine para acá y si, es cierto la verdad. Ya intenté y me tiraron

para acá. Cruce por Algodones y de allí me tiraron en San Luis Colorado y después me vine a Mexicali. ”

Alberto was another respondent who mentioned that he arrived in Mexicali after attempting to cross into the United States through the border in Algodones, Baja California since he was told that it was the best option to get across the border and that if apprehended, would not be deported directly back to Honduras. Just like some of the migrants interviewed, Alberto attempted to cross the border through Algodones but after his failed attempt was dropped in San Luis Rio Colorado and then decided to travel west again to Mexicali.

2.6 Do the migrants continue to view the border city as solely a transit country or have they begun integrating into the city?

In order to analyze if the migrants continue to view México as a transit country and the Mexican border cities, specifically Mexicali, as a temporary city, I will first revisit the survey responses of how many people arrived to Mexicali with the intention of crossing to the U.S., the survey responses to where they plan to settle in the case that they do not cross into the U.S., and their current Mexican immigration status. From the qualitative interview responses, I analyze the participants' responses about their feelings towards the city and the conditions they consider necessary for México to have in order to settle in the new country. The migrants interviewed who make up the survey sample are specifically migrants who sought assistance from either of the two shelters I

partnered with in Mexicali for different reasons whether it was housing upon their arrival or legal aid to begin their application for a work permit or Mexican residence.

I also break down the demographics of the participants' responses to the questions outlined above. Therefore, what are the demographics of the migrants who have begun settling in the city and who are the migrants who do not view the city as a permanent home? By including the demographics of the respondents to the question, it might shed light on the factors that determine the migrants' views of the city.

As mentioned in the response to the first question about the migrants' resettlement process, the survey findings demonstrate that 73% of the respondents had the intention of crossing into the U.S. when they left their country of origin. The data shows that the majority of the respondents initially arrived in Mexicali with the intention of only remaining in the city temporarily as they migrated northwards to better living conditions. The other 27% of the respondents mentioned that they left their country of origin to escape the precarious conditions in their home country, however, did not have the intention of crossing into the U.S when they first left their countries of origin.

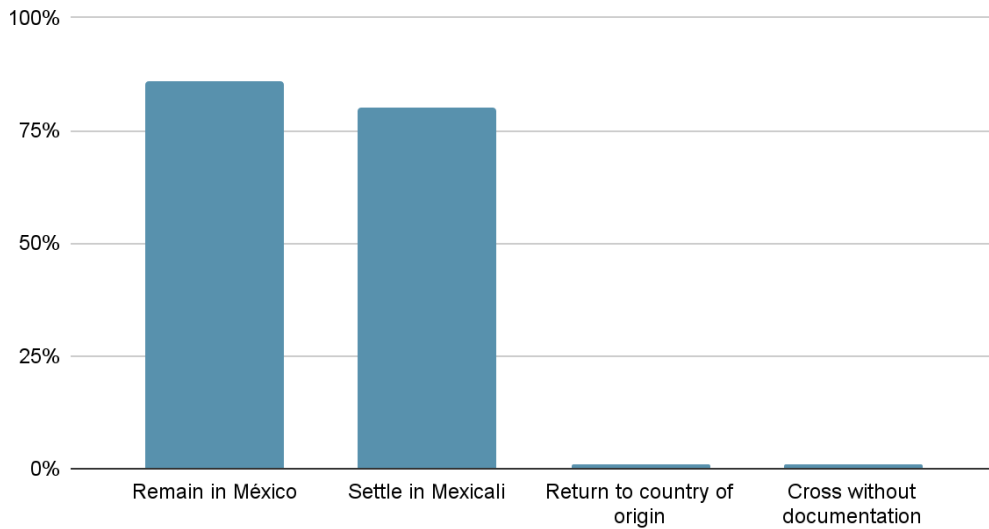


Figure 4: Where will the migrants settle if they are unable to seek asylum in the U.S.?

When asked about where they plan to settle and live in the case that they are not able to cross into the U.S., most of the participants (86%) responded that they would remain in México, while 80% of the total respondents specifically mentioned that they would stay and reside in Mexicali. Only about 1% of the respondents responded that they would return to their country of origin and only one person disclosed that they would still attempt to cross to the U.S. without documentation.

In the findings collected in the survey conducted in Tijuana the previous year, approximately 50% of the respondents reported that they did not know where they would settle and only 28% stated that they would remain in México, with 25% responding that they would settle in the city of Tijuana (MMFRP, 2021). The findings show that the migrants who view México as solely a transit country before arriving to their destination is drastically greater in Tijuana than in Mexicali and one of the factors

that might help explain the difference in responses can be the difference in violence and crime levels, employment status, and also the amount of time that the migrants have spent in each city at the moment of responding to the survey as their response might alter depending on the time spent living in the city.

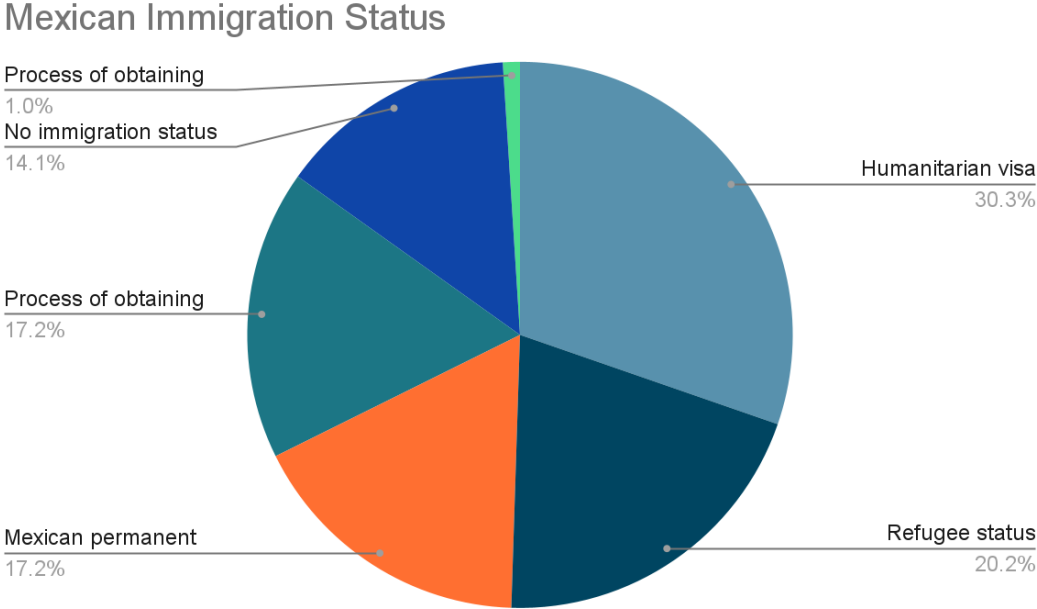


Figure 5: Current Immigration Status in México

Next, I used the survey responses on the migrants’ current Mexican immigration status to analyze where the migrants are in the process of obtaining their documentation as it will help explain if they continue to view México as a transit country. Drawing on the survey responses, 30% of the respondents reported that they have a current or past humanitarian visa, 20% have refugee status, 17% have a permanent residency in México, 17% are in the process of obtaining their permanent residency, 14% have no Mexican immigration status, and 1% are in the process of obtaining

Mexican asylum status. From the responses of the migrants' current immigration status, the findings demonstrate that only 17% of the respondents now have their Mexican residency and another 17% have started the process of obtaining their permanent residency. Therefore, since less than half of the respondents have either started or completed the process for permanent residency, the data shows that the migrants might still view the country as a transit country.

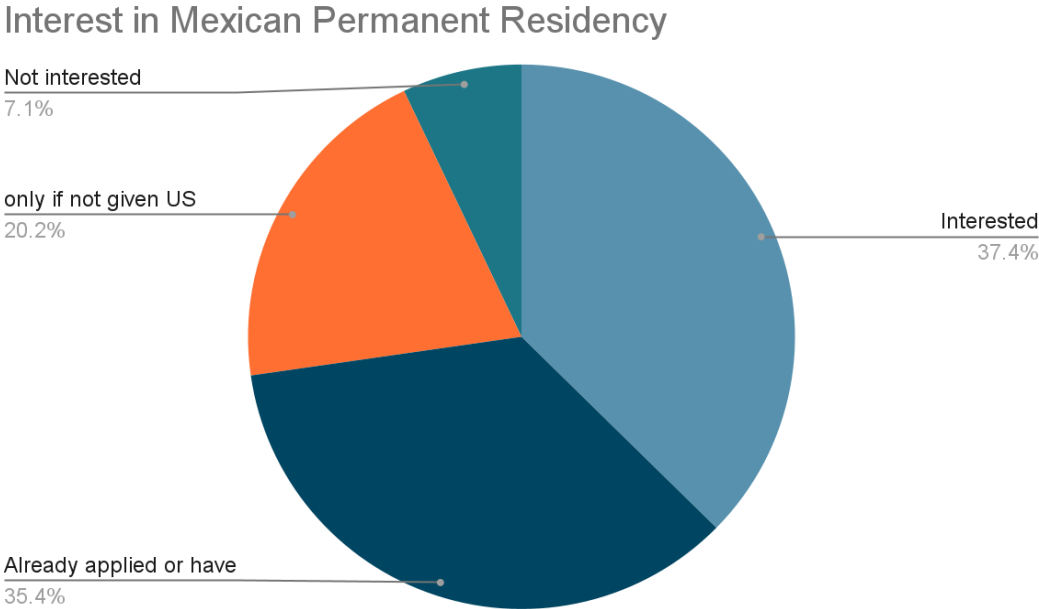


Figure 6: Interest in Mexican Permanent Residency

However, when asked whether they are interested in obtaining Mexican residency, the survey responses demonstrate that 37% of the respondents stated that they are interested in obtaining residency, 35% already applied for or currently have permanent residency, 20% stated they would consider Mexican residency only in the case that they cannot cross to the United States, and only 7% stated that they would not

consider Mexican residency. The results to this question can contradict the previous hypothesis and prove that the migrants living in Mexicali are considering México as a permanent home, instead of as a transit country as over half of the respondents are interested in obtaining Mexican residency or have already begun or completed the process for permanent residency. The findings from the respondents' current Mexican immigration status and responses to the question of whether they would be interested in Mexican permanent residency also greatly differ from the findings collected in Tijuana in Winter of 2021 (MMFRP, 2021).

