

A Fight for Migrant Women, and a Fight for Equality

Incorporating a gender-perspective into Mexico City's Prospective
Sanctuary City Policies

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action on Mexico City's progression towards sanctuary city status. It examines the role of the Institute for Women in Migration in assisting migrant women in the city and throughout the country. Employing a social constructivist perspective, this research emphasizes the significance of lived experiences, and cultural context in knowledge development, while acknowledging its subjectivity, context-dependency, and how societal norms, beliefs, and values influence it. To address this issue, in-depth expert interviews were conducted with individuals closely involved in migrant protection in Mexico City, respectively representatives from Institute for Women in Migration, and a former employee at the Mexico City municipality. Thus, seeking to explore migrant protection through lived experiences from both the positions of the municipality and service providers. In addition, perspectives from existing literature have been incorporated, identifying contradictions in the Mexican government's continued pledges of commitment toward protecting and improving the lives of migrants and women in Mexico between 2004 - 2023.

Further, the influence of the United States on Mexican immigration policies and previously mentioned contradictory statements and acts involving corruption, violence, and discrimination are studied. Leading to an emphasis being placed on the importance of critical reflection on our current understanding of both the past and present to seek societal progress and enhance communal well-being based on inclusion and protection for all. Furthermore, parallels are drawn between Mexico City and Toronto, evaluating differences in municipal approaches to incorporating sanctuary practices at the urban level. The thesis argues for the need to integrate a gender perspective into Mexico City's future sanctuary efforts in migrant protection, to acknowledge the intersectional aspects of the experience of migrant women and emphasize the urgency for the municipality to take a stand against the discriminatory practices performed at the federal level regarding immigration.

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Introduction

As of May 2022, the total number of people worldwide who were forced to flee their homes due to conflicts, violence, fear of persecution and human rights violations was 100 million (USA for UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.). A number which is expected to continue to increase unless international collaboration and efforts are not applied to search for effective and long-lasting solutions, as stated by UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi;

“Every year of the last decade, the numbers have climbed. Either the international community comes together to take action to address this human tragedy, resolve conflicts and find lasting solutions, or this terrible trend will continue” (United Nations, n.d.).

Given the escalating and extensive nature of ongoing global conflicts, it is increasingly evident that they have the potential to shape the course of the twenty-first century. In this light, the growing increase of migrants and displaced persons is a clear reminder of the urgent need for decisive measures aimed at protecting their fundamental human rights and ensuring their well-being and safety throughout their journey and subsequent resettlement in host countries.

Moreover, migration has undoubtedly had a significant impact across multiple dimensions in the predominantly affected regions, encompassing both broader national contexts and more localized urban environments. By shifting the focus to the urban level, and bringing the topic of migrant protection to the urban sphere and municipal agenda, the concept of the sanctuary city, although it has no universally accepted definition, seeks to re-imagine the urban sphere as a space for co-belonging non-dependent on an individual’s immigration status (Bauder & Godoy, 2020).

When looking at migration in the context of Mexico, despite having decriminalized irregular migration with the country’s Migratory Act (*Ley de Migración*) from 2011 contradictions are still apparent from the number of deportations and discriminatory acts being carried out against migrants, emphasizing the necessity of sanctuary cities as a tool in migrant protection (Senado de la República, 2011, p. 3). Moreover, to gain a further understanding of the efforts

made by the Mexican government concerning migrant protection, this study places focus on the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action from 2004. A declaration that focused on the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons with a goal to encourage concrete action, in order to enhance, organize, and promote specific strategies in the protection and assistance of migrants (Organization of American States, 2004). This research paper further narrows its focus to the declarations 'Solidarity Cities' program and how parallels can be drawn to Mexico City's 2017 sanctuary city declaration.

This thesis sets out to explore the role of sanctuary cities in the context of inclusion of a gender perspective in attempts to minimize gender disparities and reach gender equality, in the context of Mexico City, and the city's protection of migrant women. Throughout this research the case of incorporating the intersectional experience of migrant women, from a perspective of institutional and organizational frameworks, in the efforts to protect the rights of migrants - first in the context of general migration, and then followed by an additional focus on the possibilities of protection in an urban setting. The focus on gender, migration and equality includes the interrelated types of discrimination that migrant women face, including but not limited to, variables such as migration status, ethnicity, and societal class (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración & European Union, 2016, p. 19). Therefore, as it is evident from the findings of a report conducted by the UNHCR (2022), gender inequality and gendered power relations raises challenging questions but nonetheless questions of uttermost importance. In order to gain additional insight into the community efforts towards the protection of migrant women, this research endeavors to explore the multifaceted ways in which Mexico City based non-governmental organization Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración (henceforth Institute for Women in Migration or IMUMI) supports and advocates for migrant women.

Furthermore, in the aims to reach equality and to achieve the implementation of issues regarding migrant women on the public policy agenda, the protection and recognition of migrants as individuals deserving of human rights, regardless of their immigration status, encouraging multiculturalism, and diversity through local legislation is necessary (Delgado Wise, n.d.). Therefore, as noted by the Migration Data Portal (2022), "Migration, whether internal or international, has always been one of the forces driving the growth of urbanization and bringing opportunities and challenges to cities, migrants and governments". Accordingly,

the increase in municipal authorities including migration in their urban policy agenda and the recognition of their role as key actors in managing migration and protecting the rights of migrants residing in their city is essential - and a big step for equality. Hence, Mexico City's declaration as a sanctuary city, offers a tool of the urban space taking a vow to protect the rights of migrants in the times where their needs are not being protected by the nation state. Despite the lack of protection from federal authorities, the sanctuary city's promotion of institutional solidarity, and responsibility-sharing through cooperation across institutions, social organizations, and public - provides a layout for a chance to incorporate solidarity and protection into urban spaces. Solidarity and protection built on the experiences of the ones most affected, while also incorporating the knowledge and voices of a variety of actors throughout societal layers.

Further, this research paper proposes that, as argued by Bauder and Godoy (2020), "(...)urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices can provide a blueprint for regional and national policies, addressing the structural issues that contribute to migrant vulnerabilities at a global scale" (p.1). Additional efforts are proposed in the incorporation of an intersectional perspective, to include the experience of migrant women in order to adjust assistance efforts accordingly. Acknowledging the differences in their experiences to their male counterparts, and the additional risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrant women. Drawing on a social constructivist perspective, this study recognizes that knowledge is not only transmitted but also co-constructed through dynamic social interactions and shared experiences. It acknowledges the subjective nature of knowledge, which is shaped by the complex set of societal contexts in which it emerges. By conducting in-depth expert interviews with individuals closely involved in these initiatives, respectively Institute for Women in Migration and psychologist and prior employee at the Mexico City municipality Carolina Carreño Nigenda, this research aims to provide a rich insight into the lived experiences of migrants and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The findings of this research will shed light on possible links between Mexico's Declaration and Plan of Action and Mexico City's declaration as a sanctuary city, and how this either confirms or refutes adopted policies in the period between 2004 and 2023. A finding that, through interviews, has supported the claim that the previously adopted policies on both the protection of migrants and migrant women have been more encouraging and performative

than actually showing changes on the protection of and response to the needs of migrant women in Mexico City.

Problem Formulation:

All the previously mentioned considerations establish the basis for the problem formulation that is presented as follows:

In what ways has the Mexico Plan of Action impacted the city on its journey to become a sanctuary city? And how has the Institute for Women in Migration worked towards assisting migrant women in Mexico City?

To answer this problem formulation, I have constructed a substantial theoretical section, which includes an introductory context to the subject and concepts. In addition, a description of the methodological considerations relevant to the research; including the chosen epistemological perspective; as well as a section on qualitative data, and the method of semi-structured interviews; and a section on data selection, comprising ethical and practical considerations, and limitations. Subsequently, an analysis section is introduced where the topic is examined in connection with responses from the conducted interviews, and the chosen literature. Then, the discussion section is introduced, which presents my findings, and draws parallels to some of my previous research on Toronto's sanctuary city approach, comparing similarities and differences. Lastly, the conclusion sections will sum up main points and considerations.

Methodology

Ontology and Epistemology

Social Constructivism

The research paradigm applied in this research paper is embedded in social constructivism. Through this perspective, the role of social interaction and cultural context in the development of knowledge is emphasized. Believing that individuals construct their understanding of the world through interactions with others and that knowledge is not solely a matter of transferring a message from sender to receiver but rather lies in co-construction through social interactions and shared experiences. Hence, knowledge is viewed as a product of the social contexts that the individual engages in, and the individual is an active participant in constructing their own sense of knowledge and understanding, further shaping the contexts in which they occur. Nevertheless, as social constructivism places a significant emphasis on co-creation, it is also recognized that knowledge is objective and therefore does not have an “absolute truth”. On the contrary, knowledge is perceived as context-dependent, subjective and influenced by the society in which it is produced through norms, beliefs, and values.

