# EXTRAREGIONAL MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAS:

## PROFILES, EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS

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## PROFILES, EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), through the Western Hemisphere Regional Migration Capacity-Building Program covering Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, has developed the present study in order to provide an updated description of extraregional migration across the Americas.

## BACKGROUND

- The number of extraregional migrants from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean in Mesoamerica – Central America and Mexico – has increased in recent years. These migrants tend to use both regular means of entry as well as routes associated with smuggling of migrants and irregular border crossing points.

- Information on extraregional migrants is scarce, as it is difficult to gain access to this population. Available documentation focuses on two aspects: describing extraregional migrant groups and mapping their main travel routes to the United States and Canada.

- The purpose of this report is to describe the main experiences and needs of a group of over 350 extraregional migrants across three sections of their migration route: South America, Central America and Mexico.

## MAIN FINDINGS

- **Population description:** The extraregional migrants interviewed were between 18 and 35 years old, mainly men, and had varying levels of education. However, 22 per cent of women and 9 per cent of men travelled with children under 18. The primary places of origin were Caribbean countries, such as Haiti and Cuba; African countries, like Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Asian countries, including India and Nepal. Few of the interview participants could communicate in Spanish. Migrants from the Caribbean cited the lack of opportunities for employment and individual economic growth as the primary reasons for leaving their countries of origin, while migrants from Africa and Asia cited situations of insecurity or violence as the main impetus for migration. Extraregional migrants generally financed the journey through loans from family and friends, savings, by selling their own property and temporary work in transit countries. The United States was the primary intended country of destination, followed by Mexico and Canada.
- **Route followed:** Most interviewees followed a route that began in South America, particularly in Brazil, Ecuador, or Chile; they then travelled through Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala, finally arriving in Mexico.
- **Access to services and information:** Access was limited for the migrants, especially with regard to accurate route details, information on migration management processes in each country and medical and financial services. However, many transit communities lacked these services. In addition, language barriers and the spread of false information were important obstacles.

- **Factors contributing to vulnerability:** Multiple factors contributing to the migrants' vulnerability were identified, such as language barriers; lack of housing, food and medical care; and difficulties in obtaining temporary employment. The passage through the Darien Gap, on the border between Colombia and Panama, was identified by the population as the most dangerous point of the journey, due to the geographical and climatic conditions of the territory and the presence of organized crime networks. Recently, the number of children crossing the Darien Gap has increased, and migrant women are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse during transit through this area.

- **Border experience:** Migrants passing by official border crossing points had to follow the established procedures of each country, however, many groups crossed various borders irregularly, paying third parties to help them. The exceptions, in which the majority made the crossing through the regular border crossing points, were: the border between Costa Rica and Panama; the Tapachula area, on the southern border of Mexico; and the city of Tijuana, on the border of Mexico with the United States. At these border points, extraregional migrants remained in reception centres while immigration authorities made arrangements to allow their transit. Again, language barriers between the extraregional migrants and immigration officials hindered immigration management.

- **Social inclusion:** Social inclusion in transit countries was reported as being difficult for most of the population, mainly due to language and cultural barriers. Integration into the labour market was also challenging; some extraregional migrants found temporary jobs, but their remuneration was lower than that of citizens. At several transit points, civil society played a vital role in assisting extraregional migrants by providing Spanish classes, shelter and information.

## IDENTIFIED NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and recommendations of this study are consistent with IOM's *Plan to strengthen the governance of extraregional migrant flows in Mesoamerica*. This report highlights the importance of implementing the following recommendations:

- Encourage the development of initiatives to facilitate access to clear and reliable information on migration processes and routes.

- Strengthen security mechanisms for migrants in order to reduce their risk of exposure to theft and scams. IOM's *Plan to strengthen the governance of extraregional migrant flows in Mesoamerica* recommends the provision of adequate legal advice to migrants, including: detailed and updated information on their rights; services available; alternatives to irregular migration; as well as the existing mechanisms for reporting abuses and crimes committed against migrants along their migration routes, including those perpetrated by smugglers and traffickers.

- Facilitate access to psychosocial care, especially after passing through the Darien Gap. After the crossing, many migrants reported negative psychological effects, physical deterioration and the loss of financial resources for the journey.

- Promote community actions to offer nutritional and culturally appropriate meal options for the extraregional population, especially for migrants from Asia and Africa. Frequently, stations and reception centres do not allow migrants to prepare their own food, and their dietary requirements, such as having suitable meat substitutes, are often not considered in the meals provided to them.

- Provide accommodation options that meet the specific needs of each population on the northern border of Mexico for all that require them. In Tijuana, for example, it was evident that there are only a few civil society-operated shelters for the extraregional population. As a result, African groups usually rent private rooms; due to limited access, there was no information on the housing conditions of the Asian population in this region.
- Improve the delivery of health services for the local and extraregional migrant populations, especially water distribution.
- Develop mechanisms in transit countries to regularize access to temporary employment for extraregional migrants, such as providing government permits and creating awareness programs for the private sector. Extraregional migrants indicated in interviews that the majority of those who gain employment do so in the informal sector and work under inadequate conditions.
- Create Spanish language-learning programmes, especially for the Haitian population.
- Train border authorities in the English language.

The information collected in this study demonstrates that the management of extraregional migration has proved a challenge for the countries of the Americas. These countries, many with limited capabilities, have had to adapt and develop policies to respond to significant flows of extraregional migrants. Although the affected countries have made considerable progress in improving their migration management practices, there are still challenges to ensuring the safety and well-being of all migrants.

# FOREWORD

The global number of international migrants reached 272 million in 2019, approximately 3.5 per cent of the world's population, according to the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). Since 2000, migration flows in Mexico and Central America have grown not only in number, but also in diversity and complexity.

Additionally, the number of extraregional migrants who travel through the region has increased. The increase in the flows of migrants from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia was widely visible during the humanitarian crisis of 2015–2016, when national authorities detected almost 30,000 irregular migrants in Panama, more than 30,000 in Mexico, and 20,000 in Costa Rica, according to the National Migration Police Data (data from 2016). The management of these increased flows and the severe vulnerability of extraregional migrants posed a significant challenge for the States involved. Although information on the evolution of this phenomenon is scarce, the number of extraregional migrants who travelled irregularly through the region increased again in 2019.

Given this very complex context, responding adequately to the specific needs of this migrant population while guaranteeing orderly, safe and regular migration continues to be a major challenge for the states of the region. At the same time, access to reliable data to serve as a basis for policies and procedures to address these flows is of paramount importance.

This report, prepared by the International Organization for Migration through the Western Hemisphere Regional Migration Capacity-Building Program, increases knowledge about the extraregional migration phenomenon and identifies recommendations for the development of policies and contextualized responses, in compliance with international instruments for the protection of the rights of migrants and the IOM Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF).

The study uses administrative data provided by immigration authorities in Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama as well as information collected through surveys and interviews with more than 350 extraregional migrants, significantly expanding the knowledge on these migration flows. We are confident that these research efforts will enhance a coordinated response between countries of origin, transit and destination to ensure the implementation of existing agreements and the creation of effective solutions to emerging challenges.

**Marcelo Pisani**
IOM Regional Director for Central America, North America and the Caribbean

# INTRODUCTION

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), through the Western Hemisphere Regional Migration Capacity-Building Program,[1] has developed this study in order to provide an updated description of extraregional migration in the Americas of people from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

The number of extraregional migrants in the Americas, including both those who use regular means of entry and those who use irregular forms of migration, has been increasing in recent years. Panama, a country that is one of the main transit and registration points, detected 9,065 irregular entries of people from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean in 2018, according to data from the National Migration Service of Panama. This number rose to 18,179 in the first eight months of 2019, which represents an increase of over 100 per cent in less than a year. The same phenomenon was observed in Mexico, where, according to data from the Migration Policy Unit, the number of extraregional migrants detected by the authorities rose from 11,489 in 2018 to 18,527 in the first eight months of 2019. This represents an increase of more than 60 per cent in eight months. In Costa Rica, the Professional Migration Police registered 8,961 extraregional migrants in 2018 and 19,628 people in 2019, a rise of nearly 120 per cent.

Due to language barriers, the difficulty of accessing the extraregional migrant population and the lack of disaggregated data on irregular migration, this migration dynamic has not been studied in depth. Existing studies have focused on two aspects: describing extraregional migrant groups and mapping their main travel routes to the United States and Canada. Some of the most significant contributions to this discussion are from IOM: (a) a study conducted in collaboration with the Organization of American States (OAS), *Regional Report "Migrant flows with an irregular migration status from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean in Mesoamerica",[2]* and (b) the *Plan to strengthen the governance of extraregional migrant flows in Mesoamerica.[3]* Both documents were developed in 2016. The present study seeks to complement them, updating the data and expanding the information available on the experiences and needs of extraregional migrants who travel through the region.

This report includes a description of the sociodemographic profiles of the population surveyed and interviewed, as well as a portrait of the main experiences and needs of extraregional migrant groups across three sections of their migration route: South America, Central America and Mexico. Although the primary data collected cannot be used as the basis of a statistical analysis, they were used as indicators that, supported by administrative data and other information from secondary sources, made this analysis possible.

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[1.] The Western Hemisphere Regional Migration Capacity-Building Program is implemented in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean by IOM, thanks to funding from the United States Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM). You can find more information on this website: www.programamesoamerica.iom.int.

[2.] Organization of American States and International Organization for Migration, *Regional Report: Flows of Migrants in an Irregular Migration Situation from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean in the Americas* (Washington: OAS and IOM, 2016), www.scm.oas.org/pdfs/2017/CP37161EREPORTMIGRATION.pdf.

[3.] International Organization for Migration, *Plan para fortalecer la gobernanza de los flujos de migrants extrarregionales en mesoamérica* (San José, Costa Rica: IOM, 2016), www.rosanjose.iom.int/site/sites/default/files/plan_para_fortalecer_la_gobernanza_de_flujos_de_migrantes_extrarregionales.pdf.

Additionally, given that the experiences and needs of the population vary depending on the area through which they migrate, the research team collected primary data in multiple locations. These included the Los Planes Migrant Reception Station, on the northern border of Panama; the Siglo XXI Migrant Station of Tapachula, located on the southern border of Mexico; and the city of Tijuana, at the northern border of Mexico. These border crossing points represent three of the main centres for registration for extraregional migrants. Primary data were collected through surveys and interviews with more than 350 extraregional migrants. Administrative records, compiled by the immigration authorities in Costa Rica, Mexico and Panama, were used as secondary data.

The descriptions of sociodemographic profiles, push factors, travel planning and routes, were developed as part of the population analysis. Access to services and information, factors contributing to vulnerability, travel across borders, social inclusion and identified needs were evaluated in order to better understand the migration experiences of the population. Finally, a brief analysis of future expectations and challenges for governments and other key actors associated with migration management was conducted.

As a result, the report uses a very specific geographical and temporal scope to describe the situation of extraregional migrants in the region, while highlighting the opinions of the migrants themselves. For future studies, it would be important to complement the findings of this report with the perspectives of the other stakeholders, including States, civil society and other key actors. This would be crucial in the search for solutions to the challenges presented here and in order to better address the specific protection needs of this population.

# METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research was to describe the main experiences and needs of a group of more than 350 extraregional migrants across three segments of their migration route: South America, Central America and Mexico.

