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RETHINKING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION: LESSONS FROM MIGRANT PATHWAYS IN MEXICO AND TÜRKİYE

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ANALISIS

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RETHINKING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION: LESSONS FROM MIGRANT PATHWAYS IN MEXICO AND TÜRKIYE

INTRODUCTION

Migration, an international phenomenon that is becoming increasingly dynamic and diverse with each passing day and closely affecting national and international politics, has now become an important agenda item for almost every country. According to information provided in the last IOM's World Migration Report (IOM, 2024), there are about 281 million international migrants, which equates to 3.6% of the global population. But increasing numbers of people are being displaced, within and out of their country of origin, because of economic or political instability, conflict, violence, religious persecution as well as climate change and other disasters.

It is estimated that in 2022, there were 117 million displaced people in the world, and 71.2 million more internally displaced. The number of asylum-seekers has risen from 4.1 million in 2020 to 5.4 million in 2022, an increase of more than 30% (IOM, 2022). The social, economic, political and security dimensions of migration and migration management can become much more vital for some countries. Undoubtedly, a country's migration policies and process management vary significantly depending on the type of migration involved. While regular and planned transnational migration is generally seen as a tool for development and is encouraged, forced migration victims and irregular/undocumented migration movements are generally addressed and discussed in the context of security due to the difficulty of managing the process, the perception of transience, and the risk of the issue spiraling out of control (Naseh, et al., 2024).

International migration generally points to a multidimensional and complex phenomenon (Castles & Miller, 2009), influenced by economic, geographic, demographic, and various other factors that shape distinct patterns (Naseh et al., 2024; McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021; İçduygu, 2020). Calculating the economic contributions or costs of immigrants is quite difficult. For instance, remittances sent by immigrants

to their home countries, which hold particular importance within the immigrant economy, are observed to have increased 857 billion USD in 2023. After India, which receives \$120 billion in remittances worldwide, Mexico comes in second with \$66 billion. Türkiye receives approximately \$1 billion in resources from its citizens abroad (Migration Data Portal, 2023). However, Mexico, like Türkiye in the last decade, discusses the costs and contributions of immigrants/foreigners within the country, whose numbers far outweigh the remittances sent by its citizens abroad.

For countries such as Mexico and Türkiye, which experience all types of migration—that is, countries that are origin, destination, return and transit points—the issue of migration has become a greater focus of economic life and politics. The geography in which both countries are situated, and specifically the neighboring countries that keep migration dynamics alive, can make the management of the process even more challenging. This is because the experiences of both the countries receiving migrants and the migrants themselves vary depending on the motivation for mobility, geographical locations, the social, economic and political capacities of the receiving countries, and the characteristics of the migrants. However, it is also clear that all forms of human mobility create an economic dynamic. This applies to planned, regular, development-based migration movements as well as to forced migration and irregular immigrants.

Regardless of the reasons and nature, the arrival of large numbers of foreigners in a country can initially be perceived as a 'burden' on the economy of the host country, but can soon become a 'contribution'. The unspoken balance between the needs of the market and the urgent need of new arrivals to work in order to sustain their lives can, after a while, lead to transformations in the economies of the countries receiving migrants. What is important here is to support migration dynamics as quickly as possible with policies that prioritize economic integration through employment and entrepreneurship. Only in this way, new comers will be able to establish a dignified life through their own labor, transforming them from a burden on their country of origin into contributors. This study, which examines the migration experiences of Mexico and Türkiye—countries that have faced all forms of migration but also possess fragile economic structures—and their impact on social structures and economies, particularly over the last twenty years, aims to

address the issue from a liberal perspective and develop policy recommendations.

During the last decade, Mexico and Türkiye experienced significant changes in the composition and magnitude of migration flows. The high volume of human mobility in both countries inevitably creates very different effects on the economy. On the one hand, regardless of their status, the sudden arrival of millions of foreigners in another country, in a situation that was not planned or prepared for in advance, creates an additional economic and financial burden on the host country. On the other hand, it is known that new migrants tend to work in the informal sector and as cheap labor in order to sustain their livelihoods, with some engaging in small-to-medium-scale entrepreneurial endeavors. This situation enables migrants to stand on their own feet and contribute to the economy of the country they have come to, to a certain extent. There is no doubt that planned, regular migration is actually seen as a tool for development.

The migration waves experienced by Türkiye and Mexico in recent years have generally originated from refugees or irregular migrants. This situation is fundamentally based on temporary residence, and therefore the positive economic impact and contribution to development remain limited. Once considered primarily as countries of emigration or transit, both countries have increasingly become points of settlement for diverse groups. The changing composition of migratory inflows reveals the growing diversification of nationalities, motives, and legal status among migrants. This study approaches the issue of migration not as a positive or negative factor, but rather through as realistic an analysis as possible. It is evaluated outside of political debates, based on the approach that employing migrants and supporting their entrepreneurship for a dignified life will contribute to both the migrants and their country of origin. In this context, it is assumed that the economic integration of migrants is a precursor to their social and political integration. Unsurprisingly, more emphasis has been and continues to be placed on enabling refugees to become self-reliant through employment. However, labor market integration can also prove challenging in a developing country that struggles with its own macroeconomic problems.

Another issue this study wishes to raise for discussion is informality. There is no doubt that 'decent work', expressed by the UN as a fundamental right, is a principle

independent of a person's status. Decent work is employment that 'respects the fundamental rights of the human person as well as the rights of workers in terms of conditions of work safety and remuneration... respect for the physical and mental integrity of the worker in the exercise of their employment' (CESCR, 2006). It is an indispensable principle for every individual. However, despite this ideal, informality is a reality, as it is in Mexico and Türkiye. Yet another reality is that, particularly in countries with high levels of immigration and economies at a medium or low level, informality provides opportunities not only for the local population but also for new arrivals to establish themselves.

In economies where informality is widespread and chronic, it seems understandable and tolerable for a short period that migrants and refugees carve out new spaces for themselves. As seen in the case of Türkiye in recent years, it has been possible for newly arrived refugees to build their own lives through their own labor and efforts, albeit within the informal sector. This situation also creates a short-term opportunity for states that are obliged to provide financial support to enable new arrivals to sustain their lives but lack the resources to do so. In this context, it is necessary to discuss the need to take into account the flexibility and solutions offered by informality in emergency situations and in the short term, without abandoning the principle of 'decent work'.

Literature on economic integration of migrants provides extensive insights into the determinants of labor market outcomes, earnings, and employment patterns of immigrant populations across various host countries. As an example, Chiswick (1978) highlights the dynamic process of economic assimilation, demonstrating that immigrants' earnings tend to converge with those of natives as their length of stay in the host country increases, suggesting upward mobility in labor market over time. Borjas (1994) emphasizes that immigrants' labor market outcomes are strongly influenced by their pre-migration characteristics, such as education, skills, and prior work experience. In addition, Portes & Zhou (1993) and Zhou (1997) consider the effect of the host society's level of receptiveness and possible mobility outcomes for a second generation.

Overall, current literature consistently identifies a combination of individual, institutional, and contextual factors as central determinants of economic in-

tegrations of immigrants. Human capital, language proficiency, recognition of foreign qualifications, access to formal employment, and supportive policy frameworks are repeatedly found to influence labor market outcomes. In this regard, migration for entrepreneurial purposes has received growing attention over the past decades. Multiple theoretical frameworks (Bonacich, 1973; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015) show that immigrant entrepreneurship is not only shaped by market dynamics but also by sociopolitical and institutional contexts. In addition, it is agreed that many migrants in developed countries, entrepreneurship often emerges as a survival strategy and a means of community resilience under adverse conditions.

In this context, this paper aims to identify the best channels for economic integration by comparing the experiences of Mexico and Türkiye. Effective economic integration of immigrants can contribute to reducing south-north migration pressures. In order to achieve our objective, we briefly analyze recent trends of immigrations flows and we examine the determinants of the types of activities in which migrants participate in the labor market, with particular attention to occupational transitions and the degree of informality to which they are exposed. The study extends the empirical analysis of economic integration, understanding this concept in a broader sense beyond mere labor market participation.

The document is structured as follows. Section I summarizes briefly current migratory situation and other key characteristics of both countries. Section II presents their economic context, as well as their recent immigration trends, including multiple descriptive data. Section III reviews the current literature on economic integration, with particular attention to the countries of interest. Section IV presents the theoretical framework. Section V outlines the methodologies to be used, followed by Section VI, which presents the main results. Section VII offers several conclusions and finally a set of public policy recommendations.



SHORTEST COUNTRY PROFILES: THE GENERAL SITUATION OF MIGRANTS OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS IN MEXICO & TÜRKIYE

I.A. MEXICO

Migration dynamics have undergone profound transformations, reshaping the country's role within regional and global mobility systems. Traditionally understood primarily as a country of emigration and transit toward the United States (U.S.), Mexico has increasingly become a destination for migrants and asylum seekers from Latin America, the Caribbean, and beyond. This shift reflects both structural changes in regional migration and the effects of evolving U.S. immigration policies.

By the mid-2010s and especially after 2018, Mexico began to experience a rapid rise in asylum applications and long-term migrant settlement. The number of asylum claims rose dramatically from just over 2,000 in 2014 to more than 250,000 in 2024, marking an unprecedented increase in protection-seeking populations within the country. Mexico has increasingly become a destination country. A growing share of migrants now views Mexico as a final destination rather than a temporary stop, mainly nationals from Venezuela, Honduras, Guatemala, Colombia.

Recent U.S. immigration policies have played a crucial role in shaping these dynamics. The Zero Tolerance Policy (ZTP), the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, commonly known as "Remain in Mexico"), and the Title 42 significantly altered migration incentives and routes. Restrictive U.S. policies have contributed to the externalization of migration control, effectively shifting part of the asylum and migration management burden onto Mexico. Given the deeply interconnected nature of migration flows across the region, migration governance is likely to be more effective when policies are designed and implemented jointly rather than through unilateral measures. Cooperation can help alleviate pressure on the U.S. asylum system by enabling some migrants to seek protection or remain in Mexico rather than continuing their asylum claims in the U.S., while also ensuring that such collaboration occurs with full respect for national sovereignty and the institutional capacities of each country.

Migration patterns in Mexico over the past fifteen years reflect a structural transformation from a predominantly transit country to a complex migration hub encompassing origin, transit, return, and destination functions. This transformation has been driven by regional crises, diversification of migrant origins, and the external effects of U.S. immigration enforcement policies. As a result, Mexico now occupies a central position in the governance and experience of migration in the region.

I.B. TÜRKIYE

Since 2011, Türkiye has been exposed to sudden and very high numbers of forced migration. With the anti-regime protests that began in Syria in 2011 quickly turning into a civil war, Syrians began to seek refuge in neighboring countries. In 2010, the number of foreigners living in Türkiye with residence permits was 238,000, while the number of refugees was only 57,000. Three years later, it was close to 3 million, making Türkiye the country hosting the most refugees in the world. As the process, which was expected to be short-lived, dragged on and border security could not be fully ensured, millions of irregular migrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Iran also arrived in Türkiye.

By 2020, the total number of foreigners in Türkiye had risen to 5-7 million, including more than 3 million Syrians granted 'temporary protection' status and an estimated 35 million generally defined as irregular migrants, although their exact numbers are unknown. Between 2015 and 2016, 1.3 million refugees and irregular migrants crossed into Europe. Some Syrians and migrants from other countries were also sent back to their countries. Following the significant regime change on 8th of December 2024 in Syria, 18% of Syrians (around 600,000) voluntarily returned home. This situation occurred at a similar rate for the 6.5 million Syrian refugees who fled Syria between 2011 and 2025. In total, around 1 million Syrians returned through Türkiye, Jordan, Lebanon, and other countries. By the end of 2025, there will be 2.3 million Syrians, 1.1 million migrants with residence permits, and an estimated 1 million irregular migrants living in Türkiye.

The Turkish state had not developed any policy regarding the economic integration of Syrian and other refugees in Türkiye until 2016 (Erdoğan, 2014; Erdoğan 2015; Kayaoğlu-Erdoğan, 2019; Erdoğan-Çorabatır, 2019). This is because, during this period, the refugee issue was treated as a 'temporary' matter. But there was no objection to refugees working in the informal economy. However, in 2016, it became apparent that Syrian and other refugees would remain permanently, and Türkiye began comprehensive planning and work in the areas of health, education and employment under an agreement with the European Union (E.U.). The importance of the agreement with the E.U. for the E.U. was to stop new refugees from crossing into Europe via Türkiye. Therefore, resolving some of the problems faced by refugees in Türkiye was also important.

Türkiye has been in a relationship with the E.U. since 1959. For Türkiye, the goal is full membership. However, the process has not been finalized due to numerous political reasons, such as democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, as well as issues with Cyprus and Greece, and many economic reasons, such as Türkiye having a weaker economy than the E.U. Although full membership negotiations began in 2005, almost no progress has been made in the 20 years since. This membership process became the basis for the 2016 agreement between Türkiye and the E.U. regarding refugees. For the E.U., simply providing financial support to the country to stop refugees was not enough; the updated E.U. membership perspective played a crucial role in persuading Türkiye.

Between 2014 and 2016, 1.3 million refugees crossed into Greece by sea and headed toward central Europe. The E.U. remembered Türkiye once again during a serious security crisis and, changing its strategy, tried and succeeded in persuading Türkiye once more with the prospect of membership. In response, a significant agreement was reached on 18 March 2016. In exchange for Türkiye limiting the flow of refugees toward Europe, the E.U. pledged €6 billion in financial support for refugees residing in Türkiye, along with commitments related to Türkiye's E.U. accession process and the prospect of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens to E.U. countries. Following this arrangement, Türkiye closed its western borders and fulfilled its commitments to the E.U. The financial component of the deal also became operational, with the E.U. ultimately providing approximately €12 billion in support

over a ten-year period—double the initial pledge—to assist Türkiye in managing refugee protection and migration control (European Council, 2016; European Commission, 2018; Erdoğan et al., 2024; Pries et al., 2024).

However, political objectives, particularly E.U. membership, have not been realized (Erdoğan et al., 2024). The Türkiye-E.U. Agreement has been directed towards protection, health, education, employment and, in particular, integration efforts for refugees in Türkiye. For the E.U., the economic and social integration of refugees in Türkiye has been seen as a means of reducing refugees' desire to go to the E.U. This has become an important source of motivation for the economic and social integration of Syrian and other refugees. Türkiye's experience is noteworthy in terms of understanding the power of international dynamics in mass migration flows and the special and self-protective support they provide for economic and social integration.

After 2016, the Facility for Refugees in Türkiye (FRIT), funded by the E.U. and UN's Regional, Refugee and Resilience Plans- "3RP" (UNHCR, 2021), have increasingly expanded their livelihood projects to draw away refugees from precarious informal employment to more sustainable, formal employment options. These projects have ranged from those focused on improving life skills, provision of language and vocational training for refugees to enhance their employability in the labor market, as well as provision of tax subsidies to employers. These have been accompanied by numerous projects to encourage self-employment and the creation of small businesses. It can be said that this support, for which the E.U. has allocated approximately €12 billion over the last 15 years, has opened up new opportunities for refugees and made a limited contribution to the Turkish economy.