Moreover, social constructivism has been defined by scholar Kenneth J. Gergen through four ground principles (Holm, 2021, p. 125). First, Gergen’s understanding of social constructivism greatly emphasizes our use of language and communication, viewing it as fundamental to our construction of reality. Perceiving no necessary coherence between the world and how we define, interpret and describe it. This is because language is not viewed as a set image of reality but as a social construct. Instead, the world is understood individually, with no objective or universal truth, shaping our ideas of situations that are commonly lived but individually experienced. Second, how we describe the world arises from our social relations, where we co-create our world image. Third, it is also through our understanding of the world that we will form our future. Therefore, the shared perspectives of given things and practices form our co-created reality. This leads to the fourth principle, concerned with reflections on the future. Here, Gergen deems reflections of our current understanding of the world essential for our common well-being and process of evolving as a society. As with the previous principles, the power of language is highlighted as a tool to better society - by

changing our way of defining and describing things in our society; we will be able to create lasting societal change (Holm, 2021, p. 144).

The ontological perspective of social constructivism is evident through the chosen research method of interviews, as it aims to examine the lived experiences of the interviewees and analyze that in connection with pre-existing textual material on the topic. Not looking for an “objective truth” but to bring forth a perspective influenced by the lived experience of people close to the topic at hand. Hence, acknowledging that the knowledge that serves as the base for this research and the knowledge that this thesis has produced is a product of co-creation, ultimately making us creators of the world we live in. Nicholas Onuf (2013) further describes the previous stance on knowledge as co-creation accordingly,

World, worlds: each of us lives in a world of our own; all of us live together in the same world... All of us experience the world actively ... Together we have made the world what it is now, and we go on making the world what it shall become. As we make the world, it makes us individually what we are and it makes our worlds uniquely what they are. (p. 21)

A way in which a connection is created between an individual’s own world and that of others is through rules. The construction of rules can take many forms, such as social, legal or other manners in which an order or direction is attempted to be installed - either demanding or encouraging individuals on how to act. Onuf (2013) further states how constructivists identify society’s participants as agents, all playing a part in the rules of society, bounded by rules rooted in social constructions. Therefore, as social constructions are made up of individuals, groups of people, practices or things, so is an organization or a government acting together perceived as a social construction (Onuf, 2013, pp. 4–5).

Applied to this research, the chain of command between the government of Mexico and that of the Mexico City municipality, and finally, organizations such as the Institute for Women in Migration are shaped by the rules put in place by the actor who holds the most power. Therefore, the federal policy on migration will influence that of the city and inevitably affect its own policies and the work of the organizations working within those urban policies.

Qualitative Research

This section focuses on the methodology used to analyze the chosen topic concerning the influence of the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action on Mexico City's journey to becoming a sanctuary city and how the Institute for Women in Migration has worked towards assisting the city's migrant women. Throughout this paper, the qualitative research method is utilized when analyzing textual material and conducting an informal interview with Lorena Cano Padilla and Luisa Alvarez Icaza Pastor - Padilla working as coordinator of the Legal Clinic and Pastor as legal liaison - from the Institute for Women in Migration, which is further supported by a conversation with postdoctoral researcher Dr. Jorge Morales Cardiel who holds a PhD from Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas and has done extensive research on the topic of migration in the Mexican context. Dr. Cardiel has extensive experience in fieldwork, combining his work focusing on cross-border studies with volunteer work in shelters at the U.S.-Mexican border. In addition, my interest and motivation for pursuing this research topic derive from my internship at the Soli*City research partnership in Toronto, where an interview with Dr. Raúl Delgado Wise brought insight into the topic. Dr. Delgado Wise has published a large number of books and articles on the topic of migration and has centered his research on counter-hegemonic perspectives on migration and development, in addition to the participation of social society in the global governance of migration.

Furthermore, as described by Malterud (2001), qualitative research aims to identify the meaning of a social phenomenon in the way the participants experience and perceive it - with qualitative research having the power to allow the researcher to get an insight into the meanings which the interviewees attribute to a given social setting or context (Thomsen, 2021). Gaining an understanding of the interviewees' perspectives on certain situations is especially important for this given research, as investigating the topic of migration in a Mexican context and Mexico City's process of becoming a sanctuary city should not only be done from a policy-related standpoint but also aim at gaining a more nuanced insight into the overall experience of - in this case migrant women. Hence, this includes what is being done outside of the city's government policy by NGOs and therefore emphasizes the importance of including the perceived experience of the employees at - in this case Institute for Women in Migration.

Moreover, the qualitative research method is well suited for studying the human experience, interaction and social and cultural processes, in addition to the impact that said processes and social changes have on people's lives - in this case, migration policies in Mexico City and Mexico as a whole (Thomsen, 2021).

Firstly, applying the qualitative method when analyzing the gathered textual material enables the identification of patterns, focusing on social structures and shared beliefs, which is ideal for analyzing the approaches applied by the chosen organization and the Mexico City government regarding their efforts to protect migrant women. Further, textual material has been analyzed to present different perspectives on the topic, as well as a tool for background knowledge on the chosen organization, the chosen policies, used concepts and theories.

Secondly, in this study, interviews have been chosen over surveys, as an in-depth insight into the interviewee's experience and thoughts can be obtained through this method. Following Svend Brinkmann and Lene Tanggaard (2010), the researcher aims to understand the life of individuals from the "inside" life itself (p.18). Hence, the method of qualitative research seeks to understand and focus on the meaning and value that individuals ascribe to the world through their experiences. Further, interviews are preferable to surveys when the subject is people, interaction, or the human experience. Due to the research focus on social situations, and experiences, the informal, semi-structured interview form has been chosen, as it allows for the interview to form from a mix of both the interviewers' intentions through (guiding) questions but also gives room for exploration and unexpected information through the information provided by the interviewees' responses (Bryman, 2012, p. 212). Nevertheless, while the interview form is semi-structured, it also emphasizes the need for the interviewer to maintain focus, both when asking follow-up and clarifying questions and while listening to the interviewees' responses, ensuring the interview is not redirected from the original research topic.

Although the interview form chosen for the conducted interview with the Institute for Women in Migration was informal, the interviewees were still presented with a consent form and informed about the conduction and purpose of the interview and research in order to receive both verbal and written consent. Additionally, as the research method is qualitative,

this is also reflected in the interview where for this thesis, I have chosen to focus only on one organization to specify and narrow a topic which to start is extensive.

The in-person interview has benefits and drawbacks. A benefit is that it enables the interviewer to read the interviewee's body language and employ social skills such as active listening to make them feel at ease (Harvard Sociology, n.d.). However, there is a risk that the interviewee will be impacted by the interviewer's body language or other external traits like class, ethnicity, religious attire, etc. As a result, the interviewee may alter their initial response in an attempt to please the interviewer (Bryman, 2012, p. 214).

Moreover, as the conduction of an interview contains much attention to detail concerning the interviewer's actions, the interviewee's responses, and verbal and non-verbal communication, it can be a great advantage to use an audio recording. Recording interviews can allow the researcher to examine the interviewee's questions in more detail, both during the actual interview and after transcribing and analysis. Additionally, it enables the interviewer to review the interviewee's responses after a period of mental rest (Bryman, 2012, p. 482). Moreover, it is crucial to obtain the interviewees' permission in advance if the interviews are to be recorded in order to avoid any challenges that could invalidate the collected data, render the analysis invalid, or prolong the research process.

Furthermore, as semi-structured interviews do not follow a set structure, they can result in unexpected information and conversation topics. During the interview with the Institute for Women in Migration, I was given the contact information of psychologist Carolina Carreño Nigenda whose career includes work at Sin Fronteras, the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, and currently a position as a project officer for the International Coalition Against Detention. Doing so allowed the thesis' research to gain an additional perspective from someone who has worked more closely with Mexico City's migrant policies. The connection would not have been possible without their influence, resulting in an interview – and an additional perspective on the topic, a view of someone's lived experience. Also, while the possibility for an in-person interview with Nigenda was not possible due to distance and language differences challenging a spoken interview over Zoom, it was chosen to translate the questions and send them through email. Something that allowed her to respond via text had the advantage of giving her, as an interviewee, more time to form their responses. While

this has disadvantages, in following a more structured form, where there is no instant opportunity for follow-up questions, and people may tend to answer briefer and more limited, it was still deemed a good alternative under the circumstances. For the translation of the interview questions, an online translator was applied – ‘DeepL Translator’, which, although using an online translating tool, has its disadvantages, the risk of incorrect translation of specific meaning or general limitation of expression from the researcher.

