



4Mi Cities: Data Collection on Urban Mixed Migration Mexico City Report

January 2022



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Torre Mayor, Ciudad de México, Mexico, January 2016.

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About this report

This city report presents the work carried out by the Mixed Migration Centre and the Mayors Migration Council (shortened to MMC², given the matching acronyms) in Mexico City, as part of a pilot of the 4Mi Cities project.

In close partnership with city governments at the frontline of migrant reception and inclusion, 4Mi Cities collected data on the needs, assets, and aspirations of urban migrants and refugees as they interact with local policies and services in three Latin American cities (Barranquilla, Medellín, and Mexico City). Data collected will be used by city governments involved in the project, as well as humanitarian and development actors, to improve their current migration policies and responses at city level.

The research methods, data sources and analysis structure are aligned across the project cities, to allow comparisons between the specific situation of refugees and migrants across locations. The other reports can be found here:

[4Mi Cities: Data Collection on Urban Mixed Migration - Barranquilla City report](#)

[4Mi Cities: Data Collection on Urban Mixed Migration - Medellín City report](#)

The 4Mi Cities pilot project in Latin America and the Caribbean was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The views expressed herein should however not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Responsibility for the content of this report lies entirely with the Mixed Migration Centre and the Mayors Migration Council

About the Mixed Migration Centre

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, North Africa, West Africa and Latin America & Caribbean) and a central unit in Geneva. It is a leading source of independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The Mixed Migration Centre aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. Its overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The Mixed Migration Centre is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures its work is grounded in operational reality, the Mixed Migration Centre acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the Mixed Migration Centre does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on the Mixed Migration Centre visit the website: www.mixedmigration.org

About the Mayors Migration Council

The Mayors Migration Council (MMC) is a mayor-led organization that helps cities shape national and international action on migration and displacement. Its mission is to ensure that global responses to pressing challenges—from pandemics to the climate crisis—both reflect and address realities on the ground for the benefit of migrants, displaced persons, and the communities that receive them.

To fulfil its vision, the Mayors Migration Council secures cities' formal access and representation to national, regional, and international policy deliberations; builds cities' diplomatic, advocacy, and communications skills so they can effectively influence decisions; unlocks technical and financial resources to cities so they can deliver better outcomes on the ground; and helps cities implement local solutions efficiently and at scale to accelerate global commitments.

Created by mayors for mayors, the Mayors Migration Council is a nimble team of political advisors and urban practitioners led by a Leadership Board composed of the mayors of Amman, Bristol, Freetown, Kampala, Los Angeles, Milan, Montreal, and Zürich. It is managed as a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and operate with the institutional support of Open Society Foundations, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Robert Bosch Stiftung, in addition to other project-based donors.

For more information on the Mayors Migration Council visit their website: www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org



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List of acronyms

COMAR	Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (“Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados”)
FGD	Focus group discussion
INM	National Migration Institute (“Instituto Nacional de Migración”)
IO	International organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SIBISO	Secretariat of Social Inclusion and Welfare (“Secretaría de Inclusión y Bienestar Social”)
STyFE	Secretariat of Labour and Employment Promotion (“Secretaría de Trabajo y Fomento al Empleo”)
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Figures, tables and boxes

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Summary and key findings

This report aims to fill information gaps on the experience of refugees and migrants in Mexico City. It is grounded in secondary sources, focus group discussions, and the responses to a quantitative survey. After a short introduction on the city's mixed migration dynamics and the local responses to these movements, the report presents the main findings of the project. The report concludes by specifying the implications of the findings for policy and programming and elevating the city's uptake of the evidence and their commitments on policy and programming for refugees and migrants.

Key findings emerging from the surveys implemented in Mexico City include:

- **Mexico City gives refugees and migrants the chance for a new beginning:** Even though one-third of respondents consider their life as migrants in the city has been harder than expected, the vast majority (80%) intend to stay there. They found better access to food (56%), healthcare (54%) and livelihoods (50%) in Mexico City compared to their country of origin. Most respondents stated having good relations with the local population in their neighbourhood (75%) and where they work (85%), in contrast with their relatively high perception of discrimination against refugees and migrants.
- **Refugees and migrants rarely engage with the authorities.** As a consequence, their access to justice is limited: of those respondents who were victims of a crime or attempted crime, only 30% filed a complaint about it. Additionally, respondents expressed a low sense of community in Mexico City, as only 12% of them stated feeling like they belong to one. Finally, respondents mentioned a low level of participation in local decision-making processes: the majority (71%) do not participate in decision-making processes at either the neighbourhood or the city level.
- **Refugees and migrants face obstacles in finding sources of livelihood.** Most respondents had an informal employment contract (65%) and the share of those who are unemployed in their destination city is higher compared to their countries of origin. For those who do have a job, earnings are often insufficient: 22% stated that the household's income is never enough to cover basic needs, while 40% stated they can only cover the household's needs sometimes.
- **Access to healthcare was high among respondents but often depended on emergency services.** Receiving specialized services for people with disabilities and for mental health needs is however much more difficult, according to respondents. Only 5% reported having had access to mental health services, against 79% having experienced symptoms of mental ill-health since they arrived in Mexico City. As for respondents who mentioned having a person with a disability within their household, more than half (53%) have not been able to access specialized services.
- **Children between 0 and 5 years of age are not accessing state-run childcare and early childhood education.** 32% of respondents stated that children 0-5 in their household do not have access to daycare of any kind, while 50% mentioned that they are cared for by relatives. No respondents with children 0-5 mentioned their children being enrolled in a local/national government-run children centre (CADI, "Centros Asistenciales de Desarrollo Infantil). School enrolment also presents obstacles among children over 5, the main barriers being lack of documentation (most often school records), and insufficient places in schools.
- **Assistance to refugees and migrants is more focused on short-term needs than long-term integration.** Most respondents (60%) received assistance after arriving in Mexico City; this included food (42%), legal aid and representation to apply for asylum or regularize their immigration status (42%), housing support (27%), medical care (22%), and general information (23%). However, very few received livelihoods-related assistance or guidance on their rights as refugees and migrants: only 7% of respondents had accessed employment and/or training programmes and 5% received information on their rights.
- **Central American respondents fared worse compared to other nationalities** in many aspects related to living in Mexico City as a refugee or migrant, including access to livelihoods, living conditions and discrimination. This might be due to several factors including, on the one hand, their lower education level – which could translate into less qualified jobs and lower salaries – and, on the other, the fact that they more frequently reported having an irregular immigration status in Mexico compared to other nationalities, which limits their integration in the city. Additional qualitative information also indicates that most Venezuelan and Colombian citizens who migrate to Mexico City do so by plane as they have more financial resources compared to fellow nationals who move to neighbouring countries on foot.

