



## Migration Profile

### MEXICO

#### A. Executive Summary

Mexico is both the world's leading provider of migrants to the United States and the main transit territory for Central Americans and other migrants trying to reach that country. Although with relatively different characteristics, internal migration in Mexico also presents a universe of complexities, as it is favoured by historical labour migrations not only between municipalities, but also between states and regions of the Republic.

Mexico, with an immense territory and a population of more than 125 million inhabitants, is the country with the largest number of emigrants in the world, mostly living in the United States and providing an important source of cheap labour for that country. Due to its geographical position and the size of its territory and population, Mexico has an enormous strategic importance within the migratory system of the Western Hemisphere. It is not only the largest country of origin in the region, but also the obligatory transit route to the United States and, recently, it has become a destination place for migrants themselves. The Mexico-United States border is the busiest globally, not only because of Mexican transmigration, but also because of the transit of mixed flows arriving from Central America, other countries in Latin America and from other continents. It also has a high internal migration of labour workers and climate displaced persons.

In 1994, the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) among Mexico, Canada, and the United States entered into effect, expanding the common market of the three countries and opportunities for the development of investments in Mexico. At the same time, the labour market for Mexican migrants was expanded in the United States, mainly, but also in Canada.

That is why the connection between international and internal migration, the new configurations of local and United States labour markets, do not come as a surprise. In these scenarios, new refugee issues are arising, forcing the government to adopt new legal instruments to face these challenges. In Mexico also there is the big problem of human trafficking both for the purpose of labour and sexual exploitation. The report provides information on the legal framework that regulates these dynamics, as well as the role played by the main actors involved in the migration phenomenon.

## **B. Country Profile**

### **I. Basic Information**

Mexico has an area of 1,972,550 sq. km. It is bordered by the United States to the north, the Gulf of Mexico to the east, Belize and Guatemala to the south, and the Pacific Ocean to the west. According to data from the 2018 Census, its population was 125,200,000 inhabitants. The metropolitan area of the Valley of Mexico, where the capital is located, covers 1,700 sq. km of territory.

The Constitution of 1917 does not mention any official language, but practically 100% of the Mexican population speaks Spanish; however, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), 6 out of every 100 inhabitants aged 5 and over speak one of the 89 indigenous languages. According to INEGI, 88% of the population is Catholic, 5.2% Protestant and Evangelical, and 4.3% professes other religions.

The Mexican territory has a rich diversity of soil and environments for agriculture, with important deposits of minerals, including oil. However, during the last thirty years, agriculture has lost its importance in the calculation of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and, in its place, sectors such as trade and services have grown. Real estate and manufacturing, which includes mining and petroleum products, while still important, have also lost relative weight in the economy. The services sector, which covers tourism, trade, communications, and transport, contributes about 60% to GDP. The loss of jobs in agriculture and the industrial sector has influenced the increase of migration since the mid-nineties. Although, for the last decade, the growth of Mexican emigration has started to slow, the country also continues to be highly dependent on remittances and the binational labour market (United States – Mexico) plays an important role in the interdependence between the economies and societies of the two countries.

The Mexican State plays a key role in regulating migration to the United States, especially since it has signed a number of agreements with the US government to control immigration. On the border both from the north, adjacent to the United States, and to the south, with Guatemala, and in many cities throughout the Mexican territory, there are concentrations of several hundred thousand Central American, Caribbean, South American and other continental transmigrants who persist in their intention to cross over to the United States.

According to INEGI, GDP per capita during 2018 was \$9,715,00 (USD); however, problems with income distribution forces a significant percentage of the population into conditions of inequality and poverty. 23.4% of the inhabitants face challenges in meeting their basic needs, especially food. The average number of years of schooling is 15, and the literacy rate of adults aged 15 and over is 94.5%.

### **II. International and Internal Migrants**

According to data from the Migration Policy Unit and based on data from the 2020 Census of Mexico, 1,169,883 immigrants live in the country.<sup>i</sup> 50.5% have Mexican ancestry which means that they are children born abroad to Mexican parents, mainly in the United States. Of the latter, 67.3% are residents and 32.7% have been naturalised.