The study was developed in four stages between May and September 2019. In the first stage, a document review was conducted to assess the information available from previous studies on the subject and administrative data from the governments of Panama and Mexico. Subsequently, the research team identified key stakeholders in these two countries in order to coordinate access to the participating population. After the stakeholders were identified, primary data collection was carried out through surveys, focus groups and interviews. Finally, the research team analysed the information collected, which formed the basis for this report. The data collection methodology and phases are detailed in the following diagram:

Figure 1: Methodology process

| Desk review | Stakeholder mapping | Primary data collection | Report writing and analysis |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Migration statistics from the National Migration Service (Panama) and the Migration Policy Unit (Mexico)<br>• Press releases<br>• Reports of previous studies | • Identification of key stakeholders in government organizations, civil society and academia | • Surveys<br>• Focus groups<br>• Structured interviews | • Sociodemographic profile of extraregional migrants<br>• Migration experiences<br>• Challenges and expectations |

## SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

- **Desk review:** In order to achieve a detailed analysis of the available information, the research team conducted a document review. This included reviewing records of irregular income collected by the authorities in Mexico and Panama, press releases, reports from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other UN agencies, the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF) and Tufts University, among others.

- **Stakeholder mapping:** The research team completed a mapping of key actors for the project, with the purpose of determining a list of civil society organizations and scholars that could serve as key informants.

## PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

- **Surveys**: In response to a request from the government of Panama, a survey was conducted in June 2019 at the Los Planes Migrant Reception Station, in Gualaca, Chiriquí, Panama. This survey included 316 adults, comprised of 226 men and 90 women, from whom it was possible to attain information regarding country of origin, marital status, educational level, occupational sector, migration routes and transit locations.

- **Focus groups:** Focus groups were conducted to obtain preliminary information on the shared experiences of migrants throughout their journeys. The main purpose of the focus groups was to map the most common routes used by extraregional migrants, taking into account their countries of origin and residence, and explore push factors from countries of origin, logistics and organization of the trip. In total, eight focus groups were conducted in Mexico: six in Tapachula, Chiapas and two in Tijuana, Baja California.

- **Structured interviews:** Structured interviews consisted of a series of individual conversations with migrants. These interviews allowed for a better understanding of the migration experiences and expectations of the population. In total, the research team conducted 12 interviews in Tapachula and 21 in Tijuana, for a total of 33. All survey and interview participants signed consent forms and all were adults.

## DATA ANALYSIS

- **Description of the population:** Based on the interviews and surveys, sociodemographic profiles of the participants were created, including nationality, gender, age, marital status, educational level, employment and occupational sector. Information was also collected on push factors from countries of origin, migration routes, means of transportation, migration experiences, health conditions, experiences of violence and discrimination and main needs.

- **Categorisation:** The research team used a series of pre-established categories to analyse all the information gathered through surveys and interviews:

| Push Factors | Travel Planning | Access to Services and Information | Vulnerability Factors |
|---|---|---|---|
| Immigration Management | Social Inclusion | Identified Needs | Expectations |

The focus group and interview transcripts were analysed using these categories, and relationships with other factors, such as the country of origin, were explored.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study had several limitations, which in most cases were related to lack of data, time and resources. The main limitations identified are detailed below:

- Government data on the entry of irregular extraregional migrants are incomplete and tend to include only the population that was detained and prosecuted. There is no information on the groups that were not detected. Therefore, this report focuses on a qualitative description of those migrants who were detected.

- The sociodemographic profile was developed based on information provided by the people surveyed and interviewed. Therefore, it is not representative of the extraregional migrant population as a whole. Additionally, the data reflect a specific time period, corresponding to May through September, 2019.

- The information provided by migrants could be verified and validated only through previous studies and press releases, so the reliability of the testimonies can only be presumed.

- Government authorities were not interviewed due to time and resource limitations. Although information collected from testimonies of the migrant population could be compared with secondary data that confirmed most of the main findings, the information included in the report should be considered anecdotal.

# 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE EXTRAREGIONAL MIGRANT POPULATION

The motivations and circumstances influencing a person's decision to emigrate tend to be different for each migrant group and are often related to the socioeconomic and political context of the country of origin. The extraregional migrant population that participated in this study has specific demographic, socioeconomic and cultural aspects that directly impact the migration dynamics observed. The following section provides a brief description of the population under study.

## MIGRATION FLOWS

Across all transit countries, data on extraregional populations, whether in an irregular or regular immigration status, are very scarce. This section presents the available information on extraregional migrant flows for the years between 2014 and 2019, based on administrative data collected by the National Migration Service of Panama and the Migration Policy Unit of the National Migration Institute of Mexico. The data included in this section, in combination with other findings, serve as trend indicators but cannot be used as the basis for statistical analysis.

The following charts show the distribution of regular migrant entries from 2014 to 2018:

Figure 2: Number of regular entries into Panama, 2014–2019
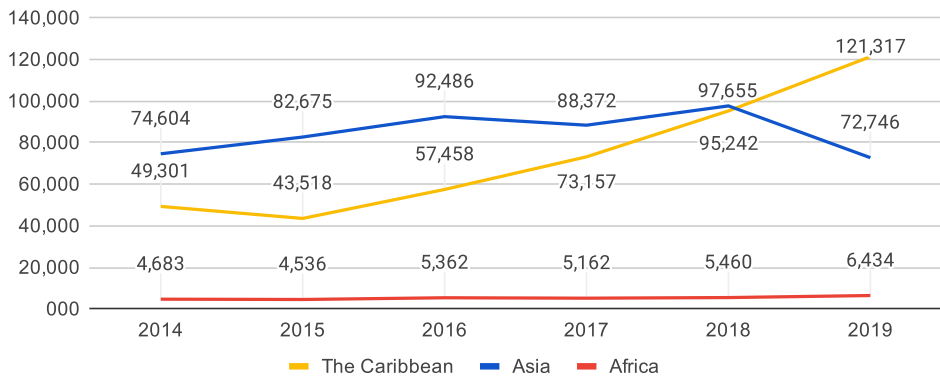
*Note:* Data for 2019 were collected from January to August.

*Source*: National Migration Service of Panama.

Figure 3: Number of regular entries into Mexico, 2014–2019



| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asia | 397,956 | 478,075 | 534,426 | 598,033 | 676,918 | 327,725 |
| The Caribbean | 81,374 | 89,685 | 132,258 | 155,469 | 213,362 | 133,436 |
| Africa | 19,748 | 22,543 | 24,190 | 25,959 | 28,579 | 32,334 |

*Note:* Data for 2019 was collected from January to August.

*Source*: Migration Policy Unit of Mexico.

These graphs show a growing trend from 2014 to 2018 of regular entries by extraregional migrants, especially those from the Caribbean. Additionally, the number of regular entries to Panama registered over seven months, from January to August 2019, exceeds the figures registered in 2018 by 24 per cent. These are, for the most part, migrants from the Caribbean, especially from Cuba, who represent 71 per cent of total entries.

With respect to migrants who entered both countries irregularly, the available data only reflect the part of the population that was detected and registered by immigration authorities; therefore, available records are limited. The number of irregular extraregional migrants detected by authorities from 2014 to 2019 is shown below:

Figure 4: Number of irregular extraregional migrants detected and apprehended by authorities, Mexico, 2014–2019
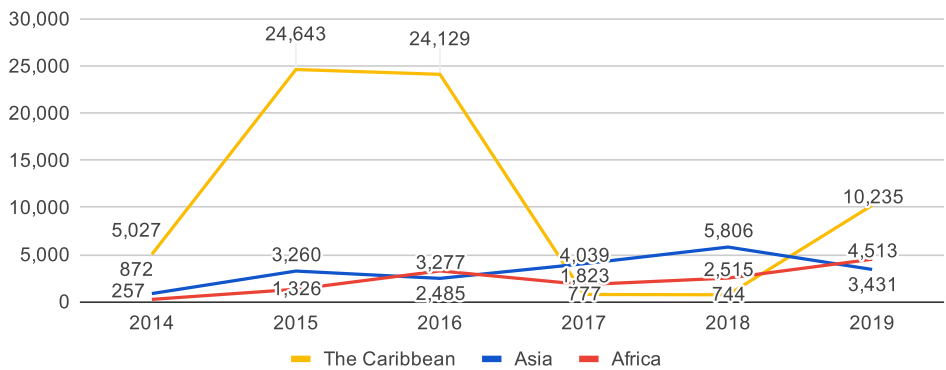


| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Caribbean | 5,027 | 24,643 | 24,129 | 777 | 744 | 10,235 |
| Asia | 872 | 3,260 | 3,277 | 4,039 | 5,806 | 4,513 |
| Africa | 257 | 1,326 | 2,485 | 1,823 | 2,515 | 3,431 |

*Note:* Data for 2019 were collected from January to August.

*Source*: Migration Policy Unit of Mexico.

Figure 5: Number of irregular extraregional migrants detected and apprehended by authorities, Panama, 2014–2019
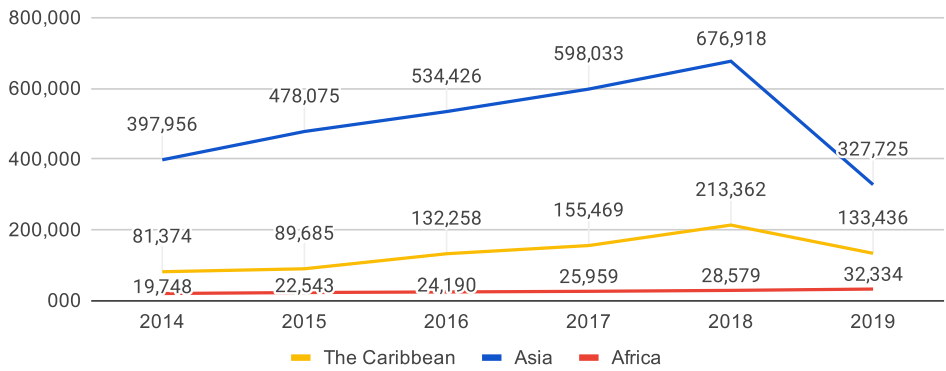


*Note:* Data for 2019 were collected from January to August.

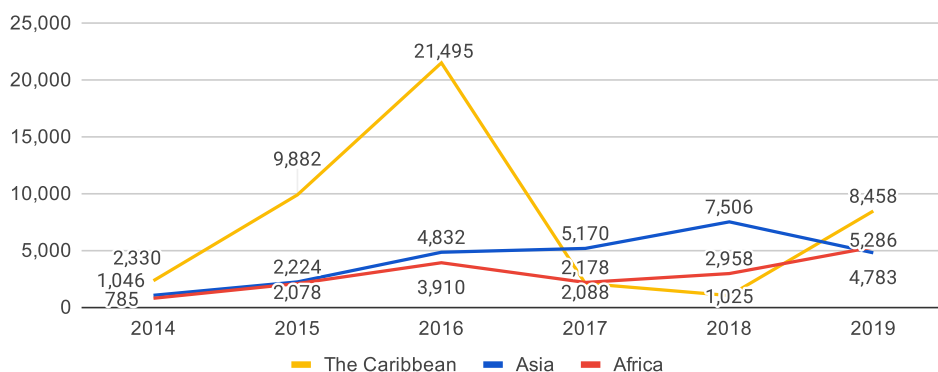*Source*: National Migration Service of Panama.