Five years after their arrival in Türkiye, in 2016, Syrian refugees were granted the right to formal work. But these rights could only be exercised if employers formally requested work permits, and Syrians could not exceed 10% of the workforce in a given workplace. As had been the case prior to this policy, many Syrians in Türkiye continued to find employment primarily in the informal economy. The number of Syrians actively employed has been estimated at between 0.8 and 1.2 million. The percentage of registered, insured workers within this number is projected to be less than 15% in 2026. The entrepreneurs who employed them also tended to operate

largely within the informal sector. In addition, Syrians established approximately 20,000 companies in Türkiye.

As Türkiye does not grant 'refugee' status to asylum seekers from outside Europe, Syrians and others under international protection in Türkiye do not receive financial support from the state. Therefore, apart from working, there is no other option for refugees, except for a small number who are financially well-off. However, informality in Türkiye is not solely a matter concerning refugees. Even when Syrian refugees arrived in 2011, informal employment in Türkiye has been around 30% since then. This means that approximately 8-10 million of the 32 million Turkish citizens actively working in Türkiye are employed informally. Informality has created an alternative way for Syrian and other refugees to make a living. While informality is not a sustainable or correct path, it should not be overlooked that it is a significant reality in both Türkiye and Mexico.

However, it is frequently claimed that the sole purpose of the financiers of these projects is not to support refugees in Türkiye. Rather, it is also to persuade these refugees to stay in Türkiye instead of going to Europe through integration policies, and this is described as an "externalization policy", which is quite significant. This externalization policy has drawn criticism from local communities and has limited the development of effective, sustainable livelihood policies. As much as these projects may have increased the "employability" of their beneficiaries, they have not been translated into sustainable formal employment and job creation in any significant manner. Instead, most refugees in Türkiye are employed informally, with all the accompanying problems of exploitation, precarity and threats to social cohesion. This process, which has developed outside the normal economic framework, has also complicated the Türkiye-Mexico comparison.

I.C. KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF MEXICO AND TÜRKIYE

Table 1.1 summarizes key features at macro level for both countries in 2024. There are notable demographic and economic differences between them that shape their respective migration dynamics. Mexico has a significantly larger population, reached approximately 130.9 million, compared with 85.5 million in Türkiye. In economic terms, both countries are upper-middle-income economies with comparable macroeconomic size: Mexico's gross domestic product (GDP) stands at roughly US\$1,856 billion, while Türkiye's reaches about US\$1,359 billion. GDP per capita levels are also relatively close, though slightly higher in Türkiye (US\$15,892) than in Mexico (US\$14,186), suggesting broadly similar income levels that influence their capacity to attract and retain migrant populations.

Table 1.1. Profile of Mexico and Türkiye, 2024

	México	Turquía
Total population (million)	130,9	85,5
GDP (current US\$, billion)	1.856,4	1.359,1
GDP per capita (current US\$)	14 185,8	15 892,7
Age dependency ratio (% of working-age population)	48,72	48,72
International migrant stock (% of population)	1,30	8,10
Net migration	-104 581	-275 952

Source: Authors' elaboration based on World Bank (2025).

Despite similarities, these countries differ markedly in their migration profiles. The international migrant stock represents only 1.3% of Mexico's total population, compared with 8.1% in Türkiye. This substantial difference reflects Türkiye's role over the past decade as a major host country for refugees and other displaced populations, particularly from neighboring conflict-affected regions. Mexico, in contrast, has historically functioned primarily as a country of emigration and transit, with a relatively small share of foreign-born residents in its total population, although this share has grown modestly in recent years.

Demographic indicators also help explain migration pressures and policy challenges. The age dependency ratio is similar—48.7% in Mexico and 46.5% in Türkiye—indicating comparable demographic burdens on the working-age population. Such ratios suggest that both countries face incentives to maintain a stable and productive labor force, potentially increasing the economic relevance of migration as a mechanism to address labor market needs and demographic change. However, the extent to which migration contributes to labor supply differs significantly given Türkiye's larger foreign-born population.

Net migration figures further illustrate contrasting migration systems. Both countries recorded negative net migration in 2024, with Mexico registering a net outflow of approximately 104,581 persons and Türkiye a larger net outflow of 275,952. For Mexico, negative net migration reflects persistent emigration alongside rising inflows of asylum seekers and transit migrants. In Türkiye, negative net migration coexists with a large resident migrant population, indicating simultaneous outflows of nationals and secondary movements of migrants toward Europe or other destinations. Taken together, these indicators underscore that while both countries occupy strategic positions within regional migration systems, Türkiye functions primarily as a major host country, whereas Mexico continues to combine roles as a country of origin, transit, and emerging destination.

More receptive and well-designed migration policies in both countries could play a significant role in improving these indicators and enhancing long-term economic and demographic outcomes. In Mexico, policies that facilitate regularization, labor market access, and geographic mobility for foreign-born populations could increase the relatively low migrant stock while contributing to formal employment,

fiscal revenues, and regional economic dynamism. Improved recognition of foreign credentials, expanded access to work authorization for asylum seekers, and local integration strategies in high-growth urban areas could help transform transit migration into a more stable source of labor supply and entrepreneurship. Such measures may also mitigate persistent net emigration by strengthening domestic labor markets and fostering complementary migration rather than one-way outflows.

In Türkiye, receptive policies centered on labor market inclusion, education, and long-term residence security could enhance migrants' productivity and fiscal contributions. Facilitating formal employment and reducing informality among migrant populations would improve per capita output and help offset demographic pressures associated with dependency ratios. Moreover, stable legal pathways and integration policies may reduce secondary out-migration and enhance social cohesion, thereby improving net migration balances over time. In both countries, migration governance frameworks that emphasize economic integration and rights-based inclusion have the potential to convert migration into a structural asset for growth, demographic sustainability, and fiscal stability.



CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

I.A. ECONOMIC

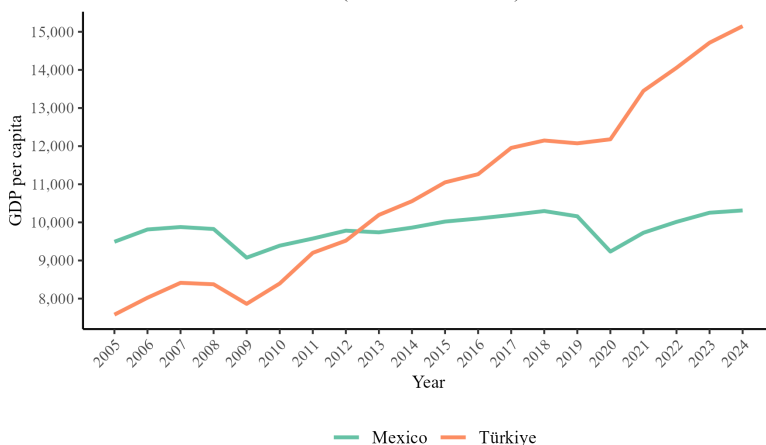
Mexico and Türkiye, while geographically and culturally distinct, share several characteristics that make them relevant destinations for international migrants. On the one hand, Mexico is a large upper-middle-income country with strong economic and historical ties to the U.S., which has made it both a country of origin and an important destination for migration flows. Türkiye, bridging Europe and Asia, functions as a gateway between regions and has experienced significant demographic growth, positioning it as a key destination for both regional migrants and those in transit toward other parts of Europe.

The E.U. holds particular significance for Türkiye in economic and political terms. This has also had an impact on the management of migration processes. Traditionally, the Turkish economy has had its strongest external ties with Europe. The Customs Union established between Türkiye and the E.U. in 1995 further increased the E.U.'s share in the Turkish economy. For example, in 2025, the E.U.'s share of total foreign trade, which amounted to 600 billion USD, was 327 billion USD.

During the last decade, Mexico's economy underwent a period of modest growth, persistent structural constraints and signs of stagnation. In contrast, Türkiye's economy is in better shape in these terms. As it is shown in Figure 2.1, between 2005 and 2024, Mexico's GDP per capita remained relatively stable in real terms, despite modest periods of growth. Structural challenges—such as low productivity, regional disparities, and persistent informality in the labor market—have constrained the country's economic expansion. Türkiye has experienced a remarkable acceleration during the same period, driven by rapid industrialization, a dynamic export sector, and significant public and private investment (Altındağ et al., 2020). The Turkish economy has benefited from diversified manufacturing and infrastructure development, enabling higher rates of capital accumulation and income growth. While

both countries faced external shocks, including the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, Türkiye's policy responses and economic diversification allowed it to recover faster than Mexico.

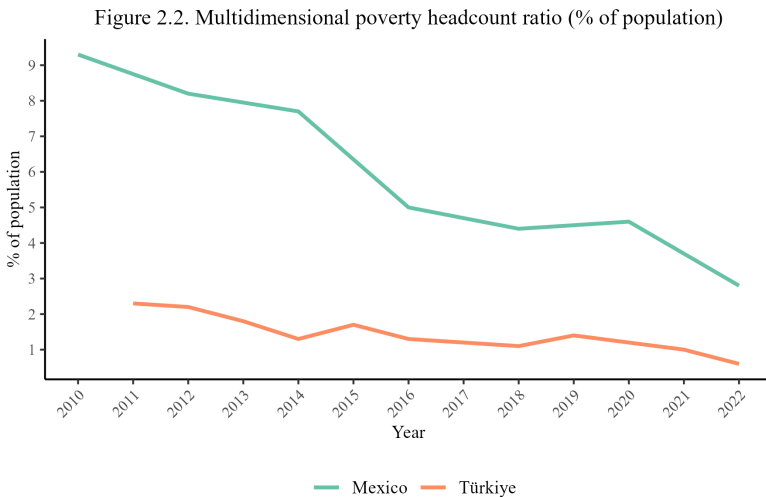
Figure 2.1. GDP per capita
(constant 2015 US\$)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on World Bank (2025).

Even though the economic stagnation registered in Mexico, multiple poverty indicators point to a significant reduction over recent years. As an example, Figure 2.2 illustrates the evolution of multidimensional poverty, as calculated by the World Bank for both countries. The figure shows a sustained decline in poverty rates for Mexico and consistently low incidence levels for Türkiye. It is worth noting that the methodology used to calculate this indicator includes, among other dimensions, the share of people with access to social security and health services through employment. Given the substantial gap between their levels of labor informality, it is not surprising that Mexico exhibits higher poverty rates than Türkiye. In this regard, the most recent estimates place informality at approximately 56% in Mexico and 28% in Türkiye (ILO, 2025).

Poverty reduction in Mexico may be associated with favorable changes in income distribution, although estimations on this issue often yield mixed results depending on the data sources and methodologies used. Based only on economic growth trend, it would be expected Mexico to have a limited capacity to absorb the increasing number of individuals joining the labor force participation, whether due to natural demographic growth or to rising migration flows—both of return migrants and those who, for various reasons, choose the country as their destination.



Source: Authors' elaboration based on World Bank (2025).

Table 2.1 presents the unemployment rates, for the most recent available year, in the main origin countries of individuals in irregular migratory situation who were apprehended during 2024 by the authorities of Mexico and Türkiye. For countries which nationals emigrate to Mexico, it is observed that, in most cases, unemployment rates are higher, with exception of Guatemala. In contrast, in the countries of origin of those migrating to Türkiye, unemployment rates are consistently lower than those of the destination country.

Table 2.1. Unemployment rate, total (% of total labor force)

	Country	Unemployment		Country	Unemployment
	Mexico	2,61 (2024)		Turquía	8,71 (2024)
1	Venezuela, RB	7,53 (2020)	1	Afganistán	5,67 (2021)
2	Ecuador	3,45 (2024)	2	República Árabe Siria	8,61 (2010)
3	El Salvador	2,99 (2023)	3	Turkmenistán	4,00 (2010)
4	Honduras	4,91 (2024)	4	Uzbekistán	5,29 (2020)
5	Guatemala	2,34 (2023)	5	República Árabe de Egipto	6,75 (2023)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on World Bank (2025), Presidency of Migration Management (2025a) and Migration Policy Unit (2025).

Note: For Türkiye, Palestine ranks fifth; however, due to the lack of statistical information on unemployment, it was not included.

Contrary to expectations, in Mexico unemployment remains low. It suggests that a considerable proportion of workers have entered into the labor market through informal activities. This acquires particular relevance within migration studies, since individuals in irregular migratory status often face legal barriers that constrain their access to formal employment, leading them to participate predominantly in the informal sector. Consequently, Mexico may exhibit a higher capacity for labor absorption compared to Türkiye, where informality is significantly lower. Ultimately, Mexico's low unemployment rate does not necessarily reflect greater labor market efficiency, but rather the persistence of a dual economy where informality substitutes for the absence of sufficient formal employment opportunities. Although such dynamics may appear beneficial for migrants in the short term, they risk discouraging the development of migration policies that promote the well-being of foreign

populations, as well as broader labor policies aimed at reducing informality, not only among immigrants, but for the entire population.

The Turkish economy's performance has been volatile in the past decade as it has suffered from sizeable booms and busts. This was caused by a set of macroeconomic policies that relied predominantly on stimulating domestic demand. This growth policy has benefited from generous capital flows following the Great Recession of 2008, lowering borrowing costs considerably, and thereby financing a massive credit expansion as well as surges in consumption and government spending (Acemoğlu & Üçer, 2020; Yazgan, 2020). However, this growth strategy failed to create total factor productivity growth and resulted in increasing inflation rates and a widening current account deficit (Acemoğlu & Üçer, 2020; Pamuk, 2020, Caro, 2020, Aksu, 2019).

The labor market in Türkiye exhibits several structural problems that hinder formal job creation even when the growth performance of the economy is relatively strong: (a) The labor force is growing at a relatively fast pace (even though the Syrians are not included in the data), (b) the informal employment is widespread, (c) the minimum wage is close to the median wage, (d) the firms complain that the workers lack the skills that they require, and the low-skilled workers work long hours that limit the opportunities for skill development, (e) the regional differences in unemployment rates persist (Uysal et al., 2020).

The issue of informality and its relationship with foreigners in Türkiye began to emerge after 2011. Between 2011 and 2016, refugees and irregular migrants did not have the right to work. However, it was known that foreigners in Türkiye, primarily Syrians, who had no other source of income, had no choice but to work, and that at least one million Syrians and another million non-Syrian foreigners were actively working in the informal economy. The regulation permitting refugees to work was introduced in 2016, but only up to 15% of actively working Syrians and other foreigners were formally employed in the formal sector. The rest found their place in the informal economy. In industrial cities along Türkiye's border with Syria, where refugees are concentrated, as well as in cities in western Türkiye such as Istanbul, Bursa and Izmir, foreigners were mostly employed as cheap labor. They quickly became important in certain sectors and developed an economic dependency.

The presence of Syrian refugee population corresponding almost to 5% of the country's population has significantly impacted the local economy and labor market. A widely debated topic has been whether the influx of refugees has caused the labor market conditions of the members of the host community to deteriorate. In Türkiye, the evidence seems mixed: that the refugee influx generated a decrease in informal employment of men in host communities while increasing their formal employment (Ceritoglu et al., 2017). This has led to occupational upgrading or transitioning to jobs that pay higher wages and require more skills as more host community members transitioned to formal jobs with higher wages (Del Carpio & Wagner, 2015). The manual task content and the abstract task content increased in the jobs host community members hold.

According to these data, it may therefore be inferred that migration to Mexico is largely driven by economic factors, whereas for Türkiye migratory flows appear to be more strongly associated with forced displacement stemming from multiple causes. In order to contextualize recent migration dynamics, the following section presents selected data on the recent dynamics of migratory flows toward these countries.