Moving into the responses collected in the qualitative interviews, I include the migrants' feelings towards Mexicali and their responses to whether there has been a positive difference in their quality of life in Mexicali compared to their quality of life in their countries of origin. Drawing on the forty-five in-depth interviews, when asked if there was a difference in their quality of life, 27% of the respondents stated that there was not a difference in their quality of life between their quality of life in their countries of origin and in Mexicali, while the other 73% of the respondents claimed that there was a positive difference in their current quality of life in Mexicali. Out of the 27% of the respondents who stated there was no change in their quality of life, 83% of those respondents and 22% of the total respondents are women and, moreover, analyzing that demographic even further, 75% of the respondents who reported no difference in their quality of life which make up 20% of the total population interviewed are women in the age group of their twenties, with a median age of 23.

The other 17% of the respondents who reported no difference in their quality of life are men and one of them is Walter, a 32 year-old man from Haiti who identifies as

Black and Eriberto, a 61 year-old man from Honduras who identifies as Mestizo and who had previously lived in the U.S. before. It is important to note that the data and demographic profile of the respondents who reported that they do not feel safe in Mexicali was almost identical to those who reported no difference in their quality of life in Mexicali. The only difference between the findings is that Eriberto stated that he did feel safe in Mexicali, but reported no positive difference in his quality of life in Mexicali in comparison to his quality of life back in Honduras.

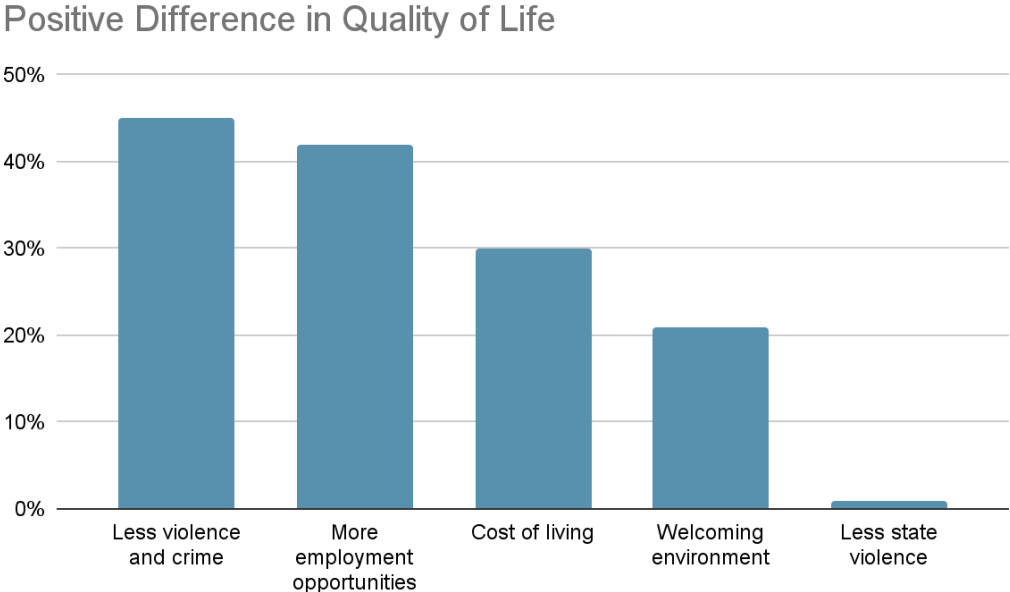


Figure 7: Reasons for Positive Difference in Quality of Life

From the 73% of the total respondents who did report a positive difference in their quality of life living in Mexicali in comparison to their countries of origin, the responses varied from 45% of them reporting less violence and crime, 42% of the interviewees reported having more employment opportunities, 30% reported a more affordable cost of living (mentioning housing, food, and health), 21% reported a more

welcoming environment, and one person, a 42 year-old man from Nicaraguas, attributed the difference in quality of life to less state violence and political persecution. From the 27% of the total respondents who reported a decrease in their quality of life, 59% of the respondents attributed the decrease in their quality of life to their feelings of insecurity due to the violence and crime rate that mirrors the precarious conditions that they faced in their own countries of origin.

Therefore, when analyzing all of the previous factors which include the survey responses of how many people arrived to Mexicali with the intention of crossing to the U.S., the survey responses to where they plan to settle in the case that they do not cross into the U.S., their current Mexican immigration status and their responses to whether they are interested in acquiring Mexican citizenship, and if the respondents have experienced an increase in their quality of life, the findings suggest that despite the fact that most of the respondents, (73%), left their country of origin with the intention of crossing the border, their inability to migrate northwards has led the migrants to view México and the city of Mexicali as viable alternatives to settle in.

Looking at all the statistics together, 86% of the respondents reported that in the case that they are not able to cross into the U.S., they would settle in México and 80% of the total population specifically mentioned that they would choose Mexicali as the Mexican city of choice. Even though only 17% of the total population currently have their Mexican residency and only another 17% are in the process of obtaining their residency, when asked if they would be interested in obtaining their Mexican residency, 37% of the total population reported that they are interested in obtaining their residency and another 35% either already have their residency or have already applied for residency.

Finally, when asked if the migrants experienced an increase in their quality of life while living in Mexicali, 73% reported an increase in quality of life, in comparison to the 27% who stated they experienced a decrease in their quality of life. Therefore, through the findings mentioned above, it can be argued that the migrants living in Mexicali, Baja California view the city as a viable option to reside in and have begun their integration into the city.

Yamira's case:

When analyzing the findings on what are the migrant profiles that reported a positive difference in their quality of life between their country of origin and in Mexicali, one of the respondents who exemplifies the migrant profile that has begun settling in the city is Yamira. Yamira is a 56 year-old woman from Venezuela who left her country in 2010 and lived in Colombia for an extended period of time until she moved to Cancun, Mexico temporarily and then arrived in Mexicali in February of 2021 with her husband and daughter. Yamira did not leave Venezuela with the intention of crossing into the United States and when she decided to move to Mexicali with the intention of settling in the city since her son-in-law had already been living in the city for about four years. When asked about her residence in Mexicali, Yamira mentioned that she lives with her family in a previously abandoned house that her son-in-law fixed up for them when they arrived to Mexicali, so they do not pay any monthly rent. She explained her living situation in the following response:

"Es un lugar donde la mayoría de las casas están abandonadas y que la gente se metió, pintó las casas y se metieron a vivir. Sí viven así esperando por si vienen los dueños. Donde yo estoy mi esposo cuando llegó, está al lado de la de

mi hijastro, pintaron una se quedaron ahí. Se fue mi esposo y cuando llegó aquí, su hijo lo llevó. Después se puso a limpiar la casa de al lado que se metieron ellos y la mayoría de las casas están ocupadas así.”

In the interview, Yamira describes how her family lives in a neighborhood where most of the homes are abandoned and in bad shape, but the current residents remodeled the homes, painted them, and moved in. She mentioned that the new residents that took over the homes live there and if the owners return, the new residents inquire about renting the home from them. Yamira mentioned that in the three years since her son-in-law has lived in his previously abandoned home, no one has ever shown up to claim the home from him and in the year and a half since Yamira has lived there with her husband and daughter, they have not been asked to leave their home as well, allowing them to live in the city without any worry about paying rent. When asked about how the family learned about the neighborhood Angeles de Puebla and the abandoned home where they currently reside, Yamira explained that her daughter-in-law, who is a Mexican national, learned about them through a woman she works with.

“La esposa de mi hijastro es mexicana. Ella lo conoció a él y ella se lo trajo desde Venezuela. Ella vivía en el 43 y a ella, una compañera de trabajo le dijo que en Ocoyucan, Angeles de Puebla, habían casas que si tú te metías, pero eso es horrible las casas como las dejan, las limpiaban y se meten a vivir y si llegaban en algún momento los dueños bueno hablan con ellos y les preguntan sobre un alquiler pero en la casa donde estan, ya han estado más de tres años y no se ha metido nadie. Y en esos tres años, empezaron a limpiar la de alado. Y son casitas así de dos en dos.”