It is possible to observe that the trend of irregular migration is consistent with the regular migration data. Although the irregular migration records through August 2019 only include the migrants detected and apprehended by authorities in Panama and Mexico, figures already exceed those for all of 2018.

Between 2014 and 2019, there were two periods during which the number of extraregional migrants in irregular migration status increased across the Americas. The first occurred between 2015 and 2016, during which there was a significant rise in the number of entries of irregular migrants from Asia, Africa and particularly the Caribbean. In 2015, the number of entries of irregular migrants increased by 390 per cent in Panama and 324 per cent in Mexico, according to data from the National Migration Service and the Migration Policy Unit for the two countries, respectively.[4]

In 2017 and 2018, the number of irregular migrants from the Caribbean decreased, while there was an increase of Asian people by 41 per cent in Panama and 45 per cent in Mexico.

The second period of growth in extraregional migrants in an irregular condition occurred in 2019. During this time, flows from Africa showed a significant increase in comparison to 2018, with a growth of almost 80 per cent in Panama and 79 per cent in Mexico. Similarly, flows from the Caribbean had an increase of over 1,275 per cent in Panama and 725 per cent in Mexico.

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[4.] Servicio Nacional de Migración de Panamá, *Movimiento migratorio 2010-2016 Panamá* (Panamá: Servicio Nacional de Migración, 2018).

In 2015, there was an increase in irregular entries of Caribbean people of **390%** in Panama and **324%** in Mexico.

## SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

As other studies have shown,[5] access to reliable statistical data on the sociodemographic description of the population is limited primarily due to three factors: (a) difficulty identifying the extraregional migrant population, (b) the significant number of people evading border controls, and (c) the challenges of systematising data in transit countries. However, based on the primary data collected as part of this study and on available administrative data, it was possible to identify a series of common experiences and factors to create a sociodemographic profile.

Most extraregional migrants, excluding those coming from Cuba, have little or no knowledge of Spanish, which is the main language spoken in transit countries. This language barrier has significant implications for the population.

Most interviewees reported that their country of origin was Haiti, followed by Cameroon. The next most common countries of origin were the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Eritrea, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Figure 6: Distribution of extraregional migrants by nationality, 2019



- Cameroon
- Haiti
- Cuba
- India
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Eritrea
- Guinea
- Angola
- Others
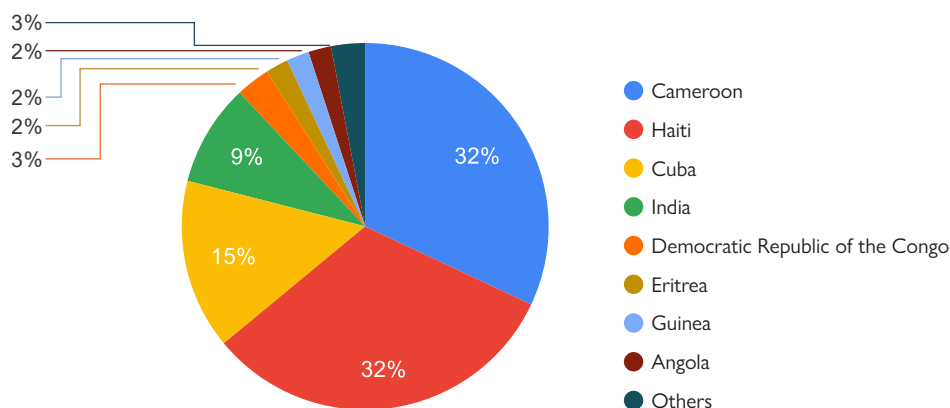
5. Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, *Diagnóstico sobre la situación actual, tendencias y necesidades de protección y asistencia de las personas migrantes y refugiadas extracontinentales en México y América Central* (Costa Rica: FLACSO, 2011), www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/Observaciones/11/Anexo8.pdf.

Figures regarding the distribution of the population by gender and the number of people travelling with companions are consistent with the numbers reported by previous studies.[6] The population was comprised mainly of men travelling without relatives, with a smaller number of women and families. However, 22 per cent of women and 9 per cent of men travelled with children under 18.

In total, 226 men (71% of the population) and 90 women (29% of the population) extraregional migrants were surveyed. These figures differ significantly from the gender distribution of the migrant population from Latin America and the Caribbean, which comprised approximately 50 per cent women and 50 per cent men.[7] As mentioned earlier, all survey participants were adults, but children were also present in the migrant population as part of family groups. Although key informants expressed concerns regarding the presence of unaccompanied minors, especially among the Asian population, no evidence of unaccompanied minors was found during the data collection of this study. However, key informants from civil society highlighted the possibility that many of these minors travel with adults who are not their legal guardians. This means that the number of children travelling without a legal guardian may be greater than the data show.

Figure 7: Extraregional migrants travelling with a companion, by gender and age

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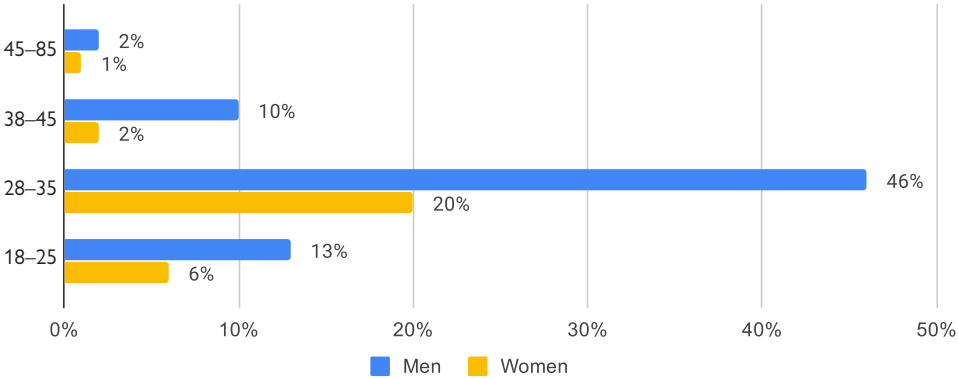
6. Ibid., 12.
7. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "International Migrant Stock 2019", United Nations, accessed 4 March 2020, www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp.

Figure 8: Extraregional migrants travelling with a companion, by type of companion
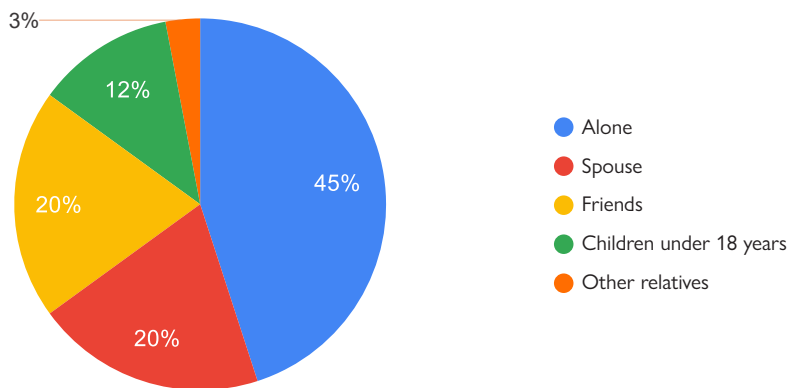


The extraregional migrants reported varying educational levels, with many having received a limited education. This was especially true for migrants from Haiti, who made up 61 per cent of those who reported having only primary education. However, other migrants cited having university and postgraduate degrees, particularly the population from Cameroon, among which 65 per cent reported tertiary or higher education.

Figure 9: Educational level reached by the population, 2019
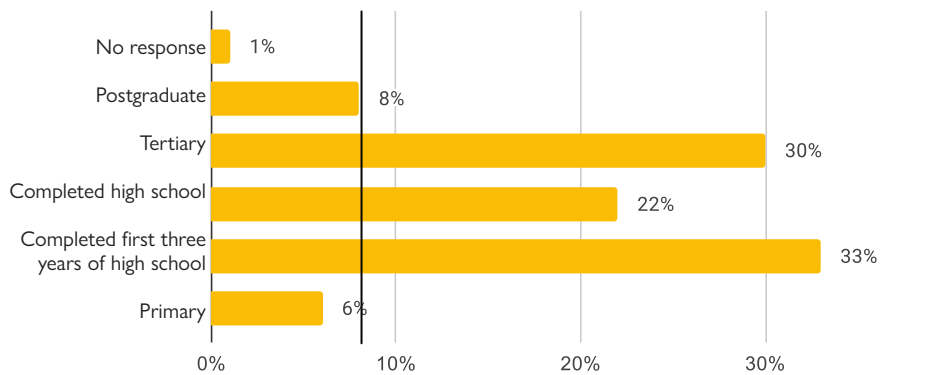


The surveyed population was predominantly composed of young adults, with over 85 per cent between 18 and 35 years old.

The extraregional migrant population spoke many different languages, but only Cuban migrants were fully proficient in Spanish. Asian migrants spoke a wide range of languages, including Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali. Migrants from Africa primarily spoke English and French. The native language of Haitian migrants was Haitian Creole, although some also spoke French, Portuguese or Spanish. Migrants who had at least basic knowledge of a second language used English, French or Portuguese to communicate with other people along the journey. Those who did not speak any of these languages had great difficulty communicating.

Seventy-three per cent of the extraregional migrants surveyed had formal jobs at the time of their departure, either as paid employees or self-employed workers. The main occupational sectors in which they worked were agriculture, commerce, carpentry and construction. The Haitian population reported the highest level of unemployment, as almost 81 per cent of the people surveyed reported that they were unemployed at the time of their departure.

Figure 10: Employment status in countries of origin, by type of employment, 2019
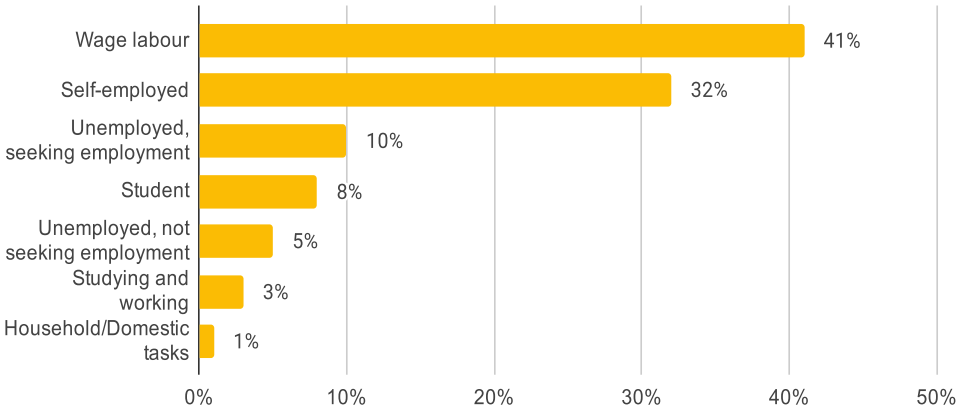


Although it is possible to identify certain similarities among the extraregional migrant population, such as age and gender distribution, it must be noted that this a very diverse population, and there are important differences in terms of their countries of origin, educational level and native language.

- **85%** of the extraregional migrant population surveyed were between 18 and 35 years old.
- **71%** were men, while **29%** were women.
- **22%** of the women and **9%** of the men travelled with children under the age of 18.