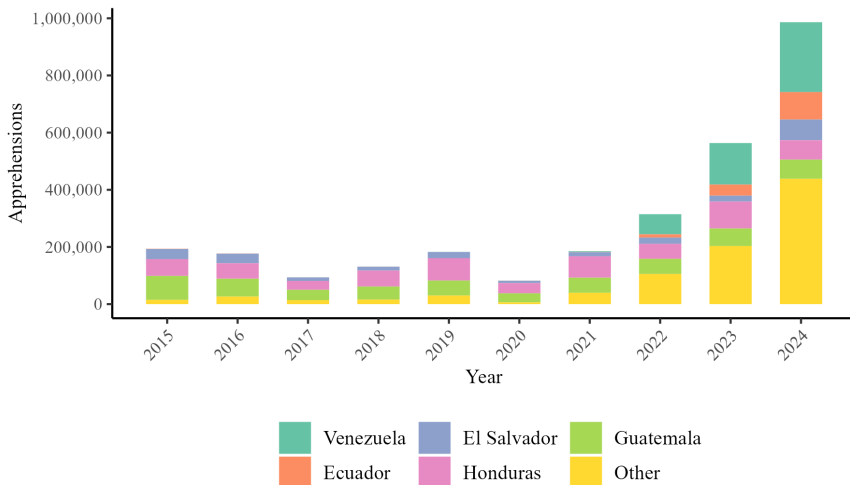
II.B. TRENDS IN IMMIGRATION FLOWS

Despite there is no evidence that an increase in asylum in transit places contributes to reducing migratory pressures in main destinations, beyond the literature on border externalization, given that a very large share of migrants who reach advanced economies travel through key transit countries, policies promoting economic integration in those states could potentially reduce onward migration. This effect can be amplified if it is considered that both Mexico and Türkiye have increased their importance as transit countries. Thus, for example, around 2015 approximately 35% of non-Mexican inadmissible individuals in the U.S. attempted to enter through the Southwest border. By 2024, this percentage had increased to 62% (CBP, 2025). During the same period, the share of inadmissible individuals to the E.U. via the land border with Türkiye rose from 3% to 11% (EUROSTAT, 2025).

In this context, the efforts of Mexico and Türkiye towards refugees and irregular migrants are extremely valuable, and their expansion, along with the strengthening of the principles of the UN-Global Compact on Refugees and the UN-Global Compact for Migrants, especially the principle of “responsibility sharing,” and the development of economic and development-based policies for migrants and refugees, rather than security-based ones, are necessary. So, the following descriptive data should not be interpreted in isolation from global trends.

Figures 2.3 and 2.4 illustrate the change in the number of apprehensions by immigration authorities of each country. For Mexico, there is a relatively stable trend, with annual apprehensions not exceeding 200,000 cases during the period from 2015 to 2021, except for a slight decline in 2020, which was associated with the worldwide public health emergency. However, beginning in 2022 the number of apprehensions surged sharply, reaching nearly one million cases in 2024. This change represents an increase of approximately 400% in only four years. Such trend reflects significant shifts in U.S. migration policy, including of Title 42 and the MPP policy.

Figure 2.3. Apprehensions of individuals in irregular migratory situation, Mexico



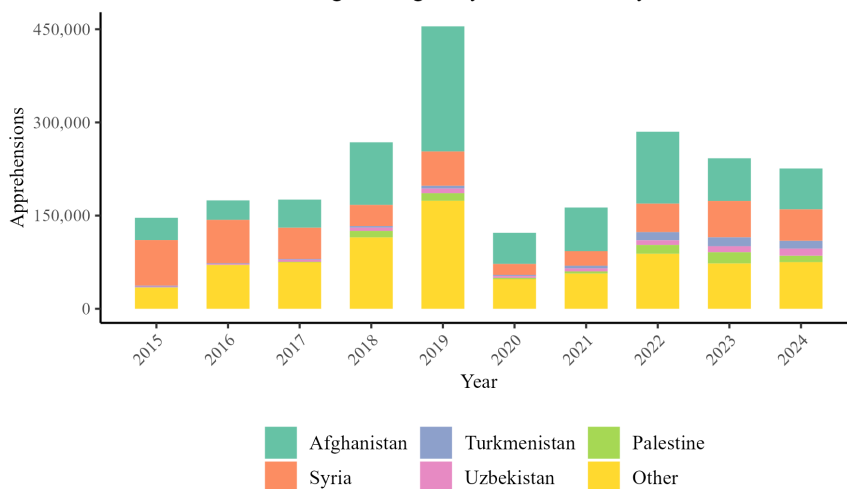
Source: Authors' elaboration based on Migration Policy Unit (2025).

Note: These data are presented by the Mexican authorities as *Encounters* and not as *Apprehensions*.

Regarding the composition of the migratory flow by nationality, between 2015 and 2021 the majority of apprehended individuals were from Honduras. In subsequent years, apprehensions involving Honduran nationals remained stable, as did those from Guatemala. Nevertheless, between 2022 and 2024, there was a substantial increase in apprehensions of migrants from other countries, most notably Venezuela and Ecuador, and to a less extent, El Salvador.

As shown in Figure 2.4, apprehensions in Türkiye did not exceed 200,000 annually before 2018. By 2019, the figure had risen to over 450,000 cases, before dropping to 122,000 during the year of the COVID-19 sanitary emergency. Regarding the composition by country of origin, the overall pattern remained relatively stable over time, with slight increases for certain nationalities during specific periods. For instance, there was a noticeable presence of individuals from Syria before 2017, an increase in Afghanistan nationals around 2019, and modest rises among migrants from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan beginning in 2022.

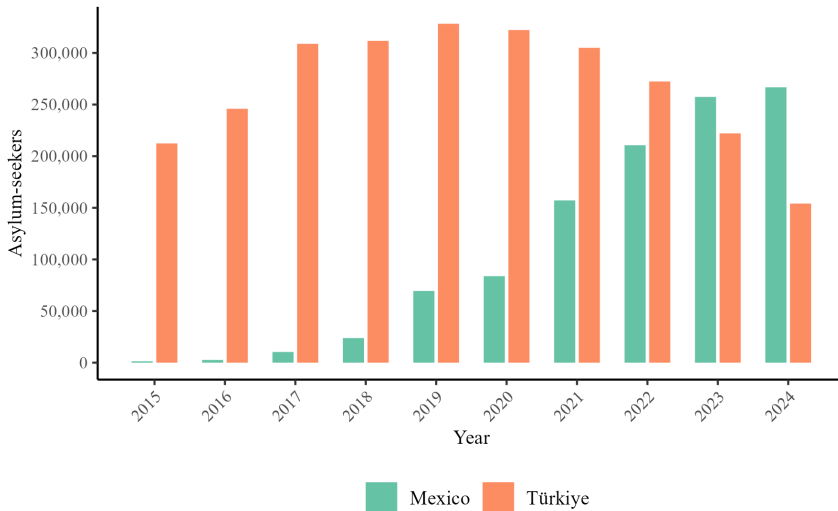
Figure 2.4. Apprehensions of individuals in irregular migratory situation, Türkiye



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Presidency of Migration Management (2025a).

In both countries, higher levels of migration control activity often coincide with increases in asylum claims, reflecting how restrictive border measures may redirect irregular migration into formal protection channels. Figure 2.5 presents the number of asylum-seekers by country. It reaffirms the correlation between apprehensions and asylum claims. For Mexico, a sustained upward trend can be observed, whereas for Türkiye, the figures increased until 2019 and then declined steadily thereafter. Despite the decrease in the number of apprehensions in 2020 for both countries, the number of asylum claims in neither case showed a change in its overall trend. This suggests that during that period, the number of people in transit decreased, while many sought alternative ways to regularize their migratory status, which in turn reduced their likelihood of apprehension.

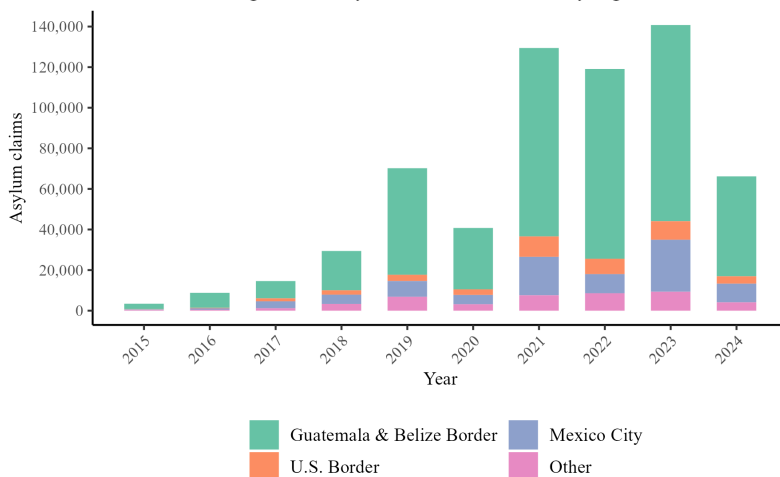
Figure 2.5. Asylum-seekers by country of destination



Source: Authors' elaboration based on UNHCR (2025).

In order to examine the extent to which human mobility changed after 2020, Figure 2.6 shows the evolution of asylum claims in Mexico, disaggregated by the region in which the federal entity of application is located. Data reveal an underreporting of cases in 2020 for federal entities along the border with the U.S., compared with other sources of information. Despite this drawback, it can be observed that after 2020, the proportion of applications filed in these border entities increased slightly. A similar pattern is clear for Mexico City. The tightening of U.S. migration policies has led to Mexico being increasingly perceived as a destination country, despite adverse economic conditions. Although much of the migrant population continues to reside in southern states, it has been a growing presence in other regions.

Figure 2.6. Asylum claims in Mexico by region



Source: Authors' elaboration based on COMAR (2024).

Note: Data for 2024 up to October. It has been identified that the 2020 and 2024 datasets lack records for federal entities bordering the U.S., which may account for discrepancies with other sources of information.

Even though asylum claims have been steadily increasing, Mexico remains far from being one of the world's main refugee-hosting countries—a situation unlike Türkiye. Table 2.2 presents statistics about refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Over the last decade, the total of recognized refugees in Mexico has increased nearly fiftyfold, whereas in Türkiye it has grown by only about 15%. By 2024 Mexico hosted merely 0.49% of all individuals recognized as refugees worldwide, while Türkiye accounted for a substantial 9.5%. It is noteworthy that in previous years Türkiye's figures were even higher, which may be associated with secondary migration flows to other destinations. It is expected that the total of refugees in Türkiye decrease after 2025 since more than half million Syrian nationals have returned to their country of origin (Presidency of Migration Management, 2025b).

Meanwhile, the issue of refugee status in Türkiye complicates the understanding of certain data. Although Türkiye is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, it did not sign the 1967 Protocol, which provides for granting refugee status to persons from outside Europe with reasonable grounds, and has continued to apply the principle of granting status only to asylum seekers coming from Europe. This situation leads to a significant discrepancy between the official numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in Türkiye. This is because almost all asylum seekers arriving in Türkiye, including Syrians, come from the Middle East, Africa or Asia, not Europe, and Türkiye does not grant refugee status to these individuals.

Table 2.2. Refugees under the mandate of the UNHCR by country or territory of asylum (total and % of refugees worldwide)

Year	MEXICO		TÜRKİYE	
	Population	Percentage	Population	Percentage
2015	2.904	0,02	2 541 348	15,77
2016	6.178	0,04	2 869419	16,70

2017	8.993	0,05	3 480 350	17,45
2018	16 530	0,08	3 681 688	18,08
2019	28 517	0,14	3 579 531	17,53
2020	45 434	0,22	3 652 362	17,68
2021	73 448	0,34	3 759 817	17,63
2022	95 579	0,32	3 568 259	12,12
2023	124 784	0,39	3 251 127	10,28
2024	150 836	0,49	2 940 735	9,50

Source: Authors' elaboration based on UNHCR (2025).

Note: Refugees data include individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the refugee definition contained in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees as incorporated into national laws, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, individuals granted complementary forms of protection, and those enjoying temporary protection.

In Türkiye, individuals who meet the conditions for refugee status are granted 'temporary protection,' 'international protection,' or 'conditional refugee status' until they are resettled in a third country or return to their own country. However, all these statuses imply that the stay in the country is temporary and that refugee status will not be granted. For this reason, even though Türkiye was defined by the UN as the country hosting the most refugees in the world between 2014 and 2023, this definition was presented in a sociological rather than a legal framework. Since refugee status is only granted to those arriving from Europe, and naturally only a minimal number of refugees come from Europe. So far Türkiye has granted fully-fledged refugee status to only 28 persons in 2019 (Bulur, 2019). It can be not under 100 in 2025.

A potential correlation can be observed between the decline in the number of refugees and the level of institutional and social acceptance toward immigrants. When societies and institutions demonstrate greater openness and support, they tend to implement more inclusive policies and provide access to protection mechanisms. In order to explore the level of receptiveness in Mexico and Türkiye, the following section presents several data related to the level of acceptance toward immigration.

III.C. SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCEPTANCE TO IMMIGRATION

Despite the growth interest about migration, there are still few international statistical projects that capture its multiple dimensions. An exception is the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7 (2017-2022) (Haerpfer et al., 2022), which aims to collect information on the economic, social and cultural values of individuals across nearly one hundred countries using a unique methodology. For Wave 7, some perceptions of host societies toward immigration were captured. Nearly 1,800 and 2,500 individuals were surveyed in Mexico and Türkiye, respectively. In both countries the average age was 31 years old and around the 50% were female, without significant differences in these variables between the two countries. The assessments here will evaluate both WVS data and data from the Syrian Barometer (SB) study, conducted annually since 2017 in collaboration with the UNHCR on Syrians in Türkiye, with the primary aim of social integration.

Table 2.3 presents the percentage of individuals, in Mexico and Türkiye, who agree with each of the statements that are included in the set of questions about immigration in the WVS. In addition, the opinions for the U.S. and Germany are also shown, as these are the main destinations for each of the migration routes involving the analyzed countries.

On the one hand, in the traditional destinations countries more polarized opinions are observed. Compared to Mexico and Türkiye, a larger number of people report agreeing with both positive and negative views, with a few exceptions. According with this Survey, in Germany people have better opinions regarding potential effects on the immigrants' lives.

Table 2.3. Opinions regarding immigration (% of population who agree with each statement)

	MEXICO	TÜRKIYE	U.S.	GERMANY
Fills important jobs vacancies	36,2	23,7	60,4	50,1
Strengthens cultural diversity	42,5	31,0	63,4	68,6
Increases the crime rate	39,5	61,5	30,1	61,0
Gives asylum to political refugees who are persecuted elsewhere	44,1	47,9	40,8	86,9
Increases the risks of terrorism	36,7	61,0	39,7	64,6
Offers people from poor countries a better living	49,0	44,7	51,9	89,7
Increases unemployment	38,4	70,5	32,1	35,9
Leads to social conflict	39,4	62,3	42,5	82,1
Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here or prohibit it	40,2	67,9	46,0	34,3

Source: Authors' elaboration based on WVS Wave 7 (Haerfer et al., 2007).