44% of foreigners reside in just five states of the Republic: Baja California 12.8%, Mexico City 9%; Chihuahua 8.5%; Jalisco 7.7%, and Tamaulipas 6%. According to data from the Ministry of the Interior (2021), in 2020 the country received 35,229 new temporary residents. That flow had decreased by 19.1% compared to 2019, due to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the documented temporary residents in 2020, 56% were men and 44% women. Of the total, 29.3% were workers, and 70% of these were men. 36.3% arrived because of family reunification (54.0% were women).

Of the total number of permanent residents, 53.2% were men and 46.8% women. The main reason for staying was family reunification (37.6%), of whom 50.2% were women. 13% of permanent residents were workers (65% men and 45% women). According to IOM, between January and March 2021, 31,492 migrants with irregular stay were located, 18% more than the previous year. Even with respect to the nationalities of origin, the largest number was from Honduras with 17,598 people, followed by Guatemala (9,422), and El Salvador (2,348). Of other countries, there were 2,124 immigrants arriving from Bangladesh, Senegal, Mauritania, Nepal, Burkina Faso, Russian Federation, Israel, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Palestine. However, these data did not yet record the significant influx of people from Haiti, Venezuela and Cuba who began to arrive from South America through Central America, from the second half of 2021. In the four-year period 2016-2020, Mexico expelled 409,757 exceeding the returns from the United States that totaled 322,223 migrants.<sup>ii</sup>

Despite the importance of international migration in Mexico, movements within the states of the Republic are more frequent and numerous. Although, as of 2010, this slowed down at the federal or national level, the flow between some states and regions rather increased. This usually occurs between border states, but also between the southern and northern areas of the territory. The states of origin of most of the internal migrants are located in the southeast: Guerrero, Tabasco, Veracruz, Chiapas, as well as Mexico City. The states which most internal migrants move to are Quintana Roo, Baja California Sur, Querétaro, Nuevo León, and Baja California.<sup>iii</sup>

According to INEGI, with data from the 2020 National Census, internal migration in Mexico has mobilised more than 15 million people, whose apparent causes are: 45.8% family reasons, 28.8% labour, 6.7% educational, 4% insecurity, and other 14.7%.<sup>iv</sup>

In addition, data from the Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH) estimates that between 2009 and 2020 there were 357,000 displaced people by conflicts and violence, and between 2020 and 2021, there were about 37,000 more displacements. According to these analyses, displacement by violence has worsened due to the so-called war on

drugs, but also due to clashes between the different groups that make up the so-called drug cartels.

### **III. Emigration and Skilled Migration**

Mexico has 11,796,178 migrants abroad. According to the Ministry of the Interior, in 2020 97.4% of them were in the United States. Their main states of origin were Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Zacatecas, Michoacán, Guerrero and Puebla. 52% of Mexicans in the United States were men and 48% women.

In 2019, 93.8% of Mexicans registered in the United States had been there for more than 10 years, and their age group was between 40 and 59 years, indicating a relative ageing of this migration. The average schooling is estimated at 43.2% below secondary, 38.9% with complete secondary, 11.4% higher technical and 6.5 professional and postgraduate.

In 2019, 19.8% of Mexicans in the United States worked in construction, 14.7% in hospitality and leisure, 12.7% in manufacturing and 12.1% in administrative work. It was estimated that 4,139,000 Mexicans resided in California, 2,611,000 in Texas, 662,000 in Illinois, 552,000 in Arizona and 269,000 in Florida, where most of them were concentrated. 71.5% received a salary as workers, 7.2% were self-employed, 7% from social assistance, 10.8% through multiple jobs. 31.8% were insured by the employer, 16.3% by the government, and 39% lacked health coverage.

Like Central Americans, the Mexican population had lower levels of education than people born in the United States and other immigrants. 82.2% of Mexicans only have a secondary school education or less, as do 73.9% of Central Americans. This might explain why the type of work held by these people is usually a low-paid job, but also because of the condition derived from their lack of proper immigration documentation.