## TRAVEL PLANNING AND MIGRATION ROUTE

### Push Factors

Push factors are those which drive people to leave their country of origin.[8] The information collected demonstrates that these factors vary among extraregional migrants, depending on the region and country of departure.

Table 1: Push factors from countries of origin

| Main push factors | Region of origin | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Caribbean | Africa | Asia |
| Limited access to basic services | 36% | | |
| Insecurity or violence | 20% | 92% | 84% |
| Economic opportunities | 9% | | |

*Note:* Less commonly reported factors were not included in this table.

As part of the interviews and surveys, participants were asked to identify the push factors that motivated them to leave their countries of origin or residency. Some identified more than one factor, but the most common were: (a) limited access to jobs and the need for better economic opportunities, highlighted by nine per cent of Caribbean migrants; (b) lack of access to basic services, indicated by 36 per cent of Caribbean people; and (c) insecurity or violence, the predominant reason for 84 per cent of migrants from Asia, 92 per cent from Africa, and 20 per cent from the Caribbean.[9] A smaller number of people cited reasons such as family reunification, pressures from the community of origin and, in the case of nationals of Haiti and Nepal, disasters triggered by natural hazards.

For thirty-nine per cent of the migrants surveyed, their country of residence before departure did not correspond to their country of nationality for 39 per cent of the people surveyed. This percentage of migrants was comprised of nationals from Haiti (84%), Cuba (5%), Eritrea (4%), Angola (3%), Guinea (2%) and Senegal (2%). The main countries of departure in the Americas or first countries of destination for this group were Chile (56%), Brazil (33%), the Dominican Republic (5%), and Trinidad and Tobago (2%); and the majority remained in their first country of destination for periods between one to three years. The main reasons for leaving the first country of destination were unemployment and a lack of economic opportunities (61%), experiences of discrimination (7%) and difficulties in accessing a regular migration status (6%). Although the reasons for people to emigrate from their country of origin are diverse, the identified push factors also confirm the presence of mixed migration flows, in which a number

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[8.] IOM, *Glossary on Migration* (Geneva, Switzerland: IOM. 2019), 162.
[9.] Heike Drotbohm and Nenneke Winters, "Transnational Lives en Route: African Trajectories of Displacement and Emplacement across Central America" *Working Papers of the Department of Anthropology and African Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz* 175 (2018).

**84%** of Asians and **92%** of Africans reported that they migrated to the Americas to apply for asylum and escape situations of insecurity or violence in their home countries.

of people travel together using the same routes and means of transport although they have different needs and profiles. These profiles can include asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants, among others.[10]

### Access to travel information and planning

The way in which the interviewed migrants planned their journey and obtained travel information also differed depending on the country of origin. In the case of African and Asian groups, two trends were predominant: (a) some migrants had access to the Internet, which allowed them to organize their own journeys without requiring the intervention of third parties, and (b) others indicated paying third parties, whether people or "agencies",[11] to manage the logistics of the journey. Regarding the Haitian population, however, several interviewees reported that they organized their trip from a country of residence that was their first country of destination, usually Brazil or Chile; most obtained information from relatives and friends who were knowledgeable about the route. Regardless of how migrants made their initial plans, once they began the journey, they depended on the information provided by other migrants or by third parties that helped them cross borders irregularly.

The financing sources reported by interviewees were the following:

| Savings or sale of assets | Money loans from family and friends | Temporary work in transit countries |
|---|---|---|
| **53%** | **44.5%** | **2.5%** |

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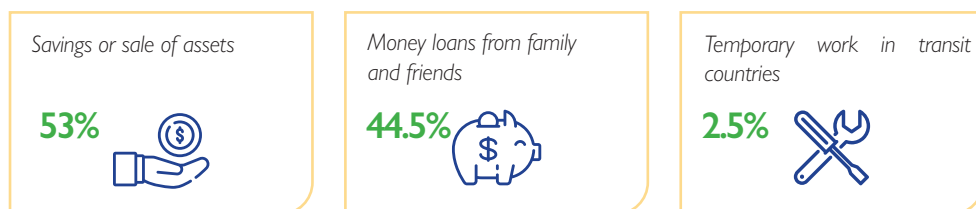
[10.] IOM, *Glossary on Migration* (Geneva, Switzerland: IOM. 2019), 139.
[11.] According to the data collected, the way in which these third parties and "agencies" operate gives indication of the participation of smugglers. In the specific case of people from Asia, key actors expressed concerns regarding the presence of trafficking networks.

### Route and intended country of destination

As illustrated in the pie chart below, collected data show that the most common intended country of destination was the United States, chosen by 68 per cent of the migrants. Mexico was the country of intended destination for 14 per cent of migrants, and 7 per cent chose Canada. The remaining 11 per cent of the migrants interviewed reported being unsure where to go.

Figure 11: Countries of destination chosen by extraregional migrants
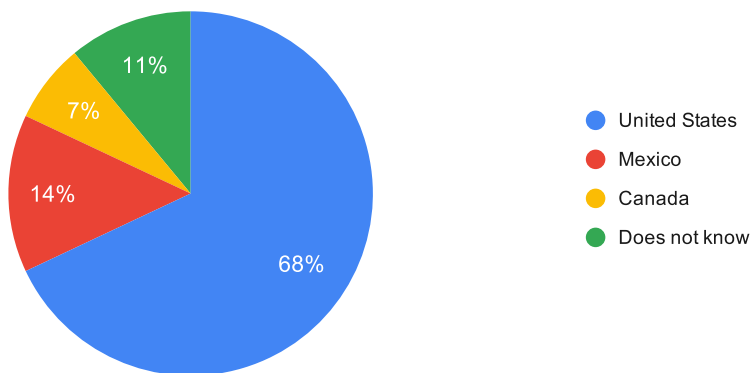


Among the population interviewed, those who had higher educational levels indicated that they did not wish to request asylum or residence in any country in South or Central America, as they believed they would need to live in a place that offered greater economic opportunities in order to meet their goals. Migrants with lower educational levels were unaware of the possibility of applying for asylum or residence in some of the transit countries.

The main pull factors that attracted the migrants to their intended countries of destination were: (a) availability of opportunities to improve socioeconomic conditions, indicated by 41 per cent of the people surveyed; (b) political stability and greater potential to access asylum, mentioned by 32 per cent; and (c) reunification with family members, reported by 10 per cent.

The amount of money spent during the journey varied according to the migrants' country of departure. About 71 per cent of the Caribbean population reported expenditures between USD 1,000 and 3,000. Approximately 54 per cent of African migrants said they had invested between USD 3,000 and 7,000, and 69 per cent of Asian migrants reported that they had spent over USD 10,000.

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12. IOM, *Glossary on Migration* (Geneva, Switzerland: IOM. 2019), 162.

**69%** of Asian migrants reported spending over **USD 10,000** on the journey.

The findings of this study related to the route followed by extraregional migrants are consistent with information presented in other studies.[13] The journey was made up of three sections:

## 1. Entry into South America

Migrants, particularly from Africa and Asia, commonly entered South America by flying to Ecuador and Brazil. A few individuals reported arriving in Cuba first. Haitians generally entered South America through Brazil and Chile, which were their first destination countries before deciding to migrate onward to the United States.

## 2. Transit

- Colombia: Generally, the migrant groups entered the country by land, though Peru or Ecuador. Some migrants mentioned taking a flight to Bogotá. The duration of their transit through Colombia ranged from one to three weeks.
- Panama: Migrants entered by land from Capurganá, Colombia, and 63 per cent of the respondents confirmed they paid smugglers to cross the border. Most of the population travelled across the Darien Gap for approximately five to six days.[14] When migrants reached a border crossing point, they were referred to Migrant Reception Stations. They had to remain in these stations while the Panamanian authorities coordinated with Costa Rican officials to allow movement across the border, based on a controlled flow agreement between the two countries. This process could last about a month, according to the migrants interviewed.
- Costa Rica: Migrants travelled across the country by bus, which took approximately one day.
- Nicaragua: Some migrants crossed the country by land, while others crossed irregularly by sea due to entry restrictions set by the immigration authorities. The journey lasted one or two days
- Guatemala: Migrants crossed the country by land and travelled for one to two days.
- Chiapas, Mexico: Most migrants reported paying third parties to help them enter the country, crossing the Suchiate River and accessing a border crossing point in Tapachula, which is the main urban centre of the area. They remained at the Migration Station there while the authorities processed their transit requests. According to interviewees, this could take between 15 days and a month.

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[13] OAS and IOM, 2016, 27; Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 2011; Henry J. Leir Institute, The Other Migration: The Financial Journeys of Asians and Africans Travelling through South and Central America Bound for the United States and Canada (Boston, MA: Tufts University, 2019), ww.sites.tufts.edu/journeysproject/files/2019/05/FinalReport_Papers_PB_vFIN.pdf.
[14] This number contrasts with the information obtained in other studies that established a period of 20 days for the journey through the Darien. Reference: Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos de México (CNDH México) and Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF), Migrantes haitianos y centroamericanos en Tijuana, Baja California, 2016-2017. Políticas gubernamentales y acciones de la sociedad civil (Mexico: México and COLEF, 2018), www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/Informe-Migrantes-2016-2017.pdf.

### 3. Arrival at the Border with the United States

• Tijuana, Mexico: Migrants who were authorized to continue through Mexico would take a bus to Tijuana, located on the northern border, and apply for asylum in the United States. The waiting period could last weeks or months.

The countries of transit, means of transport and the duration of the journey also varied depending on the region from which the migrants departed. The following table presents the main aspects of the route followed:

Table 2: Description of the migration route of extraregional migrants

| Type of population | Transit ountries | Transport | Duration in the country |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Asian Population** | United Arab Emirates, Oman, Ethiopia, Turkey, Cuba | Air | Less than a day |
| | Brazil, Ecuador | Air | 1–2 weeks |
| **African Population** | Nigeria | Land | Less than a day |
| | Brazil, Ecuador | Air | 1–2 weeks |
| **Caribbean Population** | Brazil, Chile | Air, land | Varies |
| | Peru | Land | 2–4 days |
| **All** | Colombia | Land | 1–3 weeks |
| | Panama | Land | 1–4 weeks |
| | Costa Rica | Land | 1 day |
| | Nicaragua | Land, occasionally sea | 1–2 days |
| | Honduras | Land, sea | 1–2 days |
| | Guatemala | Land | 1–2 days |
| | Mexico (southern border) | Land | Varies. Waiting period from 1 to 4 weeks |
| | Mexico (northern border) | Land | Varies. Waiting periods of 6 months or longe |

In general, the extraregional migrant population shared common experiences at access points and in the duration of each part of the journey. The countries where more time was invested were Colombia, Panama and Mexico, with an average of three weeks; in the rest of the countries, the crossing took fewer than five days. In most cases, the entire journey from Colombia to Mexico lasted seven to ten weeks.

The map below shows the main routes used by extraregional migrants to travel from their countries of origin to North America.