On the other hand, comparing Türkiye and Mexico, it should be said that Mexican respondents tend to hold more positive or neutral views, perceiving immigration as contributing to economic opportunities, cultural diversity and humanitarian protection—Oxfam Mexico (2023) estimated that 74% of the Mexican population is neither for nor against migration, but it is concerned that immigration may exacerbate problems such as drug trafficking, crime, insecurity, or corruption. In contrast, respondents in Türkiye express higher concerns regarding potential risks, such as unemployment (70.5%), social tensions (62.3%) crime (61.5%) and show stronger

support for restrictive immigration policies (67.9%). These patterns may reflect differences in recent migration experiences, economic conditions, and political narratives surrounding immigration in each country, with Türkiye facing higher inflows of refugees and public debate emphasizing security and labor market pressures, whereas Mexico's immigration context is shaped by smaller relative flows and an apparent more favorable framing of migrants economic and social contributions.

The SB study also reveals that concerns about immigrants are even higher in Turkish society. These can be seen more clearly in the last wave of the study, SB-2023. It revealed that Turkish society has serious objections to the inclusion of refugees in the domestic economy. Even though the public recognizes that the likelihood of the refugees returning is low, nearly half of surveyed people (48.7%) believe that no Syrians will return and another 29.7% of the respondents thought, "even if some of them return, majority will remain in Türkiye," and they are resistant to Syrians' formal inclusion. Similarly negative responses are found relative to the Syrians' inclusion in the labor market. A significant majority of Turks surveyed (56.8%) believe that refugees "Under no circumstances should they be allowed to work/given work permits," though a significant minority, 21.4%, appears to be willing to accept that "They should be given work permits to work only in specific jobs". As seen in the SB study, the Turkish society's reaction to Syrian refugees working is stronger in the area of entrepreneurship. The percentage of those who say that Syrians should not be allowed to open businesses in Turkey was 55% in SB-2020, while this rate increased to 65.5% in SB-2023. The stronger reaction is because, for Turkish society, opening a business means "strengthening permanence". Similar attitudes can be observed for granting citizenship to refugees. This is not surprising, considering that 87% of the Turkish public believe Syrians "should not be given any political rights" and over 90% are against the granting of citizenship (Erdoğan, M., 2024). Interestingly, it is also observed that the most serious concern in Turkish society is not security or "job stealing", but 'identity'.

It is important to consider the possibility of regional differences in perceptions toward immigration, as noted by Valenzuela Moreno & Román-Bejarano (2024) in the case of Mexico. These authors find that in cities with higher levels of skilled migration, there is also greater acceptance of newcomers. Such places are typically large urban centers in the central region of the country, which are less exposed

to the transit of people compared to other regions. In contrast, according to the SB, in Türkiye reactions are observed to be higher in urban and highly immigrant population areas.

Something similar happens at the local level in the main destination countries. In surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in the U.S., attitudes toward immigrants vary across regions. For example, a majority of respondents in the West (55%) and Northeast (54%) report that immigrants make a positive contribution to the country, whereas the proportion is lower in the South (48%) and Midwest (46%). At the same time, around 38% of respondents in the Midwest and 37% in the South state that immigrants represent a threat to traditional American culture and values. These regional differences are often associated with variations in levels of urbanization, economic structure, and historical exposure to immigration, as coastal regions have traditionally experienced higher levels of immigrant settlement than many interior areas (Pew Research Center, 2025).

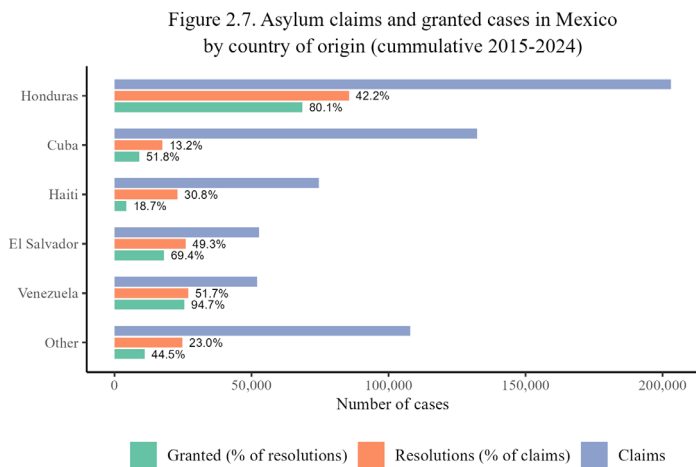
Differences have also been documented in Europe. Data from the European Social Survey (ESS) show that across several European countries there is a consistent relationship between regional exposure to immigration and public attitudes toward immigrants. For example, ESS results indicate that in countries such as Germany, France, and Sweden roughly 55–65% of respondents living in metropolitan or high-immigration regions report that immigration is beneficial for the economy or cultural life, while this share tends to fall to around 40–50% in regions with lower immigrant presence, where support for more restrictive immigration policies is correspondingly higher (ESS, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of local demographic composition and the degree of everyday contact with immigrants in shaping public perceptions toward them.

Another relevant issue is the estimation of both the government and the local community regarding how long the new arrivals will remain in the country. As can be seen in the example of Türkiye, the positive approach and solidarity shown to refugees in the first five years has been reversed by the strengthening perception that Syrians will not return and will remain in the country. This change is referred to as ‘compassion fatigue’ (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024). In such processes, it is important for the state to make efforts to alleviate the rapidly spreading and largely

speculative concerns of society and to ensure transparency. If it does not happen, paranoia in society increases, and populist politicians who embrace this growing paranoia and even turn it into a political crisis can dominate the system. This situation can be explained by the concept of securitization, which is very common in the field of migration studies.

Immigrants may face significant difficulties in achieving economic integration when they arrive in societies where generalized negative attitudes prevail. Hostile public opinions can limit their access to employment opportunities, reduce employer willingness to hire them, and exacerbate social exclusion, all of which hinder their ability to contribute productively to the host economy. In this context, the role of government becomes crucial, as official discourse and migration policies shape public perceptions and signal societal openness or rejection. A government that implements inclusive asylum policies and communicates acceptance toward refugees and asylum-seekers can foster a more favorable environment for integration, while *de facto* restrictive policies may reinforce prejudice.

Figure 2.7 presents cumulative data on asylum claims filed by foreign nationals in Mexico from 2015 to 2024, disaggregated by country of origin and outcome. Under current Mexican law, protection can be granted in the form of refugee status or complementary protection. The latter applies to individuals who neither meet the definition of a refugee nor fulfill the administrative requirements but face credible risks if returned to their country of origin. While complementary protection offers legal stay, it is more limited: beneficiaries lack direct access to permanent residency, family reunification, and certain social services, and their status can be revoked if conditions in their home country improve. So, resolutions in Figure 2.7 include three outcomes: granted cases, complementary protection and denials.



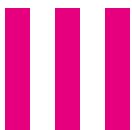
Source: Authors' elaboration based on COMAR (2024).

The nationalities with the largest number of asylum applications are not the same as those most frequently subject to detention by immigration authorities, as was shown in Figure 2.3. Regarding asylum claims, the main countries of origin are Honduras and Cuba. However, there is a significant difference between these two nationalities in the percentage of cases that reach a resolution: for Honduras, it is 42.2%, while for Cuba, it is only 13.2%. Although some cases remain unresolved due to processing time delays, others do not reach completion because the applicant withdraws the claim. Therefore, this difference reflects variations in settlement intentions that, on average, characterize individuals from certain countries of origin. Countries such as Venezuela (51.7%) and El Salvador (49.3%) also show resolution rates similar to that of Honduras.

Significant differences by country are also observed in the recognition of refugee status. On the one hand, there are countries whose nationals have very high acceptance rates, such as Venezuela (94.7%) and Honduras (80.1%)—for the latter, the number of granted cases increased substantially after the implementation of Title

42 by the U.S. In contrast, some other countries show very low acceptance rates, as is the case of Haiti. This may be due to language barriers but also to systemic racism or negative stereotypes, as has been documented (CGRS, 2024).

Overall, these descriptive findings from different sources highlight the complex interplay between public attitudes and asylum outcomes in shaping migrants' prospects for integration. Understanding how narratives of inclusion or exclusion operate becomes essential to explain disparities in refugee recognition and economic integration trajectories.



LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Mexican case, studies have identified complex and unexpected patterns among workers from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA). For example, Meza & Pederzini (2022) find that immigrants comparable to Mexican workers can, in some cases, earn higher wages than their local counterparts. However, this wage advantage does not translate into better working conditions, as migrants generally receive fewer benefits and experience lower levels of formality. This situation also applies to Syrian refugees and irregular migrants in Türkiye (Erdoğan et al., 2023). Additionally, in an economy where informality is merely a reflection of the underlying structural problems of the national labor market and accessing formal jobs remains unreachable for a significant proportion of people in host communities, graduating refugees from an informal job market to a formal one will remain a major challenge.

Coubès & Hernández Campos (2025) study labor segregation among different migrant groups in the Mexican northern border. Foreign-born individuals and deportees face greater barriers to accessing this high-productivity segment. On the one hand, foreigners exhibit high levels of labor segregation and are heavily concentrated in hospitality and restaurant services, where informality reaches 58%, a figure close to the national average. On the other hand, deportees are usually employed in call-centers—because of their English proficiency—and construction sector.

From a qualitative approach, Nájera (2022) analyzes the process of economic integration and settlement in Mexico City among undocumented immigrants. The author notes that although informality entails significant risks—such as mistreatment, employer abuse, or unpaid overtime—it becomes an essential means of daily survival and sustenance in urban settings. As a consequence, widespread informality facilitates a segmented and vulnerable, yet functional, form of labor insertion that enables migrants to sustain their settlement process, particularly when they lack social networks at the destination. As the author further highlights, while possessing papers does not automatically ensure integration, it does help to reduce

vulnerability throughout the settlement process.

Using data from the Survey of Asylum-Seekers and Refugees in Mexico (ESCRR), conducted in 2019, Calva Sánchez & Orraca Romano (2024) present a characterization of the labor dynamics among asylum-seekers in Mexico. Their findings show that only 37.6% of respondents were employed. Moreover, participation increases substantially with the length of stay, rising from 19.7% among those who had been in the country for less than six months to 67.9% among those who had lived there between 12 and 24 months. These results are consistent with what was identified by Chiswick (1978) and illustrate the gradual nature of labor insertion processes and show that time spent in the host country is a decisive factor in improving employment prospects for asylum-seekers and refugees.

Geographic context is also crucial. In the Mexican context, the participation rate in the central region (62.4%) is almost double that the northern region (34.5%) and far higher than in the south (26.7%). The highest average monthly incomes are reported in the central region (7,306.30 pesos or 379 USD), while the lowest are found in the southern region (4,593.50 pesos or 238 USD). This regional differentiation aligns with broader structural inequalities in labor market, underscoring how geographic concentration and regional economic capacity migrants' integration outcomes (Calva Sánchez & Orraca Romano, 2024).

Regarding the Turkish case, according to official data, by 2025, 1.2 million of regular migrants residing in Türkiye with a residence permit and around 3 million of Syrian refugees live in Türkiye. However, employment in the informal economy is particularly high among Syrians and other undocumented migrants. It is known that in 2024, a total of 300,000 foreigners received work permits in Türkiye, meaning they were officially employed. The largest group within this number is Syrians, with 117,000. This number is insufficient to understand the employment status of over 2 million Syrians of active working age (15-65 years). This is because it is exceptional for Syrians to receive financial support from the Turkish state or other international sources. More than 600,000 Syrian families live in Türkiye. Therefore, they are forced to work. Indeed, all field studies show that Syrians generally work actively in the informal economy. SB-2023 shows that the employment rate among Syrians is 32%. However, there is a significant gender gap, with the employment

rate among women remaining at 4%. Estimates suggest that between 800,000 and 1 million Syrians are employed.

Approximately half of the Syrians in Türkiye live in cities along the Syrian border—specifically Gaziantep, Hatay, Şanlıurfa, Kilis—while the rest does in industrial cities in the west, primarily Istanbul. As there is no relocation policy for Syrians in Türkiye, they generally decided to go to cities where they could find work and settle there. Recent studies show that Syrians, who initially worked for extremely low wages, almost half of what Turkish workers earned, have come to earn the same wages as Turkish workers over time. Syrian workers are employed in construction, the footwear and textile industries, the service sector, agriculture and livestock farming, and mostly in the manufacturing sector.

Integration into the formal labor sector remains limited. For Mexico, only 23.6% of employed respondents have access to public health services through their jobs. Formality rates are significantly higher for recognized refugees (39.5%) than for asylum-seekers (12.7%) (Calva Sánchez & Orraca Romano, 2024). In contrast, in Türkiye all healthcare expenses, including medication, for Syrians under temporary protection were covered by the state until the end of 2025, i.e., for approximately 15 years. However, health insurance will be terminated from 2026 onwards. In this case, Syrians will either have to take out private health insurance themselves or have their employers cover it. This situation may cause many Syrians to lose their jobs and return to Syria.

In response to the difficulties of integrating into the labor market, some groups tend to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Bonacich, 1973) or self-employment, which the literature usually treats interchangeably. As a consequence, immigrant populations are more likely to start new businesses compared to native-born residents (Levie, 2007). Farlie & Lofstrom (2015) further investigate the factors that account for differences in entrepreneurial activity across immigrant groups in the U.S. Their review emphasizes the role of human capital, access to financing, prior business experience in countries of origin, and the presence of ethnic enclaves. Among these mechanisms, the most robust evidence suggests that ethnic enclaves and higher levels of schooling significantly encourage entrepreneurship. Due to these complex dynamics, the literature has also noted that self-employment

within enclaves can function as a survival strategy, rather than as a straightforward indicator of economic success.

Along similar lines, Lintner (2015) argues that migrant entrepreneurship constitutes a new arena for social, economic, and political agency, particularly in contexts marked by restrictive immigration policies and economic crisis. The author contends that the potential of migrant entrepreneurs lies in their ability to generate employment, facilitate labor-market integration, and strengthen social and cultural cohesion within their communities, ultimately serving as a bottom-up strategy of self-organization.

In Türkiye, the entrepreneurial and particularly self-employment efforts of refugees and undocumented migrants, primarily Syrians, whose numbers once exceeded 5 million, have had a significant impact. It is stated that, in addition to small businesses employing fewer than five people, of which approximately 10,000 are officially registered, there are around 30,000 unregistered businesses (Erdoğan et al., 2023). A major problem for refugees in Türkiye stemmed from their inability to open bank accounts, obtain credit, or even deposit money. The main reason for this is the high level of suspicion surrounding terrorist-linked structures and money laundering activities. Especially during the period when ISIS was active, almost no public or private bank opened accounts for Syrians and other undocumented migrants. This situation became one of the most serious obstacles to entrepreneurship. The Turkish state has allowed some state banks to open accounts for Syrians, at least after numerous security checks. However, all this has once again highlighted how important the migrant-refugee distinction is in terms of economic integration.

Building on this line of inquiry, future research should further examine the different forms of economic participation available to migrant and refugee populations—including wage labor, self-employment, and entrepreneurship—while considering the varying degrees of formality, vulnerability, and mobility associated with each occupational pathway.

IV

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Segmented Assimilation Theory—developed in the seminal works of Portes & Zhou (1993) and further formalized by Zhou (1997)—proposes that the integration of immigrants into host societies does not follow a single, homogenizing trajectory. Instead of a linear assimilation process toward the social majority, migrants can follow divergent paths leading to upward mobility, stagnation or marginalization. These trajectories depend on the complex interaction between: individual characteristics (human capital, age, gender, ethnicity and legal status), community-level factors (local labor markets, ethnic composition of neighborhoods and the presence of support organizations), and institutional structures (public policies, employer practices and systemic discrimination).