When asked if there is a difference in the quality of life that Yamira had back in her country of origin Venezuela and the quality of life that she has here in Mexicali, Yamira mentioned that the difference is drastically better living in Mexicali. Yamira described how she notices the difference in her quality of life in her nutrition since she is able to have more than one meal since she moved to México. Moreover, she is also able to help her daughter financially by sending her and her grandchildren that live in Venezuela money when they need financial assistance.

“Es exagerada la diferencia. Aquí en el supermercado, puedes entrar, por lo menos con lo que gana mi esposo en la semana, tú puedes hacer compras y todo. Mira, desde que llegue aumente 30 kilos porque yo no estaba así cuando llegué pero el poder comer lo que tenías años que no podías comer y poder satisfacer tus gustos y la tranquilidad que te da y la satisfacción de saber que puedo ayudar a mi hija económicamente. Allá solo se podía comer una arepa al día y pollo solo una vez a la semana pero aquí lo puedes comer todos los días. La diferencia es increíble. ”

Yamira has three daughters who are now all adults and they are all currently living in different countries. One of her daughters lives with her in Mexicali, another daughter lives in Argentina, and her other daughter lives back in Venezuela. Yamira reported that she plans to bring her daughter and grandchildren who are still living in Venezuela to live with her here in Mexicali once she receives her Mexican permanent residency. Yamira applied for her Mexican permanent residence shortly after arriving in Mexicali and reported that she plans to live here indefinitely.

Chapter Three - Experiences of Violence and Discrimination in Transit

3.1 Statistics of Violence and Crime in Transit

For the migrants who flee their countries of origin due to the high levels of violence, crime, and fear of persecution, the migration routes from South America and the Caribbean to the northern Mexican border cities, mirror the precarious conditions which they faced in their countries of origin and make them targets to organized crime groups and other dangerous actors in México. In 2017, the World Bank reported that from the population of Mexican and Central American migrants living in the U.S., the three highest nationality populations were from México (11,573,680), El Salvador (1,387,022), and Guatemala (935,707) and according to the Mexican Ministry of the Interior, in 2014 there were approximately 390,000 undocumented individuals from Central America living in México (Leyva-Flores R, Infante C, Gutierrez JP, Quintino-Perez F, Gómez-Saldivar M, Torres-Robles C, 2019). While living in transit in México as they make their journey northwards towards the U.S. the migrants are subjected to different forms of violence and discrimination such as physical violence, kidnapping, sexual assault, theft, threats, discrimination, among others.

Migrants that experience violence and discrimination while in transit report on different actors responsible for their experiences such as organized crime groups, Mexican authorities, a former partner, Mexican nationals, and other perpetrators as well.

As a final stop before arriving into the migrants' intended destination in the U.S., the U.S. - México border continues to be a perilous space for migrants and in 2015, it was ranked the third global destination for the most migrants found missing or dead (Leyva-Flores R, Infante C, Gutierrez JP, Quintino-Perez F, Gómez-Saldivar M, Torres-Robles C, 2019). Despite the high levels of violence and insecurity the migrants experience throughout their journey to the U.S., 88% of the migrants who experienced a form of violence, decide to continue their journey northwards to the U.S. (Leyva-Flores R, Infante C, Gutierrez JP, Quintino-Perez F, Gómez-Saldivar M, Torres-Robles C, 2019). For most of the migrants who decide to continue their journey, there is no alternate destination or "safe third country" as the migrants have encountered that their experiences of violence are just the same in México as they were in their countries of origin where they fled from.

Drawing on the research conducted with undocumented migrants living in México in transit throughout the years 2009-2015 with a sample of over 12,000 migrants, the findings demonstrate that 29% of the total respondents reported any form of violence throughout their time in transit, 24% of the migrants reported experiencing physical violence, 19% reported psychological violence, and about 2% of the interviewees reported sexual violence (Leyva-Flores R, Infante C, Gutierrez JP, Quintino-Perez F, Gómez-Saldivar M, Torres-Robles C 2019). Leyvas' research findings also analyze the difference between the migrants' genders and their responses to their experiences of violence in transit and demonstrate that there was a statistically greater percentage of females and transgenders that reported experiencing violence and discrimination in comparison to the male interviewees (Leyva-Flores R, Infante C, Gutierrez JP,

Quintino-Perez F, Gómez-Saldivar M, Torres-Robles C, 2019). Leyvas' research interviews were conducted at five migrant shelters located strategically in five different cities that are in close proximity to the railroad tracks commonly used by the migrants to travel northwards towards the border.

Comparing Leyvas' study that was finalized in 2015 to my own research conducted in the summer of 2022 in Mexicali, I also found that the reports of violence and discrimination were significantly greater among women in comparison to men and as mentioned in Chapter three, when asked if the respondents feel safe living in Mexicali, most of the respondents who reported feeling unsafe in Mexicali were migrant women with a median age of twenty-three that reported having children and not having a current partner. Therefore, my findings demonstrate that the migration flows are drastically changing in the previous years where migration, along the Latin American routes towards the U.S. - México border specifically, has shifted from being a male dominated phenomenon to now having entire family units, unaccompanied minors, or single women traveling alone.

3.2 Gender-Based Violence in Transit

As the literature on violence in transit and my own research demonstrates, single migrant women traveling towards the border have now become among the most targeted or vulnerable migrant population and due to this reason, it is imperative to conduct further research on the experiences of women in transit and create more resources for this specific population while in transit along the Latin American migration

routes. In conversation with the idea of how adding to the literature of migrant women and their experiences of gender violence in transit is crucial, Olivera and Garcia emphasize the need to treat the phenomenon of migrant women in transit as parallel to the conversation of migrants in transit and there needs to be more knowledge on the systemic phenomenon of migrant women (Olivera and Garcia, 2018). The scholars state that the statistics of migrant women in transit and their experiences of violence is no longer a small percentage and, therefore, requires to be brought to the forefront of the discussion and policy agendas.

The migrant women phenomenon has also shifted in the causes or reasons for the population's migration northwards to the U.S. or México as the reasons for their migration has gone from reunification with spouses and families to women escaping violence and becoming sole economic providers for themselves and children. As the migrant women become part of the most vulnerable populations during their time in transit along with unaccompanied minors, and LGBTQ migrants, migrant women's experiences of gender violence are still treated as casualties among the experiences of violence in transit as a whole. Therefore, while it is important to treat gender violence as its own category of violence in transit, it is also necessary to view women as people with autonomy and not assign them subalternate roles in border spaces as the women's experiences in transit demonstrate that they have to make different decisions during transit such as take different migration routes, travel in larger groups, or pay higher costs for "security packages" that will guarantee them a safer passage through transit (Cortes, 2018).

For instance, a large population of migrants will travel through the train route, *la Bestia*, in order to arrive in the border cities, however some migrant women have reported having to switch routes and avoid the migration routes along the train in order to avoid becoming targets to traffickers or other organized crime groups that are waiting for them along those routes. Instead, these women might opt to use migration routes along the roads to decrease their risk of experiencing gender violence, but migrating northwards through routes along the roads will then increase their visibility and lead to the risk of being deported or captured by Mexican authorities (Cortes, 2018). Another method used by migrant women in order to avoid the risks of violence in transit is to pay for more expensive services from coyotes or other people to transport them to the northern Mexican border cities or all the way across the border into the U.S. However, paying for transportation services from coyotes or other people does not eliminate the risks of violence completely as some of the women are still subjected to violence in the form of sexual assault from such entities or actors (Cortes, 2018). Moreover, the migrant women will pay drastically higher transportation costs than the migrant men as some women will pay for extra "security packages" from coyotes, which also leads us to analyze the factor of socioeconomic status or class among the migrant women since migrant women who are unable to pay for such security transportation packages will experience higher rates of violence throughout their time in transit.

Research with migrant women demonstrates that some of the migrant women have reported initiating relationships and finding partners in men who are either Mexican nationals or who are also traveling northwards in order to avoid experiencing violence during their time in transit (Cortes, 2018). However, this method can also result

in the increase of experiencing sexual assault and gender violence in transit as well. For example, a specific case study that I analyze in the following section of this chapter demonstrates how an eighteen year old woman fled the home in which she was being sexually trafficked and found refuge in her former partner who, in time, also became extremely abusive towards her during her pregnancy and after the pregnancy.

In conversation with Cortes's literature on the need for more research on gender-based violence in transit and classifying it as its own form of violence, it is also important to note that gender-based violence is not currently recognized as its own category under U.S. refugee and asylum law (Gonella, Villatoro, and Collins, 2022). The migrant women who embark on the journey northwards to flee their experiences of gender-based violence then face a continuous of violence as between 60 to 80 percent of migrant women are sexually abused during their time in transit in México (Amnesty International, 2021). Despite the extremely high percentage of migrant women that experience gender violence throughout the journey northwards, the women continue the trip to the border as the violence they are subjected to in their countries of origin and in transit influence their decision to attempt the journey across the border.