Furthermore, thematic coding was indirectly applied throughout the analytical approach, with the paper, although not explicitly addressed, exhibiting evidence of thematic coding through the observation and exploration of repeated themes, patterns and concepts derived from both the selected literature and interviews. The applied form of coding has been theory-driven and has influenced the interview questions and the later analysis of the interviewee’s responses. While a distinct coding scheme or process has not been outlined and explained, the repeated investigation of overall themes like; intersectionality, migrant protection, gender-based discrimination, and contradictions between policy and reality suggests the approach of underlying thematic coding. Additionally, the use of coding has allowed for the creation of coherence throughout the paper, and related topics, which has also functioned as a way of narrowing an already extensive subject. Although the study does not explicitly mention the use of thematic coding, its use can be identified from thematic exploration and the mapping of repetitive patterns and concepts. This approach allowed for deeper insights to be uncovered and contributed to an overall understanding of the research topic.

Data Selection

Limitations of the Study: Practical and Ethical Considerations

As is the case for every study, combining methodology, theory, and topic will lay the ground for possibilities and limitations. This research concentrates specifically on the implementation of migration policies in Mexico from 2004 with Mexico’s Declaration and Plan of Action until the present day, focusing on Mexico City and examining the city’s declaration as a sanctuary city. In addition, a comprehensive analysis has been conducted to explore the intersectional encounters of migrant women using textual analysis and in-depth

interviews as methodological tools to emphasize the importance of integrating a gendered perspective in the design of sanctuary city policies in the eradication of gender inequality and migrant protection.

Furthermore, a limitation of the study is the limited number of interviews conducted. Nevertheless, concerning the chosen interview form being qualitative, a choice has been made only to conduct two interviews; one with interviewees Lorena Cano Padilla and Luisa Alvarez Icaza Pastor, both working in the legal department of the Institute for Women in Migration and one with psychologist Carolina Carreño Nigenda who has been working with migration issues for almost 20 years, including work for the government of Mexico City. It is important to emphasize that their responses reflect their experiences and opinions and can, therefore, not be used to represent the entirety of their organization or affiliated government explicitly. Their responses will be used and analyzed as an insight into the given topic and field of work.

Additionally, it would have supported the research of this paper significantly if I could have done a participant observation at the Institute for Women in Migration, a women's shelter or another organization working with migrant women in Mexico City, but this was not possible due to lack of time to establish the connection and do the fieldwork. Fieldwork in the form of participant observation would have allowed for a better understanding of, e.g., the city's shelters as an institution - including how they are organized, what is working and what requires improvement. Additionally, interviews with migrant women in Mexico City would also have given a great perspective into their experience, journey, view of the city in the context of migration, difficulties they face, etc. Moreover, the previously mentioned additions to the thesis would have significantly impacted the research by allowing for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of migrants, workers, and the analyzed system - something that could not be accessed simply through texts. However, due to such connections having to be established, connections that take time, and a large amount of practice, due to the delicate topic and the vulnerable situation that the migrants are in, with a risk of causing them further distress, this was impossible.

Theory and Context

The objective of this study is to explore how the intersectional experience of migrant women is being responded to in a Mexican context, from a perspective of institutional and organizational frameworks, in the efforts to protect the rights of migrants, and what opportunities the urban sphere can propose in the form of a sanctuary city. In this regard, this paper will present factors proposing issues for the safety and protection of migrant women, in addition to the response in efforts by the Mexican government and non-governmental organization Institute for Women in Migration. Further, focusing on Mexico City's position as a declared sanctuary city, this paper seeks to research the city's role when applying a gender perspective to the sanctuary protection of migrants. Nevertheless, when exploring the city's position in migrant protection, as Margaret Godoy and Harald Bauder highlight, the topic of sanctuary and solidarity in the Global South, thus including Latin America, represents a general lack of literature (Bauder & Godoy, 2022, p. 229). While there is substantial literature on municipal responses to migration in the sense of, e.g., integration, it does not make a clear and explicit connection to the topic of sanctuary or solidarity cities. Still, Bauder and Godoy (2022) highlights the comparison between the European 'Solidarity Cities' alliance, established between municipalities and the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Actions' 'Cities of Solidarity' program on a Latin American scale. Additionally, Stefanie Kron and Henrik Lebuhn support this comparison by viewing the frameworks as similar networks of cooperation between governments and administrations (Bauder & Godoy, 2022, p. 232). This study will also draw parallels between the aims of the 'Cities of Solidarity' program and that of the sanctuary city, exploring Mexico City's chance of going against changing federal immigration policies in the protection of migrants.

In addition, existing theories and relevant literature written by experts in the field form the basis of this thesis. By utilizing established theoretical frameworks and expanding on insights from previous research, this study aims to build on the existing knowledge base and extend the work of others. The research design, methodology, and interpretation of findings have been guided through theoretical perspectives and concepts from the chosen literature, ensuring a comprehensive and informed exploration of the research topic.

This paper will explore several theoretical concepts to achieve a well-rounded research and understanding of the overall topic and problem formulation. First, the concept of

intersectionality is outlined in correlation with women's experience in the context of migration. This aspect is relevant as it helps emphasize the need to differentiate between separate categories in the experience of migrants, which is further essential in the protection of migrants and policy creation. Subsequently, the paper will explore three approaches to incorporating a gender perspective in policy creation, namely the concepts of **Equal Treatment, Positive Action and Gender Mainstreaming**. The focus on women's migrant experience and the three approaches to including gender in policy creation examines different ways to overcome gender inequality. It will be relevant in the examination of past and future implementations of policies. The study then examines a country's position as a **sender, transit, or receiving country** in the context of Mexico as an essential tool in the further analysis, aiming to understand the migrants' experience in Mexico and the policies implemented. Followed by a description of the **sanctuary city** as a concept and its intent to utilize the urban space and power of municipalities in the protection of migrants to gain a further understanding of how this has the potential to be unified with a gendered perspective on migration in sanctuary policy creation and implementation.

Lastly, sections introducing and incorporating the case into a transition from theory to analysis are presented. The two sections respectively describe, first, the interviewed organization Institute for Women in Migration, and second, Mexico's position as a sending, transit, and receiving country of migrants in preparation for the emergence of theoretical concepts, cases, and analysis.

Woman in Migration

Intersectionality

An intersectional approach to sociological analysis takes a point of departure in the idea that various types of discrimination and repression, connected to social categories such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, socio-economic status and, in this case also, immigration status - mutually constitute and reshape each other's meaning in complex ways (Qvist & Skjøtt-Larsen, 2019, p. 35). Most research on intersectionality applies qualitative methods, which will also be the case for this thesis.

As described by bell hooks in her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1982), “[r]ace and class identity create differences in quality of life, social status and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share” (hooks, 2001, p. 10). Hence, Hooks presents an intersectional focus on inequality and oppression, where interrelated systems uphold inequality and uneven power balances.

This study will focus on migrant women and how gendered inequalities make them disproportionately affected and vulnerable. The societal gender disparities include a heightened risk of facing abuse through sexual and gender-based violence and issues rooted in toxic gender stereotypes, which differentiate their experience from their male counterparts. Thus, the vulnerability of migrant women builds upon intersectional factors and layers of discrimination, including but not limited to; ethnic origin, socio-economic position, nationality, age, migratory status and gender-related qualities (UN Women & Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, 2014, p. 11). Additionally, traditional views of gender, where women, e.g., are being withheld from education opportunities and have more care responsibilities in the home, can result in fewer opportunities for economic prosperity (The World Bank & UNHCR, n.d.). UN Women (2014) asserts that the legal level reinforces this vulnerability through laws that perpetuate gender stereotypes and portray women as caregivers and men as breadwinners. One example is the issuance of migration documents to women attached to their male partners (UN Women & Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, 2014, p. 11). The aforementioned makes them financially dependent, limits their options for prosperity, and makes them vulnerable to abusive relations with a partner or employer in an informal job.