A central element of segmented assimilation is the demographic heterogeneity of migration flows. The demographic profile acts as a conditioning factor that shapes the likelihood of entry into different labor market segments. For instance, young migrants with technical education may find niches in industrial or formal services sectors, while older or less-educated migrants tend to find more opportunities in the secondary segment, characterized by precarious, temporary and informal jobs. The asymmetry in human capital interacts with discrimination based on origin or visible traits, limiting the translation of skills into quality employment. Consequently, even equivalent formal qualifications can yield divergent outcomes upon arrival.

The experience in the place of destination—understood as the processes of job-seeking, workplace socialization, access to social networks and interaction with public institutions—shape the possibilities of upward mobility. Portes & Zhou (1993) demonstrate that territorial settings and community composition determine whether social networks serve as buffers or as traps of poverty. Additionally, negative experiences in the labor market consolidate paths of vulnerability that can become intergenerational without institutional intervention.

From a complementary perspective, Kaczmarczyk et al. (2020) reorient the discussion toward economic integration, understood not merely as labor market partici-

pation but as a multidimensional and dynamic process shaped by both individual capabilities and structural opportunities. Building on Sen's (1999) concepts, Kaczmarczyk et al. (2020) argue that integration should be analyzed through the ability of immigrants to convert their resources into meaningful outcomes (functionings), such as stable employment, decent income or access to social protection. This conceptualization marks a shift from static indicators—for example, employment rates, average wages—to a more process-oriented approach, emphasizing agency, institutional context, labor conditions and living standards. Thus, economic integration becomes a matter of expanding migrants' real freedoms to achieve the kinds of lives they have reason to value.

Linking segmented assimilation to the capability's framework provides a multidimensional understanding of economic integration, considering the circumstances in which the person emigrated, the experiences in the host country and the possibilities for realizing personal projects. From a capabilities approach, the immigrants' positions in the labor markets are not determined solely by effort or skills, but by the institutional and structural conversion factors that either enable or inhibit the transformation of resources into sustainable functionings. For example, recognition of foreign credentials, access to legal documentation and legal regulations, all shape the actual opportunities available to newcomers. In segmented contexts, these conversion factors are especially restrictive, producing asymmetric integration outcomes among similar individuals.

Moreover, the demographic diversity of immigrant populations plays a central role in defining both the scope of their capabilities and their vulnerability to labor market segmentation. For instance, female migrants may face a double segmentation, by gender and migratory status, limiting their ability to achieve functionings such as income stability or occupation mobility. This could become even more complex if age or periods out of the labor market are considered.

In this context, for immigrants who face institutional barriers to formal labor markets, self-employment and entrepreneurship could become a strategy to transform restricted capabilities into productive functionings. Through these activities migrants face structural exclusion and transform limited opportunities into autonomous but precarious livelihoods. As the segmented assimilation framework pre-

dicts, these entrepreneurial activities frequently occur within the informal sector.

Formal employment pathways, while more stable, often remain inaccessible without legal status or recognized qualifications. This structural imbalance reinforces the segmented nature of assimilation, where only certain groups can translate their capabilities into durable functionings. For others, particularly refugees and undocumented migrants, economic integration remains constrained to survival-level occupations, perpetuating patterns of socioeconomic segmentation.

Additionally, the temporal dimension is key to understanding integration trajectories. Over time, the accumulation of experience, expansion of networks, and gradual acquisition of legal or social capital can expand migrants' capabilities, enabling transitions from informal to formal employment. But prolonged exposure to precarious conditions may also consolidate exclusion, especially in contexts where institutional barriers remain unaddressed. As Kaczmarczyk et al. (2020) emphasize, integration policies must therefore focus not only on immediate labor participation but also on building the structural conditions that enhance the capability set necessary for sustainable inclusion. In their framework, integration is not a one-sided adaptation but a co-constructed process that reflects the responsiveness of host institutions to migrants' needs and capacities.

Finally, combining Segmented Assimilation Theory with the capability-based understanding of economic integration proposed by Kaczmarczyk et al. (2020) allows for a nuanced analysis of immigrant inclusion—one that accounts for demographic heterogeneity, structural barriers, and the agency of migrants in navigating limited opportunity structures. Economic integration, thus, should be conceptualized not as a static outcome but as a dynamic process of expanding and realizing capabilities within segmented institutional environments.

Throughout all these processes, emigration causes and ways in which people move to another country, naturally leads to clear distinctions. Mass influxes of refugees, as experienced by Türkiye, the presence of terrorist organizations, and the uncertainties faced by both the host country's administration and the incoming population complicate economic integration processes in the short and medium term, inevitably leading to the majority of migrants remaining within the informal economy.



METHODOLOGY

With the purpose of making the most of the available statistical information and exploring beyond its inherent limitations, a mixed methodology is used. The quantitative analysis aims to identify multiple causal relationships between individual characteristics and multiple labor-related outcomes. For Mexico, it is used the 2020 Population and Housing Census sample, which covers approximately 10% of national population (INEGI, 2020). The sample is further restricted to the foreign-born population, excluding individuals born in the U.S. For Türkiye, it is used data from Syrian Barometer 2023, which was conducted in collaboration with UNHCR and revealed the situation of Syrians through extensive fieldwork. In both cases, only individuals above 15 years old are considered. The model to be estimated is expressed as follows:

$$y = \alpha + X\beta + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

This initial model is a simple probabilistic model where y is a discrete variable indicating if the person was working and zero otherwise; X is a vector of controls including: gender defined as a discrete variable that takes the value of one when the individual is female; marital status which is also a discrete variable equals to one when person report being married or living together, and zero otherwise; age and age squared to capture nonlinear effects; a dummy variable that indicates if person immigrated in the last five years, and schooling (continuous for Mexico and discrete for Türkiye). In both cases, a geographical variable is included: Mexico City, Northern Border and Southern Border when Mexican data is used, and for Turkish case: Marmara (where Istanbul is located), Southern Anatolia (border provinces with Syria) and Other. Furthermore, only for Mexico we incorporate a discrete variable indicating the cause of emigration (Labor, Familiar, Education, and Other), and language proficiency of the destination for Turkish data. Finally, ε is the error term.

In a second model, the aim is to estimate the causal effects on the type of economic activity. Therefore, the sample is restricted only to people who was working. Preserving structure and controls in equation (1), it is estimated a multinomial pro-

probabilistic model where y is a discrete variable that indicates the type of occupation, i.e., dependent employment, self-employment or entrepreneurship. Basically, the difference between self-employment and entrepreneurship categories lies in the fact that the last one is assigned to individuals who report having employees. So, individuals in entrepreneurship category are also employers. Because dependent employment occurs more frequently, this category is used as the reference group to estimate the rest of probabilities. For the Turkish data, due to the small number of people reporting such activities, the dependent variable includes in the same category both self-employment and entrepreneurship. Thus, it is estimated a simple probabilistic model.

Likewise, indicators of the individuals' country of origin are not included. This is intended, on the one hand, to avoid reducing the statistical efficiency of the estimated coefficients, and on the other hand, to maintain as much variation as possible in the dependent variable, since categories with fewer individuals increase the likelihood of encountering flat areas. For the same reason, the interaction between marital status and gender is also not included. Although such interaction may have a significant impact on the decisions regarding which household members are working.

To explore whether there are differences among individuals from different countries, three distinct samples were defined for the Mexican case: all immigrants; immigrants from Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries; and immigrants from NTCA countries. Due to the similarity between the results for individuals from LAC and NTCA countries, the results section only presents those for the NTCA sample, along with the results for the sample including all nationalities. These exercises, together with the progressive inclusion of controls in the X vector, serve as robustness checks for the results. Because the Turkish data only capture information about Syrian population, no disaggregation by country is shown.

Quantitative analysis has the limitation that is not possible to track previous migrant and labor experiences, opportunities, economic dependents living abroad or migratory status. Moreover, the data used only capture labor conditions for individuals in the dependent employment category, but not for those in the self-employment or entrepreneurship categories. It is also not possible to identify what

led each individual to enter their current occupation or how this influences their personal and professional aspirations.

To address these limitations, qualitative research is used, consisting of multiple semi-structured interviews with migrants in Mexico, who are currently working. Participants were contacted through the purposive sampling via direct contact. Given that processes and outcomes may vary according to nationality, gender, reasons for migration, and geographic location, these elements constitute the criteria for heterogeneity. Thematic axes and interview model are presented in Table 5.1.

For Türkiye, within the framework of SB-2023 , 12 FGDs (Field-Gain Debates) were carried out as part of the qualitative section of the comprehensive field study with Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Through these exercises, multiple experiences and difficulties faced by the immigrant population in the country were captured.

Table 5.1. Thematic axes and interview model

Theoretical axis	Category	Question
Segmented assimilation	Origin	Could you tell me a little about yourself and what your life was like before migrating?
	Origin	Why did you leave your country, and how did you get here?
	External factors	Have you gotten any help finding a job—from family, friends, an organization, or the government? What kind of help was it?
	Labor market integration	What other jobs have you had since you arrived to the country?
	Labor market integration ¹	Have you had the opportunity to study, take courses, or receive training in the country? How did this happen?
	Trajectory	How do you think your migratory status has affected your job chances/your ability to start a business?
Economic integration	Labor market integration	What's your current job, and how did you get it?
	Labor market integration Abilities	How have your background—like your education, age, or work experience—affected the kind of work you're doing now?
	Financial inclusion	Do you have access to a bank account, app account, or another financial product? If yes, how has that affected the opportunities you've had?

Economic integration	Financial inclusion Remittances	Do you usually send money back home? Have you ever received money from family or friends abroad?
	Freedom	When you get sick, where do you usually go for medical care?
	Freedom	Has your job helped you reach goals such as saving money or improving your well-being?
	Freedom	Are you planning to stay in the country, go back home, or move somewhere else?

VI RESULTS

VI.A. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

In Table 6.1, the descriptive statistics are presented. First, labor force participation differs visibly between countries. In Mexico, it is 56.4%, while in Türkiye it is only 32.2%. Among the employed population, in both countries the proportion of dependent employees is close to 70%, while those engaged in self-employment and entrepreneurship account for around 30%, with a slightly higher proportion of entrepreneurs in the Mexican case.

Regarding the demographic profile, in both cases the presence of women is close to 50%. However, important differences are observed in marital status and age, which are closely related variables. In Mexico, 67.4% report being married and the average age is 40 years. In the case of Türkiye, 58.1% is married and the average age is 31 years. The average schooling is similar in both countries. In this regard, it is important to consider the limitations of this variable due to differences in educational systems across countries of origin. Regarding proficiency in the destination's language, information is only available for Türkiye, and each level has similar frequencies.

Table 6.1. Descriptive statistics

	Mexico Mean (SD)	Türkiye Mean (SD)
Working	0,564 (0,496)	0,322 (0,467)
Dependent employee	0,692 (0,462)	0,678 (0,467)
Self-employed	0,251 (0,434)	0,312 (0,463)
Entrepreneur	0,057 (0,232)	0,010 (0,098)
Female	0,499 (0,500)	0,507 (0,500)
Married	0,674 (0,469)	0,581 (0,493)

Age	40,1 (16,3)	30,5 (14,6)
Region - Mexico City/Marmara	0,383 (0,469)	0,581 (0,493)
Region - Northern Border	0,111 (0,314)	
Region - Southern Border/Southeastern Anatolia	0,102 (0,302)	0,265 (0,441)
Region - Other	0,405 (0,462)	0,010 (0,098)
Recent migration (less than 5 years)	0,310 (0,462)	0,010 (0,098)
Schooling (years)	10,1 (6,0)	
Schooling - Illiterate or less than primary school		0,177 (0,382)
Schooling - Primary school		0,376 (0,484)
Schooling - Middle school		0,286 (0,452)
Schooling - High-school or more		0,161 (0,367)
Language proficiency - Basic		0,346 (0,476)
Language proficiency - Intermediate		0,328 (0,469)
Language proficiency - Advanced		0,326 (0,469)
Cause - Labor	0,391 (0,488)	
Cause - Familiar	0,209 (0,407)	
Cause - Education	0,049 (0,215)	
Cause - Other	0,351 (0,477)	
NTCA	0,461 (0,498)	
Observations	20 256	5 247

In terms of geographic distribution, despite the differences between countries, similar patterns can be observed. Between 33% and 38% are concentrated in the regions where the most populated cities are located, around 25% in border areas (for Türkiye this only includes the border with Syria), and around 40% in inland areas within each country. For Türkiye, only one percent of respondents arrived in the

country after 2020. In contrast, in Mexico, around one-third arrived recently, with economic reasons predominating as the main drivers of migration. A significant portion of this sample originates from the NTCA (46.1%).

MEXICO

Table 6.2 presents the marginal effects—in which extent a small change in one variable affects the occurrence of the outcome—for the probability of working. In almost all cases, the effect of each factor does not differ based on country of origin. In contrast, these effects do vary depending on how long a person has been residing. Having immigrated in the last five years decreases the likelihood of being employed by approximately nine percentage points. This result is consistent with expectations, as those who have arrived more recently are also the ones likely to face the greatest barriers to entering the labor market.

Table 6.2. Probability of working in Mexico (marginal effects)

Variable	All immigrants			Only NTCA		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female	-1,116***	-1,118***	-0,806***	-1,473***	-1,474***	-1,059***
Married	-0,183***	-0,182***	-0,114***	-0,312***	-0,316***	-0,211***
Age	0,140***	0,136***	0,118***	0,123***	0,123***	0,125***
Age ²	-0,002***	-0,002***	-0,002***	-0,001***	-0,001***	-0,002***
Region - Mexico City	0,302***	0,246***	0,204***	0,424***	0,327**	0,394
Region - Northern Border	0,115***	0,162***	0,112**	0,059	0,071	0,083
Region - Southern Border	0,014	0,189***	0,058	-0,033	0,040	0,032

Recent migration (less than 5 years)	-0,190***	-0,224***		-0,091**	-0,105***	
Schooling (years)		0,026***	0,018***		0,018***	0,005
Cause - Labor			0,614***			0,565***
Cause - Familiar			-0,151***			-0,073
Cause - Education			-0,683***			-0,375
Observations	20 256	20 192	6.253	9 332	9 324	2.335

* $p < 0,10$, ** $p < 0,05$, *** $p < 0,01$.

Together with the variable capturing recent immigration, being married or being a woman significantly reduces the probability to have a job. Among the factors included in the models, gender carries the greatest weight in determining whether an individual is working or not. Moreover, in this case, a slightly stronger effect is observed among the NTCA population. This may be related either to household structure or to cultural factors.

Regarding geographic effects, residing in a border region—whether north or south—or in the country's capital increases the likelihood of working, compared with individuals living in any other state. This effect is strongest in the Southern Border states and in Mexico City. For the Southern Border, this may reflect the fact that a significant share of recent immigrants settles in that region. In the case of Mexico City, the effect likely responds to the capital's strong economic dynamism.

To further examine the factors that may influence the decision to pursue self-employment or entrepreneurial activities, Table 6.3 presents the results of the model estimating these probabilities. The reference or comparison group consists of dependent workers, which is also the largest group. When comparing the results

for self-employment and entrepreneurship, it is clear that both sets of outcomes are quite similar, with only a few exceptions. Being a woman or being married increases the likelihood of engaging in such a job. The female variable has no effect on entrepreneurship for the total immigrant population, and only shows a positive effect among individuals from the NTCA. This may be due to the fact that immigrants from the NTCA tend to migrate primarily for economic reasons, while for immigrants from other countries, educational motives or family reunification may play a larger role.