Figure 1. Map of Mexico City



Source: INEGI (2018) [Mapa de CDMX. División por demarcación territorial.](#)

About the 4Mi Cities project

Localized data and analysis on migration is often limited, hampering city government decisions and policy development. The Mixed Migration Centre and the Mayors Migration Council (shortened to MMC², given the matching acronyms), working in close partnership with three city governments (Medellín and Barranquilla in Colombia, and Mexico City), designed and implemented a pilot data collection project called 4Mi Cities. MMC² developed and applied a new 4Mi toolkit to find out specifically about refugees' and migrants' urban experience in a way that can support improved policy and service provision at the city level,

What is 4Mi?

Set up in 2014, 4Mi is a unique network of field enumerators situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs. It aims to offer a regular, standardized, quantitative and globalized, system of collecting primary data on mixed migration. 4Mi predominantly uses a closed question survey to invite respondents to anonymously self-report on a wide range of issues that results in extensive data relating to individual profiles, migration drivers, means and conditions of movement, the smuggling economy, aspirations and destination choices. 4Mi data allow MMC and its partners to inform migration policies, debates, and protection responses for people on the move through the production of high-quality quantitative analysis grounded in evidence.

Like many other urban centres, the three cities included in this pilot – Barranquilla, Medellín, and Mexico City – all host refugee and migrant populations. Whether they represent an intended, or final, destination or not, they offer economic opportunities, access to services, and a diaspora community, but at the same time, barriers such as xenophobia and lack of knowledge regarding available services and programmes persist. In addition, access to services is often tied to regular immigration status, which can be difficult to obtain. Access to livelihoods can also be a challenge, along with housing. City governments have made efforts to meet refugees' and migrants' needs by developing policies, and designing assistance programmes, but gaps persist.

4Mi Cities aims to build evidence to better inform local responses to mixed migration in cities and create a strong case for national and international legal, fiscal and policy frameworks that enable cities to adequately provide necessary services to refugee and migrant populations. The data collected will be used by city governments involved in the project, as well as humanitarian and development actors, to improve their current migration policies and responses at city level.

Figure 2. 4Mi Cities project locations



1. Methodology

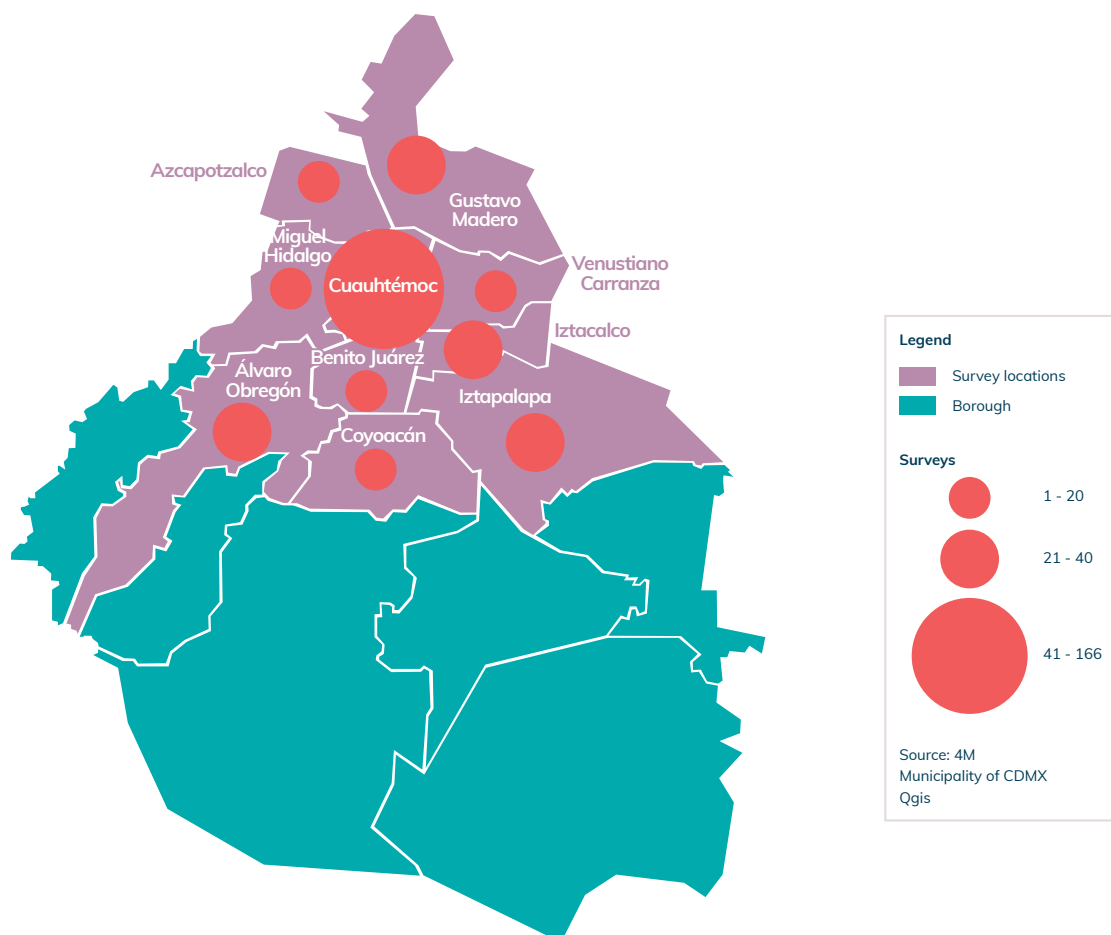
The research questions that the 4Mi Cities project set out to answer are:

1. What are the profiles of refugees and migrants in Mexico City?
2. What are the reasons behind their decision to choose Mexico City as a destination?
3. What are the protection risks and challenges they face in the city?
4. What are the opportunities that refugees and migrants encounter?
5. What access do they have to services in the city?
6. Are refugees and migrants satisfied with their decision to migrate to Mexico City and what are their future intentions?

The 4Mi Cities project took a mixed-methods approach, including both qualitative and quantitative research as well as several consultation and validation workshops. The pilot of the project in Mexico City was conducted between June and October 2021 and was based on the following activities:

- **Urban context analysis**, largely based on secondary sources and a select number of key informant interview with city government staff.
- **Two focus groups with:** i) female refugees and migrants; and ii) LGBTI refugees and migrants.
- **Three workshops with mixed migration actors.** Experts from the public and private sector, IOs, NGOs, and UN agencies participated in: i) a mapping workshop to determine key locations where the target population lives and gathers and to identify sites for data collection; ii) a survey workshop to ensure that the information to be collected by the project would fill gaps and meet the needs of local actors; and iii) a validation workshop to discuss results with city government staff and other local actors.
- **301 interviews with refugees and migrants** conducted by 10 4Mi Cities' enumerators in 10 boroughs ("demarcaciones") of Mexico City: Álvaro Obregón, Azcapotzalco, Benito Juárez, Coyoacán, Cuauhtémoc, Gustavo A. Madero, Iztapalapa, Miguel Hidalgo and Venustiano Carranza.

Figure 3. 4Mi Cities' sample distribution



The 4Mi Cities survey covered six main themes relating to the research questions: i. demographic and migration profile; ii. housing; iii. access to services (healthcare, mental health, education, and early childcare); iv. livelihood opportunities and challenges; v. protection risks and access to justice; and vi. life in the city (interactions with the local population, with city government and NGOs, access to public places and transportation, among other topics). The closed-question survey of 95 questions was answered only by refugees and migrants (18 years and older) who had been residing in Mexico City - for more than three months and less than five years at the time of the interview. The surveys were complemented by the focus group discussions, which covered the same topics with particular population groups (women, LGBTI persons).

Several limitations to the data are worth noting. As the 4Mi Cities sampling process was not randomized and three specific data collection sites were prioritized, the survey responses are not representative of the entire refugee and migrant population in the city of Mexico City. Additionally, the responses of participants in the 4Mi Cities survey cannot be independently verified, and there may be response bias. Nonetheless, the findings from the survey can provide important insights into the life of refugees and migrants in Mexico City. Informed consent and anonymity were communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the surveys.

The next section of the report will present the context overview, based on the secondary data review and key informant interviews. The report then presents analysis of the survey and focus group discussion results, according to the themes in the research questions.

2. Context overview

2.1 Migration dynamics in Mexico City

Mexico City, the capital of Mexico, is the country's most populous city with 9,209,944 inhabitants.¹ The larger Mexico City Metropolitan Area ("Zona Metropolitana del Valle de México") is one of the largest urban agglomerations in the world. This area grew over time to absorb surrounding locations: it contains over 60 municipalities, including municipalities from the neighbouring State of Mexico and the State of Hidalgo. The total population of the metropolitan area amounts to more than 23 million people according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI).² In addition, Mexico City is also one of the most important financial and cultural centres of Latin America.

Located in the centre of Mexico, Mexico City has long been a transit and destination location for a variety of profiles of people on the move. The city has the largest share of foreign residents in Mexico, representing 31.4%³ of foreigners in the country. Official data indicate that regular migrants residing in Mexico City come mainly from the United States (US), Spain, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, and Canada.⁴ In recent years, it has increasingly become a destination for mixed migration movements⁵ from Venezuela and Central America – mainly Honduras and El Salvador – including refugees and migrants who left their country of origin due to violence, political instability, and economic hardship. Migration to and through Mexico has also become more visible in the context of the so-called "migrant caravans" between 2018⁶ and 2019.⁷ According to the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR), while the State of Chiapas receives the majority of asylum applications among Mexican federal states (70% of total requests nationwide between January and July 2021), Mexico City comes second (15%).⁸

1 INEGI (2021) [En la Ciudad de México somos 9 209 944 habitantes: censo de población y vivienda 2020.](#)

2 Massachusetts Institute of Technology (n.d.) [The Mexico City Metropolitan Area \(MCMA\): Case Study Initiative.](#)

3 Rendón y Wertman (2017) [Reintegración migrante: Un modelo social, económico y empático para el retorno.](#)

4 Unidad de Estudios de Finanzas Públicas (2020) [Ciudad de México 2020: un diagnóstico de la desigualdad socio territorial.](#)

5 "Mixed migration refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers." Source: [Mixed Migration Centre.](#)

6 Sin Fronteras IAP (2018) [Una propuesta desde la Sociedad Civil para una Agenda progresiva por la movilidad humana en la CDMX.](#)

7 Gandini, L. et al. (2019) [Caravanas migrantes: las respuestas de México.](#)

8 COMAR (2021) [La COMAR en números: Julio 2021.](#)

Although not the subject of this report, in addition to international migration, the city is also the main destination of internal displacement mainly due to violence by criminal groups and drug cartels⁹ as well as displacement that is related to climate impacts and environmental factors.¹⁰

Mexico City is also a destination for Mexican returnees who, after migrating to the US and settling there for some time, return voluntarily to their country of origin, as well as those deported from the US against their will. While some of these returnees lived in Mexico City before migrating, others were originally from other parts of the country and have no support network in the city but believe they will find better opportunities in the capital compared to their place of origin, according to 4Mi Cities additional qualitative data.