However, throughout their journey in transit in México and as they reach the border cities before their intended destination across the border, it is evident that the border cities lack the necessary resources to aid the migrant women in coping with the trauma from the violence they experienced. For example, when analyzing Mexicali and its current migrant shelters, some of the shelters with larger maximum capacities do not have designated rooms for women and men separately or other physiological services to help the migrant women with the violence and trauma they experienced. Therefore,

one of the two NGO's that I conducted the fieldwork interviews at was Albergue del desierto, which is a shelter that solely serves migrant women and children and provides certain resources such as an on-site psychologist, an all female staff, and referrals to outside NGOs such as the Instituto de la Mujer (INMUJER) that focuses on serving women that have experienced gender violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. However, a limitation of this shelter is that it is one of the smaller shelters in Mexicali with a lower capacity of migrants. A future recommendation would be to allocate more funds to the other shelters in the city explicitly for the treatment of women who have experienced gender violence throughout their time in transit and in their countries of origin.

Adding the literature on gender-based violence and migrant women's' experiences of violence while in transit is important to consider as it demonstrates how it plays a role in the women's' decision-making process of whether they are able to settle in México or if due to the violence, they are forced to continue the journey northwards to the U.S. Moreover, the high rate of gender violence in transit will also affect the success of the migrants' resettlement process in Mexicali or any other Mexican city as it will cause the women to live in constant fear of being outside and hinder them from adjusting into the receiving society.

In the following section of the chapter, I include three specific case studies of women and their experiences of violence and discrimination while living in México in transit. The three case studies were chosen to analyze due to the similarities and differences between the migrant profiles in regard to factors such as their age, time spent in transit, whether the migrant woman traveled alone or with a partner, and

whether the respondents settled in other Mexican cities before arriving in Mexicali or if they traveled directly towards the border.

3.3 Case Studies of Experiences of Violence in Transit

While answering the question of what is the migrants' process of resettlement in Mexicali, how does it differ across the demographics, and if the city of Mexicali can be considered a safe, viable option for the arriving migrants, I also analyze whether the migrants' experiences of violence both in transit while traveling towards the border and while living in Mexicali influences their decision to either remain in México or continue to migrate northwards into the United States. It is important to take the migrants' past experiences of violence into consideration since the findings suggest that if the migrants' experiences in México mirror the conditions they faced in their countries of origin, the migrants will decide to continue to migrate northwards across the border to avoid the same conditions they fled from.

Since most of the respondents who reported feeling unsafe in Mexicali are women in their early twenties, with an average age of twenty-three who have children, I have selected one of these woman and her experience of violence while living in transit for about five years in the southern states of México until she finally decided to make the journey northwards to cross the border into the United States through the border of Algodones, Baja California.

Jessica's case:

In her account, Jessica details her experiences of violence in transit after migrating from her country of origin in Honduras to the state of Tabasco at her sixteen years of age. Jessica is a twenty-three year old woman from Honduras who migrated to Tabasco, México after she lost both of her parents who were murdered by organized crime groups in Honduras. Jessica was received by family members who were living in Tabasco and her experiences with violence in México began shortly after arriving in México. Jessica recounted how when she had just turned seventeen, her family members who she was received by in México began selling her into prostitution. After a few months, Jessica managed to escape her situation with help of one of the family members who she was living with and moved to the city of Balancan in the state of Tabasco. While living in Balancan, Jessica met the father of her daughter and began living with him while she was pregnant with her daughter. Jessica mentioned that her previous partner was never violent with her until the later stages of her pregnancy when he became extremely abusive towards her, resulting in pregnancy complications.

When Jessica's daughter was about a year and a half old, Jessica returned to Honduras, but due to the lack of financial support she returned to Tabasco after four months to live with the father of her daughter. Months later, Jessica decided to leave her partner and move to Villahermosa, the capital of Tabasco, with a friend she had met. However, Jessica explained that she was struggling financially to provide for herself and her daughter and was barely able to make ends meet after arriving in the new city. Therefore, that was when Jessica decided to begin working as a sex worker in

Villahermosa and experienced multiple physical abuses by her clients. In her account, Jessica describes these experiences and states,

“ Como yo ya había vendido mi cuerpo antes, se lo que se siente y se cuanto voy a sacar. Entonces me fui yo a Villahermosa con una amiga y ahí fue cuando volví a vender mi cuerpo y solo así podía sustentar a mi niña porque no tenía un techo y un lugar donde podía meter a la niña a la escuela. Y luego un cliente se obsesionó conmigo y se confundió de cliente a ser mi marido, osea el señor se confundió en cuestión de que me daba la confianza de desahogarme y me gustaron los consejos que él me daba y se confundió. El señor era muy posesivo y muy atrás de mí y siempre que tenía los encuentros con el, yo siempre dejaba a la niña con una niñera porque yo siempre he sido muy sobreprotectora con la niña. Tengo que saber con quién la voy a dejar y como yo vivía con ellos (her housemates) yo veía que eran muy cuidadosos con ellos y entonces yo les pagaba por que me la cuidaran. Y ya el señor en una de esas me dijo te voy a dar tanto dinero pero quedate a dormir conmigo. Y yo me quedé, wow, con lo que me daba eran como tres hombres ahí y entonces solo era él pero la cantidad era lo que yo calculaba. Y luego me callo un mensaje del padre de mi niña solo preguntando cómo estaba la niña. Siempre solo preguntaba por la niña pero solo eran preguntas. Solo preguntaba por ella pero nunca quería verla y ese era su único rango de papel como papá de la niña, solo preguntas. Y entonces pues el vio que el papá me mando mensaje y el reacciono, no se si el se drogo pero me empezó a asfixiar y cuando me asfixio me dijo que perras como nosotras no tenemos que sobrevivir. Me acuerdo cuando me empezó a asfixiar y lo único que me acuerdo es que se veía oscuro. ”

In her response, Jessica mentions that when she moved to Villahermosa and began working as a sex worker, her reasoning was that she was already familiar with how it worked and how it felt as she referenced her experience of being sold into prostitution by her own family members after migrating to México for the first time in 2016. In the interview, Jessica mentioned that she suffered some physical altercations with her clients, but the abuse by the client she details in this excerpt made her doubt whether she would be able to see her daughter again.

Some time after this experience, Jessica mentioned that her daughter's father began to seek her and his daughter and when he visited he once again became abusive, which led her to begin a custody battle for the safety of her daughter. After the last encounter where her former partner physically abused her and her reports at el DIF were ignored, Jessica fled the state of Tabasco and began her journey northwards towards the border of Algodones, Baja California with the intention of crossing into the United States without documentation.

When asked whether she attempted to seek asylum at the border after being apprehended by the immigration officers, Jessica responded,

“ No, siempre dicen que yo tengo desventaja porque mi niña es Mexicana. Que yo no puedo tener asilo Americano pero yo no puedo llevar a mi hija hacia abajo porque me la van a quitar. Y yo no puedo regresar a Honduras porque yo sé la vida y se lo que cuesta allá. Yo simplemente quiero darle una vida a mi hija sin que nadie nos esté molestando y decirle a mi hija ya tu mama no va a vender su cuerpo, ya tu mama no va tener hombres detrás de ella que la quieren matar, ya yo voy a trabajar y tu vas a estudiar. ”

Jessica stated that she has not tried to seek asylum yet and has only attempted to cross the border with her daughter as she believes that her daughter's Mexican nationality might be a disadvantage to her case. Jessica expressed that her desire to cross to the US is to be able to provide her daughter a better life where she does not have to live in fear. After the interview, Jessica was referred to the non-profit organization Albergue del desierto as they serve migrant women who are survivors of abuse and sex trafficking and provide them with legal aid, psychological services, and other resources to help them recover from their experiences of violence and abuse.

Samara's case:

Another case that demonstrates how the experiences of violence that the migrants experience both in transit while migrating northwards and while living in Mexicali greatly influence the migrants' decision to either remain in México or continuing northwards by attempting to cross into the United States is Samara's case. Samara is a twenty-seven year old woman from El Salvador who left her country of origin in 2021 in order to escape from her former partner as she was a victim of domestic abuse. During her interview, Samara stated that her partner physically abused her several times and after the last experience of violence, Samara decided to migrate to Tapachula, Chiapas and left her two children with family members in El Salvador. Samara mentioned that when she initially left El Salvador, she did not have the intention to travel to the border and attempt to cross into the U.S. Instead, Samara's plan was to migrate to México as she feared for her life, settle in the southern state, and eventually send for her kids to accompany her. Samara lived in Tapachula for six months until the precarious conditions led her to migrate to the state of Nayarit where she lived and worked for a few months. However, after the experiences of violence that she encountered in her time in transit, Samara decided to migrate northwards towards the border where she also faced similar experiences of crime and violence.