### **IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)**

In 2017, INEGI estimated that there was an accumulation of the period 2006-2007 of some 329,917 people who were forced to move to the interior of the country. The main states of origin were Tamaulipas, Chihuahua, Mexico City and the State of Mexico due to public insecurity. The receiving states were Veracruz with the largest percentage of displaced people (22.18%), adjacent to Tamaulipas, becoming the interstate border with the largest corridor of internally displaced persons. In addition to Veracruz, the main receiving states were the State of Mexico, with 9.27%, Jalisco 7.32%, Puebla 6.89%, and Querétaro 6.14%.<sup>v</sup>

In the report of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid, it is recorded that between 2013 and 2021 the country received 194,146 refugee applications. Of the total number of cases, 63.2% were approved and 26.4% were rejected, while 10.4% were placed under Complementary Protection, which means that, even if they are not granted refuge, the applicant would not be returned to the territory of another country where their life would be threatened or would be in danger of being

subjected to torture. The approved resolutions favoured applicants from Honduras (42.8%), El Salvador (12.8%), Venezuela (10.9%), Cuba (12.3%), Guatemala (5.4%), Haiti (7.9%), and Nicaragua (3.2%). Also, according to UNHCR, between 1994 and 2018 there were 114,540 Mexicans holding refugee status in different countries of the world.

In 2019, the Government of Mexico signed an agreement with the United States, under which asylum seekers in the United States had to remain in Mexican territory until their application had been resolved. At the same time, the Mexican government adopted different measures to prevent the flow of Central Americans and other migrants transiting through its territory to reach the United States. Under the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, known as “Stay in Mexico”), thousands of asylum seekers were stranded at Mexican border cities.

In January 2021, a new US administration came into power and suspended the agreements adopted by the previous administration with Mexico, seeking other options to increase asylum seekers. However, in early December 2021, both governments agreed to reinstate the MPPs due to a US Supreme Court order, prompted by a lawsuit filed by the States of Texas and Missouri against the suspension of the 2019 settlement.

The government of Mexico, meanwhile, pledged not to return asylum seekers to their countries of origin and suggested the US government to seek options other than MPPs, because this policy had imposed unjustifiable humanitarian costs on migrants and did not eliminate the root causes of illegal immigration.

Forced displacement in Mexico has been recognised by the government and, despite the considerable internal mobility between states and municipalities, it is not possible to recognise the different causes of this phenomenon; however, the climate crisis has surely played an important role. Some 2.3 million Mexicans have been displaced within the country by the effects of climate change and natural disasters. This figure could be much higher than the displacements caused by drug trafficking and violence.<sup>vi</sup> The Valley of Mexico and many of the main cities, like Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, and others in different states have become over the decades the recipients of hundreds of thousands of displaced people. A silent displacement has been affected by rains and landslides, droughts and soil erosion and that according to Armelle Gouritin, professor of the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACT) and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), will increase in the coming decades. But the country will also continue to experience the effects of the regional migration crisis, which includes increasing flows of climate displaced people from Haiti and the countries of Northern Central America.

## **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

According to the Citizen Council for Security, Justice and Peace, of a group of 95 victims of human trafficking who were treated, most were recruited under a deceptive offer of employment (44%), another group fell into trafficking networks due to some condition of vulnerability (34%), and the

others through some other forms of deception. Girls, aged between 13 and 17, represent one of the groups most likely to be trafficked in prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation.

According to the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System (SESNSP), mentioned in a report by Hispanics in Philanthropy (HIP),<sup>vii</sup> Mexican authorities identified at least 550 victims of human trafficking in 2020, which meant an increase of 43% over the victims registered in 2016. Sexual exploitation was one of the main forms of trafficking for women and girls, and sexually diverse persons. Both men and boys were subjected to forced labour in the mining and construction sectors, while women were also pressured into domestic service. Children between the ages of 5 and 12 were victims of sexual abuse and pornography, as well as were forced to beg.