2.2 Local responses to migration

Mexico City is one of the 32 autonomous states that make up the federation of the United Mexican States. Formerly referred to as the Federal District, the city acquired state status with the adoption of its own Constitution in 2017.¹¹ As the Federal District, the capital city was limited in making its own decisions. As Mexico City, it has autonomy in all matters concerning its political and administrative organization.¹² It is divided into 16 boroughs (“demarcaciones”): decentralized political-administrative bodies.¹³

Based on its experience as a destination for people on the move, Mexico City has started developing a specialized legal and policy framework, which includes the adoption of a Charter for the Right to the City,¹⁴ the Law on Interculturality, Migrant Support and Human Mobility and the Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination in the Federal District.¹⁵ The Political Constitution of Mexico City¹⁶ also introduces a narrative of a hospitable, diverse, inclusive, and human rights-based city.

The actions implemented by the government of Mexico City are developed jointly and in coordination with federal authorities.¹⁷ The government of Mexico City is led by a Head of Government and is divided into Secretariats, which are equivalent to ministries. The Secretariats and other governmental bodies offer social programmes effective throughout the year as well as temporary programmes (“acción social”), some of which are specifically targeted at refugees and migrants.¹⁸ The Secretariat of Inclusion and Social Welfare (SIBISO), which includes a Sub-directorate for Migrants, designs and implements public policies and actions to assist migrants, refugees, and returnees in the city. Among other things, the SIBISO provides information to displaced persons, internal migrants, returnees, international migrants and refugees living in Mexico City on how to access documentation, health, and employment opportunities.

Other ministries, besides SIBISO, are also relevant for the local integration of refugees and migrants. In employment-related matters, for instance, the Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion (STyFE) is currently coordinating the implementation of a new inclusive labour policy that fosters decent work for refugees and migrants. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, STyFE created a support programme for residents of Mexico City who lost their formal employment during the public health emergency, including refugees and migrants.¹⁹ The programme provides economic support to people who lost their jobs after January 1st, 2019 through unemployment insurance and improves their employment reintegration opportunities through training and connection to job offers. For this programme, Mexico City is a grantee of the Global Cities Fund, described below.

9 Insight Crime (2021) [Violencia de carteles agudiza desplazamiento interno en México.](#)

10 El Sol de México (2021) [Cambio climático empujó a 100 mil mexicanos fuera de su hogar.](#)

11 SEGOB (2016) [Acuerdo general del Pleno del Consejo de la Judicatura Federal por el que se cambia la denominación de Distrito Federal por Ciudad de México en todo su cuerpo normativo.](#)

12 La Voz de Galicia (2016) [La Ciudad de México deja de ser distrito federal y se convierte en estado.](#)

13 Gobierno de México (2017) [Alcaldías de la CDMX, un cambio de paradigma.](#)

14 Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora (2019) [La ciudad intercultural: panorama general sobre el proyecto de Hospitalidad en la Ciudad de México.](#)

15 Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (2018) Ley Federal para [Prevenir Eliminar la Discriminación](#)

16 Congreso de la Ciudad de México (2020) [Constitución Política de la Ciudad de México.](#)

17 Procuraduría Ambiental y del Ordenamiento Territorial de la CDMX (2018) [Ley Orgánica de Alcaldías de la Ciudad de México.](#)

18 [Sistema de Información del Desarrollo Social | SIDESO \(s.f.\) Programas Sociales de la Ciudad de México.](#) The current government also created a registry of international migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and Mexican returnees in Mexico City, known as “Padrón de Huéspedes”. See SIBISO (2020) [Padrón de huéspedes y migrantes en retorno de la CDMX.](#) Registration automatically generates a proof of residence in Mexico City and can be used as an identity document to access social programmes. Key informant interview in Mexico City, September 15, 2021.

19 Gobierno de la Ciudad de México (2020) [Gaceta Oficial de la Ciudad de México No.274.](#)

Mexico City's Inclusive Income Protection Programme

Mexico City is one of the first five city grantees of the Global Cities Fund, the Mayors Migration Council's response to the unmet needs of cities as they support migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people in the face of pressing global challenges. Mexico's project which expands a municipal income protection programme led by the Secretariat of Labor and Employment Promotion (STyFE) assists 450 migrants, refugees and displaced persons and connects them to local services (education and health) so they can settle in the city. The Inclusive Income Protection Programme has catalyzed a collaboration among three city government secretariats previously operating independently. For the first time, STyFE, the Secretariat of Social Inclusion and Welfare (SIBISO), and the Secretariat of Health (SEDESA) have come together to deploy a holistic response to the main challenges facing migrants, refugees, and IDPs affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes coupling direct cash assistance with services related to employability, obtaining personal identification, and access to health care.

The city government also created a working group that includes the main non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with refugees and migrants in Mexico City, with the objective of coordinating actions in response to mixed migration flows. This working group is coordinated by the SIBISO and 31 NGOs participate, including grassroots organizations of refugees and migrants and Mexican returnees.

Each local municipality within Mexico City (*Alcaldías*) are also expected to adjust existing social programmes to include refugees and migrants. The operating rules²⁰ for municipality-level programmes only allow refugees and migrants to access services and programmes in the borough ("demarcación") where they reside. However, each *Alcaldía* must review each individual request and can decide to approve requests coming from residents of different municipalities as an exception to the general rule.²¹

3. Profile of 4Mi Cities respondents

3.1 Survey respondents

301 refugees and migrants were interviewed for this project: 49% of respondents were men, while 50% were women and 1% self-identified as another gender. The majority were between 25 and 44 years old (59%), had completed secondary (56%) or tertiary education (31%) and had regular immigration status (86%). Most respondents were single (50%) while 24% were married. The majority were from South America (60%), followed by Central America (32%) and the Caribbean (6%)²² (see Figure 4).