Moreover, the intersectionality that further complicates the lives of migrant women when facing the process of migrating, settling and integrating includes the unattended psychosocial processes, which they often have not worked through due to a lack of resources (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-c). Whether it be financial or human resources in the form of a social support network, these can originate from both physical, emotional and mental abuse the women have been through (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-a). The lack of resources can, as argued by IMUMI, be even further affected by discriminatory factors such as if the migrant is not a native Spanish speaker, e.g., if they are of Afro-descendants or indigenous origin (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-a). Hence, to complicate things further, the lack of immigration documents and a supportive

network - either for emotional support or for those traveling with children, can limit women's opportunities for work and integration. An example of this would be, e.g., not being able to have someone watch their children while working specific jobs, making it harder to break the barriers keeping them in a vulnerable and precarious position.

Furthermore, the intersectional approach to social inequalities has, as described by Claudia Mora and Nicola Piper (2021), been one of the most important contributions to the social sciences in the last decades (p. 2). The inclusion of an intersectional approach has brought attention to the unidimensional analysis of gender, which had been conducted prior, something which had been a factor in preventing sufficient anti-discrimination laws and policies to protect individuals affected by multiple types of discrimination.

Feminist Policy Analysis: A Gendered Lens

“Women make up half the world's population, and for too long, women's views and experiences have not been heard and valued—they have been seen as secondary to men's” (Cocker & Hafford-Letchfield, 2022, p. 12). The global position of women remains far from equal when compared to men. This inequality is visible throughout society, and stages of life from positions in the job market, to time spent on domestic labour etc. - and is even visible in migration (Cocker & Hafford-Letchfield, 2022, p. 1). Feminism as a social and political movement has been a tool to examine gender disparities through a critical frame across various social issues. Therefore, it is argued that women's experiences should be viewed and understood from a multidimensional - intersectional - perspective - viewing the multiple structural inequalities - where gender inequalities affect the individual woman's experience in different ways (Cocker & Hafford-Letchfield, 2022, p. 2). Therefore, in combination with intersectional dimensions of inequality, a means to change said societal inequalities is through policies. Hence, the connection between policies, gendered perspectives, and equality hold importance in securing rights for migrant women.

Critical Feminist Policy Analysis is an approach that views policy through a gendered lens, focusing on how a given policy affects marginalized groups and how this contributes to perpetuating gender disparities. When commenting on policy analysis, McPhail (2003) states that it “(...) involves identifying, examining, explaining and understanding the content,

causes, and consequences of public policies” (p. 40). Moreover, while it could be argued that the analysis of policies should be as neutral as possible, Carol Lee Bacchi points out that policy approaches are inherently political, including the questions the analyst asks, which will affect the direction of the research, the received answers, possible solutions and recommendations of improvements (McPhail, 2003, p. 41). Further, the critical feminist policy analysis aims at identifying the ways in which policies are reinforcing and perpetuating gender-based oppression in the search for solutions to end or minimize gender disparities. The desired outcome of placing gender disparities at the center of policy analysis is to develop more inclusive and just policies to help work towards equality and fight previously set gender stereotypes and norms. In addition, it is argued that the gendered lens should be a constant in policy analysis whether the policy directly mentions women or not. This speaks not only to the gendered inequalities women face throughout society but also to the lived experience of women throughout society and their lifetime being a constant - something which therefore needs to be accounted for and a perspective to be incorporated into all policies.

Another significant aspect of and main argument for the research in and implementation of feminist policy analysis is equality. As described by McPhail (2003), “A feminist policy analysis is an action-oriented model with the explicit goal of ending the sexist oppression of women” (p. 45). Hence, the policy is analyzed to empower women and shift societal power dynamics. This reasoning can be followed by Kantola and Lombardo (2017), who propose three fundamental reasons for the need to apply and research women and policy approaches. Firstly, the need to acknowledge the role played by women in society. Secondly, the impact that public policies have on women, and thirdly, women’s presence in public policy and policy processes (p. 162). This can, therefore, also be argued to be applicable to migration policies, indicating a need to acknowledge women’s agency, enhance their opportunities and work towards equality by changing existing power structures. Something which is argued by the International Organization for Migration (n.d.-a) to be done by understanding the lived experiences of women, with governments tailoring responses in accordance so that the rights of all migrants can be protected and guaranteed. Moreover, referring back to Kantola and Lombardo’s previously mentioned third point, it leads to the question of how to regard the next steps in the creation of policies that both seek to minimize gender inequality and also acknowledge the current state of gender disparities. In order to overcome gender inequalities

in society through the use of policy, Theresa Reese (1998) distinguishes between three ideal-typical approaches to gender issues: equal treatment, positive action, and gender mainstreaming (Rees, 1998).

Firstly, as stated by Rees (1998) equal treatment implies “(...) that no individual should have fewer human rights or opportunities than any other” (p. 29). Hence, this strategy has a focus on equality through access, rights, and opportunities - viewing exclusion from either as the major obstacle hindering marginalized groups from reaching equality. Nevertheless, as it is argued by Mark Pollack and Emilie Hafner-Burton (2000), the approach of equal treatment only focuses on the legal rights of women as workers and therefore does not include what is referred to as “(...) the informal ‘gender contracts’ among women and men” (p. 433), and the deep-rooted causes of sexual inequalities. As stated by Catherine Marshall (1999), policies that have the goal of gender neutrality - equal treatment - fail by being blind to the advantages that men have throughout different aspects of society. Hence, it is pointed out that applying a gender-neutral approach focusing on equal opportunity in policy creation can result in the opposite effect and end up working against the best interests of women and the prosperity of equality and equal rights (Marshall, 1999, p. 62).

Secondly, instead of looking to reach equality through equal access, the strategy of positive action places its focus on “(...) the adoption of specific actions on behalf of women, in order to overcome their unequal starting position in a patriarchal society” (Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2000, p. 433). Hence, positive action seeks to encourage participation from women and other underrepresented groups by using affirmative-action preferences or quotas to break with inequality - something which, at the extreme, can be viewed as what Reese (1998) calls positive discrimination (p. 433).

Thirdly, gender mainstreaming entails a systematic incorporation of gender issues throughout all policies and governmental institutions to ensure the promotion of gender equality. This approach devotes complete commitment to the creation and implementation of equality policies and efforts to mobilize “all general policies and measures specifically to achieve equality by actively and openly taking into account, at the planning stage, their effects on the respective situation of women and men in implementation, monitoring and evaluation” (Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2000, p. 434), as described by the Commission of the European

Communities in 1996, when it adopted a formal commitment to gender mainstreaming. The approach of gender mainstreaming, which requires commitment from all the central actors in the policy process and agreement in adapting a gender perspective to all issues, no matter the interest or experience of the included parties, is demanding to implement. Still, in the context of migration, the integration of gender mainstreaming approaches to policies regarding migrant women is something that the International Organization for Migration (n.d.-a) deems essential. This is due to the fact that,

“At each stage of a person’s migration process, whether at the destination, transit, origin or return, they are likely to be treated differently according to their gender identity. Understanding migration from a gender perspective offers States tools to guarantee and protect the rights of migrants of all gender identities” (IOM UN Migration, n.d.-a)

Hence, gender mainstreaming can be used as a tool to fight the assumption that all migrants have a universal experience regardless of gender. Something which is further argued by the International Organization for Migration to have made women, girls and other individuals with diverse gender identities invisible from a policy perspective (IOM UN Migration, n.d.-a)

Gender and Policy

The precarious situation of migrants, especially those without status, places them in a position where they are easily exploited and targets of violence, with few places to turn for help due to fear of deportation and local authorities (Global Migration Group, 2013, p. 29). Most migrant women who come to Mexico as workers from Central America work irregularly due to not having the necessary legal documents (UN Women & Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, 2014, p. 11). Resulting in limited options for work in safe environments, where the law can protect them from exploitation and leaves them to work precarious jobs - making them part of the informal economy. The positions available to them are often containing few qualifications with very low pay in fields often considered ‘feminine’ such as domestic service, caregiving, agriculture, street vending, and the sex industry (UN Women & Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, 2014, p. 11). The factors leading women to vulnerable work environments indicate a need for specific dedication to the analysis and creation of policies and general implementations to protect the rights and well-

being of migrant women - without being dependent on immigration status - and prevent them from vulnerability in an already precarious state.

Previous studies by Kantola and Lombardo (2017) state how the analyzing of gender as discourse allows for the development of theories and methodology for the further study of policies: The gendering practices that lie behind our construction of a specific idea of women and men, based on frames, meaning and norms will inevitably have consequences for society, and gender equality (p. 181). While the acknowledgment of a need for a gender perspective in policy analysis is visible throughout both already existing policies and research, it is argued by Kantola and Lombardo (2017) that much of gender analysis in policy employs gender as a binary concept. Consequently, by only focusing on the relationship between men and women, the risk of maintaining ‘fixed gender categories’ and excluding, e.g., transgender issues arise (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017, p. 168).