# MAIN MIGRATORY ROUTES AND MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION, JULY 2019

Morocco

Cuba

Dominican Republic

Haiti

Guinea

Colombia

Guyana

Ecuador

Perú

Plurinational
State of Bolivia

Brazil

Chile

Argentina

## Legend

↖ Point of departure

↔ Transit point

● Monitoring point

Means of t

0 500 1,000 2,000 3,000 4,000
Km

*Note:* This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official

**Turkey**

**Pakistan**

**Nepal**

**Emirates of Dubai**

**Saudi Arabia**

**India**

**Bangladesh**

**Oman**

**Yemen**

**Eritrea**

**Nigeria**

**Ethiopia**

**Cameroon**

**Uganda**

**Democratic Republic of the Congo**

**Angola**

**Namibia**

**South Africa**

transportation
- Airplane
- Boat
- Bus
- Walking

**Mexico**

**Guatemala**

**Honduras**

**Nicaragua**

**Costa Rica**

**Panama**

**Colombia**

**Zoom in to Central America and Mexico**

## SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

- Most ages between 18 and 35 years old.
- Varied educational levels: some had tertiary education, while others had only primary education.
- The minority spoke Spanish. Native languages included Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, English, French and Haitian Creole.
- About 73 per cent had paid jobs in their home countries.
- Nearly 71 per cent were men, and 29 per cent were women.

## MAIN PUSH FACTORS

- Lack of employment and economic opportunities.
- Situations of insecurity and violence.
- Lack of access to basic services.

## MAIN PULL FACTORS

- Favourable socioeconomic conditions.
- Political stability.
- Access to refugee status determination processes.
- Family reunification.

## TRAVEL PLANNING

### INFORMATION ACCESS:
- Migrants with higher levels of education used the internet.
- Those with lower levels of education relied on information from people they knew.
- En route, migrants received information from other migrants and third parties that helped them cross borders irregularly.

### FINANCING SOURCES TO FUND THE JOURNEY:
- Money loans from family and friends.
- Savings or sale of assets.
- Temporary work in transit countries.

## MIGRATION ROUTE

- Countries of origin: India and Nepal (Asia); Cameroon (Africa); Cuba and Haiti (the Caribbean).
- Many Haitian migrants resided in Brazil and Chile before migrating to North America.
- Transit countries: Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico.
- Destination countries: United States, Mexico and Canada.

## OTHER ASPECTS

- All interviewees made irregular border crossings, for which many paid third parties.
- The total journey usually lasts between seven and ten weeks.
- Travel costs vary between USD 1,000 and USD 10,000.

# 2. EXPERIENCES OF EXTRAREGIONAL MIGRANTS IN THE AMERICAS

As discussed previously, the sociodemographic profiles of extraregional migrants were diverse according to country of origin, educational and economic level and push factors.

Data collected as part of this study revealed that these factors also influence the migration experiences of the population. Additionally, migrants' access to information and services, situations of vulnerability, identified needs and other circumstances, were different for each section of the journey or migration route. This chapter describes key features of the experiences of extraregional migrants in three different parts of the journey: South America, Central America and Mexico.

FIRST SECTION OF THE JOURNEY:
**SOUTH AMERICA**

According to the population surveyed, South America was the most common point of arrival for extraregional migrants,[15] and Brazil and Ecuador were the main countries of entry into the Americas. In the case of the Haitian population, Brazil and Chile were their first destination countries, where migrants resided for periods of up to two years before deciding to travel to North America. The following section provides information on the experiences and main needs of extraregional migrants during the first section of the journey.

### Access to services and information

The level of access to services and information was a key factor influencing the migration experience of extraregional groups. The lack of knowledge of the terrain and route was reported as one of the main challenges for the extraregional migrant population. While planning the journey in their countries of origin, migrants generally used the internet to obtain geographical information about South America. Although several interviewees mentioned using a mobile app for navigation, their knowledge of the distances between borders was limited. In addition, other studies have pointed out that this population normally does not have the knowledge required to read and use maps.[16]

The migrants interviewed also reported significant difficulties in accessing accurate information, which led them to rely on third parties to guide and assist them during some parts of the route and to cross borders irregularly. This was costly, as many migrants had to pay USD 50 or more in exchange for information about the route. In addition, this information was often incorrect or intentionally misleading, exacerbating the vulnerability of the groups in transit. Some interviewees also mentioned paying tolls to authorities on certain parts of the journey.

As most migrants had money in cash while crossing South America, the majority did not report a need to access financial services, such as automated teller machines (ATMs), on this section of the journey. According to the interviewees, those who chose North America as their intended destination tried to minimize costs by crossing South America as quickly as possible.

In regard to migrants' access to health care, most reported that they did not require specialized health assistance during the initial part of their journey.

### Situations of vulnerability

Migrants reported that the language barriers, especially at the border crossing points in each country, were the main factor contributing to vulnerability in South America. Extraregional migrants encountered difficulties in communicating with transportation officials and authorities. Nationals of Cameroon and other migrants who spoke English found it easier to find individuals or institutions who could assist them in their language. However, communication was very difficult for migrants from Haiti who did not speak Spanish.

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[15.] South America is comprised of the following countries: Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the territory of French Guyana.
[16.] Henry J. Leir Institute, 2019, 16.

The migrants' vulnerability was also increased by their aforementioned dependence on third parties along the route and the spread of misleading information. The migrant population also cited that individuals took advantage of this to steal their belongings or, in the case of those facilitating migrants' transportation, use longer routes to obtain a greater profit.

### Experiences at the borders
#### *Brazil - Chile: First destination countries for Haitian migrants*

Brazil and Chile were the main South American countries in which many Haitians resided. Interviewees said they took advantage of favourable economic conditions to find jobs in both countries. In the case of Brazil, migrants were initially attracted by the demand for labour to support construction projects for hosting the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.[17] Additionally, the access to humanitarian visas, valid for five years, was an important pull factor.[18] The 2014 Brazilian economic crisis, which prompted a decrease in the demand for foreign workers, influenced the decision of many to migrate to North America.

Several Haitian interviewees reported that although Chile has a reputation for offering a wide range of job opportunities, the language barrier and the migrants' irregular status hindered their inclusion into the Chilean labour market. This in turn motivated them to migrate to other countries,[19] a trend that is consistent with information reported by other key informants in this study.

#### *Brazil - Ecuador: Countries of entry into the Americas (people from Africa and Asia)*

Brazil was one of the main access points to the Americas for migrants from Africa and Asia, specifically through the cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The interviewees reported that they chose Brazil because the country´s airport has many connections with airports in other parts of the world (Ethiopia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates, among others).

In 2008, Ecuador established an "open door" policy that removed the visa requirement for tourists.[20] As a consequence, Ecuador became an entry point for extraregional migrants. Interviewees reported that by entering through Ecuador they could use public transportation to travel to the Colombian border in only a few days. At the time of this report, Ecuador had reinstated the visa requirement for tourists from several countries.[21]

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[17] Emily Gogolak, "Haitian Migrants Turn Toward Brazil," *The New Yorker*, August 20, 2014, www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/haitian-migrants-turn-toward-brazil.
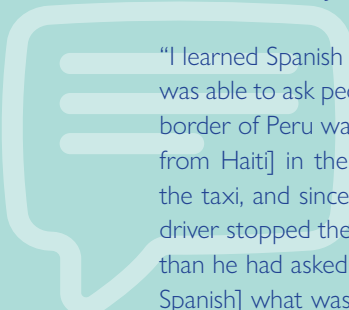
[18] Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Brazil and Haiti: Situations of Haitians in Brazil, including rights and obligations; permanent resident status; documents issues to Haitians, including Foreign Identity Cards Cédula de Identidade de Estrangeiro, CIE); treatment of Haitians in Brazil, including access to employment and education, state protection and support services (2010-June 2018)* (Ottawa: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2018), www.refworld.org/docid/5b615cfe4.html.

[19] CNN Chile, "Estudio revela que al 86% de los haitianos en Chile les cuesta encontrar trabajo en comparación a otro migrantes," *CNN Chile*, November 8, 2018, www.cnnchile.com/pais/estudio-revela-que-al-86-de-los-haitianos-en-chile-les-cuesta-encontrar-trabajo-en-comparacion-a-otro-migrantes_20181108.

[20] Laura Dixon, "Ecuador: A New Gateway to the Americas," *East Goes West: Dangerous Passage and Uncertainty in Europe Push Migrants, Refugees To Americas* (Washington, DC: Journalists for Transparency, 2017), www.j4t.org/stories/ecuadors-relaxed-visa-standard-makes-it-gateway-to-north-america.

[21] Diario El Universo, "Ecuador requerirá visa a ciudadanos de once países africanos y asiáticos," *El Universo*, August 12, 2019, www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2019/08/12/nota/7467837/ecuador-requerira-visa-ciudadanos-once-paises-mas.

### Colombia

In Colombia, three border crossing points were highlighted: (a) the border with Ecuador, (b) the border with Brazil and (c) the Colombian Caribbean coast, specifically the towns of Turbo and Capurganá, near the border with Panama. Once there, the migrants had to pay third parties to guide them on the way to Central America.[22]

Interviews showed that most border crossings were done through irregular channels, and many involved the participation of third parties, probably smugglers, to facilitate the passage.

### Social Inclusion

In South America, extraregional migrant groups reported difficulties achieving social inclusion, mostly due to linguistic differences. Haitian nationals, who initially travelled to Brazil or Chile, often became more involved in their communities and had greater access to employment as salespersons, custodians, gardeners and construction workers.[23] They also mentioned having access to private housing and health services before deciding to emigrate to North America.

African and Asian migrants prioritized moving across South America in the shortest time possible. They remained in closed groups with limited interaction with the communities in transit countries.

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[22] "Colombia, el paso de migrantes de América, África y Asia tras seuño de EEUU," *La Opinión,* June 21, 2016, www.laopinion.com.co/colombia/colombia-el-paso-de-migrantes-de-america-africa-y-asia-tras-sueno-de-eeuu-114059#OP.

[23] Sebastián Follert Bravo, *De la Segregación Cultural, a la Inclusión Productiva: Migración Haitiana en Chile, el Caso de la Población La Victoria (2006-2016)*, Thesis (Departamento de Ciencias Históricas, Universidad de Chile, n.d.), www.repositorio.uchile.cl/bitstream/handle/2250/147349/De-la-segregacion-cultural-a-la-inclusion-productiva.pdf.

# FIRST SECTION OF THE JOURNEY: SOUTH AMERICA

## ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION

- The population had limited access to accurate information on migration routes and processes in each country.

## SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY

- The language barrier was the main vulnerability factor reported by the extraregional migrants.
- The spread of false information about the routes increased the migrants' vulnerability.

## BORDER EXPERIENCES

- Brazil and Ecuador were the main points of arrival to the Americas for migrants from Africa and Asia.
- Many Haitians resided in Chile and Brazil before changing their intended country of destination.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

- Language barriers were the main obstacle to social inclusion for extraregional migrants in transit countries.
- The Haitian population achieved greater inclusion in Brazil and Chile, their first countries of destination.

## IDENTIFIED NEEDS

- Provide accurate information on migration processes and routes. Extraregional migrants arrived in South America with very limited knowledge of migration processes and the routes between countries.
- It is necessary to strengthen security measures for the protection of migrants, regardless of migration status, and to offer reliable information to prevent scams resulting from the use of dangerous forms of transportation.

SECOND SECTION OF THE JOURNEY:
**CENTRAL AMERICA**

Central America was a transit zone for the entire extraregional migrant population,[24] as none of the participants indicated their intention to remain there. This section will describe their migration experiences.

### Access to services and information

Access to information regarding routes and basic services was crucial for the migrant population, but in most cases was limited and inaccurate.