When asked if she had ever had any issues with the Mexican authorities, Samara reported a few instances where she was detained and robbed by the authorities when she stated,

“ Nos piden dinero o nos meten ahí adentro (in jail) y ahí adentro nos piden dinero. Yo estuve ocho días ahí adentro y teniendo mis papeles pero solo porque no andaba con la tarjeta verde. Entonces me pedían dinero y yo no tengo dinero, no tengo quien me ayude entonces pasé ocho días castigada. Cuándo a veces que salgo a comprar cualquier cosa que tenemos que tener nosotros acá, en la noche cuando salimos, pues de repente nos topamos con personas que solo porque somos inmigrantes nos discriminan y tal vez para dejarnos ir nos piden dinero porque a mí ya me ha pasado ahí por el Parque del mariachi al lado izquierdo. Ahí me pidió un policía, ahí se paró una patrulla y me pidieron dinero y me dijeron que si no andaba con la tarjeta verde me iban a meter presa. Y porque no me la han dado me pidieron dinero. Eso fue recién venido aquí al albergue.”

In her account, Samara describes how she has been extorted by Mexican authorities multiple times since she arrived in Mexicali and was even detained in jail for eight days for not having her Mexican documentation with her. Samara was one of various interviewees who reported being harrassed by both Mexican authorities and Mexican residents while at the Parque Mariachi in Mexicali. During the interview, Samara also mentioned an experience of violence while in transit living in Nayarit when she says,

“ Sí, ahí en Nayarit. Ahí me agarraron con otro grupo de personas y nos llevaron así como a una casa y nos pedían dinero y que nos decían que nos iban a matar, todo lo que pasa cualquier inmigrante y nos robaron las pertenencias que traíamos, nos robaron dinero. Para venir hasta acá se sufre mucho.”

Samara reported an instance where she was abducted with a group of other migrants by an organized crime group, taken to what she described as a house, and

were robbed of their money and personal belongings. When asked why she decided to arrive in Mexicali instead of one of the other border cities in Mexico, Samara responded,

“Como le digo, mis intenciones no eran cruzar para el otro lado porque yo no traía intenciones de cruzarme, si no de quedarme aquí y venirme a vivir acá y eso pero ya con tantas cosas que pase en el camino, ya hasta aquí en México me da miedo estar porque siempre a uno por ser emigrante, o sea siempre siempre tratan de verlo mal y de discriminarlo a uno, le piden dinero o lo amenazan poniendole pistolas en la cabeza. Porque piensan que si todos queremos emigrar pero entre todos, existimos unos que no. Ya me siento bien atemorizada y con mis hijos si quisiera pedir un asilo para el otro lado.”

In her account, Samara reiterated how her initial intentions were never to cross to the United States, but to escape from El Salvador as she feared for her life and decided to migrate to southern México with the plan of settling there and then bringing her children with her. However, her experiences of violence in transit led her to feel unsafe in México and after being abducted during her time living in Nayarit, Samara decided to migrate northwards towards the border and try to seek asylum in the U.S.

Both Jessica and Samara share a similar experience of living in transit for over a year before migrating from the south of México northwards towards the Algodones border in order to attempt to cross into the U.S. When both women initially left their countries of origin, they did not have the intention of seeking asylum at the border or crossing to the U.S, however, due to the various experiences of violence they faced during their time living in México, their experiences influenced them to attempt to make the journey northwards to the U.S. Jessica and Samara’s experiences of violence in

transit mirrored the precarious conditions they were faced with in their countries of origin and decided that remaining in México would not be a safe, viable option for them to reside in permanently.

Marta's Case:

Another respondent who reported several experiences of violence throughout her journey in transit and the weeks it took for her and her partner to reach Mexicali is Marta, a forty-three year-old woman who is from Honduras and left her country in April 2022 before arriving in Mexicali in May. In comparison to Jessica and Samara, Marta did not make the journey northwards alone as she left Honduras with her partner after they both suffered physical violence and extortion from the organized crime groups back in Honduras. Marta is currently in the process of applying for political asylum in México, however, she is another one of the respondents that reported she does not feel safe living in México and will attempt to seek asylum in the U.S. Unlike Jessica and Samara, when Marta left Honduras, she did have the initial intention of crossing the border into the U.S. and after the violence experienced in transit, the plan to continue the journey northwards is ever more present.

Marta mentioned that most of her encounters with violence throughout the trip in transit were committed by Mexican authorities or officials as the perpetrators who would stop the buses they were traveling in to rob them of their money were wearing police uniforms. Marta recounts how on one of the instances where the perpetrators in police uniforms stopped the bus they were traveling in, her partner was kidnapped that day.

“Desde que salimos de Guatemala, nos han asaltado bastantes policías en Guatemala y aquí en México. Aquí en México, fue en Salto de Agua cuando secuestraron a mi pareja. Fue horrible, se subieron al bus y empezaron a bajarnos a todos. Nos bajaron del bus, al bus, me orillaron y después subieron a otro muchacho y a mi pareja pero como yo iba al rincón yo me bajé porque se estaban llevando otros más pero no los pudieron agarrar, los otros salieron corriendo y como él no andaba con dinero y le pedían \$30,000 para que le dieran pero él andaba sin dinero y él no traía una lempira y lo llevaron se lo llevaron y yo me bajé de ahí para ver si lo miraba cuando ya venía de regreso como no le podían sacar nada y cuando él, yo creo que venía con los nervios me contó el muchacho que se lo llevaron que lo secuestraron también a él y que él temblaba de nervios y me contó que se había puesto mal y los secuestradores como no les podían sacar dinero los dejaron ir después. Pero si ellos eran policías, estaban uniformados porque estaban en la calle ahí parando a todos los buses, quiere decir que si eran policías.”

Marta describes how both her partner and another young man were taken among the group of people traveling north in the bus and after the perpetrators took them too, Marta got off the bus and waited along the road for her partner to return, waving down cars to help her, even though she believed she would not see her partner again. Hours later, her partner and the other young man, who she believes was from Guatemala, returned and since her partner was not in condition to talk given the trauma, the man from Guatemala who was also kidnapped shared some of the details with her.

Soon after that kidnapping experience that her partner endured, they experienced more violence and physical harm along their journey northwards both in the train, referred to as “la bestia”, and while waiting for one of the trains in the desert near Caborca, Sonora. Marta describes her experience of when she severely injured her legs after falling from the train multiple times and another experience being held at gunpoint with her partner and other migrants in the group.

“ Cuando nosotros llegamos estamos en primera vez que agarré el primer tren que un muchacho corrió agarrarme la maleta y me la jalo y yo me fui para atrás y cayéndome de espalda y traté de agarrarme de la primer grada pero me arrastró el tren como de aquí está la cachanilla de largo y después iba chorreando sangre mis pies yo creí que me los había partido y chorreaba sangre, chorreaba sangre, fue muy difícil. Es muy difícil que me caí dos veces de ese tren.

Cuando llegamos a Caborca, ahí agarramos el tren, otro tren verdad, era el mismo tren que veníamos de sufragio lo único que en la noche se quedó allí entonces ese tren iba a salir a las 3 de la mañana. Nos bajamos como pudimos. Nos bajamos entonces nos quedamos durmiendo agarramos el de las 8 de la mañana cuando llegamos y cuando estábamos por el medio del desierto, notamos la noticia que nos dan que miramos que dice se quedó el tren porque se dio vuelta al otro índice se lastimaron muchas personas y quedamos en medio del desierto cuatro días, cuatro noches, cinco días sin comer, fue lo más horrible que he vivido en mi vida. Y una noche antes de que se que haya arreglado, llegaron unos hombres, nos dijeron que andan haciendo aquí entonces dice no quiero que se acerquen al tren y entonces vinieron a hacer un montón de disparos, nos dispararon en los pies. Así los vamos a matar dicen. Estaban digamos como medio metro de mis pies. Y entonces me dije si nos van a matar porque estábamos ahí en una rueda y nos estaban apuntando. Voy a vigilar dijo para ver si se mueven y se acercan al tren entonces pero creo que ellos lo que querían era asaltar el tren y robar todas las cosas que traía el tren. ”

Marta describes how her journey north that lasted approximately three to four weeks, was extremely dangerous as both her partner and her suffered violence such as several extortions and a kidnapping by Mexican authorities while traveling by bus and physical harm and death threats at gunpoint by organized crime groups while traveling by trains. As mentioned in the literature, traveling through the quicker routes north by taking transportation such as the train and the buses, can expose the migrants to violence by perpetrators such as organized crime groups and Mexican authorities.

3.4 How do the migrants' past experiences of violence influence their initial decision to either settle in México or continue migrating northward?

In order to add to the response for the question of whether the respondents' experiences of violence in transit and in Mexicali influence their initial decision of whether they decide to either remain in México or continue their journey northwards to the U.S., I incorporate the migrants' survey responses of whether they suffered an experience of violence in transit and in Mexicali. Moreover, I also include the survey data that shows the respondent's responses of who were responsible for their experiences of violence and crime both in transit and while living in Mexicali. The first graph will show the migrants' different experiences of violence and crime that they reported during the quantitative section of the interview. The migrants surveyed who reported their experiences of violence and discrimination while in transit represent a sample of migrants who arrived in Mexicali and eventually received resources from a shelter in the city.