“Gender and policy approaches criticize policies for perpetuating gender biases and inequalities through norms that are supposedly gender neutral while, in fact, they reproduce unequal social structures that tend to assign men to the public sphere and women to the private. These approaches not only challenge unequal policies but also propose ways of integrating gender into public policies” (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017, p. 161).

In summary, views on attempts to combat gender disparities have been proposed, with a call for changes in legislative frameworks and the promotion of gender equality issues across different aspects of society. Policy approaches that will challenge patriarchal, heteronormative, and heterosexist societal practices that have been shaping society and keeping women unequal to men.

An additional aspect of the correlation between gender and migration and migrant women is the lack of attention given to the subject throughout history. Hence, as stated by Monica Boyd, accounts of migration throughout history were often genderless (thus gender-blind) or focused on the male experience, with women and children placed in a category of being ‘extras’ to the man (Mora & Piper, 2021, p. 19). Throughout time, changes occurred which was influenced by a line of events; the rising of women’s presence in the labor force, political

and economic interconnections between countries, a rise in supra-organizations such as the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration, and an enhanced focus on feminist perspectives which emphasized women in migration (Mora & Piper, 2021, p. 20). The acknowledgment and rising focus on women in the context of migration allowed researchers, non-governmental organizations, and policymakers to study and implement newly acquired data into their agendas by adding the intersectional relationship between gender, inequality, and migration (Mora & Piper, 2021, p. 20).

As Marrujo (2009), the risks which migrants - and especially those without legal status - face on their journey toward a better life are severe. Still, these risks are additionally heightened as a woman and include exploitation, assault, and acts of sexual aggression, which they are more likely to face compared to their male counterparts (p. 31). In some instances, sexual assault has been described by migrant women as “the price you pay for crossing the border,” emphasizing the frequent occurrences of the assault (Marrujo, 2009, p. 31). Violence against women is a powerful tool for domination and has severe effects on and consequences for women’s health, physical and mental, personal integrity, general life, and employment. The frequency and severe consequences of the abuse and assault that migrant women risk emphasize the need for action to be taken and highlight the additional vulnerability of their state not only as migrants but as migrant women. Therefore, a need for action to be taken through the application of necessary measures and implementation of policies can be identified. Hence, this shall include policies that aim to prevent, protect, and address gender-based violence in any form, whether it is rape, sexual harassment, or assault (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017, p. 162).

In 2007 the Mexican government passed the ‘General Law on Women’s Right to a Life Free of Violence’ (*Ley General de Acceso de la Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*) that while recognizing different forms of violence, aimed to both prevent, eradicate, and sanction violence and discrimination against women (Tamés, 2019, p. 88). The law was based on the following four principles; legal equality between men and women, respect for the human dignity of women, non-discrimination, and freedom of women (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2007, p. 5). The motivation and aim of the law’s implementation were to establish coordination between the state, federation, and municipalities in order to;

“(…) prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women, to establish principles and modalities to guarantee women’s access to a life free of violence, which will favor their development and well-being in accordance with the principles of equality and nondiscrimination, and to guarantee democracy and comprehensive, sustainable development, which will strengthen the sovereign and democratic regime established in the Constitution of the United Mexican States” (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2007, p. 4)

The presented argumentation relates to the gender strategy of policy creation and positive action, which has been previously touched upon. Further, by accepting both the role women play in society and that gender-based violence threatens their possibility of success and well-being in society, the law calls for action of protection. Acknowledging that to be equal, points of gender disparities need to be eradicated to establish the basis for equal opportunities and participation in society.

Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración

Located in Mexico City, Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración (hereafter also referred to as Institute for Women in Migration or IMUMI) is a non-governmental organization that specializes in providing assistance for migrant women and children, promoting their rights in the Mexican and some extent U.S. context. The organization was founded in 2010 by Gretchen Kuhner and works with both policy advocacy, research, and legal representation to better the living conditions of migrant women and their families (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 1). IMUMI’s work follows a human rights perspective, believing that women must be provided with the needed information and resources to access their rights and to be able to take advantage of the positive aspects of migration (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-c). Additionally, the organization’s efforts have “(…) put the challenges faced by transnational families on the policy map in Mexico.”, as has been described by the MacArthur Foundation (n.d.). Something has been done through the organization’s proposed four main goals to achieve better and safer circumstances for migrant women. These are presented as follows:

- “Promote safe migration for women through access to justice.
- Promote the development and implementation of public policies and programs that benefit women in migration.

- Educate and sensitize the political class, academia, university students, and the media about the rights and needs of women linked to migration.
- Contribute to strengthening the capacities of women so that they can exercise those rights that have been affected by migratory processes.” (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-c)

Here, the emphasis is placed on the importance of a combination of improvement of public policies and education for more than just the migrant women directly affected but also the general public. The aforementioned four goals focus on the needed collaboration between policymakers, service providers through programs, and the media to make lasting societal change.

The organization is non-profit and without political affiliation and does therefore fund its work via. Support from national and international partners through pro-bono work and donations in either services and goods or financial support (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-d). Information regarding the organization’s sources of funds is visible on its website, with an overview of different donors and how they contributed. This supports IMUMI’s transparency and credibility by focusing on reaching the previously mentioned organizational goals. Hence, combating possible skepticism around the spending of non-profit organizations may deter people from donating. Additionally, the organization conducts extensive research on the impact of migration and the lives of women and how the intersectional experience of migrant women comes with specific needs. This research is conducted both individually and in collaboration with other institutions, using techniques such as field research and interviews.

Furthermore, as part of the Institute for Women in Migration’s communication efforts, the organization advocates partly through the creation of; infographics, videos, newsletters, posters, opinion columns, and weekly collaboration with a radio station, among other platforms and information sources to spread knowledge about their cause. The emphasis placed on the power of knowledge also takes the form of education, where they train journalists, civil society organizations, and academics about the participation of women in migration and the importance of this gaining news coverage. Further, training journalists and scholars in the experiences of migrant women is part of their goal to change the existing

narratives and information coverage on migration and how this affects women - emphasizing the power of knowledge and action taken by all, both policymakers and the public (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-b).

Mexico: Sender, Transit, and Receiving Country

Most migrants fleeing the Northern Triangle leave their home countries due to life-threatening situations, where the risks and dangers connected to escaping - the dangerous journey and risk of getting denied at the border - are deemed less dangerous than staying in their country of origin. Also, fears of facing violence in case of returning caused by rejection from border control are of worry for the migrant as a large part of the violence in which they are fleeing is gang related - gangs controlling communities, making returning migrants an easy target (Cornelius, 2018, p. 15).

Moreover, the precarious situation of migrants intensified in April 2018, when the Trump administration implemented the following two policies to deter new migration, which, as described by Cornelius (2018), created a major humanitarian crisis. First, a 'zero tolerance' policy, where all unauthorized migrants who were apprehended at the border were to be transferred for criminal prosecution in the federal court system. Second, a policy which separated migrant children from their parents for the duration of the adjudication of the parents' legal case (Cornelius, 2018, p. 15). The attempt to deter future migrants continued with the ruling that migrants were no longer eligible to claim asylum in the United States based on "private" violence, which included domestic, drug, and gang-related cases, something which disproportionately affected women fleeing domestic abuse (Sacchetti, 2018). In response, the director of the Women's Refugee Commission's migrant rights and justice program Michelle Brané stated that women and children would die as a consequence of the decision to exclude private violence from eligible reasons to get asylum (Sacchetti, 2018).

A study conducted by Institute for Women in Migration found that 64% of the women they assisted who fled their country of origin had done so due to being victims of violence, with an additional 34% of the women have faced deprivation of liberty in Mexican immigration detention centers (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-a). In some cases, the

aggressors whom the victims had been fleeing from had tracked them down in Mexico - which due to migrants needing valid immigration documents to file complaints, can lead to, at times, fatal consequences. A fear which, as described by IMUMI, has led some migrant women to continue their journey toward the United States in the hope of protection due to a lack of trust in the Mexican authorities to protect them against their aggressors or follow up on already existing cases (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, n.d.-a).