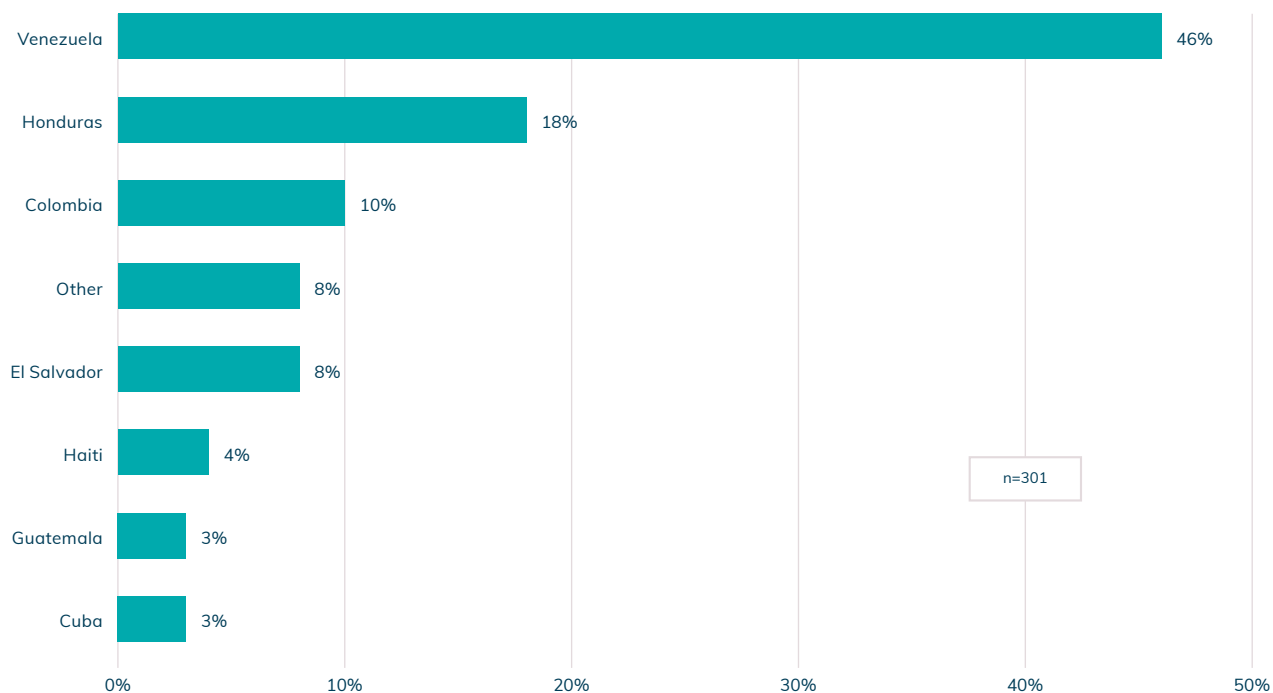
Disaggregated data indicates that Central American respondents had a lower education level compared to those from South America: 34% of Central Americans had only completed primary education, compared to 2% among Venezuelans and 5% among respondents from other South American countries; at the same time, only 11% of Central American respondents had a university degree, compared to 48% of Venezuelan respondents and 28% of respondents from other South American countries. Central American respondents were also more likely to be in irregular status (26%) compared to other nationalities (only 5% among Venezuelans, for instance).

20 Provisions to which some federal programmes and funds are subject to, to provide transparency and ensure the timely and efficient application of public resources.

21 Key informant interview in Mexico City, September 15, 2021.

22 South American nationalities represented among respondents included Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia; Central American nationalities included Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Nicaragua and Costa Rica; and Caribbean nationalities included Haiti and Cuba.

Figure 4. Respondents' country of nationality



Note: results for the "other" answer option include 8 countries with percentages lower than 1% (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru).

Survey data also includes some information regarding the respondents' household. The average household consisted of 2.6 people; in total the survey gathered data on 797 people. Most household members were between 18 and 44 years old. 33% of households included at least one child and the average number of children per household with children was two. 5% of respondents were single heads of household with children. In addition, 25% of respondents mentioned their household included at least one person with specific needs, including lone adults over 60 years of age in charge of children (7%) and persons with disabilities (6%).

3.2 Focus group discussion participants

11 refugees and migrants participated in two FGDs. The distribution of respondents' nationalities, age group, type of residence permit, and time of residence in Mexico City was as follows:

Table 1. Focus group discussion overview

Focus group	1	2
Target population	Women	LGBTI persons
Number of participants:	6	5
Age group		
18-59 years of age	6	5
60+ years of age	0	0
Type of residence permit		
Without a residence permit	6	0
With a residence permit		2
Asylum-seeker	0	0
Refugee		3
Place of origin		
Colombia	0	1
Guatemala	1	0
El Salvador	1	0
Honduras	4	0
Perú	0	1
Venezuela	0	3
Length of residence in Barranquilla		
Between 3 & 6 months	6	0
Between 6 months & 1 year	0	2
Between 1 & 2 years	0	0
Between 3 & 5 years	0	3

4. Life in Mexico City²³

Mexico City is often the first destination option for refugees and migrants, especially those coming from South America, including Venezuela. 64% of respondents did not stop in another city within Mexico before arriving in Mexico City. According to focus group discussion (FGD) participants, those who did make a first stop somewhere else before reaching Mexico City stopped in the states of Quintana Roo (Cancún) or Chiapas (Tapachula). Additional qualitative data also indicates that those who had stopped in Quintana Roo either stayed there for a short layover during their journey by plane or had initially settled there and later decided to move onward in search of better economic opportunities, due to the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector.