Violence and Discrimination in Transit

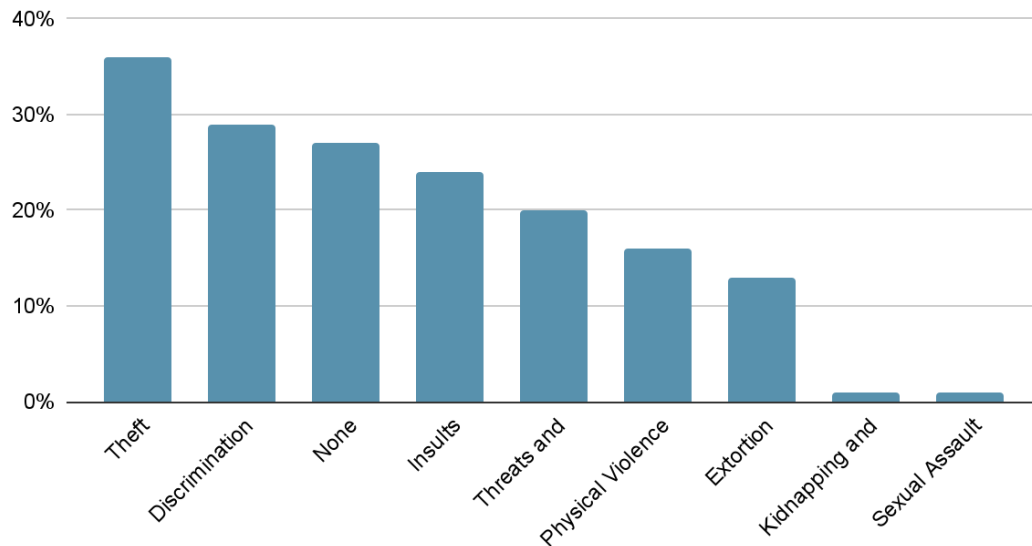


Figure 8: Migrants' experiences of violence, crime, and discrimination in transit

According to the respondents' responses, the migrants interviewed in both albergues reported experiences of theft, physical violence, violence with weapons, threats or intimidations, kidnapping, extortion, fraud, discrimination, insults, and other. Drawing on the responses from the forty five migrants interviewed in both shelters, 36% of the migrants interviewed reported experiencing theft, 29% reported being discriminated against, 24% reported experiencing insults, 20% reported receiving threats or being intimidated, 16% reported experiencing physical violence and violence with weapons, 13% reported being extorted, 1% reported being kidnapped and experiencing fraud, less than 1% reported being sexually abused, and finally 27% of the respondents reported no experiences of violence and discrimination during their time in transit.

Actors responsible for violence in transit

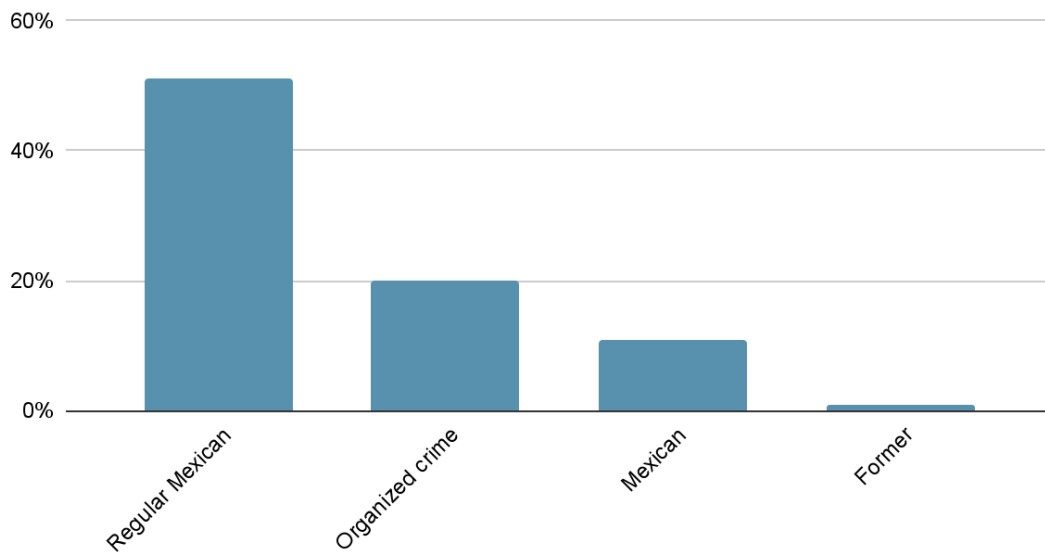


Figure 9: Actors responsible for the migrants' experiences of violence and discrimination

When the interviewees were asked in the quantitative section of the interview who was responsible for the experiences of violence and discrimination that they suffered while in transit from the moment they left their country of origin to when they arrived in Mexicali, the respondents reported on the following: regular Mexican citizens, organized crime groups, Mexican authorities, former partners, and people who they worked with. Analyzing the survey responses from the forty five migrants interviewed, more than half of the respondents (51%) reported on regular Mexican citizens, 20% reported it was the organized crime groups they encountered in their journey in transit, 11% reported the Mexican authorities, and less than 1% reported on people they

worked with and their former partners who they were involved with during their time in transit.

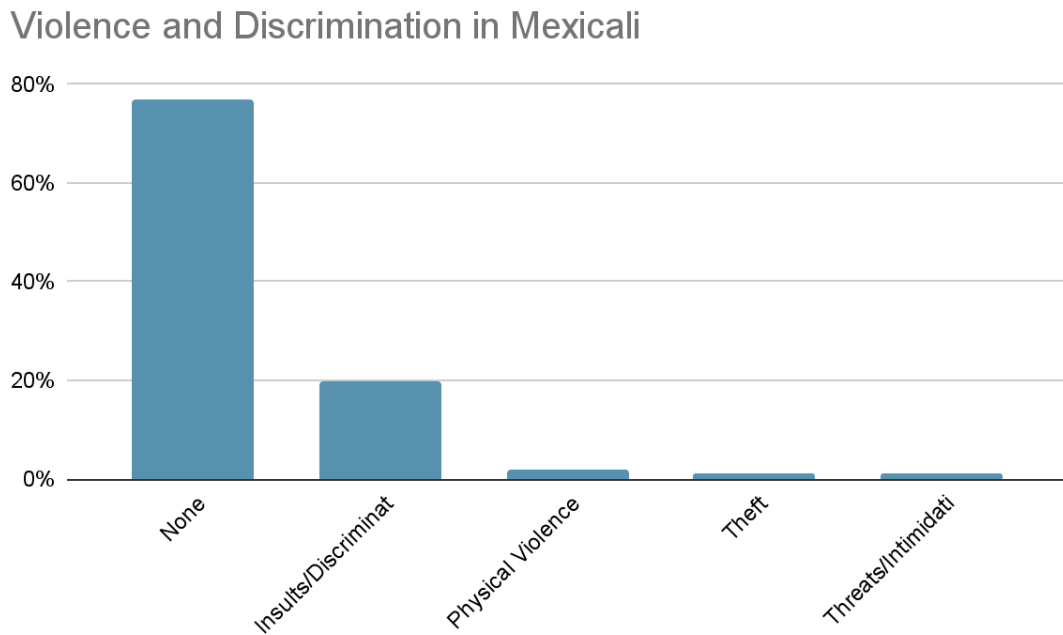


Figure 10: Migrants' experiences of violence, crime, and discrimination in Mexicali

According to the respondents' survey responses on whether they suffered experiences of violence and discrimination while living in Mexicali, the migrants reported being victims of theft, physical violence, violence with weapons, threats and intimidations, discrimination, and insults. Of the forty-five migrant responses surveyed, a majority of the respondents (77%) reported not experiencing any experience of violence and/or discrimination during their time living in Mexicali. However, 11% of the total

migrants interviewed reported that they experienced insults, 1% reported experiencing discrimination and threats or intimidations, and less than 1% reported being victims of theft, physical violence, and violence with weapons. Drawing on the findings and comparing the migrants' experiences of violence and discrimination in transit with their experiences living in Mexicali, there is a drastic difference in the amount of experiences reported and the quantity of migrants that reported each crime or discrimination. Therefore, the findings from the survey responses help shed light on whether the migrants would view the border city of Mexicali as a viable option to settle in or whether the migrants' experiences of violence and discrimination during their time in transit still plays a greater role in influencing their decision to keep attempting to journey northwards into the U.S.