The types of exploitation mentioned are classified as follows: prostitution (45.2%), labour exploitation (26.6%), servitude (19%), begging (4.8%), illegal adoption of minors (2.4%), and use of minors in criminal activities (2.4%). By age, these victims fall into these categories: 41.1% under the age of 18, 28.4% between 18 and 30 years old, 9.5% between 31 and 50 years old, and 6.3% older adults. Central Mexico was mostly hit by human trafficking, but also the southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca were among those with the highest percentage of human trafficking. The Puebla-Tlaxcala corridor, Mexico City and the Gulf state of Veracruz are the hotspots for human trafficking.<sup>viii</sup>

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

According to the legal framework governing migration in Mexico, foreigners have access to the protection and respect of human rights, in accordance with the provisions of the country's Constitution and in compliance with the international treaties signed by the country. The 2011 Migration Act recognises that irregular migration is an administrative offence but not a crime, and states that public servants should not abuse migrants to facilitate their passage. Under this migration law, the country's migration policies are governed, seeking to guarantee the right of the State to authorise the entry and stay of foreigners in the national territory, as well as to safeguard the protection of human rights.

The Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection, and Political Asylum, and its regulations, also approved in 2011, outline the principles and procedures for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers that, as in matters of migration, are also established at the federal level.

Except for a few reforms in the area of migrant protection and, in particular, additions related to children's rights, the Mexican immigration legislation has not undergone other major changes. However, procedures to manage migration in Mexico are constantly influenced by changes in US legislation and policies. In that sense, in July 2019 the government of Mexico agreed to collaborate with the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) policy, approved by the US government, and this new policy in Mexico was referred to as "Stay in Mexico". The Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) went into effect in January 2019 and was implemented by the US Department of Homeland

Security (DHS), requiring that certain asylum seekers arriving overland in the US-Mexico border be returned to Mexico to wait for their immigration case to be processed. Mexico agreed to readmit foreigners who had entered the US to seek asylum after crossing its territory, and many of these foreigners relocated to Tijuana and other border cities.

With the change in the US administration in January 2021, the new government agreed to suspend the MPP policy; however, on August 13, 2021, the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas ordered the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to make good faith efforts to resume the MPP implementation. The government requested a stay of the order, but the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit denied it. The suspension request was later appealed to the US Supreme Court, but on August 24, 2021, the suspension request was denied. Although DHS will have to comply with the district court's ruling for the time being, it has appealed the full case to the Fifth Circuit and could still appeal the case to the Supreme Court as well. In early December 2021, the governments of Mexico and the United States re-established the 2019 agreements to re-implement the MPP policy.

In March 2020, with the onset of the pandemic, the US government applied a public health statute, enacted in 1944, to determine whether a contagious disease in a foreign country poses a serious danger of spreading in the United States "Title 42", and under it the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), was ordered to immediately expel anyone who entered the country without authorisation to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, without giving refugee applicants the opportunity to submit their applications. With the change of government in the United States in 2021, the expulsion order for children was exempted; however, according to figures from the National Institute of Migration, in the first year of the order the United States expelled to Mexico 24,644 migrants arriving from the countries of Northern Central America, most of them sent to Tamaulipas (15,710). The government of Mexico has pointed out to the United States that the country has no obligation to receive these people.

## **VII. Main Actors**

### *The State*

According to the Migration Law of the Republic of Mexico, in force since May 25, 2011, the agencies with competence over migration matters are: the Migration Secretariat, which directs Mexico's migration policy; the Mexican Institute of Migration, aimed at implementing migration policy: entry and exit of nationals and foreigners, deportations, registration of foreigners, management of migratory stations, coordination of migrant care groups, among others; the National System for the Integral Development of the Family, the State Systems and Mexico City that provide social assistance for the care of migrant children and adolescents who require services for their protection; and, finally, the National Women's Institute, which carries out inter-institutional actions to prevent violence against migrant women. Other bodies and instruments come from the International Treaties that protect the rights of migrants and from which the

National Human Rights Commission, the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims and the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance operate.