Presence of family or friends and employment opportunities are the main factors for choosing Mexico City as a destination. Disaggregated data indicates that Venezuelan respondents were more likely to have chosen Mexico City to reunite with their friends and family, compared to refugees and migrants with other nationalities. As for the main reasons that led them to leave their country of origin, respondents often mentioned more than one:²⁴ 58% of respondents reported economic reasons, followed by violence and insecurity (55%) and rights and freedoms (33%). Only 1% of respondents mentioned leaving their country of origin because of natural disasters or environmental factors. Disaggregated data indicates that Venezuelan respondents more often left their home country because of economic reasons (78%), followed by violence, insecurity, and conflict (55%), rights and freedoms (46%) and access to services/corruption (32%). Central Americans, on the other hand, mostly left their country because of violence, insecurity, and conflict (71%), economic reasons (41%), rights and freedoms (24%) and personal or family reasons (19%).

Despite the challenges in accessing livelihoods and basic services, detailed below, **most respondents consider that Mexico City has offered something to them and their families, especially those who have been in the city for longer:** Only 6% of respondents consider that the city has not offered them anything, most of them new arrivals and Central Americans. 80% of respondents intend to stay in Mexico City, while 12% plans to move to another city within Mexico. Those who intend to move onward to another country (5% of respondents) are mostly Central Americans and their final destination is the US.

Qualitative data also indicates that Mexico City offered LGBTI refugees and migrants the chance of feeling free to be themselves. LGBTI FGD participants reported not having felt discriminated against because of their sexual orientation and gender identity in the city.

4.1 Documentation and regularization

72% of respondents had a residence permit at the time of the interview, which facilitates job security, housing, and access to public services. Similarly, **79% of respondents reported that all the children in their household have a permit,** while 6% declared that only some children have it. **Of those without a residence permit, 57% had already applied for one,** while 29% would like to do so but did not have the necessary information.

Interest in seeking asylum in Mexico is high: 76% of respondents had already applied for asylum, while only 13% said they were not going to apply, mainly because they were not interested or did not see the usefulness in doing so, especially respondents from South American countries (excluding Venezuelans). The remaining 11% of respondents either did apply for asylum but their application was denied; do not have enough information on how to do it; or withdrew their application after submitting it. The share of those who wanted to apply for asylum but did not have the necessary information was higher among Central American respondents, compared to other nationalities.

4.2 Livelihoods

There are strong differences between the respondents' occupation in the country of origin and occupation in Mexico City. Data indicates that more respondents were unemployed in Mexico City compared to when they were in their country of origin (23% versus 1%), of which a significant share are from Central America (37%). At the same time, less respondents were employed (34% vs 40%), self-employed (24% vs 29%), were working as a civil servant (1% vs 11%) or were studying (3% vs 9%)

²³ For more information, please consult Appendix 1, which includes a profile of 4Mi Cities' respondents, data disaggregation and more results.

²⁴ The survey question concerning migration drivers is a multiple-choice question.

Lack of proper documentation²⁵ (63%), lack of employment opportunities (44%), and discrimination based on age and nationality (29%) were the **most frequently mentioned barriers to accessing decent employment and starting a business**. According to FGD participants, employers also lack the necessary information on how to hire refugees and migrants; in particular, they are unaware of the relevant legal procedures and valid documentation. Some employers, for instance, still demand the FM3 permit, a temporary residence permit which does not exist anymore, or refuse to hire refugees and migrants who hold a Visitor Card for Humanitarian Reasons because they think it is a tourist visa which does not grant the right to work. **Disaggregated data indicates respondents between 35 and 64 years old more often have their own business/entrepreneurship, compared to younger respondents (18-25).**

Financial anxiety and stress are high among respondents. 43% of respondents' households rely on just one person earning an income and 22% of respondents reported that household income is never enough to cover their basic needs, while 40% of respondents can only cover the household's basic needs sometimes. Disaggregated data indicates that it was more common in Venezuelan households (66%) for there to be more than one income earner, while 57% of Central American households depend on only one income.

Coping strategies for lack of financial resources include reducing less urgent expenses such as utilities and clothes and delaying rent (48% of respondents), borrowing money (26%), prioritizing food security for the most vulnerable members of the household (24%) and reducing food portions for all household members (23%).

Access to savings is limited: 53% of respondents reported being unable to save after covering their household's basic needs. Additionally, only 42% of respondents had a bank account. Disaggregated data indicates that Central American respondents had less access to bank accounts, compared to those from South America. Additional qualitative data indicates that there are only two banks in the city that show some flexibility when it comes to opening a bank account for a refugee or migrant: BanCoppel and Banco Azteca. According to FGD respondents, some banks overtly discriminate against specific nationalities (Colombians) and refuse to open bank accounts for them.

4.3 Access to public services

The enrolment rate in early childhood education and care is extremely limited. No respondent reported that their children 0-5 were enrolled in a public day care centre or a local government-run children centre (CADI – “Centros Asistenciales de Desarrollo Infantil”) and only 8% reported they attend private day care. While 50% of respondents said their children 0-5 were cared for by family members and 5% that they were cared for by friends, 32% said they did not have access to any day care option, which prevents parents from working, according to FGD participants. The main reasons for lack of access to childcare options relate to the lack of financial resources (33%) and respondents' distrust in day care centres (17%).

The school enrolment rate of children over 5 is higher, but remains very low among new arrivals: 68% of respondents with children over 5 years old mentioned their children are attending school and 12% reported that only some of the children attend. The rate of households whose children over 5 are not enrolled however increased to 50% among respondents who arrived in Mexico City between three and six months before the interview. The main reasons for not enrolling include lack of documentation, mostly school records (48%), and insufficient places in schools (24%).

Most respondents mainly accessed healthcare services (93%) through a public health centre/hospital but access to private health centres/hospitals was also high (36%). Most respondents **used emergency services** as the only option available to them. Additional qualitative data indicates that refugees and migrants also resort to free medical consultations provided by community pharmacies for care. **Access to specialized health services for refugees and migrants with a disability was lower: only 47%** of respondents with a disabled family member reported that they had access to adequate services.