Table 6.3. Probability of being self-employed or entrepreneur in Mexico (marginal effects)

Self-employed

Variable	All immigrants			Only NTCA		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female	0,210***	0,213***	0,004	0,487***	0,472***	0,223*
Married	0,163***	0,164***	0,158**	0,273***	0,265***	0,361**
Age	0,050***	0,051***	0,036*	0,063***	0,063***	0,034
Age ²	-0,000***	-0,000***	-0,000	-0,000***	-0,000***	-0,000
Region - Mexico City	-0,109*	-0,111*	-0,177	-0,170	-0,279	-0,249
Region - Northern Border	-0,451***	-0,454***	-0,513***	-0,522***	-0,508***	-0,912***
Region - Southern Border	-0,149***	-0,144***	-0,110	-0,183***	-0,072	-0,395**
Recent migration (less than 5 years)	-0,269***	-0,265***		-0,289***	-0,315***	
Schooling (years)		0,000	0,020**		0,029***	0,021
Cause - Labor			-0,441***			-0,023
Cause - Familiar			0,119			0,337*
Cause - Education			-0,222			0,305
Observations	20 256	20 192	6.253	9 332	9 324	2.335

Entrepreneur

Variable	All immigrants			Only NTCA		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Female	0,023	-0,002	-0,101	0,353***	0,331***	0,768**
Married	0,179***	0,189***	-0,005	0,606***	0,594***	1,302
Age	0,076***	0,072***	0,060**	0,090***	0,093***	0,101
Age ²	-0,001***	-0,001***	-0,000	-0,001***	-0,001**	-0,000
Region - Mexico City	0,054	-0,028	-0,024	-0,556	-0,943*	-11,391***
Region - Northern Border	-0,217**	-0,157*	-0,306	-0,051	-0,040	0,200
Region - Southern Border	-0,717***	-0,467***	0,007	-0,557***	-0,295**	0,247
Recent migration (less than 5 years)	-0,290***	-0,330***		-0,378**	-0,429***	
Schooling (years)		0,037***	0,069***		0,073***	0,146***
Cause - Labor			0,159			1,262**
Cause - Familiar			0,231			0,587
Cause - Education			-0,614			-10,624
Observations	11 430	11 386	3.353	5.146	5.139	1.242

*p<0,10, **p<0,05, ***p<0,01.

For self-employment specifically, in Northern Border states, people are more likely to work as dependent employees—an outcome that is generally associated with higher levels of labor formality. One of the most relevant findings related to the geographic dimension is that, in the Southern Border states, the effect on the probability of entrepreneurship is so large and negative that engaging in entrepreneurial activity in that region becomes a non-viable alternative. It shows that entrepreneurship is an uncommon pathway to economic integration among migrants at the time the data were collected. This, in turn, may be linked to local factors and to individuals' experiences throughout the migration process. If entrepreneurship is to serve as a possible pathway to economic integration, it is necessary to develop strategies that promote economic activity in the southern areas of the country, while also ensuring that the immigrant population does not remain concentrated exclusively in this region.

This pattern may also reflect structural conditions that shape the feasibility of entrepreneurial activity in border regions. Entrepreneurship rarely emerges in the absence of a viable market environment. In contexts where local demand is limited, purchasing power is low, or institutional conditions are weak, the incentives for starting a business tend to diminish substantially. In such settings, the absence of robust entrepreneurial ecosystems, limited access to credit, and weak market demand may constrain not only migrants but also local populations seeking to establish businesses. As a result, even when migrants possess entrepreneurial aspirations or skills, the local economic environment may not provide the conditions necessary for these initiatives to materialize (Acs, Szerb, & Autio, 2017; North, 1990).

Research on immigrant entrepreneurship consistently emphasizes that business formation is strongly influenced by the opportunity structure of the host economy, including regulatory frameworks, access to markets, and the quality of local institutions (Kloosterman & Rath, 2001; Fairlie & Lofstrom, 2015). In regions where institutional capacity is limited and economic activity is relatively weak, migrants may face additional barriers to starting and sustaining businesses, particularly if their legal or migration status further restricts access to formal financial systems and business networks. Consequently, policies aimed at promoting these kinds of

economic activities should not only focus on individual-level interventions—such as training or microcredit—but also address the broader regional development context by strengthening local markets, improving institutional quality, and expanding economic opportunities beyond the border region.

Finally, higher levels of schooling increase the likelihood that an individual will opt for entrepreneurial activities. As with regional effects, if this type of activity is to become a viable alternative for economic integration, it is crucial to carry out policies and actions that foster greater human capital accumulation.

TÜRKIYE

Table 6.4 presents the results regarding the probability of working among the Syrian population. Overall, results are similar to those for Mexico. This is the case, for example, for the variables indicating marital status, age, and living in regions with the largest cities. Despite these similarities, important differences are registered for some other variables. The main disparity is found in the variable indicating whether the person is a woman. According to the results for Türkiye, being a woman reduces the probability of working by twice as much as what was found for Mexico. Another variable showing an opposite effect across countries is education. In Türkiye, a higher level of education is associated with a lower probability of working. This is due to the fact that it is not very possible for Syrians to work in skilled jobs. Working in daily jobs is more possible, and education is not a necessary factor for this.

As expected, the variable measuring Turkish language proficiency has a positive effect on the probability of working. However, this indicator has an important limitation in the estimated model, since there may be reverse causality. In other words, being active in the labor market may increase interaction with locals and, consequently, improve Turkish language proficiency. Even after including this variable, the rest of the coefficients remain similar, which provides evidence of the robustness of the results.

Table 6.4. Probability of working in Türkiye (marginal effects)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	-2,406***	-2,365***	-2,307***
Married	-0,298***	-0,292***	-0,295***
Age	0,269***	0,267***	0,272***
Age ²	-0,004***	-0,004***	-0,004***
Region - Marmara	-0,007	-0,031	-0,035
Region - Southeastern Anatolia	-0,451***	-0,454***	-0,513***
Recent migration (less than 5 years)	-0,238	-0,271	-0,259
Schooling - Primary school		-0,178**	-0,214***
Schooling - Middle school		-0,183**	-0,249***
Schooling - High-school or more		-0,393***	-0,489***
Language proficiency - Intermediate			0,500***
Language proficiency - Advanced			0,412***
Observations	5.247	5.247	5.247

*p<0,10, **p<0,05, ***p<0,01.

Regarding the determinants of being self-employed or an entrepreneur, little can be said because in most cases the estimated coefficients were not statistically significant. To a large extent, this is due to the limited variation in all the variables considered, which translates into a very homogeneous profile among most of the surveyed individuals. This issue is very common when migration is studied, due to the dynamism of this phenomenon.

As shown in Table 6.5, only two variables have an effect on the probability of being self-employed or an entrepreneur: age and residence in Southeastern Anatolia. As age increases, the propensity to engage in self-employment or entrepreneurial activities increases slightly, even after considering the potential effects of sex and marital status. In addition, residing in the provinces bordering Syria reduces such probabilities. These results remain even after controlling for Turkish language proficiency, which has a significant number of native speakers in the south of the country.

These findings should be interpreted with caution due to representativeness limitations. In particular, the small number of respondents engaged in self-employment or entrepreneurship, together with the relatively homogeneous profile of the surveyed population, limits the statistical power of the estimates and reduces the ability to detect significant differences across groups.

Table 6.5. Probability of being self-employed or entrepreneur in Türkiye (marginal effects)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	0,163	0,148	0,165
Married	0,089	0,092	0,110
Age	0,060*	0,057*	0,070*
Age ²	-0,001	-0,001	-0,001

Region - Marmara	0,097	0,087	0,082
Region - Southeastern Anatolia	-0,213*	-0,220*	-0,230*
Recent migration (less than 5 years)	0,412	0,348	0,422
Schooling - Primary school		-0,130	-0,099
Schooling - Middle school		-0,014	0,026
Schooling - High-school or more		0,130	0,159
Language proficiency - Intermediate			-0,202
Language proficiency - Advanced			0,166
Observations	1.687	1.687	1.687

*p<0,10, **p<0,05, ***p<0,01.

VI.B. QUALITATIVE RESULTS

MEXICO

The study draws on eight semi-structured interviews with migrants aged between 18 and 59 years old from Cuba, El Salvador, Haiti and Venezuela who have been living in Mexico between six months and four years. The participants are distributed across three cities that represent distinct migration contexts: two in Mexico City, three in Tijuana (on the border with the U.S.), and three more in Tapachula (on the border with Guatemala). Interviews were conducted between November 2025 and January 2026. The migration status of participants ranging from individuals who recently initiated regularization procedures to others who have obtained different types of humanitarian protection.

Table 6.6. Profile of interviewees

City (Region)	Origin	Gender	Age	Migratory Status	Current Occupation
Tijuana (Northern Border)	Haití	Male	18	Irregular	Construction (Dependent)
	Haití	Female	27	Refugee	Non-Governmental Organization (Dependent) Undergraduate Student
	Haití	Female	38	Refugee	Restaurant Owner (Entrepreneur) Undergraduate Student
Tapachula (Southern Border)	Cuba	Female	50	Asylum-seeker	Wooden Crafts (Self-employed)
	Cuba	Male	48	Complementary protection	Metalworker, Cobbler (Self-employed)
	Haití	Male	27	Complementary protection	Muralist, Painter, Painting Teacher (Self-employed)
Mexico City	Venezuela	Male	34	Irregular	Security Guard (Dependent)
	El Salvador	Female	54	Complementary protection	Clothing Repair

The decision to migrate constitutes the initial turning point across all narratives. In Haiti, widespread violence, the collapse of public infrastructure, and political instability push especially young people to leave. In Cuba, motivations combine acute economic crisis, persistent inflation, deteriorating employment conditions, and a marked rise in insecurity. Political constraints appear as an additional factor that

limits internal mobility and pushes people toward leaving the country. Migration routes reveal distinct patterns by nationality. Haitians commonly have lived in other countries, such as Brazil or Chile. For Cubans, departure almost always requires a major sacrifice of family assets: to finance the journey, they must sell their homes, businesses, or household possessions. None of the participants portray themselves as passive victims of migration; rather, they emphasize agency and clarity of purpose.

Regional differences play a decisive role in shaping trajectories. The saturation of labor supply, low wages, and widespread discrimination hinder early integration in the Southern Border, as one of Cuban participants mentioned: “In some businesses I’ve seen job postings seeking employees, but only of certain nationalities—specifically Guatemalans and Mexicans. They do not want people from other nationalities.” Self-employment in Tapachula operate primarily as survival strategies rather than consolidated projects. This exemplifies what Portes & Zhou describe as downward assimilation risk, where migrants’ early incorporation into precarious segments of the labor market can trap them in long-term vulnerability unless external interventions or opportunities occur.

This pattern cannot be understood solely through labor market outcomes but must also be situated within the broader institutional environment of the regional economy. Liberal institutional approaches emphasize that economic opportunities depend heavily on the presence of stable rules, secure property rights, and accessible markets that allow individuals to invest and compete productively (North, 1990; Acemoğlu & Robinson, 2012). In southern Mexico, structural constraints—such as weak local investment, limited access to credit, and high levels of informality—affect not only migrants but also local populations. Under these conditions, the prevalence of survival self-employment reflects a broader context of limited opportunity rather than simply migrants’ individual labor market disadvantages. As a result, entrepreneurial efforts tend to concentrate in low-productivity sectors characterized by informality and limited capital accumulation (Baumol, 1990). Thus, the experience in the region illustrates how restricted institutional development can shape the economic incorporation of migrants and locals alike, transforming self-employment into a strategy of subsistence rather than a pathway toward economic advancement.

In Tijuana, economy is more dynamic, with greater sectoral diversification, demand for labor, and more formal employment channels. Interviewees reported that although competition and exploitation risks persist, it is more feasible to access stable jobs or to develop entrepreneurial ventures. In Mexico City, the situation shifts again: it offers stronger institutional frameworks, a wider array of public programs, and more formal employment possibilities. Although the cost of living is higher, those who achieve labor insertion generally find greater stability and opportunities for professional advancement.

Among all participants, only in two cases interviewees preserved her occupation: A Salvadorian in Mexico City who owns a clothing repair business and a Cuban in Tapachula who makes wooden crafts. In both cases, they have a similar profile: women over 50 years old, who have emigrated in family units. Family members have learned the activity, participate in the business, and play an active role as a support network.

In the only two observed cases of entrepreneurship, this activity began as self-employment to generate some income and, by taking advantage of circumstances, personal skills, training, and resilience, they have been able to consolidate small businesses. Particularly, both Cubans and Haitians rely on self-employment when they cannot secure dependent jobs or when they experience discrimination. A wide array of activities is represented—street food sales, artisanal production, independent domestic work, hour-based cleaning, shoe repair, and artistic services.

In both cases of entrepreneurship, they are women with complementary protection, and tax registered. However, the hiring of workers is informal. The participant in Mexico City expresses a desire to help other migrants and, in this regard, comments about a worker from her country: “a young woman comes to help me, she came to Mexico with her child (...) being a young woman with a child, nobody wants to hire you.” When asked whether she had considered hiring this person formally, she states: “it’s difficult; they do it this way because they don’t want us to stay.” According to current legislation, to contract a foreigner, the employer must be registered at the National Institute of Migration (INM) and the employee must have valid immigration status with permission to work.

While entrepreneurs benefited more from institutional or community-based support and gradually transitioned into entrepreneurship after initial wage employment, there are two cases of consolidated self-employment. Both of them related to arts. In these cases, they faced specific difficulties related to market demand, commercialization of products, and acquisition of materials or spaces for production, but also demonstrated higher levels of occupational autonomy. Despite precarious incomes and ongoing uncertainty, both artistic interviewees reported meaningful achievements, such as establishing a client base, participating in fairs, or stabilizing their production.

Regular status not only determines whether migrants can legally work but also shapes their bargaining power, the types of jobs they can access, and their expectations regarding stability and fair treatment. Participants repeatedly emphasized that documentation affects whether employers respect contracts, pay on time, or offer safer working conditions. From a capability's perspective, legal status functions as a pivotal conversion factor that either enables or restricts the transformation of skills into meaningful functionings such as secure income or occupational mobility.

In all cases, the asylum is perceived as the pathway to regularization and thus to remaining in the country. This is so even though Mexican authorities themselves indicate that asylum is not the same as direct regularization. In this regard, it would be worthwhile to explore alternative pathways for the regularization of people who do not intend to return to their countries of origin but who do not fall squarely within the criteria for the recognition of international protection. Across all cities, dependent work is highly sensitive to migration status: those without documents face elevated risks of exploitation, lower wages, and arbitrary dismissal. Even individuals with regular status recount experiences of discriminatory assumptions.

Labor transitions—from informality into formal employment—appear as sudden but often fragile processes shaped by opportunity, documentation, and accumulated social capital. Migrants in irregular situation begin in informal occupations upon arrival. Over time, some are able to move into formal jobs, typically when they secure legal status, improve their Spanish proficiency, or relocate to cities with more dynamic labor markets. Several interviewees described specific mecha-

nisms that facilitated their entry into formal employment. The most important of these include obtaining regular status, gaining fluency in Spanish and developing professional reputation.