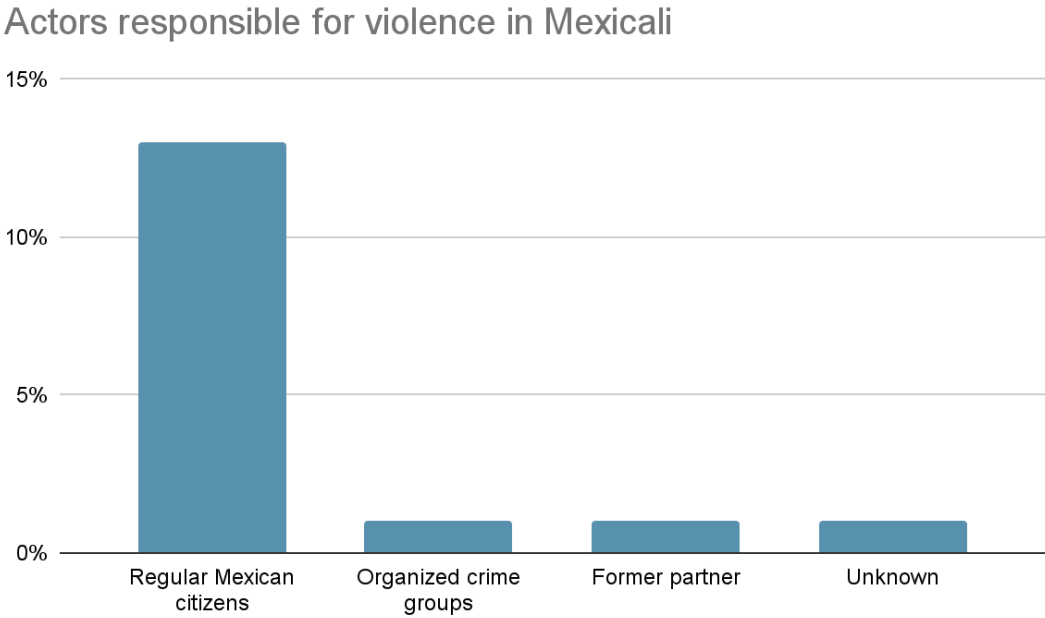


Figure 11: Actors responsible for migrants' experiences of violence and discrimination while living in Mexicali

When the respondents were asked who were responsible for their experiences of violence and discrimination while living in Mexicali, the migrants reported on regular Mexican citizens, organized crime groups, and responded that they did not know who was responsible. Drawing on the survey responses, 13% of the migrants reported that the people responsible for their experiences of violence were regular Mexican citizens and less than 1% of the total forty-five respondents reported on organized crime groups, Mexican authorities, and someone unknown. Again, the findings demonstrate a drastic decrease in the number of migrants reporting on Mexican citizens, Mexican authorities, organized crime groups, and partners as the people responsible for their experiences of violence or discrimination during their time in Mexicali as opposed to those responsible for their experiences while living in transit. However, some factors that might affect this drastic decrease in experiences of violence and discrimination in transit in comparison to in Mexicali are the duration of their stay in Mexicali and the fact that most of the respondents (78%) are living in one of the shelters and, therefore, are not exposed to violence and crime as the migrants who have been living in the city as long or who do not reside in a shelter with security resources.

3.5 Not a "Safe third country"

The process of extra-territorialisation refers to how states push out their migration controls outside of their own geographical boundaries into the neighboring states in order to deter, block, and filter out unwanted migration (Fitzgerald, 2019). Therefore, the migrants' experiences of violence throughout their journey in transit serves as a form of

remote control which hinders the migrants to begin their asylum process at the physical U.S. border. The way in which nation-states collaborate in the deterrence of migrants and global north countries practice their "hierarchy of sovereignty" over neighboring states in order to extend their borders into the neighboring states only reproduces the violence inflicted on migrant bodies throughout their time in transit (Fitzgerald, 2019). By declaring or designating transit countries such as México as "safe third countries" , the migrants are forced to remain in México and consider the country as a viable option for resettlement, despite the fact that a large percentage of migrants would not be able to resettle in the country due to their classification as a "highly vulnerable" population. Scholars Ramirez and Moreno define the categorization of migrants as "highly vulnerable" if they meet the following criteria that includes:

- a) the systems or form of life to deal with threats against one's life (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021)
- b) protection; which should be understood as in conjunction with previous experiences or events such as life threats (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021)
- c) social protections, which includes the protection of rights provided by the state (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021).

In conversation with Ramirez and Moreno's definitions of highly vulnerable populations, Bustamante's literature alludes "vulnerability" to structural reasons such as not being able to belong to a state due to lack of citizenship and due to the lack of documents to facilitate the journey in transit, which are caused by the restrictive

immigration policies set by the state, the migrants are unable to access crucial resources such as housing, employment, and medical resources (Bustamante, 2002). Vulnerability can be defined as stable and consistent over a long period of time or as recent, however, as Ramirez and Moreno explain, stable and recent vulnerability can also interlap based on the individual's experiences (Ramirez and Moreno, 2021). Drawing on the research findings from the summer of 2022, the data shows that in the sample population when comparing which migrants are considered "highly vulnerable" according to the migrants' experiences and demographic profiles, the women in the age group of 19-27 who are traveling alone and who have children are the migrants who would fall under the category due to their experiences of stable and recent vulnerability which began before leaving their country of origin, continued throughout transit, and is also recent during their time living in Mexicali.

Therefore, I argue that the women who fit in the category of highly vulnerable must be prioritized and considered when making policy, creating resources such as employment, and allocating funds for medical and psychological services in order to live safely during their time in transit. Otherwise, the research suggests that the migrants in this specific demographic will not be able to achieve a successful resettlement in Mexicali or in other cities in the republic. Moreover, this chapter proposes that gender-based violence in transit should be analyzed in its own separate category of violence in transit as the literature and the research conducted over the summer demonstrates that women suffering gender violence in transit experience violence at drastically higher rates than men.

When discussing the migrants' resettlement process in México, it is imperative to also analyze and consider the migrants' experiences of violence in transit while living in México since the findings suggest that if there is not a drastic decrease in the migrants' exposure to violence in México in comparison to their countries of origin, the migrants will not consider resettling in México as the country will not be a viable alternative for them to reside in. If the conditions the migrants face in México simply mirror the precarious conditions the migrants fled from in their countries of origin, the migrants will decide to continue their journey northwards as México is not a "safe third country".

Conclusion

Research Findings

- Drawing on the forty-five in-depth interviews conducted from mid-August to mid-September 2022, women in the age group of 19-27 with a median age of 23 who reported having children and not having a partner by definition of "high vulnerability" are the most vulnerable individuals of the sample as the migrant women in this category reported the most cases of violence and discrimination both in transit and while living in Mexicali, reported feeling unsafe in Mexicali, and consequently demonstrate experiencing the most difficult transition and resettlement process in México.
- Out of the sample of forty-five migrants interviewed during the fieldwork, the migrant profile that demonstrates the most successful resettlement or transition into México are migrant men in age group of their early 30s who identify racially as white, speak Spanish as their first language, had a stable income in their country of origin prior to arriving in México, were able to obtain employment shortly after arriving in Mexicali, and whom if they have a family, the migrant men reported that their family remain back in their countries of origin.
- The migrants reported different reasons for specifically choosing Mexicali as their border city destination before either attempting to cross into the U.S. or settling in the city, but the reason that was reported the most by migrants is due to the close proximity to the city of Algodones, Baja California as 56% of the migrants intended to cross the border through Algodones before arriving in Mexicali as

they alluded in their statements that crossing through Algodones would result in a successful crossing into the U.S.

- Moreover, 31% of the total respondents explained in their statements that they chose to migrate to Mexicali with the intention of crossing since they believed that crossing the border through Algodones or Mexicali was "safer and easier due to there being less law enforcement present".
- The survey findings demonstrate that 73% of the respondents had the intention of crossing into the U.S. when they left their country of origin and the other 27% of the respondents mentioned that they left their country of origin in order to escape the precarious conditions in their home country, however, did not have the intention of crossing into the U.S when they first left their countries of origin.
- When asked about where they plan to settle and live in the case that they are not able to cross into the U.S., most of the participants (86%) responded that they would remain in México, while 80% of the total respondents specifically mentioned that they would stay and reside in Mexicali.
- **Interest in permanent residency:** When asked whether they are interested in obtaining Mexican residency, the survey responses demonstrate that 37% of the respondents stated that they are interested in obtaining residency, 35% already applied for or currently have permanent residency, 20% stated they would consider Mexican residency only in the case that they cannot cross to the United States, and only 7% stated that they would not consider Mexican residency.

- **Employment:** Drawing on the quantitative data on employment, 38% of the total respondents reported that they had employment and out of the 38% of migrant workers, 41% are women and 59% are men.
- **Positive Difference in Quality of Life:** From the 73% of the total respondents who did report a positive difference in their quality of life living in Mexicali in comparison to their countries of origin, the responses varied from 45% of them reporting less violence and crime, 42% of the interviewees reported having more employment opportunities, 30% reported a more affordable cost of living (mentioning housing, food, and health), 21% reported a more welcoming environment, and one person, a 42 year-old man from Nicaraguas, attributed the difference in quality of life to less state violence and political persecution.
- **Negative Difference in Quality of Life:** From the 27% of the total respondents who reported a decrease in their quality of life, 59% of the respondents attributed the decrease in their quality of life to their feelings of insecurity due to the violence and crime rate that mirrors the precarious conditions that they faced in their own countries of origin.