The Government of Panama established migrant reception centres in the south of the country, such as the Migrant Reception Station *La Peñita*, to register and receive migrants coming from the Darien Gap. These centres receive migrants referred from the border crossing points, providing medical attention and temporary shelter while migrants await authorization to continue the journey. However, according to the interviewees, immigration officers' lack of knowledge about the migrants' country of origin along with language barriers hamper migrants' access to assistance that would respond to their specific needs. In addition, often migrants had very limited information on the migration procedures in transit countries and were misinformed regarding entry requirements. For example, some interviewees believed that the process was expedited for migrants travelling with children or for pregnant women.

Migrants pointed out that these stations often accommodate people from very diverse cultural and educational backgrounds in the same space, and in some cases, this causes conflicts between migrants of different nationalities. They also mentioned the need for psychosocial attention in the centres to manage the emotional impact of their experiences crossing the jungle.

In Panama, the migrant population reported easier access to medical services, including checkups and vaccinations at migrant reception stations after exiting the jungle. In some cases, the population reported having paid for private medical services or medication in pharmacies. Many women also emphasized the need for personal hygiene products.

Access to other services, such as water and culturally or religiously appropriate meals was limited, mainly because transit communities did not have adequate resources to provide them.

### Situations of vulnerability

The language barrier was again reported as the main vulnerability factor, directly related to difficulties accessing information and services. Moreover, many of the interviewees were robbed while crossing the jungle, losing money and travel or identification documents.

The loss of official documentation made gaining access to financial services more challenging, as

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[24] Central America includes the following countries: Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

these are usually required to receive money from abroad. According to the migrants interviewed, this forced them to look for alternative ways to receive money from relatives and friends, such as asking strangers to carry out the transaction; these alternatives increased their vulnerability to scams. Similarly to the migrants' experience in South America, relying on strangers to obtain information or access to services was a significant risk factor.

Migrant children and women were particularly vulnerable while crossing the Darien Gap. Seventy-seven per cent of interviewed parents indicated that their infants had suffered health issues during the journey, mainly gastrointestinal infections, rashes and fever. Two of the interviewed women reported sexual abuse, and two men reported witnessing such aggressions. However, the true figure is likely higher, based on witness statements and corroboration by civil society organizations assisting survivors of sexual assault.

Another factor that increased the extraregional migrants' vulnerability was the difficulty in meeting nutritional requirements. About 20 per cent of the respondents reported a lack of access to food and water during this segment of the journey, especially while crossing through the jungle in Panama. In addition, respondents mentioned that migrant reception centres experienced food shortages, and that the food provided was not culturally or religiously appropriate.

### Experiences at the border
#### Panama
According to interviews, crossing the jungle in the Darien Gap could take five to seven days. After that, migrants reached a border crossing point and were then referred to the Migrant Reception Stations near *Puerto Peñita*. People indicated that they were held in these stations while the immigration authorities coordinated with their counterparts in Costa Rica. At the stations people would also go through an interview process, including providing their fingerprints for biometric records. This lasted approximately one week, but some people reported being held for a month without being allowed to leave. According to key informants, the delay was mainly caused by the large number of migrants being processed and because the agreement between Panama and Costa Rica establishes a daily quota for the number of persons allowed to cross.

Once the transit permit was granted, immigration authorities offered migrants the option of paying for internal transfer service to the border with Costa Rica. From there the migrants had to reach Los Planes Migrant Reception Station in Chiriquí and wait for authorization to enter Costa Rican territory.

#### Costa Rica
In Costa Rica, the official border crossing points were: (a) the southern border in Paso Canoas and (b) the northern border in La Cruz, Guanacaste.

At the first border crossing point, migrants reported receiving
permits to travel through Costa Rican territory. Due to the delay caused by the high number of applications, extraregional migrants had to be accommodated in temporary stations.[25]

Several interviewees reported good treatment by border officials. In addition, they mentioned that the information was provided in different languages and that many officers spoke in English, facilitating communication.

Migrants also cited that the journey through Costa Rica was done via bus in less than a day. Despite high maintenance and transportation costs, the migrants did not have to pay any individuals to enter the country, due to the existing agreement between Costa Rica and Panama.

At the second border crossing point in La Cruz, Guanacaste, migrants said they were not authorized to enter Nicaragua because entrance has been restricted for extraregional migrants since the crisis of 2015. The migrants had to find shelter in Costa Rican Migrant Reception Stations, churches, hotels and private homes while looking for a way to cross to Nicaragua. As La Cruz is located near the Pacific Ocean, many reported paying smugglers to travel to Honduras by boat.

### Nicaragua
As discussed previously, interviewees stated that entry into Nicaragua was highly restricted. Migrants had to seek out alternatives to enter the country, which included hiring irregular maritime transport from Costa Rica to Honduras or paying a fee in order to be allowed to cross through Nicaraguan territory.

### Honduras and Guatemala
According to most interviewees, passage through Honduras and Guatemala was quick. Migrants did not encounter major incidents, although they heard about cases of theft and kidnapping. No passages through El Salvador were reported.

### Social Inclusion
The short duration of the passage through Central America did not favour the groups' participation in community life, and achieving social inclusion –even temporarily– was challenging for migrants in these countries.

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[25] Henry J. Leir Institute, 2019, 33.
[26] Lésber Quintero, "Ejército ha retenido a 2,500 indocumentados en Rivas," *El Nuevo Diario*, July 28, 2016, www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/nacionales/399457-ejercito-ha-retenido-2-500-indocumentados-rivas.

In Panama, the population housed in Migrant Reception Stations was normally grouped with migrants of the same nationality but could move freely around the facilities. Interactions with other groups were scarce.

In Costa Rica, migrants did not interact much with local communities, as they crossed the country relatively quickly. However, Cuban migrants mentioned that on several occasions during the migration crisis of 2015, they received assistance from the inhabitants of La Cruz. Cuban migrants could also engage in temporary work, which was facilitated by the similarities in culture and language.[27] In contrast, there were reports of conflicts between Haitian migrants and the local population of La Cruz,[28] mostly related to communication problems.

According to a previous study,[29] no Central American country has policies to provide temporary work permits for migrants in transit. This is one of the reasons why all migrants who were able to find employment did so informally.

[27] Allan Madriz, "Cubanos realizan mural como símbolo de agradecimiento a Costa Rica," *El Periódico*, December 29, 2015, www. elperiodicocr.com/cubanos-realizan-mural-como-simbolo-de-agradecimiento-a-costa-rica.
[28] Sergio Jimenez, "Guanacastecos arremeten contra migrantes haitianos," *La Prensa Libre*, August 24, 2016 www.laprensalibre.cr/ Noticias/detalle/81697/guanacastecos-arremeten-contra-migrantes-haitianos.
[29] Henry J. Leir Institute, 2019, 11.

# SECOND SECTION OF THE JOURNEY: CENTRAL AMERICA

## ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION

- Information about the routes, migration processes and entry requirements were disseminated informally and in many cases was inaccurate.
- Limited access to water services by transit passengers.

## SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY

- The Darien Gap is considered the most dangerous point of the journey, due to the geographical and climatic conditions of the territory and the presence of organized criminal networks.
- Children and women were especially vulnerable.

## EXPERIENCES AT BORDERS

- The border between Costa Rica and Panama was a point of concentration for a large number of migrants requesting transit permits.
- After the 2015 crisis, immigration authorities in Nicaragua restricted transit for extraregional groups.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

- In Panama, migrants in shelters preferred to remain in groups with people from their same nationality.
- During the 2015 crisis, local communities on the northern border of Costa Rica provided assistance to extraregional migrants, especially those from Cuba.

## IDENTIFIED NEEDS

- Improve psychosocial care for people who cross the Darien Gap. After crossing this area, many migrants reported negative physical and psychological effects and the loss of financial resources needed to continue the journey.
- Provide information on the dangers of crossing the Darien Gap. Migrants often underestimated the duration or difficulty of crossing the jungle and did not expect the severity of the risks to which they would be exposed.
- Train border authorities in the English language.
- Develop protection and assistance mechanisms for especially vulnerable groups.
- Promote community actions to offer food that is nutritionally and culturally appropriate for the extraregional population, especially for migrants from Asia and Africa.
- Provide personal hygiene products for women in reception centres. In the case of minors, prioritize medical care, as they are more susceptible to health threats.

THIRD SECTION OF THE JOURNEY
**MEXICO**

This study confirmed the findings of other studies, which highlight the border between Mexico and the United States as a point of arrival for large numbers of migrants.[30] Migrant groups found at this border were comprised of people waiting for the results of their refugee status determination process and people trying to find a way to cross the border irregularly.

## Access to Services and Information

The main points of access to services and information were the southern and northern cross-border regions.

In Tapachula, located on the southern border of the country, Migration Stations provided access to accommodations, food, hygiene products and medical care for the migrant population while they awaited travel authorization.[31] They also received legal advice and contacts for civil society organizations that provide assistance to migrants. However, interviewees indicated these services were insufficient and reported inadequate conditions during their time there.

In Tijuana, on the northern border of Mexico, some civil society organizations (most of them religious) established shelters for migrants. However, some of the shelter managers indicated that they do not usually receive extraregional migrants because of the cultural differences and language barriers. Shelters that did receive extraregional migrants generally dedicated a section of the facility to accommodate this population. Other shelters offered more specialized assistance such as overnight shelter, meals or legal counselling.

An example of a specialized shelter can be found in "Little Haiti", located in the Barranca del Alacrán, Tijuana, where a community of Caribbean people (approximately 2,000) formed and hosts a shelter exclusively for Haitian migrants.[32]

Other studies have also reported that civil society organizations in Tijuana facilitate access to services and information for extraregional migrants, especially Haitians, by offering Spanish courses.[33]

## Situations of vulnerability

According to various reports, the capacities of the official border crossing points in Tapachula have been exceeded on many occasions since the extraregional groups joined the preexisting flow of Central American migrants. Additionally, the difficulty in providing services that are appropriate for the cultural and linguistic needs of the extraregional population has caused conflicts between migrant groups and immigration authorities.

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[30] Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 2011, 19.
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## HIGH RISK SITUATIONS
## THE CASE OF THOMAS AND HIS COMPANIONS

"While going to Tijuana, we were stopped by a group of men who entered the bus. One of them saw me and told me to come down. I saw that he had a gun (...). When I came down, he asked me in English where I was from and what I was doing there. I replied that I was from Cameroon and I was going to the United States. After that, he told me I could go back to the bus. When I sat down, I saw that several Central Americans were taken out of the bus and taken away (...) Later, other passengers told me that those who approached us were drug traffickers from Sinaloa and were looking to kidnap people to ask for their families for ransom. In my case, since it was so far away, they considered it not worth it."

Cameroonian citizen, 31 years old

Civil society organizations maintaining shelters highlighted these situations as the main reasons for not allowing the entry of extraregional migrants. This renders the extraregional migrant population especially vulnerable, as they have to find accommodation and food by their own means.

Study participants also reported cases of family separation at the Siglo XXI Migration Station in Tapachula, as transit visas were granted individually. Interviewees indicated cases in which extraregional migrants in Tijuana were separated from relatives who had been detained at the southern border, and they could not communicate.

Another factor that increased migrants' vulnerability was the extended length of stay in Mexico in comparison to other transit areas. This forced migrants to search for temporary jobs, often in the informal sector, and in many cases, to accept lower salaries than those received by the local population.

Some informants reported that the passage from Tapachula to Tijuana was dangerous, especially because of the presence of organized criminal networks.