While Mexico is in the position of being a country of both sending, transit, and receiving of migrants, it is essential to look into the differences that separate the types of migration. Moreover, as Dr. Jorge Morales Cardiel stated, “Mexico plays a changing role in the context of international migration dynamics. Its shift from being a country of high emigration to becoming, increasingly, a country of transit has given the country a new regional function” (Jørgensen & Schierup, 2022, p. 274). This has left migrants in a more precarious state, as border control and border security policies are targeted at controlling and containing irregular migrants. This has placed groups of organized crime in a position to benefit from the desperate and precarious situation that the border policies put the migrants in.

Viewing a country as a ‘sending country’ states that individuals from the given state migrate either regularly or irregularly towards a country of destination. In the Mexican context, as Institute for Women in Migration described, many Mexicans travel to the U.S. in search of the American dream. This, connected with family reunification and a history of migration toward the US, keeps people traveling across the border (R. Delgado Wise, personal communication, January 24, 2023).

Furthermore, when looking at transit migration through Mexico to the United States, Cornelius (2018) describes government policy coordination between the two nations, dating back to the 1980’s with Mexico serving as what he describes as a ‘*buffer state*’ between the U.S. and Central America. This was done through a variety of approaches, including controlling transportation routes leading north (through the country- *frontera vertical*), tightening temporary visa requirements for Central Americans, and accepting help from U.S. government agencies to help keep non-status migrants away from the U.S. border in the 1990s and 2000s (Cornelius, 2018, p. 16). Further, Mexico working in cooperation with the U.S. to stop transit migration was a condition for the country to receive financial and military assistance from the United States. Additional efforts to stop transit migration and apprehend

and deport Central Americans trying to reach the U.S.-Mexico border were applied by the Mexican government, with immigration agents targeting Central American migrants through ethnic stereotyping, physical appearance, and clothing. In addition, as in other nations - for one with the Trump administration - the Mexican government attempted to justify and gain support from the public by connecting transit migration with a public threat and crime, using fear as a tool for public 'coercion' (Cornelius, 2018, p. 17). By emphasizing and tying together immigration and rising crime - especially gang violence - the government uses it to justify efforts to restrict migration through tighter control. Here Cornelius (2018) mentions a comparative survey that states fifty-three percent of the Mexican population viewed immigrants as a "bad influence" on their country. Reasons such as job competition and the threat of cultural cohesion were used as argumentation, although the country has what Cornelius (2018) describes as a "(...) long-standing, latent current of racism and xenophobia that is rarely acknowledged (...)" (p. 20). The Migration Research Hub (n.d.) describes xenophobia as the fear or prejudice of someone viewed as foreign to the dominant sense of culture, nationality, religion, or ethnicity. The negative discourse can sometimes be used as a tool by politicians, media, and organizations for personal gain, making migrants the scapegoat in cases of economic or social discontent (Blocher, 2017).

On the contrary, research shows that migration is overwhelmingly positive and significantly contributes to societies in both economy and development. Still, as presented on a panel from the United Nations University's Migration Network, an anti-migrant narrative which is often applied by, e.g., the media creates the false assumption that migrants take away from the communities they reside in, and by that, therefore also robs the given society and its residents of something, e.g., jobs (Blocher, 2017). This is a narrative that not only goes against the previously mentioned benefits that migration has to communities but also assumes that migrants have little to nothing to contribute. Additionally, the anti-migrant narrative, xenophobia, and the Mexican government's intensified focus on limiting transit migration forced migrants into further hiding and more dangerous routes to cross the border. Hence, the use of human smugglers grew, and so did the charges, bringing the already precarious migrants into an even further vulnerable state.

Finally, Mexico also takes the role of a receiving country or a 'country of destination' for migrants traveling from Central and South America (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 4). The definition of a receiving country has

been defined by the European Commission (n.d.) as, “(...)a country that is the destination for a person or a group of persons, irrespective of whether they migrate regularly or irregularly.”. The role of a receiving or host country can, as explained by International Organization for Migration, take different forms; first, migrants returning to their country of origin or being sent back to a specific country. Second, in the context of resettlement, it relates to when a country has agreed to receive a certain number of migrants and refugees based on decisions made by the government (Sironi et al., 2019, p. 169).

Furthermore, Mexico, as a country containing precarious migrants of various sorts from diverse origins, is also one of the most dangerous countries for irregular migrants and asylum seekers due to xenophobia and intensified government efforts to limit transit migration through, e.g., migrant enforcement systems, which included checkpoints throughout the country (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, 2022b, p. 1). The immigration checkpoints and stops were managed by both soldiers and immigration agents who would board buses, stop people in airports, pull over cars, patrol public places, and raid buildings in search of non-status migrants (Mattiace, Tyler, 2022). The internal checkpoints of inspection were spread out from the border of Guatemala to the U.S. border. As described by Tyler Mattiace (2022) for Human Rights Watch, they often targeted specific individuals based on racial profiling, which often came to affect black, brown, or indigenous individuals, whether Mexican nationals or not. This had multiple consequences, such as unlawful detaining, torture, and deportation, in addition to forcing migrants to seek alternative, and often more dangerous, routes when traveling through the country (Mattiace, Tyler, 2022). The government's efforts towards limiting the number of migrants reaching the northern border have led migrants to not only find themselves in a further precarious situation but have also resulted in more violence towards migrants from the hands of both organized crime and law enforcement (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, 2022b, p. 1). Research conducted by the Institute for Women in Migration (2022b) further states that groups of organized crime have taken advantage of migrants' need for new routes of travel through the country, using the vulnerability of precarious migrants to expose them to various kinds of abuse, sexual assault, extortion, or in some cases the human smuggling groups will work together with the National Guard, the Armed Forces, state or local police emphasizing the migrant's risk of captivity and deportation (p.1).

The discriminatory practices that were taking place at the immigration checkpoints throughout the country were protested by civil society organizations and human rights groups who advocated for the end to the discrimination and violence. As highlighted by Institute for Women in Migration (2022b), proposals were made with hopes of regular pathways, regularization, family reunification, access to asylum proceedings, and humanitarian status for people seeking protection for decades (p. 1). In May 2022, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled to end the checkpoints, based on the policy of stopping and searching individuals to check immigration status was deemed racist and discriminatory, hence unconstitutional (R. Wolf, 2022). The decision to allow checkpoints, and the excessive use of force that followed, were also argued to be overbroad and disproportionately affecting indigenous and Afro-Mexicans. This was significantly influenced by a case of three indigenous Mexican citizens being wrongfully detained and tortured based on racial profiling, presented to the Supreme Court (R. Wolf, 2022).

The Sanctuary City

When describing the “sanctuary city”, it often refers to the local efforts of cities to grant non-status migrants protection from national immigration policies. This is accomplished via policy implementation and the city's refusal to assist federal immigration authorities in deporting and apprehending non-status migrants (Garcia, 2009).

While the protection that the city can provide on an urban level cannot be complete, its efforts have been described by Harald Bauder and Dayana A. Gonzalez as more than shielding migrants from deportation,

“Although sanctuary cities are unable to offer complete protection, they commit to including all inhabitants—independent of federal status—in the local community and improving the lives of those without full national status.” (Bauder & Gonzalez, 2018, p. 125)

Having a policy that is based on inclusion, without segregating the city's community depending on immigration status, is essential for society's most precarious migrants.

A non-status migrant is described as an individual who has either entered or remained in a country without the required legal papers. This also concerns persons who were, for example, denied asylum, had their status revoked, or overstayed their visa (Drejer-Jensen, 2023, p. 2).

Additionally, non-status migrants are often referred to as illegal migrants or illegal immigrants. The use of these terms criminalizes the migrant and further contributes to negative connotations, according to the Canadian Council for Refugees (2017).

Kwan (2021), further states that the terms used to define classes of individuals are not only neutral descriptors, but come with associations and connotations that influence our perspective on a given group or subject. To describe individuals without status as "illegal" is arguably dehumanizing since it characterizes the individuals' existence as 'illegal' and overlooks their roles as families, employees, friends, etc. Moreover, it undermines social cohesion in which the term 'illegal' connotes a division of people and a suspicious environment, which oftentimes is based on religion and/or ethnic origin (UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, 2018).

Furthermore, it is argued by Alexandra Délano Alonso (2021) that the current understanding of *sanctuary* - and sanctuary cities - are mostly tied to the idea of approaches of how to assist and protect precarious migrants and refugees when arriving at their country of destination in the Global North (Délano Alonso, 2021, p. 86). Aimee Villarreal has also argued that the amount of literature on sanctuary and asylum in non-White and non-Christian societies is limited. Throughout history, the term has mostly had religious connotations, referring to a sacred quality of space. However, this could range from a place where safety and protection from persecution are offered for refugees and migrants to a place for prayer or a sacred area for wildlife protection (Délano Alonso, 2021, p. 86). Today, Graham Hudson has described the sanctuary city movement as "a grassroots, human rights-based response to the increased numbers of non-status migrants living and working in global cities" (Hudson et al., 2016a, p. 2).