Thesis Argument

While the goal for advocates is to aid the migrants, especially the most vulnerable population, in obtaining asylum in the U.S., the reality is that the probability of entering the U.S. either through asylum or through other methods is very slim. In fact, the Biden administration has decided to maintain the 125,000 admissions cap for refugee admissions for 2023 as the U.S. immigration backlog has reached an all-time

high at the end of 2022 (Roy, 2022). While the month of March, 2023 maintained a steady increase in the number of migrants who entered the U.S. in order to begin their asylum cases with approximately 200 migrants per day who entered through the Tijuana port of entry and 20 migrants who entered through Mexicali, the population of foreign migrants continued to increase in the Mexican northern border cities causing the shelters to become overcrowded and leaving numerous migrants without housing and other essential resources in the border cities (Strauss Center, 2023). Therefore, for the migrants awaiting their asylum process and living in Baja California's capital, Mexicali, the future might look unclear and for those migrants who are not able to cross the border into the U.S. and ultimately, decide to settle in México, it is beneficial to understand what their resettlement process entails and how that transitions looks different depending on the migrants' profiles or demographics.

Is resettlement even possible for such a large population of foreign migrants, from whom a majority initially intended to stay in the city temporarily, in a small border city such as Mexicali, Baja California? If so, is resettlement possible for every migrant demographic and how does the transition differ based on the migrants' demographic and experiences? Drawing on the forty-five in-depth interviews conducted in Mexicali during the summer of 2022 in two specific migrant shelters, the research findings analyze the resettlement process of migrants in the city and demonstrate the divergent experiences of migrants based on their different demographics and whether they are considered "highly vulnerable".

Moreover, the research examines how the migrants' access to essential resources in the city such as housing, employment, legal aid, among others play a great role in how the migrants are able to begin their resettlement process in Mexicali and how the city is aiding their transition through actors such as NGO'S, employment recruiters, and the migrant shelters. Throughout the research, I define a **successful resettlement** as a transition that represents upward mobility and who can increase their quality of life in comparison to their previous quality of life in their country of origin by increasing their income, decreasing their exposure to violence, and establishing community in their new home. However, I define an **unsuccessful resettlement** as being unable to attain employment and a stable income within the first few months of their arrival, living in precarious conditions that mirror the violence in their countries of origin, and not being able to socially adapt into the new environment.

While the research findings demonstrate that one of the most important factors that leads to a successful resettlement in the city is obtaining employment upon arrival to the city, another contributing factor is whether the migrants' exposure to violence and crime is drastically decreased in comparison to that experienced in their countries of origin. Since the women in the population sample were more likely to continue experiencing violence while living in Mexicali at a much higher rate than the migrant men, the migrant women's resettlement process was hindered and demonstrated the most difficult transition or resettlement process. Looking closer at the demographic of migrant women in the sample, the migrant women between the ages of 19-27 with a median age of 23, who reported having children and traveling alone without a partner,

portrayed the most unsuccessful resettlement into Mexicali and also portrayed cases of “high vulnerability”, meaning that if the city does not create the necessary resources catered towards this demographic, the women will most likely not be able to transition into Mexicali as México could not be a “safe third country” for them. In coming to this conclusion, the research also considers the migrants’ early decision- making process upon arrival to the city and how their experiences of violence and discrimination in transit as they travel northwards towards the border influence their decision to either decide to settle in México or continue the journey north into the U.S. Therefore, the research findings show that the migrants who experience more violence and discrimination while in transit are more likely to not consider remaining in México as their experiences in México mirror the conditions they lived through in their countries of origin. Again, the demographic that reported more experiences of violence and discrimination while living in transit were migrant women with an average age of 23.

As México is preparing for the next presidential election that will be held in July 2024, it is currently unclear what will be the future of migration policy in the country and therefore, how it will impact the migrants currently living inside the country. However, during a transition period, it is also an opportunity for creating updated policy and creating more resources for a population that would also benefit the country economically. In theory, México has over 30,000 employment vacancies that, if filled, would be beneficial for México’s economy, however, the research demonstrates that the state has not done enough to accelerate the hiring process, so that the migrants can obtain those employment opportunities (Migration Policy Center, 2019). While the

solution seems tangible, in practice, the state has not made the transition into the country and the employment process accessible for the migrants. Without the proper documentation such as the RFC or the CURP, the migrants are not permitted to obtain formal employment and so, in many cases, are led to obtain informal employment where they are not paid livable wages and do not have the same rights as other employees working in formal labor.

Recommendations

Therefore, there needs to be more policy created in regard to accelerating the process for the newly arrived migrants to be able to obtain the documentation needed to start working in order to begin their resettlement process in México. However, an obstacle that impedes the application process for migrants to acquire their work permits and visitor cards is how a great amount of the migrant population is living in transit and do not stay in the country for long which slows down the process for other migrants. México currently does not have the capacity or necessary infrastructure to serve the immense number of migrants who require legal assistance in order to obtain the documentation needed to obtain employment and begin the resettlement process in an adequate period of time.

Even after obtaining the necessary documentation to obtain employment in the city, there needs to be more resources or funds allocated towards the recruitment of the migrants in the workforce that is safe and fair to their transition needs. The issues

surrounding gendered work must be addressed, so that the migrant women, whose transition is the most difficult, are also able to find employment in the city upon their arrival. Drawing on the research and the forty-five survey responses, 38% of the interviewees reported having employment and out of the total respondents, only 13% are women, despite women making up 55% of the total sample. One of the reasons that prevents women from obtaining work in Mexicali upon their arrival, along with lack of documentation and lack of employment resources, is the lack of childcare services for their children. Therefore, there needs to be more resources available to this specific population of single migrant mothers who have arrived in the city with children in order to provide more opportunities for the migrant mothers to live and resettle in México in the case that they are not able to cross into the U.S. There is currently only one migrant shelter in Mexicali that exclusively serves migrant women and children, however, it is one of the migrant shelters with the lowest capacities in the city, so allocating more funds to such a shelter where the migrant women can feel protected and aided by the all-women staff currently at the shelter is imperative.

Other policy recommendations that would greatly improve the resettlement process of the migrant population who decide to reside in Mexicali permanently would be implementing more housing resources for their transition after leaving the shelter. Most of the migrant shelters in Mexicali only allow the migrants to stay in the shelter for up to four months, so the city needs to designate specific low-income housing for the newly arrived migrant population after their stay in the shelter

Contributions to the Literature

Currently most of the literature surrounding the migrant population at the border is regarding the migrants' asylum and entering the U.S., however, for the large majority of migrants who are unable to cross the border or who are waiting for their case to be heard in México, their lives remain in a limbo state. What becomes of the migrants who do not get to enter the U.S. and remain in México and how does this population adapt to their new home when that was not the initial plan when they arrived at the Mexican border city? The research intends to shed light on the migrant population who ultimately decided to begin a new life in Mexicali, whether that was the initial plan or not, and what that resettlement process entails in such a small city that lacks resources and funds for migrant communities. The research adds to the literature by demonstrating the migrants' early decision-making process on why they decided to arrive in Mexicali, how they are able to access different essential resources in Baja California's small capital, how the city and the city's different actors are aiding in their transition and understanding of the population's needs, and what are areas that require improvement in order to center the most vulnerable populations such as migrant women and mothers.

Drawing on previous integration policies and assimilation theories, the research intends to build on specific ideas such as the way in which assimilation into a new host society will not always result in upward mobility depending on existing society characteristics and how integration policies that focus solely on "refugee employability" are not always successful. However, the research also highlights the importance of centering such theories or policies from a Global South perspective as such concepts

cannot always be applied in the same way in countries such as in México or other Latin American countries.

Limitations of Research

One of the factors that affected the research findings is the timeline of the research as the interviews were conducted from mid-August to mid-September just a week after the current administration lifted the Migrant Protection Protocols and weeks before the Title 42 exceptions processing begun in Mexicali at the end of September 2022 (Migration Protection Protocols, 2022). Therefore, at the time there existed limited knowledge on the asylum process in the city and the amount of migrants in the city were drastically less than the number of migrants after the Title 42 exceptions processing began and the migrants were allowed to begin their asylum case in the United States. Moreover, due to the timeline of the interviews and the limited knowledge surrounding the Title 42 exceptions at the time, these factors could have influenced the respondents' decision making process and responses to the interview questions about settling in México.

Another limitation of the research and the data collected is the small sample size as I conducted a total of forty-five interviews that consisted of a sample of twenty-five women and twenty men. In comparison to other studies that include a sample size of over one hundred, the research findings are not as representative of a total population since it is a rather small sample. Moreover, a majority of the respondents reported

arriving in the city recently before the interview was conducted. Therefore, their length of stay in Mexicali greatly affected their responses regarding their future resettlement plans and feelings towards the city.

Finally, a limitation of the research is my own bias towards the city of Mexicali, Baja California as I lived in the city for most of my life and even though I lived in neighborhoods near the city's center that have a higher crime rate, I was extremely privileged to not experience violence or discrimination while living in Mexicali. Another potential limitation is my identity as a Latina woman as several interviewees were migrant women who were also around my own age group, however, I understand how I hold an immense privilege due to my citizenship status and ability to cross the international border between Mexicali and Calexico every day since I was a teenager who crossed the border twice a day to attend high school in the U.S. Therefore, even though being raised in Mexicali can be considered a limitation of the research, I also consider myself a product of the U.S. - México border and a person who can understand the border from a firsthand perspective as I witnessed this border every day for eighteen years of my life.

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