Refugees and migrants have little information regarding how to access general healthcare services. According to FGD participants, refugees and migrants have very little knowledge of Mexico's popular health insurance (“seguro popular”²⁶), which includes free medical services and prescription drugs.

25 Includes basic identity documents, temporary/permanent residence permit, school transcripts, apostilled diplomas/certificates, ect.

26 As of December 1, 2020 and based on Article 77bis of the General Health Law, “all persons in the country who do not have social security have the right to receive free public health services, medicines, and other associated inputs, at the time of requiring care.” Refugees and migrants must however prove both their identity and residence in Mexico City to access health services, which excludes those with irregular status.

Access to adequate care for mental health is very low, despite the needs. 79% of respondents have experienced adverse mental health symptoms (depression, anxiety, stress, mood swings) since arriving in Mexico City, but only 5% received professional support. The majority seek help from family members or friends, while 18% have not sought any support at all. Disaggregated data indicates that respondents who recently arrived in Mexico City (3-6 months prior to the interview) are more likely to seek professional help for mental health needs from the shelter where they are staying or where they stayed in the past.

Access to free public spaces is high: 90% of respondents have accessed public spaces, mainly parks and walks around the city-centre, along with cultural venues. **Entry fees, COVID-19 restrictions and fear of contracting COVID-19** were mentioned as the main barriers to accessing spaces such as museums or movie theatres. Disaggregated data indicate that refugees and migrants who settled in the city less than a year ago are less likely to access these spaces, as well as Central Americans.

4.4 Housing

New arrivals and those who are unemployed more often lived in shelters and other types of group accommodation, compared to respondents who spent a longer period in Mexico City, who live mostly in apartments only with their family. Disaggregated data indicates that 30% of Central American respondents lived in overcrowded shelters/groups accommodation, while only 1% of Venezuelans lived in this type of housing.

Central American refugees and migrants have less access to private bathroom facilities: 50% of Central American respondents had access to a shared bathroom with other families, connected to the sewage system, compared to respondents of other nationalities who mostly had access to a private bathroom (75% of Venezuelans and 88% of respondents from South American countries other than Venezuela).

Access to the internet is broadly available: 78% of respondents have regular access to the internet at home and 14% have access sometimes. Disaggregated data indicate that Central Americans have less access to the internet compared to other nationalities: while 74% of all respondents reported having regular access to the internet at home or on their phones, this share went down to 54% among Central Americans.

Average tenure security: 76% of respondents pay for their housing monthly, securing tenure to some extent. Nonetheless, 43% of respondents - 65% of whom are from Central America - have an informal lease agreement (verbal), which increases their risk of being evicted. It was more common for South American respondents (including Venezuelans) to have a formal written contract (65%).

More than half of respondents stated having faced no barriers to housing. Disaggregated data by survey location indicates that respondents living in the Gustavo A. Madero borough faced fewer obstacles than those in other boroughs. Among those who did face barriers to finding housing, lack of resources (48%), lack of guarantor (48%), lack of documents (33%) and xenophobia (23%) were the most frequently mentioned obstacles. FGD participants also mentioned that landlords often ask for a deposit, a financial barrier to housing in Mexico City for all residents.

4.5 Protection risks and access to justice

Mexico City is not necessarily a safe place for refugees and migrants: 40% of respondents knew of refugees or migrants who had faced protection risks while in the city and 35% said them or their family had been victim of a crime. Among the most frequently mentioned protection risks are **theft, non-physical violence (harassment), and physical violence.** **The risk of detention** was more frequently reported by **Central American respondents, while the risk of sexual violence was mentioned more frequently by South American respondents** (excluding Venezuelans).

Locations where **protection risks** are most likely to occur include **the street/public places** (66%), **public transportation** (25%) and **the workplace** (23%). Disaggregated data indicate significant **differences in the locations where protection risks occur depending on the nationality of respondents:** Central American respondents were more prone to indicating public transportation and the street/public spaces as dangerous locations, while South American respondents stated more often that protection risks are most likely to occur at home and in the community/ neighbourhood – a difference that goes hand in hand with the types of risks more often reported by different nationalities. The most frequently mentioned perpetrators of abuse include strangers/local population (64%), criminal groups (15%) and co-workers/employer (15%). Law enforcement (police/military) was most mentioned by Central American respondents (18%).

Access to justice is limited. Of those respondents who were victim of a crime or an attempted crime, only 29% filed a complaint. Most did not file a complaint because of mistrust in the police/institutions (40%), fear of being detained/deported (19%) or because they thought it would be useless. According to additional qualitative information, many refugees and migrants mistrust authorities in general after their experiences of interaction with the authorities in their country of origin, coupled with their negative encounters with Mexican immigration authorities. Disaggregated data indicates that respondents who had lived in the city for longer (4–5 years) were more inclined to file a complaint, compared to those who arrived recently.

4.6 Coexistence, discrimination and participation

Perceived discrimination against refugees and migrants is relatively high, especially among Central Americans: 34% of respondents have felt discriminated against, mainly because of their nationality or ethnicity/colour of their skin. The places where they most perceived discrimination included the street/public places, the workplace and public transportation – the same places where protection risks are most present. Disaggregated data indicates that perceived discrimination was higher among those interviewed in the borough of Cuauhtémoc, compared to other data collection locations. Additional qualitative data indicates that respondents were unaware of the existing complaint and feedback mechanisms (hotlines) specific to discrimination and xenophobia.

However, respondents mentioned good relations with the local population in their neighbourhood (75%) and where they work (80%), although their sense of belonging to a community is low: only 12% of respondents feel part of a community in Mexico City. Despite a 40% perception of exposure to protection risks in the city, 78% of respondents **feel safe where they live**, but disaggregated data indicates that respondents in Itzapalapa feel insecure because of the prevalence of drug use where they live.