When viewing sanctuary cities in a Mexican context, the government of Mexico City declared the city sanctuary in April 2017 (Cardiel, 2022, p. 274). Still, opinions about the

sanctuary commitment have not been universal, as there has been a change in government and contradicting statements made by Mexican politicians about whether the country should hold its position as a country of asylum and refuge' or if it should be more restrictive. As expressed by Tonatiuh Guillén, who, back in 2018, was the country's commissioner of Mexico's National Institute for Migration, who stated that Mexico would not be 'a country of open doors, nor a sanctuary country' (p. 84). Because just months prior, Olga Sánchez Cordero, Minister of the Interior, affirmed that Mexico would "(...) return to its tradition as a country of asylum and refuge, as it had during moments of political and economic crises in Europe, and Central and South America", as it had done during the twentieth century (Cardiel, 2022, p. 86). This was part of the steps taken to change the country's discourse and approaches regarding migration, where the goal was to end forced migration and, as described by López Obrador in his 2018 election day speech, "(...) make migration a voluntary choice rather than a forced one" (Cardiel, 2022, pp. 84–85).

With a former government supporting the views of border control held by the United States, with its plan '*Plan Frontera Sur*,' a plan which, as described by Alonso (2021), "(...) had turned Mexico's southern border into an extension of the United States border enforcement and deportation strategies (...)" (p. 84), affected by corruption and limited institutional infrastructure resulting in hundreds of thousands of deportations to Central America, and violations of migrants' rights. These violations included extortion, trafficking, enforced disappearance, and homicides - an enhancement in crime that heightened the precarious circumstances the migrants entering the country faced.

In 2008, the General Law of Population was re-amended, decriminalizing non-status migration and the assistance of individuals without legal status, whereas prior being without legal status was punishable by ten years of imprisonment (Cornelius, 2018, p. 19). This has now changed to become more of an administrative offense, resulting in a fine. Still, while it has been decriminalized, contradicting government actions in treating migrants are visible. As pointed out by Cornelius (2018), while non-status migration has been decriminalized, on the contrary tens of thousands of non-status migrants from the Northern Triangle are brought to detention centers each year - with a further increase of detention centers from 22 to 50 in the period between 2000-2011 (p. 19). Something which does not align with the process of both decriminalization and the ambitions presented in the Mexico Plan of Action, which

views seeking and receiving asylum as a fundamental human right, which is reaffirmed in the Declaration (Organization of American States, 2004).

The rise in forced migration from Central America starting in 2018 has resulted in an increase in xenophobia, racism, and discrimination against Central American migrants (S. Wolf, 2020). Something which, as previously mentioned, is seen around the world in receiving and transit countries, where migrants become an easy target for hostile acts from the local community. Further, while all migrants can be victims of xenophobic, racist, or discriminatory actions, those without status are additionally vulnerable due to their fear of deportation, which often makes them reluctant to seek assistance from authorities in receiving justice (S. Wolf, 2020, p. 5). Still, the negative responses and anti-migrant narratives also tend to encourage new initiatives from social organizations and individuals expressing different acts of solidarity and hospitality to protect and support the newly arrived migrants. Furthermore, viewing this from the perspective of sanctuary cities, including solidarity efforts by the municipality, non-governmental organizations, and the general public, can, through collaboration between different aspects of society, attempt to create safe spaces for precarious migrants and fight the negative narrative surrounding them. Said areas, as described by Paola Virginia Suárez Ávila (henceforth, Paola Suárez), protect migrants through data protection and policies at the city or municipal level, mainly focusing on those that are non-status migrants (Cardiel, 2022, p. 277). The Declaration of a city being sanctuary highlights a lack of unity and collaboration between local authorities and federal or national - a resistance, which Paola Suárez describes as often leading to further restrictive policies and measures (Cardiel, 2022, p. 278).

When looking at Mexico City's position as a sanctuary city, Dr. Morales Cardiel argues that the city is still in the beginning stages (Cardiel, 2022, p. 279). Something influenced by the opinions on irregular migration held by the Mexican state and collaboration with the United States. The continuously changing immigration policies can be argued to play a hindering role in the process of incorporating long-lasting solutions for the assistance of migrants. Hence, Dr. Cardiel(2022) states that the sanctuary city has the potential to become either inclusive or exclusive, determined by the extent to which it is exposed to and pressured by discriminatory public policies regarding migration (p. 279). In this case, the city has become, as described by Zygmunt Bauman, "the dump of the problems generated and gestated

globally,” aiming at finding local solutions to global problems (279). Bauman’s statement was supported through the interview with IMUMI’s Lorena and Luisa, who, through their perspectives on both their work with migrants and collaboration with the municipality of Mexico City, had seen the results of a to some degree passive stance from the government’s side. Here, the lack of space in shelters and long waiting times for processing of asylum documents was mentioned as the inevitable consequence of the migrant situation at both the country’s northern and southern border (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 6).

Analysis

Mexico Plan of Action

In 2004, the governments of twenty Latin American countries, experts, and different sectors of civil society gathered in Mexico City to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees from 1984 (Organization of American States, 2004). This resulted in the creation of the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action, which was adopted by the following countries; Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Medecins Sans Frontieres, n.d.).

The Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America (henceforth also referred to as Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action, Mexico Plan of Action or MPA) is a top-down initiative that was created with the intent of protecting refugees and internally displaced persons, with a fundamental goal to “(...) promote concrete action: to improve, systematize and establish precedents of good practices for all those in need of protection, assistance, and durable solutions” (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2007, p. 5). Hence, the meetings taking place aimed to analyze the main challenges to the protection of refugees, and displaced individuals in Latin America, with the goal of creating durable solutions for future courses of action.

The Mexico Plan of Action was created as a regional strategic and operational framework in response to the ‘complex humanitarian situation’ that was a consequence of forced displacement (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2007, p. 11). And as a result, it reaffirmed the obligations of States to “(...) respect the principle of non-discrimination and to take measures to prevent, combat, and eliminate all forms of discrimination and xenophobia in the context of protection of refugees and asylum seekers (Medecins Sans Frontieres, n.d.). An additional aspect of the Declaration, which is essential for this research paper, is its acknowledgment of the gender perspective of persecution. In the Declaration, it is stated that it shall recognize,

“(...) that persecution can be related to gender and age of refugees; and the need to provide protection and humanitarian assistance in keeping with the differentiated needs of men and women, boys and girls, adolescents and elderly persons, persons with disabilities, minorities and ethnic groups” (Organization of American States, 2004).

Hence, the intersectional aspect of migrant women’s experience is recognized and sought to be considered in the planning and execution of protection and humanitarian assistance efforts regarding refugees, migrants, and individuals seeking asylum. The Mexico Plan of Action sought to better the options for assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons through durable solutions and protection through legal frameworks. It emphasized that “humanism and solidarity are fundamental principles that should continue to guide State policies on refugees in Latin America” (Bauder & Godoy, 2022, p. 230). Focusing on solidarity and sharing the responsibility of making lasting changes regarding bettering the lives of refugees and migrants. The Declaration acknowledges the following three co-existing situations regarding refugees in Latin America; first, countries that continue to receive a small number of asylum-seekers and refugees immersed in regional and continental migratory flows. Second, countries hosting a significant number of recognized refugees and asylum-seekers, and third, countries with emerging resettlement programs. It further points out that all three situations may be present in some countries and that it is necessary to consider this when planning new sustainable solutions (Organization of American States, 2004). Here, the concepts of **cities of solidarity**, **regional solidarity resettlement**, and **borders of solidarity** were introduced in the form of programs.

Firstly, concerning the ‘Cities of Solidarity,’ the UNHCR (2007) states that the Mexico Plan of Action has pushed for assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons concerning local integration and self-sufficiency. The need for action to be taken on an urban level, in regard to refugees and migrants, is supported by the vast number of individuals seeking urban centers. According to research done for the World Refugee Council, more than 60 percent of all refugees and 80 percent of all internally displaced persons reside in urban areas (Muggah & Abdenur, 2018, p. 1). Moving towards urban areas can have different motivational factors, e.g., getting away from camp or border areas which may be dangerous or lack opportunities, in the form of employment and services (Park, 2016). This has been done through the establishment of municipal-government alliances connected to the framework of the Declaration, that as of April 2023, ties together 62 cities, seven provinces, and two municipalities’ associations throughout the region (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2023, p. 1). The parties included in the network have signed agreements with the UNHCR, dedicating themselves to the inclusion of refugees into social programs with the aim of integrating them into the given local community (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2007, p. 13).