In cases where participants have a formal employment, it is observed that they have received support from international organizations, civil society, or religious groups. Such support ranges from information and assistance with asylum applications to medical care, cash or in-kind aid, job training and Spanish courses. In recent months, however, there has been a decline in activities from these support sources, mainly due to budgetary constraints. In this regard, it would be worthwhile to assess the impact of these support networks and potentially redirect efforts toward improving the economic integration of migrants.

Access to health services also depended on networks and economic predictability. Those who achieved a stable income were better positioned to pay for voluntary enrollment in social security or private health insurance. In cases where participants report having formal employment, they also report seeking medical care at private pharmacies or at public hospitals that do not require proof of eligibility. This may indicate, on the one hand, that they are not fully aware of the labor benefits to which they are entitled. On the other hand, it may suggest that they work in places where hiring is not fully formal.

Having a regular status allows migrants to open bank accounts, access formal jobs or relocate to more dynamic labor markets. Financial inclusion, according to the interviewees, is highly useful because it enables them to receive electronic payments in a context where potential customers increasingly use less cash, and because it allows the purchase of certain supplies through online channels, thereby reducing transportation costs associated with buying supplies directly in commercial establishments. Participants describe documentation as a key factor in advancing their occupational strategies. A Salvadoran participant commented: "What has helped me is already having my migration document, because it allowed me to open a bank account and accept payments by transfer."

Regarding documentation, a participant from Venezuela stated that he has not sought migration regularization because his passport has expired. He considers

the renewal cost to be high and has heard of cases in which the process takes several months. In addition to concerns about having a valid document for the purpose of applying for asylum, he reports being worried that in the coming months he may not have access to a phone line because the Mexican government has implemented a registration system for mobile lines requiring foreigners to provide passport information. It should be noted that the authorities require asylum applicants to maintain an active phone line, and in some cases this medium is also used to send remittances.

Geographical differences point to the importance of state capacity and institutional development in shaping migrant economic integration. Regions with stronger administrative capacity, more effective labor regulation, and better access to formal markets tend to generate broader opportunities not only for migrants but for the local population as well. Inclusive and well-functioning institutions are central to enabling productive entrepreneurship and sustained economic mobility (Açemoğlu & Robinson, 2012). Resettlement programs can contribute to better economic integration in the short term. Asking about experiences with these programs, participants report having heard about these programs and express interest and willingness to move to other places—medium-sized cities—where they can find employment opportunities.

Finally, most participants express intentions to remain in the country long-term. Cases of successful entrepreneurship as well as upward occupational mobility illustrate that migrants seek not only to survive but to contribute actively to local economies. Supporting their capability expansion thus becomes central to ensuring long-term integration.

TÜRKIYE

FGDs were conducted between December 2023 and January 2024 with Syrian nationals. In total, FGDs had 75 participants. Table 6.7 disaggregates participants by city and category. Special efforts have been made to increase women's participation in FGDs with Syrians. The reason for this was the desire to be aware of gender-specific experiences as well as to include women's perspectives, expectations, and opinions. Besides women, FGDs were conducted with Syrians from different occupational groups. The groups included in SB-2023 were "women", "men", and "mixed" (academics, lawyers, shopkeepers, employees, local journalists, NGO workers, etc.). FGDs were conducted in Adana, Hatay, Izmir, Istanbul and Mersin, covering different regions of the country.

One of the main problems faced by participants is the issue of travel/permits, which negatively impacts their economic activities. From 2011 onwards, there were no mobility restrictions for Syrians arriving in Türkiye until 2018. This allowed Syrians to settle in any city and neighborhood they wished. More than half of the Syrians moved away from the border region, heading towards industrial cities in Western Türkiye such as Istanbul, Bursa, Kocaeli, and Izmir. In these cities, they generally preferred to settle in inexpensive neighborhoods close to their workplaces. Another reason for this preference was the desire for solidarity and security among other Syrians, brought about by the "chain migration" movement. However, the sociological ghetto formations of Syrians rapidly concentrating in certain districts and neighborhoods of certain cities created unease in Turkish society.

Table 6.7. Field-Gain Debates with Syrians

City (Region)	Number of FGDs	Category	Number of Participants
Adana (Others)	1	Men	5
	2	Woman	11
Hatay (Southeastern Anatolia)	2	Mixed	12
	1	Student	7
İzmir (Other)	1	Woman	9
	1	Mixed	6
Mersin (Other)	1	Mixed	6
	1	Mixed	6
İstanbul (Marmara)	1	Student	7
	1	Woman	6
Total	12		75

In 2018, the Turkish Ministry of Interior issued a decision stating that Syrians could only travel to the provinces where they were registered with a reasonable justification and that those who did not comply would be deported. Later, through neighborhood-based studies, the government prevented neighborhoods where more than 20% of the registered residents were foreigners from granting residency permits to new arrivals of Syrians and other foreigners. However, these measures created significant problems for Syrians. In particular, the movement of those engaged in commercial activities or those who had found jobs in different provinces was restricted. These obstacles became a major problem, especially for entrepreneurs. Even visiting children attending universities in other provinces became problematic for Syrians who had been living in Türkiye for over 10 years on average. Therefore, the “travel permit” system became an obstacle to many economic and social mobility opportunities for Syrians.

The second significant problem that Syrians reported in the FGDs concerns the “closed neighborhoods” implemented by the Turkish government for process management. For the reasons stated above, approximately 1,500 neighborhoods were closed to foreigners to prevent the ghettoization of the Syrian population. This prevented Syrians from moving to cheaper and higher-quality housing in these neighborhoods. Although this measure was introduced to combat ghettoization, it has significantly worsened the lives of Syrians. In fact, the administration was aware that this measure would make life difficult for Syrians. These measures encouraged Syrians to make decisions about returning home. Throughout this process, the Turkish state has also demonstrated that it does not intend for Syrians to remain permanently in Türkiye. The mechanisms for combating ghettoization and controlling mobility have also negatively impacted Syrians’ employment and other economic activities. In reality, preventing the mobility and address changes of Syrians is clearly contrary to liberal economic and market principles. However, the high level of politicization of the issue in Türkiye, the establishment of populist anti-immigrant political parties, and the fact that almost all political movements oppose integration efforts for Syrians and prioritize their repatriation as a core policy have also hindered Syrians from becoming productive members of society.

In the FGDs, Syrians identified “uncertainty” and “status” as the third most significant problems they face in Türkiye. The status of Syrians in Türkiye is “tempo-

rary protection.” This status has been in place for over 10 years, and for Syrians, it means the constant possibility of returning to or being sent back to their country. This lack of foresight creates a significant obstacle to economic activity, particularly for investors. Almost all Syrians wish to become “Turkish citizens.” However, their current status prevents them from applying for citizenship. If the Turkish state (Ministry of Interior) wishes to grant citizenship to a Syrian through exceptional means, it invites them and grants citizenship after a process. Between 2016 and 2022, approximately 240,000 Syrians were granted citizenship in Türkiye. However, this situation quickly drew significant criticism within Turkish society, with serious objections that citizenship was being used as a political tool. A significant problem is the lack of a standard procedure and transparency regarding citizenship. Therefore, the citizenship granting process was halted after the 2023 elections. Syrians who obtain citizenship generally retain their Syrian citizenship as well, becoming “dual citizens.” Consequently, the approach of “if I become a citizen, I will return to Syria, but if there are too many problems, I will come back again” is very common.

Another important issue highlighted in the FGDs is the difficult working conditions, long working hours, and low wages. Syrians in Türkiye have complained from the beginning about the excessive workload in Türkiye. The difference in work cultures becomes apparent here. Since a significant portion of Syrians are in the informal economy and considered “cheap labor,” their complaints about the labor-wage imbalance are understandable. However, in recent years, it has been observed that Syrians are working under almost the same conditions as Turkish workers, particularly in terms of wages. This problem is no longer just a problem for Syrians, but a common problem for all workers, and Syrians are no longer seen as “cheap labor,” but rather as willing, skilled workers who are needed.

During the interviews, Syrians highlighted the high cost of living in Türkiye, particularly the high rents. Syrian earthquake victims, especially those forced to relocate to other cities due to the severe earthquakes in border provinces in 2023, expressed significant hardship due to high rents. The closure of affordable, refugee-populated neighborhoods to foreigners, primarily Syrians, further complicates their lives.

The FGDs observed a very low participation rate of Syrian women in the workforce. Due to factors such as large families, male-dominated and highly conservative fa-

mily structures, feelings of insecurity, and traditional habits, women's participation in the workforce is between 4% and 6%. Türkiye generally faces problems regarding women's participation in the workforce, and while participation among women has risen to 35% in recent years, this rate is still considerably higher than that of Syrian women. Therefore, it is necessary to work on increasing the active participation of Syrian women in the workforce.

Another significant problem area related to the economy, as expressed by Syrians in FGDs, is the opening of bank accounts and obtaining credit for commercial activities. Turkish banks generally do not accept Syrians opening bank accounts due to concerns about potential links to terrorism or money laundering. This naturally negatively impacts the economic activities of Syrians. Recently, public banks have begun opening accounts for those who are legally employed and insured in their workplaces. However, this problem remains significant. Access to credit is virtually impossible for those who cannot even open a bank account. This particularly affects entrepreneurs.

One more problem expressed by Syrians in FGDs is an obstacle unique to Syrians in Türkiye. Due to border disputes between the two countries in the 1930s, Syrians cannot purchase land, houses, buildings, shops, etc., in Türkiye. This situation also applies to Turkish citizens in Syria. Syrians can only acquire property in the name of a company. This obstacle is one of the most significant problems facing Syrians' economic activities.

Another problem highlighted by the Syrians is the more general issue of informality, which is also faced by Turkish citizens. The fact that approximately 30% of the Turkish economy is informal, and that at least 8-10 million Turks out of 85 million work in the informal sector, already reveals that this is a general problem independent of the Syrians. However, while Syrians initially did not consider informality a problem, even seeing it as an opportunity, in recent years, taking into account state controls, they have increasingly preferred to work formally – with insurance and premiums paid – and are working formally more intensively than they did 5 years ago.

VII

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, Mexico and Türkiye have undergone profound transformations in their migration landscapes, shifting from countries primarily characterized by emigration to key destinations for regional and transregional mobility. In both cases, complex combinations of geopolitical pressures, regional conflicts and tightening migration policies in the Global North have contributed to increasing migrant arrivals, reshaping local labor markets and placing integration at the center of public debate. Despite their different geographies, political organizations and policy frameworks, both countries now face the challenge of incorporating diverse migrant populations into segmented labor markets marked by informality and persistent socioeconomic inequalities.

The main contribution of this research is that it uses comparative information from two countries located along different migration routes and, therefore, they are usually studied separately. Due to the different data sets, it was necessary to conduct separate assessments for Mexico and Türkiye in this analysis. However, joint assessments were carried out in the results section. The analysis presented reveals that migrant economic integration in Mexico is structured by interlocking factors—legal status, regional contexts, gender, education, nationality and social networks—that channel individuals toward distinct occupational paths. While dependent employment offers greater stability, its accessibility is conditioned by documentation and local labor demand. In this context, self-employment and entrepreneurship emerge as significant alternative pathways for economic integration. For a considerable share of migrants, self-employment constitutes regularly an immediate mechanism to generate income when formal opportunities are scarce or inaccessible. Entrepreneurship, although more selective and require higher human capital and more robust networks, provides a path toward upward mobility and has a greater potential for local economic spillover.

A central implication of the findings is that territorial context is not merely a backdrop but a decisive dimension shaping integration trajectories. The contrast between regions illustrates how local economic structures, local institutional fra-

meworks and labor-market segmentation can generate divergent opportunities for migrants with otherwise similar profiles. These territorial disparities are also present in the Turkish context, where greater cities or southern borders regions offer relatively more openings for formal labor insertion and entrepreneurship, mainly among undocumented people.

Türkiye's experience over the last fifteen years has been marked by significant internal changes. As the issue of refugees in Türkiye also involves Europe, the E.U.'s financial support and significant assistance for economic integration cannot be overlooked in the management of this process. However, Syrians who have carved out a new space for themselves within the informal economy face numerous obstacles as both workers and small-to-medium-sized entrepreneurs. For Syrians, who still need to find reasonable grounds for permission to leave the province in which they are registered in Türkiye and who face serious problems in opening bank accounts and obtaining credit, the most important factor in the coming period will be the Turkish state's 'return' policies. This is because Syrians who are actively working in certain regions and sectors of the Turkish economy also pose a political risk for the Turkish government. For this reason, particularly following the political changes in Syria, while the continued presence of Syrians in Türkiye is not highly desirable to Turkish society, the government's shift towards policies that would strengthen permanence carries considerable political risks.

The departure of foreign workers, who account for around 2% of the active workforce in the Turkish economy, could create short-term sectoral problems, but if this is something the government can tolerate, the decision may be to 'send them back'. Unless the reactions of Turkish society subside to a reasonable level, it seems difficult to make permanent plans for refugees in Türkiye. For this reason, the citizenship policy was halted after 240,000 citizenships were granted. Turkish society perceives Syrians not as economic contributors but as a 'burden'; moreover, a serious identity debate surrounding this perception of 'burden' is putting further pressure on the government. However, if the Turkish government decides in the near future to intervene in the livelihoods of Syrians, thereby encouraging or even forcing them to return, it is highly likely that the economic contributions and impacts will be overshadowed. It is precisely at this point that we can observe how economic planning

and social perceptions differ between refugees and regular migrants.

Field studies conducted with refugees in Türkiye reveal that they frequently complain about harsh working conditions, low wages and uncertainty. The barriers they face in entrepreneurship limit their potential contribution to the Turkish economy.

Finally, the narratives analyzed suggest that, despite structural challenges, migrants demonstrate strong adaptative capacities and aspirations for long-term settlement. Their trajectories show that meaningful integration becomes feasible when migrants can accumulate resources that expand their capabilities and allow them to convert their skills into stable functionings. Policies that strengthen regularization mechanism, promote fair labor inclusion, enhance access to financial and social protection systems can play a transformative role in shaping future outcomes. In this sense, the experiences documented here offer important lessons for both Mexico and Türkiye: economic integration is not achieved solely through migrants' efforts but through the creation of enabling environments where their capabilities can flourish. Considering this goal, in the following section some policy recommendations are presented.