For its part, the objective of the National Institute of Migration (INM) is to monitor the migratory status of people, review documents, give them asylum in a migratory stay and safeguard their human rights, by providing them with security and permanent assistance.

### *The Catholic Church*

The main organisations and institutions of the Catholic Church, whose mission is the protection and the rights of migrants, are the Dimension of the Pastoral Care of Human Mobility of the Episcopal Conference of Mexico, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Scalabrinian Missionaries, the Franciscan Network for Migrants, the Migrant Houses in all the states of Mexico and the CLAMOR Network, Mexico chapter.

The Pastoral Care Dimension of Human Migration aims to attend, accompany, welcome, and advise people who are on the move in Mexican territory. Under his pastoral guidance, there are more than 120 shelters throughout the country, in addition to a larger number of soup kitchens and a network of services, catering to the vital needs of migrants, to offer legal and psychological advice and health care. Through programmes to assist migrants and refugees, they contribute to ensuring the physical and psychological integrity of people who have had to leave their homes because of poverty, violence or persecution.

The Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo (Scalabrinians) provides comprehensive care to migrants, victims of trafficking and other abuses and applicants for refugee status in Mexico. In addition, it provides shelter, psychological, medical, legal care, and support for labour insertion. It also advocates with the federal and state governments, to improve migration policies.

The Jesuit Refugee Service of Mexico is defined as a mission of the Society of Jesus, composed of a plural team of men and women, who accompany migrants in transit, in need of international protection, refugees, deportees, returnees, regular and irregular settlers, people from the communities of origin or Mexican expellers, disappeared and internally displaced persons, with various care and reception programs through migrant shelters, as well as the formation of work teams and pastoral agents, institutional strengthening, analysis and advocacy in decision-making and both legal and psychosocial accompaniment to people.

The Franciscan Network for Migrants was created in April 2018 in Guadalajara with the aim of creating a network of lay and religious men and women, who are affiliated with the Franciscan family and deal with migration issues. The Franciscan Family helps migrants with information, support and guides that will reduce their risks and to find help while on the move. They provide training in human rights, legal advice, and psychological support. In addition, many of them offer shelter and hospitality.

In conjunction with the Pastoral Dimension of Human Migration, a large number of dioceses and parishes also provide various activities to assist migrants in many communities along the transit routes.

Over the past decade, the US bishops have actively engaged in cross-border collaboration with Mexican bishops, with whom they meet twice a year on either side of the border to coordinate work for the pastoral care of migrants, described in a joint pastoral letter.<sup>ix</sup> Various Mexican congregations and pastoral centres also hold binational and regional initiatives to coordinate pastoral activities on behalf of migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking.<sup>x</sup>

### *International organisations*

Among the international organisations that offer care services to migrants there are the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO). They all work together to “help address the growing challenges of migration management at the operational level, foster understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration; and to ensure respect for the human dignity and well-being of migrants.”

### *Other Organisations*

In Mexico, there is a wide range of civil organisations that deal with the phenomenon of migration. Some of them belong to networks with a wide national and international presence. These organisations are made up of a large number of agencies that conduct research, provide advocacy services for the protection of the rights of both Mexican and foreign migrants, offer psychosocial support and other services that include a network of shelters to receive migrants in transit.

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## D. Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Migration Policy Unit, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> Morales Gamboa, Abelardo, 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> Gordillo, G., & Plassot, T., 2017.

<sup>iv</sup> INEGI, 2021.

<sup>v</sup> Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights, 2018.

<sup>vi</sup> Hernández, S., 2020.

<sup>vii</sup> HIP is a non-governmental group working in Latin America and the Caribbean. HIP publishes its report on human trafficking every four years.

<sup>viii</sup> Insight Crime How Human Trafficking Worsened in Mexico During COVID-19, 2021

<sup>ix</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Strangers No Longer Together on the Journey of Hope, A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States*

<sup>x</sup> *No Queda de Otra: An Exploration of the Root Causes of Forced Migration to the Southern Border*.