Participation in local decision-making processes is low: 71% of respondents believe that their opinion is not taken into account in discussions about their neighbourhood or the city because they do not participate in them. Additional qualitative data indicates that refugees and migrants cannot participate in citizen consultations because they do not possess a voter registration card.

4.7 Local actors supporting refugees and migrants

More than half of respondents received some sort of assistance since arriving in Mexico City, but mostly short term: primarily food (42%), legal advice and representation (42%)²⁷, housing support (27%), and medical care (26%). Housing assistance (shelter) was more frequent among respondents who had arrived in the city less than 6 months before the interview. South American respondents (excluding Venezuelans) have received less assistance in the city, compared to other nationalities.

The offer of services and programmes for refugees' and migrants' long-term inclusion is still limited: only 7% of respondents had access to employment and/or vocational training programmes and 5% to guidance on their rights, while 15% received support in accessing the school system. Respondents who had stopped in other locations within Mexico, specifically Tapachula, mentioned that they had received much more information there, compared to Mexico City. The main **assistance providers** mentioned by respondents were **government institutions**²⁸ (59%), followed by **UN agencies** (42%) and **NGOs** (28%).

Knowledge of assistance programmes for refugees and migrants in the city is quite high: 65% of respondents were aware of the existence of government programmes aimed at assisting refugees and migrants, while 59% had knowledge of UN or NGO programmes. Only 8% of respondents indicated having heard of programmes from the city government. According to additional qualitative data, respondents who lived in a shelter or were currently living in one mentioned shortcomings in the provision of information on access to services and social programmes and its quality.

Access to social programmes and assistance in the borough where refugees and migrants reside is limited. FGD participants mentioned that there are no local offices that provide support to refugees and migrants or even information. Support programmes for refugees and migrants are mostly delivered by the city government in a centralized way, rather than by local municipalities (“Alcaldías”) but the city government has no decentralized presence

27 Note that respondents often mistakenly considered the information on the asylum process received by the national refugee commission (COMAR) as legal advice, so the percentage of those who did indeed receive legal advice was likely lower.

28 Note that a share of respondents were referred for interview by the SIBISO and had previously received assistance from this body, meaning that the share of those who received assistance from the authorities among the general refugee and migrant population is likely lower.

in each municipality. Additionally, even for services that the municipalities do provide, if refugees and migrants seek assistance in an *Alcaldía* where they do not reside – for instance, because they have an irregular status and do not have a legal residence anywhere in the city - they are rejected and referred either to the city government (SIBISO) or the INM.

5. Conclusions

The 4Mi Cities project has shown the value of data collection at the city level in partnership with local stakeholders, and the potential of including data collection and analysis as an integral part of the policy and programming process. In Mexico City, data collection and analysis has shown that refugees and migrants lack awareness of and access to the municipality, its staff and services. It has also indicated what refugees and migrants consider to be their priority needs, as well as specific obstacles to accessing services.

Finding a decent source of livelihood is a major challenge for refugees and migrants, as lack of proper documentation, scarcity of employment opportunities, discrimination, and lack of knowledge on relevant procedures among potential employers often prevent refugees and migrants from being hired or setting up their own business. For those who do manage to find a job, income is often not sufficient to adequately cover their needs. Refugees and migrants also face obstacles in accessing early childhood education and care, mainly due to a lack of resources and distrust in care centres. Access to education for children over 5 is better but still presents obstacles related to lack of documentation and insufficient places in schools. While access to healthcare is generally good, gaps remain regarding awareness on how to access general health services, as well as specialized care for disability and mental health-related needs. The lack of financial resources and xenophobia make it more difficult for refugees and migrants to find an accommodation, while the same lack of resources and the prevalence of verbal lease contracts expose them to living in overcrowded conditions and risk to suddenly lose their accommodation. Finally, Central American refugees and migrants are generally worse off compared to those from South American nationalities, possibly due to lower education level and financial resources.

The identification of specific needs and gaps has enabled the city government, as well as other stakeholders, to draw up tailored policies and programmes that should be both more efficient and more effective, as the next section shows.

6. Evidence uptake

By working in close partnership with city governments and other local actors throughout the project's life-cycle, MMC² ensured that 4Mi Cities produced relevant and useful city-level data and analysis at two main levels: on the one hand, information on the extent to which refugees and migrants are integrated in Mexico City and the main barriers they face in accessing services can guide the city government to develop and strengthened local policies; on the other hand, detailed information on the needs and priorities of refugees and migrants in the city, be it areas with limited presence or on topics that are often not prioritized in emergency response, can support humanitarian and development organizations in adjusting and consolidating their programming.

The city government of Mexico City has identified next steps based on the knowledge produced by 4Mi Cities and plans to:

- Disseminate 4Mi Cities findings through both internal and external communication channels, as evidence to combat misinformation on and xenophobia against refugees and migrants.
- Create opportunities for migrant and refugee voices to influence city planning decisions, for instance through existing "Tequio Barrio"²⁹ community engagement platforms.
- Strengthen and expand Mexico City's Global Cities Fund project, which provides income protection to refugees, migrants and internally displaced people while connecting them to local services delivered by the city government and civil society partners, beyond the current timeframe (2021).
- Work with Mexico City's Institute for Democratic and Prospective Planning (Instituto de Planeación Democrática y Prospectiva) to update guidelines for the creation of any new city-level social programmes. By the end of 2022, such guidelines will mandate that Secretariats specifically consider the needs and preferences of refugees and migrants living in Mexico City when designing and implementing new programmes, using 4Mi Cities data as a resource.

²⁹ The objective of this city government-led social programme is to improve living conditions and strengthen community engagement in under-developed and marginalized neighbourhoods in Mexico City. For more information: SIBISO (2021) [Programa Mejoramiento Barrial y Comunitario "Tequio Barrio"](#).



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Dhaka.

For more information visit:
mixedmigration.org and follow us at @Mixed_Migration