For the purposes of this study, it was not possible to confirm the presence of Asian migrants in Tijuana. However, interviews with key informants confirmed that these groups are difficult to locate even for the local population, as they usually stay in hostels or private inns and travel in tight groups. As a result, there is no information available on the specific situation or needs of Asian groups in the Tijuana area.

## Border Experiences

### *Tapachula, Chiapas*

The first contact point for the extraregional population in Mexico was the Suchiate River, which migrants paid third parties to cross. They were subsequently stopped by the authorities and sent to the *Siglo* XXI Migration Station. The interviewees indicated that they were held while waiting for transit authorization to the northern border. As discussed previously, the station was overwhelmed by a large number of groups, and this led several people to be relocated to an extension called the Mesoamerican Fair;[34] adjacent to the Migration Station.

Tapachula is the most important reception point for refugee applications, receiving more than 65 per cent of the total applications registered in Mexico during the years 2018 and 2019.[35] The applicants were required to wait for the resolution of their application, which could take up to 90 business days; as a result, they were forced to stay at the Stations, exacerbating the overcrowding.

Finally, according to interviewees and other reports, migration processes in Tapachula changed in 2019.[36] The lack of knowledge about these changes caused frustration and confusion among extraregional groups at the moment of their arrival, as most of them ignored the new processes and requirements established by the authorities to allow transit north.

### *Tijuana, Baja California*

Tijuana was the end point of the journey for most of the extraregional migrant groups. Interviewees who intended to travel to the United States as their final destination reported that they made an asylum request at the border crossing point, even in cases where they did not migrate due to persecution. All applicants received a waiting number for the first appointment of the refugee status determination process. However, between five and ten numbers were called each day, so the waiting time for this process in Tijuana could exceed six months.

## Social Inclusion

According to migrants and key institutional actors, the difficulties experienced in Mexico were similar to those in other parts of the continent. The main obstacles to social inclusion were language barriers and unemployment. Those with higher educational levels achieved greater access to employment options. However, several study participants mentioned that even in specialized fields such as automotive mechanics, they received less pay than local employees due to their foreigner status and lack of Spanish language skills.

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[34] Martinez, 2019.

[35] Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR), "Reporte Estadístico" (August 2019), accessed September 7, 2019, www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/493180/REPORTE_CIERRE-DE-AGOSTO-2019.pdf.

[36] "México atenderá a migrantes africanos y haitianos en la frontera sur," *EFE*, August 30, 2019, www.efe.com/efe/america/sociedad/mexico-atendera-a-migrantes-africanos-y-haitianos-en-la-frontera-sur/20000013-4052953; Notimex, "812 migrantes africanos varados en Chiapas logran amparo para salir de México por cualquiera de sus fronteras," *El Economista*, August 31, 2019, www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/812-migrantes-africanos-varados-en-Chiapas-logran-amparo-para-salir-de-Mexico-por-cualquiera-de-sus-fronteras-20190831-0015.html.

In Tijuana, the waiting time for the interview part of the refugee status determination process can exceed six months.

On the southern border of Mexico, it was reported that the local population's perception of the migrant groups was negative, as they blamed the migrants for the increase in both unemployment and crime.

According to media reports and interviews,[37] Haitian groups achieved the greatest social inclusion on the northern border of Mexico, specifically in Tijuana. Civil society organizations contributed to this success by offering Spanish classes, assistance in the search for housing and with migration processes, inclusion in the daily life of the city and shelters for vulnerable populations, such as LGBTI people.[38]

As a result, the Haitian population that stayed in Tijuana for more than one year managed to register their children in local schools, obtain employment in the informal sector or in factories and participate in cultural and religious activities. In mid-2019, a special mechanism called the Association for the Defense of Haitian Migrants[39] was created to provide legal advice and Spanish classes to the Haitian population that reached the northern border.

No evidence was found that the African and Asian populations have achieved the same level of social inclusion.

[37] CNDH México and COLEF, 2018.
[38] Merari Stephanie Montoya-Ortiz and Eduardo Andrés Sandoval-Forero, "Migrantes haitianos en México: un nuevo escenario migratorio," *Huellas de la Migración* 3, no. 6 (2018): 133-156, https://huellasdelamigracion.uaemex.mx/article/view/11719, 147.
[39] Daniel Iglesias, "Nace la Asociación para la Defensa de Migrantes Haitianos en Tijuana," *Uniradio Informa*, September 12, 2019, www.uniradioinforma.com/noticias/tijuana/576540/nace-la-asociacion-para-la-defensa-de-migrantes-haitianos-en-tijuana.html.

# THIRD SECTION OF THE JOURNEY: MEXICO

### ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION

- Civil society has organized multiple shelters and spaces to provide information and advice, especially in Tijuana.
- Access to services that respond to the specific needs of the population was limited, due to the language barrier and cultural differences.

### SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY

- Safety risks were identified on the Tapachula-Tijuana route.
- Migrants encountered difficulties in obtaining temporary employment.
- Lack of information on the situation or specific needs of the population of Asian migrants in Mexico.

### EXPERIENCES AT BORDERS

- The Tapachula area on the southern border was a point of concentration for migrants at migration stations while they were waiting for the transit or asylum resolution.
- In Tijuana, the refugee application process usually lasts several months.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

- Some migrants found temporary jobs but received lower pay.
- Haitian migrants have achieved greater social inclusion in Tijuana.
- In mid-2019, the Association for the Defense of Haitian Migrants in Tijuana was created to provide legal advice and Spanish classes.

## IDENTIFIED NEEDS

- Facilitate access to accommodations on the northern border. In Tijuana, shelters were more accessible to the Caribbean population than to the African population, who must rent private rooms. Some shelters restrict access to extraregional populations.
- Develop mechanisms in transit countries to regularize access to temporary jobs, such as special permits and partnerships with the private sector.
- Develop a language interpretation program, especially for the Haitian population.
- Ensure the protection of minors and avoid family separations during immigration management, especially at the Mexico southern border.
- Strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations working in the region to identify and respond to the needs of extraregional migrants.

# 3. EXPECTATIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Based on concerns raised by the key informants and secondary sources, this section analyses future challenges related to the phenomenon of extraregional migrants in the Americas. This assessment was centred on the future plans of the migrant population and the associated capacities required by States and assistance providers. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure the safe, regular and orderly management of these migration flows and to support attention to the specific needs of this population. As this assessment of capacities is based on secondary sources and migrant testimonies, it should be considered in conjunction with inputs from immigration authorities of the region.

## EXPECTATIONS OF THE POPULATION

Nearly all study participants expected to receive asylum in their intended country of destination, regardless of the difficulties they encountered in the process and the relatively low rates of asylum requests granted. They did not have a plan for their next course of action if their application was rejected, and they were unaware of the options available to obtain a regular migration status or apply for asylum in other countries in the region. Although governments, IOM and other stakeholders have made efforts to provide updated and reliable information about these processes, disinformation on alternatives remains a pressing issue for migration management, and communication campaigns and initiatives on regular channels must be strengthened.

## ASSISTANCE CAPACITIES

The available information indicates that the government authorities have been repeatedly overwhelmed in their ability to operate reception and shelter facilities in a safe and orderly manner when groups larger than 40 or 50 migrants arrive simultaneously.[40] In addition, there was lack of training for frontline officers on addressing specific needs, such as the preparation of food adapted to the cultures of origin.

In the case of Panama, however, the government designed, with the support of several United Nations agencies (IOM, UNICEF, PAHO and UNHCR), a Response Plan for these six-month flows that identifies concrete actions to improve the care provided during transit.

Therefore, given the prospect of a sustained flow of extraregional migrants, a response plan should be implemented for the medium and long term, which requires developing personnel capacities, infrastructure and cultural awareness in transit countries. In 2016, IOM provided a proposal for a migration management plan,[41] which contains recommendations for the improvement of State capacities relating to extraregional migration.

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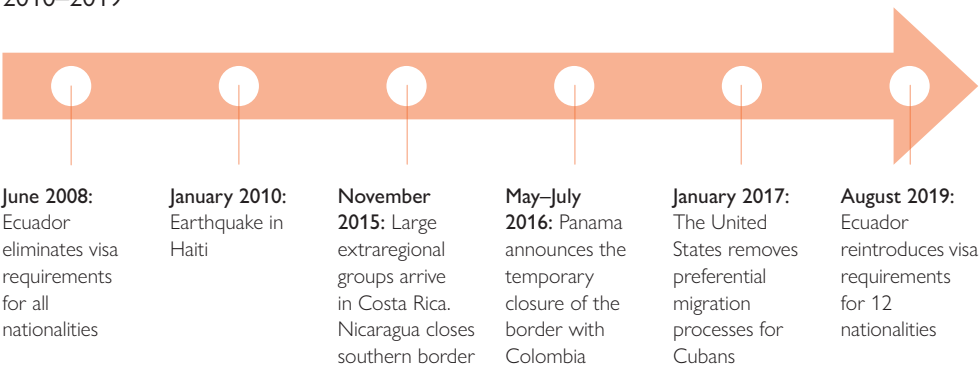[40] Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 2011, 30.
[41] IOM, 2016.

The main points where extraregional migrants concentrate in reception centres and border stations were southern Panama, the Costa Rica-Panama border, and the southern part of Mexico. The governments of these countries have made significant efforts to accommodate these groups in a humanitarian manner and to mobilize resources to support this population. However, the authorities' lack of familiarity with the cultures and languages of these groups renders it more difficult for migrants to find shelter, communicate about migration processes and receive appropriate meals.

## MIGRATION MANAGEMENT AND DATA COLLECTION

Governments adjusted their approaches to migration management in response to the increase in migration flows between 2010 and 2019. Some of the main events and actions are summarized in the following timeline:

Figure 12: Events and migration policies with an influence on extraregional migrants, 2010–2019

**June 2008:** Ecuador eliminates visa requirements for all nationalities

**January 2010:** Earthquake in Haiti

**November 2015:** Large extraregional groups arrive in Costa Rica. Nicaragua closes southern border

**May–July 2016:** Panama announces the temporary closure of the border with Colombia

**January 2017:** The United States removes preferential migration processes for Cubans

**August 2019:** Ecuador reintroduces visa requirements for 12 nationalities

This timeline shows that as of 2015 the countries of the region made adjustments in their migration management measures to address the unexpected flows of extraregional groups, and these remain active through the publication of this report. While the governments of Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico managed registration systems for extraregional groups, the information was not consistent across the various points, nor was it disaggregated by variables such as age or educational level. The prevalence of migrant smuggling in border areas also meant that many groups were not detected by the immigration authorities, which contributes to data gaps.

From an analysis of international press coverage, the experiences of study participants and previous studies, possible strengths and areas for improvement in migration management in the Americas are:[42]

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[42] Ibid., 28.

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses in the management of extraregional migration in the Americas

| Strengths | Areas for Improvement: |
|---|---|
| • All countries in the region covered in this study have a central authority that receives, processes and adopts decisions on the determination of refugee status.[43]<br>• Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico implement care protocols at their migrant reception centres, which include access to food, medical care and humanitarian assistance. | • Most countries in the region do not have legislation against trafficking in persons.<br>• The level of training and technical knowledge of the authorities that analyse requests for refugee status is not uniform across the region.[44]<br>• There is a lack of mechanisms to share information and coordinate actions among authorities that have refugee status determination processes.<br>• Data collection systems at border control posts are not exhaustive and lack disaggregation by socio-economic characteristics, which prevents the execution of evidence-based interventions.[45]<br>• There is no human resource available for communication in languages other than Spanish or English; services in Haitian Creole are especially needed. |

## SECURITY

Irregular extraregional migration was associated with a series of problems that undermined both the safety of migrants and the sovereignty of transit countries. The interviewees stated that the journey presented a high risk to migrant groups and that there were no protection mechanisms in place. As a result, migrants were subject to theft, sexual assaults, kidnappings and homicides.