Undoubtedly, migration is a global phenomenon that cannot be explained solely by the experiences in countries like Mexico and Türkiye, which have been closely affected by this issue in recent decades. Particularly since the 1990s, migration has become a major social, economic, demographic, and security issue globally, and a concept frequently used in political transformations that both strengthen liberal values and create a breeding ground for anxieties, discrimination, and even racism. The intense human mobility, which Castles and Miller aptly termed the "Age of Migration" (2009), is discussed in many areas, including freedoms, belonging, economic needs, production, demographic transformation, multiculturalism, and security. W. Kymlica's important 1995 work, "Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights" (1995), has become one of the most important theoretical frameworks on the subject. Kymlica, from a liberal perspective, proposed multiculturalism within the integration models of immigrants, and this approach had a global impact. The economic integration of immigrants (labor market participation, income level, occupational mobility, entrepreneurship, etc.) is also one of the most important issues in migration studies. Among the pioneering but also

highly debated studies in this field, the USA-based “Classical Assimilation Theory” (Gordon, 1964), “Human Capital Approach” (Borjas, 1994), and “Segmented Assimilation” (Portes & Zhou, 1993) approaches stand out. However, in Europe, which is not a classic immigration country but tried to fill its labor shortage with guest workers after World War II, “labor market integration” is more frequently discussed in the economic integration of immigrants. The integration of immigrants into the labor market in Europe is closely linked to the welfare regimes, immigration policies, and labor market structures of the countries. Several different models or approaches are generally defined in the literature. These models differ from each other in terms of both policy design and integration outcomes. Several models and practices can be discussed in this study: the “Anglo-Saxon Model” prevalent in the United Kingdom and Ireland; the “Corporatist Model” prevalent in Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, which is based on vocational training; the “Social Democratic Model” in high-welfare countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark; the flexible “Southern European (Mediterranean) Model” applied in Mediterranean countries where the informal economy is large and informality is part of the system; and the “Selective Migration and Skills-Oriented Model,” observed in recent years, particularly in Germany, the Netherlands, and France, which prefers highly qualified migrants. However, since this study primarily focuses on migrants and economic integration processes in Mexico and Türkiye, it only touches upon the models and practices mentioned above to a very limited extent.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEXICO AND TÜRKIYE

1. Strengthen policies and actions aimed at informing immigrants and employers.

There is widespread misinformation regarding the requirements, procedures and documents required to apply for international protection—when individuals' lives are at risk in their country of origin—or to obtain a work permit. Likewise, employers often lack accurate information about the requirements for hiring foreign-born workers. In practice, only large companies tend to hire immigrants, which severely limits labor absorption capacity given that nearly 99% of firms in Mexico are micro, small or medium-size enterprises. Given their prior knowledge of the markets and language advantage, the exports to Syria and the MENA region are more common among the Syrian-owned firms. Almost 10,000 firms with Syrian ownership have been established since 2011, with an average number of 7 employees (TEPAV, 2018). A survey conducted by TEPAV with 300 Syrian establishments reveals that 51% of the firms surveyed are in manufacturing and 42% of the firms surveyed are exporters (UNDP, 2019). Moreover, even though there is a 10% quota on formal Syrian employment, the firms with Syrian ownership report that 67% of the workers are Syrian. The presence of refugees also impacted some of Türkiye's macroeconomic parameters. The lower labor costs translate into lower prices for the finished products. Consumer prices decrease by 2.5%, on average, in the refugee-hosting regions, indicating that lower labor costs are reflected in the prices, particularly for the products of the informal labor-intensive sectors (Balkan & Tumen, 2016). Although there is not enough empirical evidence, something similar may be occurring in regions with higher concentrations of migrants in Mexico.

2. Develop a comprehensive immigration policy aligned with the local context.

The literature on migration mobility is based on regular migration in countries such as U.S., Europe, Canada or Australia. Unfortunately, the migration received by countries such as Mexico and Türkiye mostly stems from asylum or undocumented migration. As the same time as they serve as awaiting countries and return places.

While universal rules govern the economy, employment, production, and entrepreneurship, it is necessary to develop more modular systems based on the motivations, qualities, circumstances, and characteristics of the country where migration takes place. In all cases, human rights, freedom of expression and enterprise must be fully respected.

Migration policy aimed at economic integration should take into account the needs of the local labor market, as well as mechanisms to identify and leverage the skills of the immigrant population, in line with their diverse profiles. In particular, initiatives to promote entrepreneurship should target individuals with prior experience in their countries of origin and those who migrate as part of family units.

3. Include international migration within national statistical information systems.

Currently, there are insufficient statistics for the planning, organization, and evaluation of evidence-based migration policy. Given the current context and the growing importance of migration, it is essential that both countries have accessible, reliable, and timely statistics on the subject. All information should be disaggregated, at least, by period, location, country of origin, age, sex, and education. This would make it possible to adjust local migration policy in a timely manner and to identify potential changes in trends resulting from shifts in countries of origin and in the main destination countries.

4. Simplify access to financial services.

Access to basic financial products allows immigrants to enter formal employment and expands opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship, since these tools enable saving, receiving payments and making purchases easier. In the long-run, transaction histories can serve as evidence for financial institutions to assess creditworthiness, thereby increasing the opportunities to get loans to scale business. As previously proposed, the participation of non-bank financial institutions may be a viable pathway in Mexican context (FNF Mexico, 2025). In both countries there are significant barriers preventing migrants from accessing financial services. One of the main reasons for this stems from concerns about money laundering and the financing of terrorism. In particular, Türkiye must urgently enable

foreigners in the country to access financial services and Mexico must guarantee an effective access.

5. Invest in gender-responsive entrepreneurship programs.

Given the differentiated effects by gender observed in the quantitative analysis, programs should include childcare support, flexible schedules, safety orientations and dedicated financial schemes for women-led businesses. This recommendation seeks to reduce opportunity gaps by gender. That only 4% of Syrians working in Türkiye are women actually explains the problem sufficiently. However, it should not be forgotten that this is also related to asylum and irregular migration practices.

6. Travel, settlement and commercial activity restrictions should be lifted.

It is extremely important for migrants and other foreign nationals to be able to move freely and communicate freely in order to carry out and develop their economic activities and achieve a real integration. Particularly in places where travel and settlement restrictions are imposed, it becomes impossible for migrants to sustain their own lives and contribute to the country in which they live. Therefore, restrictions should be made as exceptional as possible.

7. Encourage market linkages between immigrant entrepreneurs and local supply chains.

In order to reduce economic inequalities by regions, governments and development agencies should develop mechanism to connect migrant-owned enterprises with local markets. The IOM entrepreneurship manual (IOM, 2021) underscores the importance of strengthening commercial linkages and visibility strategies as core components of sustainable business development.

8. Promote geographic mobility to reduce concentration in low-opportunity regions.

Given that entrepreneurship is nearly non-viable in the Southern Border region of Mexico, where conditions tend to trap migrants in downward assimilation trajectories, federal authorities jointly private sector should create relocation incentives, job-matching programs and temporary housing assistance that enable migrants to move toward places with higher potential for local economic spillover and greater economic opportunities according to their professional profiles. The situation in Türkiye regarding Syrian refugees appears quite problematic. After 2018, Syrians were only allowed to reside in the provinces where they were registered, and permission was required if they moved to another city. Similarly, address changes were largely restricted to prevent spatial concentration, i.e., ghettoization. However, these measures play a role in hindering both job opportunities and entrepreneurship from the outset. To strengthen the positive impact of immigrants on the economy, opportunities for mobility that are in line with the natural logic of the economy should be provided.

9. In order for the local community to support the process, their reasonable concerns must be respected and they must be informed through transparent processes.

The local community may perceive unexpected, unplanned, and uncontrolled human movements from outside as a threat. This situation leads to the securitization of the process. In this case, public institutions' policies towards newcomers may also come under political pressure. Therefore, the local community's concerns must be taken seriously, the community must be informed transparently, and special programs must be developed to obtain acceptance.

10. Evaluating migrant motivation for the development of the entire economy.

In general, migrants are highly motivated individuals who work hard to establish their new lives as soon as possible, come up with creative ideas, are not afraid of

entrepreneurship, enjoy taking risks, and are hard-working. Barriers to these people's self-development should be removed and even support should be provided. It should not be forgotten that a growing economic pie in a country ultimately benefits everyone.

11. Decisive policies must be implemented regarding the informal employment of migrants and the labor of migrant children.

Informal employment and child labor are unacceptable and unsustainable issues. However, in countries like Mexico and Türkiye, where informal employment among their own citizens is very high, informal employment and child labor cannot be prevented in the short term. Planning should be based on this reality and should cover the medium and long term. It is even known that the existence of a large informal economy in a country allows both migrants and host country governments to weather crises with less difficulty. Without condoning informal employment, it should not be forgotten that it serves as a lifeline for migrants in their initial years. It should also be considered that, in the short term, the alternative to informal employment creates a high demand for financial support in their countries of origin.

12. Language and effective vocational training programs should be planned for adult migrants.

Educational programs for immigrants are generally planned for school-aged children. However, it is a common problem that adult immigrants do not know the language of their country of origin or lack professional skills. For both social integration and economic cohesion, it is necessary to ensure that adult immigrants learn the language and receive effective vocational training tailored to the needs of their country of origin. This is also a requirement of development-based migration policies.

13. The education and skills acquired by immigrants in their home countries must be recognized and given equivalent status.

One of the major problems faced by immigrants is the lack of recognition and equivalence of the education and skills they acquired in their home countries. This

negatively affects the motivation of immigrants and becomes a significant obstacle to economic integration. One of the major problems faced by immigrants is the lack of recognition and equivalence of the education and skills they acquired in their home countries. This negatively affects the motivation of immigrants and becomes a significant obstacle to economic integration.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAIN MIGRANT DESTINATIONS

1. Immigration policies should be developed based on liberal values.

Liberals, within the framework of a liberal worldview and economic understanding, must propose bolder and more balanced policies, taking into account the reality of migration, which will never end and will only increase. Migration itself is not a phenomenon to be rejected or negated in social, political, or economic terms. Unfortunately, however, the issue of migration has become the most significant challenge to liberal democratic systems in recent decades. Therefore, realistic and proactive migration policy proposals should be put forward from a liberal perspective. The protectionist nationalism approach triggered by migration is rapidly transforming into a xenophobic structure. This situation primarily threatens liberal values. The responsibility for a social and economic liberal perspective that takes seriously societies' concerns about migration, but also considers the need for and reality of migration, should not be ignored. In this regard, the Council of Europe's "The Intercultural Cities" framework offers tools and incentives for cities to manage diversity

2. Developing mechanisms within the GCR Concept for international solidarity and burden-sharing.

One starting point would be to explore extending preferential trade arrangements for countries hosting a large number of refugees to help spur employment both for

refugees and locals, as advocated by the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) as well as the World Refugee & Migration Council (UNHCR, 2018). The first and so far, only manifestation of the idea took the form of the 2016 E.U.-Jordan Compact, in which the E.U. agreed to allow greater access to its market for Jordanian companies employing refugees.

3. Create alternatives that will allow migration to take place in a legal and orderly manner.

It is well known that almost all developed and wealthy countries are experiencing a serious demographic problem due to factors such as declining birth rates and an increasing elderly population. To combat this problem, the need for external human resources is growing. For example, the E.U., with a population of approximately 500 million, needs around 5 million immigrants annually and cannot supply them within the E.U. In Germany, at least 3-4 million foreign workers are needed to replace the 7 million Germans who will retire in the next 10 years. In light of these facts, countries like the E.U. and the U.S., which are target destinations for immigrants, must activate some flexibility in their immigration policies, prioritizing both economic and political factors. This will also reduce the destructiveness of irregular migration. While both bilateral trade agreements between states and global ("UN Global Compact for Migration" and "UN Global Compact on Migration"-2018) and regional ("New Pact on Migration and Asylum"-2024) agreements provide a general framework on this issue, serious problems are encountered in practice. There is a need for more realistic, functional, and implementable regulations that center on development-based migration policies.

4. Countries exposed to migration should consider migration as a development tool; that is, it is not migration itself but its management that is decisive.

Migration is fundamentally a tool for development. Almost all developed and wealthy countries attribute significant contributions to their development and wealth to immigrants. Undoubtedly, countries that plan and accept immigrants are more advantageous. However, even countries that experience migration without such planning will reap the benefits, if not in the short term, then in the medium and long

term, if they create opportunities for immigrants in economic activities, work, and entrepreneurship. In this context, it should not be forgotten that it is not migration itself, but its management that is decisive.

5. Leveraging multinational corporations to expand labor inclusion pathways for migrants.

Migration governance strategies should incorporate large multinational firms as key actors in facilitating labor market inclusion. Due to their scale, resources, and legal capacity, these companies are better positioned to navigate complex regulatory frameworks related to the hiring of foreign workers. This creates an opportunity to expand safe and formal employment channels for migrants, particularly for those coming from contexts of war, violence, or generalized political instability.

Public policy can play a role in encouraging these firms to adopt inclusive hiring practices across their global operations, including the development of internal mechanisms for skills recognition, legal support in migration procedures, and targeted recruitment strategies for vulnerable populations. In coordination with governments, these efforts could help reduce barriers to formal employment, accelerate economic integration, and provide more stable alternatives to irregular migration pathways.

6. Promoting transnational migrant entrepreneurship for development in countries of origin.

Migration policies should recognize migrant entrepreneurship not only as a mechanism for economic integration in destination countries, but also as a driver of economic dynamism in countries of origin. Migrants often acquire skills, networks, and knowledge in host economies that can be leveraged beyond borders. Public policy should facilitate these transnational linkages by supporting mechanisms that enable migrants to transfer skills, capital, and business models across countries, including access to financing, technical assistance, and platforms that connect diaspora entrepreneurs with opportunities in their countries of origin.

In this context, countries such as the U.S. and Germany can play a strategic role by promoting training and incubation initiatives. By fostering these activities, migration can

contribute to economic development, job creation, and innovation in origin countries, while helping reduce incentives for economically driven migration over time.

7. Both developed and wealthy countries, as well as international institutions, particularly the UN, should be more sensitive to international responsibility sharing and should contribute to countries that receive large numbers of irregular migrants and refugees.

Migration, which has existed since the dawn of time and will continue to exist, is fundamentally a tool for development. However, in recent years, migration has been labeled as a “crisis,” a “problem,” and even a “threat” in the world shaping local politics. This new approach, which has become the most useful tool of populist politics and opens the door not only to anti-immigrant sentiment but also to racism, poses significant risks for democratic systems. The growth of these risks is closely linked to the lack of global solidarity. Therefore, developing policies that assume shared responsibility with countries that face the flows such as Mexico and Türkiye, rather than externalizing it regarding migration is essential to sustain liberal democracies.

NOTES

1. Analysis for Türkiye is focused on Syrian population. It is based mainly on three previous projects carried out under leadership of M.M. Erdoğan: Erdoğan (2023a); Erdoğan, Kirişçi & Uysal (2021); and Erdoğan (2023b).
2. The ZTP was implemented in 2018, it required the criminal prosecution of all adults who crossed the border irregularly. Because children cannot be held in criminal custody, in some cases this policy led to the systematic separation of families at the U.S.–Mexico border. The Title 42 was implemented starting in 2020 under a public health order that allowed U.S. authorities to rapidly expel migrants, including asylum seekers, without access to the asylum process, on the grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19.
3. This survey was carried out by El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and FM4 Paso Libre (Dignidad y Justicia en el Camino, A.C.). It has a sample size of 1,722 individuals. Although the sample is not representative, the data constitute one of the few sources of statistical information about the labor and demographic profile of asylum-seekers. The data is not publicly available.
4. This variable is only reported in cases where the individual is identified as having migrated within the last five years. Therefore, it is collinear with the recent migration variable. For this reason, in the estimated models, both variables are never included simultaneously. When the variable capturing the reason for migration is included, the sample is restricted only to recent migrants.
5. Mexican database allows for the construction of additional variables that, according to previous empirical studies, may have significant effects on both variables of interest. For example, the number of children and religion. But these were not included to preserve comparability of datasets and because they did not have a significant effect in any model. In particular, the variable “number of children” in census data can be problematic in migrations studies because only children who are present in the same household are identified, excluding the possibility that the individual may have children living abroad.

6. The data used for this study is drawn from the Syrians Barometer survey, which was conducted in collaboration with UNHCR and revealed the situation of Syrians through extensive fieldwork, and from the study entitled 'The Impact of Social Cohesion Policies of Türkiye on the Economic Integration of Syrian Business Owners and Entrepreneurs in Türkiye,' which was conducted in collaboration with Building Markets.

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