This situation may partially be explained by the fact that governments of transit countries have exceeded their capacity, and extraregional groups are crossing the region without security guarantees. A good practice, however, was identified in Panama and Costa Rica, where health security protocols were applied for the containment of infectious and contagious diseases as part of the controlled flow transit agreement. As part of the protocol, each migrant who arrived at a reception centre in the border area received medical attention and vaccination.

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 30.

Additionally, there are concerns, based on previous studies and interviews, that illegal smuggling networks are operating near the borders to transport irregular extraregional migrants, especially at the border of Colombia and Panama, from Costa Rica to Nicaragua, and from Guatemala to Mexico.

None of the people interviewed claimed to have received offers to transport goods during the journey.

There is no evidence that extraregional migrants participate in the transport of illegal goods during their journey.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study analysed the main characteristics, needs, and experiences of a group of more than 350 extraregional migrants while on their migration route through South America, Central America and Mexico. This section presents the main conclusions and recommendations derived from the available information. Several of the recommendations are consistent with what was proposed in IOM's *Plan to strengthen the governance of flows of extraregional migrants in Mesoamerica*, and this suggests a need to follow up on the implementation of the Plan.[46]

## DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

The interviewed extraregional migrant population was found to have diverse characteristics, though they also shared many commonalities. Some people, especially from Cameroon and some Asian countries, had high levels of educational attainment, knowledge of the English language, and greater funds budgeted for the trip. Other groups, such as Haitians, had lower levels of schooling and available financial resources.

It is recommended to implement protocols at migrant reception centres and border crossing points to obtain demographic information. This data should be disaggregated by gender, age, country of origin, level of education, identification of women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and other conditions such as disability. Special attention must be given to women and men travelling with children under 18 years of age, due to the vulnerability children experience en route.

One of the planned actions to be implemented in Migrant Reception Stations in Panama is a Shelter Registration System (SIRA), a software created by IOM in Guatemala, which would need to be adapted to address the specific characteristics of extraregional groups.

## PUSH FACTORS AND TRAVEL PLANNING

One of the main findings was that most interviewees with high educational levels and employment in their countries of origin (mainly in Africa) decided to emigrate seeking political asylum, while migrants who were unemployed or had lower educational levels sought better job opportunities and economic development. Groups of African and Asian migrants often organized their own journeys using the internet as a source of information. On the other hand, Haitian people generally planned their journey based on information provided by friends and family.

The main recommendation is to train immigration officers to recognize the conditions of departure and the diverse profiles of the populations they receive, as they signify migrants' differing needs. For example, groups requesting refugee status should be referred to specific protection mechanisms, and migrants who are vulnerable to multiple factors should receive psychological attention.

[46] IOM, 2016.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION

Although study participants reported that information was their most critical resource, they generally received it from unreliable sources. No data are available to determine if this incorrect information is provided by trafficking networks, but this was identified as a concern among key actors. Previous studies and interviews confirmed that extraregional migrant groups had few tools to locate themselves geographically, and this made them susceptible to abuse by those transporting them. The main services accessed were medical, especially after entering Central America; and financial, to receive money sent by migrants' family and friends.

As the *Plan to strengthen the governance of extraregional migrant flows in Mesoamerica* stipulates, IOM recommends that information in several languages is provided at various border crossing points in transit areas and migrant stations to avoid the spread of false information. These documents should include a brief description of migration procedures, the rights and responsibilities of migrants and how they can request help if necessary. IOM also recommends the relevant immigration authorities to develop strategies to prevent the spread of disinformation.

Based on IOM's experience in Panama, an inter-agency Communication Plan for Migrant Reception Stations was designed. This Plan highlights the development of flyers, infographics and brochures in English, Arabic and Hindi, featuring information on the details of transit migration through checkpoints and the characteristics of the area. The Plan has not yet been implemented, but it provides an institutional approach to address extraregional migrants' needs for reliable information.

IOM recommends the promotion of community actions to offer nutritional and culturally appropriate food options for the extraregional population. This is especially recommended for migrants from Asian and African countries, since their dietary requirements were frequently not considered in the food provided to them in stations and reception centres. It is also important to improve the living conditions of local populations with regard to access to health services, especially water, so that they can also be provided to migrants without any difficulty.

## SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY

Language barriers contribute significantly to migrants' vulnerability. In addition, migrants highlighted insecurity and attacks by organized criminal networks during their journeys, especially in the Darien Gap.

Requesting assistance from third parties to obtain information or access to services also increased migrants' vulnerability, as it increased the risk of scams or other aggressions.

Although the majority of the extraregional migrant population surveyed were men travelling without relatives, women and minors in these groups were particularly vulnerable, especially to health threats. Therefore, their specific and individual needs must be addressed.

Migrants from Asia were difficult to access for interviews, and some key informants expressed suspicions that they are frequently subjected to migrant smuggling and human trafficking. In the Tijuana area, it was not possible to locate the Asian population. Previous studies suggest that this may be because they are highly vulnerable to human trafficking, often travel in groups that attempt to remain out of sight, and most likely opt for private accommodations. This could not be corroborated within the framework of this study.

As a measure to minimize risk, IOM advises governments to create programmes to facilitate basic communication between extraregional migrants and officials in the transit routes of the region. This was identified as a factor that would enhance protection for this population. For Asian migrants, it is recommended to work with people from verified diaspora communities to facilitate access to this population.

In order to strengthen the security of migrants in transit, the *Plan to strengthen the governance of extraregional migrant flows in Mesoamerica* recommends offering adequate legal advice to migrants. This should include detailed and updated information on their rights, available services, available alternatives to irregular migration and existing mechanisms for reporting abuses and crimes along their migration route, including those committed by traffickers and smugglers.

## BORDER EXPERIENCES

Although extraregional migrants sought to regularize their immigration status to travel between countries, lack of knowledge of the procedures, language barriers, and the limited capacity of border crossing points were obstacles to achieving this. It has been confirmed that the interviewed groups do not have knowledge of the legal and migration resources available to them during the trip and received incorrect information about the processes and possibilities available to them. In addition, communication problems made it difficult for immigration authorities to carry out adequate initial screenings of migrant groups, which is necessary to process refugee applications or to identify possible victims of human trafficking.

IOM recommends to collect more information on the capacity-building needs of the authorities in charge of migrant reception centres. Some training topics could include intercultural approaches, cultural sensitivity, data recording methods and access to interpreters. It is also recommended to include certified interpreters in the source language of the main extraregional groups, particularly for Haitians and Indians, to perform the initial profiling. This can contribute to the prevention of conflict between migrants and communities, as highlighted in the *Plan to strengthen the governance of extraregional migrant flows in Mesoamerica*. The same Plan also offers a series of alternatives to the detention of people with irregular status, such as the installation of shelters open for migrants; custody by civil society organizations that have adequate shelter infrastructure and that are adequately monitored by the authorities; and non-detention supervision programs, among others.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

Difficulties have been reported for migrants in achieving social inclusion in transit countries and border areas during the journey. The lack of Spanish language skills increases the vulnerability of the migrant population to abuse and increases distrust of migrants among the national population in transit countries. However, in some cases such as La Cruz, Costa Rica, and Tijuana, Mexico, there have been significant efforts by the local population and civil society to include extraregional migrants in community life.

One measure to promote social inclusion is the development of awareness campaigns targeting nationals of transit countries, so that they have basic knowledge of the contexts of origin and cultural characteristics, motivations and needs of extraregional groups.

IOM recommends the development of channels in transit countries to regularize access to temporary jobs, such as permits from governments and awareness programs for the private sector. Extraregional migrants often require income and access to employment, so they accept work in the informal sector under inappropriate conditions.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In general, despite the limitations in the scope of the study, it was possible to describe the main experiences of a group of extraregional migrants, as well as to make their perspectives more visible. This analysis seeks to support policies and initiatives that respond to the specific needs of extraregional migrants in the Americas and that are respectful of the sovereignty of each State. According to IOM's Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF), migration policies are best formulated based on evidence obtained from the collection, analysis and use of reliable data, so it is recommended to continue efforts to understand the characteristics and needs of extraregional migrants in America.

## APENDIX I: GLOSSARY

**Asylum seeker:** An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker.

**Borders (international):** Politically defined boundaries separating territory or maritime zones between political entities and the areas where political entities exercise border governance measures on their territory or extraterritorially. Such areas include border crossing points (airports, land border crossing points, ports), immigration and transit zones, the "no-man's land" between crossing points of neighboring countries, as well as embassies and consulates (insofar as visa issuance is concerned).

**Country of destination:** In the migration context, a country that is the destination for a person or a group of persons, irrespective of whether they migrate regularly or irregularly.

**Country of origin:** In the migration context, a country of nationality or of former habitual residence of a person or group of persons who have migrated abroad, irrespective of whether they migrate regularly or irregularly.

**Country of transit:** In the migration context, the country through which a person or a group of persons pass on any journey to the country of destination or from the country of destination to the country of origin or the country of habitual residence.

**Displacement:** The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.

**Identity document:** An official piece of documentation issued by the competent authority of a State designed to prove the identity of the person carrying it.

**Immigrant:** From the perspective of the country of arrival, a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.

**Immigration:** From the perspective of the country of arrival, the act of moving into a country other than one's country of nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.

**Integration:** The two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community. It entails a set of joint responsibilities for migrants and communities and incorporates other related notions such as social inclusion and social cohesion.

**Irregular migration:** Movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination.

**Labour migration:** Movement of persons from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment.

**Members of the family:** Persons married to a migrant or a national, or having with them a relationship that, according to applicable law, produces effects equivalent to marriage, as well as their dependent children or other dependent persons who are recognized as members of the family by applicable legislation or applicable bilateral or multilateral agreements between the States concerned, including when they are not nationals of the State.

**Migrant:** An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.

**Migrants in vulnerable situations:** Migrants who are unable to effectively enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care.

**Migrant worker:** A person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.

**Migration:** The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State.

**Migration flow (international):** The number of international migrants arriving in a country (immigrants) or the number of international migrants departing from a country (emigrants) over the course of a specific period.

**Migration management:** The management and implementation of the whole set of activities primarily by States within national systems or through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, concerning all aspects of migration and the mainstreaming of migration considerations into public policies. The term refers to planned approaches to the implementation and operationalization of policy, legislative and administrative frameworks, developed by the institutions in charge of migration.

**Permit**: In the migration context, documentation, such as a residence or work permit, which is usually issued by a government authority and which evidences the permission a person has to reside and/ or carry out a remunerated activity.

**Refugee (1951 Convention):** A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

**Smuggling (of migrants)**: The procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the irregular entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.

**Vulnerability:** Within a migration context, vulnerability is the limited capacity to avoid, resist, cope with, or recover from harm. This limited capacity is the result of the unique interaction of individual, household, community, and structural characteristics and conditions.

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