Secondly, the ‘regional solidarity resettlement’ focuses on the strategic resettlement of those that are displaced and in need of protection - supported by partners in both the public and private sectors working to assist and help the integration process of the resettled refugees (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2007, p. 13). Thirdly, the focus on ‘borders of solidarity’ aims to improve the monitoring of border areas to identify those needing international protection. This since the Mexico Plan of Action’s implementation resulted in the establishment of refugee and UNHCR offices in several countries, in addition to the UNHCR and its partners have started close to 1,000 community projects spreading across 350 border communities as of 2007 (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2007, p. 12).

Barichello (2016) states that the Mexico Plan of Action is a step towards enhanced protection of human rights and the affirmation of the universality of human dignity through its point of departure in solidarity and cooperation. The previously stated collaboration between countries and regional governments that face similar struggles regarding handling the

protection of refugees and migrants allows for more specific problem resolutions shaped for the individual case and community (p. 202). Yet, as identified by the UNHCR (2007) and its regional overview of Latin America, nine countries held presidential elections in 2006, only two years after implementing the Mexico Plan of Action (p. 1). This was an area of possible interruption for implementation of the MPA and something which could result in a prolonged process of implementation - something which, due to the Declaration relying on regional solidarity networks and responsibility, could result in longer waits in seeing improvements for migrants and displaced individuals.

The Cities of Solidarity Programme

The Mexico Plan of Action, with its three solidarity components, follows what Chilean Senior Liaison Officer at UNHCR Fabio Varoli describes as Latin America's long reputation of offering asylum to those fleeing persecution (Varoli, 2010, p. 44). Further, when focusing on the Cities of Solidarity Programme (*Ciudades Solidarias*), the initial idea of the program cites multiple broad goals, including:

“Fostering the generation of sources of employment, in particular, the establishment of micro-credit systems;

Setting up mechanisms for the expedited issuance of documents and simplifying procedures for authentication and recognition of certificates and diplomas issued abroad; and

Contemplating mechanisms for the participation of civil society and UNHCR in designing, implementing, monitoring and improving integration projects” (Bauder & Godoy, 2022, p. 231)

Margaret Godoy and Harald Bauder describe the last two goals as mirroring the urban sanctuary solidarity initiatives that exist in the Global North, with the first goal expressing a desire to connect both top-down and bottom-up solidarity initiatives through the intention of participation from civil society.

Moreover, the Cities of Solidarity Programme aims to provide a concrete framework/mechanism for both asylum and full integration into local communities, which, as

stated by Varoli (2010), arose due to refugees and asylum seekers tending to settle in cities (p. 44). An obstacle for programs caring for refugees in Latin America has been for the refugee or asylum seeker to achieve self-sufficiency and integration into the community in which they reside. Still, the director of UNHCR's Bureau for the Americas, Marta Juárez, states that,

“There are valuable examples of refugees who have successfully integrated in many locations in Latin America where communities have been welcoming and where local government is working effectively to support them.” (Varoli, 2010, p. 44).

A statement which both emphasizes the need for a plan of action to assist countries and local communities in how to care for vulnerable individuals fleeing persecution and hardship but also a point of encouragement through previous successes. It is further argued that “Effective local integration is achieved through the execution of public policies that take account of the social, economic, and cultural rights of refugees as well as their obligations” (Varoli, 2010, p. 45). This is influenced by the complex socio-economic situation refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants face when arriving in their host communities/communities of settlement. A situation where their needs compete with other disadvantaged social groups in the host community regarding, e.g., governmental financial aid. Something which Ange-Marie Hancock describes as an ‘oppression Olympics,’ where trying to present one’s cause as the most oppressed to gain resources and attention from both the public and possible donors (Yuval-Davis, 2012, p. 47). Whereas the acknowledgment of different causes all being in need of resources, the reality is that the limited resources - both monetary and human resources, lay the ground for competition and for each cause to ‘heighten’ itself (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017, p. 332).

Like the Sanctuary City movement’s perspective on the role of the city in welcoming and assisting precarious migrants, the Cities of Solidarity Program views the city as a space where opportunities can be both explored and exploited by the newcomer. In addition, it not only focuses on short-term solutions but also creates a broader span of connections between public social programs and the municipality’s efforts to have multiple aspects of a community work together to help integrate and welcome newcomers to the community. Barichello (2016) describes the program as a novel and positive approach, given the

strategies that it outlines for establishing new partnerships between local governments and civil society actors and fostering participation from and interaction between top-down and bottom-up initiatives.

In summary, as highlighted by the UNHCR's 2007 report, the Mexico Plan of Action presented a framework for States to establish efforts of protection and humanitarian assistance for victims of internal conflicts, persecution, and generalized violence. The MPA's 'Cities of Solidarity program seeks to "(...) support the integration and self-sufficiency of persons in need of protection residing in medium-sized and large cities" (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2007, p. 46), placed a large responsibility on national and local governments to take action in providing options for assistance to support the integration of precarious migrants through the implementation of public policies. The MPA further emphasizes solidarity and responsibility-sharing while encouraging cross-sectional cooperation between, e.g., States, international agencies, local NGOs, and civil society. In addition, it addresses the influence of gender and the intersectional experience, which migration and persecution can take, by how conflicts of forced displacement disproportionately impact minority groups, women, and children (UNHCR ACNUR La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados, 2007, p. 15).

The Mexico Plan of Action further states that in the process of creating new policies and plans of action to better the current conditions for refugees and precarious migrants, the current socio-economic situation in the given host country needs to be considered. Additionally, it is acknowledged that not all will be equally affected by persecution and migration, and therefore the distinct profiles of refugees and other displaced persons are also important factors that should be part of the creation and implementation of policies regarding migration (Organization of American States, 2004).

A Dangerous Country to be a Woman - Societal Factors of Violence Against Women

Violence against women is something that has been a significant and growing issue in Mexico, exceeding the worldwide average, and described by Flor Avellaneda & Luis R.

Torres (2023) as a ‘growing public health and human rights crisis.’ The severity of these crimes can be fatal, affecting millions throughout the country and causing many casualties, placing Mexico as the Latin American country with the most femicides in 2019 (Avellaneda & Torres, 2023). While laws and policies have been formed aiming to protect women against violence, continued cases of gender-based violence and femicide spark repeated protests throughout the country and especially in Mexico City. In 2021, the Mexican government reported approximately 3,700 killings of women, with a quarter of these being considered femicides, a number which is expected by Women’s rights groups to be higher (Avellaneda & Torres, 2023). In the following year, Reuters presented an estimate which suggests that an average of 10 women were killed daily, and tens of thousands were missing throughout the country (Morland & Pelaez-Fernandez, 2022). A statistic obtained from INEGI (2022) estimated that 76.2% of women, 15 years or older in Mexico City, had experienced either physical, psychological, sexual, economic, or patrimonial violence throughout their life - with 46.1% having experienced violence of either sort in the past 12 months of the survey. As Mexico City and the surrounding State of Mexico had the highest number of women experiencing violence, averaging 77%, it indicates a severe problem - not only for the country but also for the municipality (Morland & Pelaez-Fernandez, 2022). This is a problem, which can be expected to be equally harmful to migrant women in Mexico City, and therefore is of great relevance for this research paper.

Moreover, the violence against women is described by (Avellaneda & Torres, 2023; 2022) as being a result of structural violence. Some of the factors that have been identified are lack of access to healthcare, formal education, legal rights, community and familial support, and employment. These factors are part of both making the process of dealing with and overcoming gender-based violence and intimate partner violence (IPV). Further, associated reasons for the high level of violence against women are views on *familismo*, *machismo*, and *gender roles*; while Mexico is a multicultural society, most continue to follow traditional perspectives on gender roles, especially in the lower socio-economic parts of society (Avellaneda & Torres, 2023). Although these are not equaling factors or unique to Mexico, they can still be deemed to affect the vulnerable position women in Mexico are in when it comes to becoming victims of violence due to their gender. First, with the family being valued highly in Mexican society, *familismo* is defined by Avellaneda & Torres (2023) as “(...) a multidimensional construct that includes strong ties and support among family

members; behaviors and attitudes related to the primacy of family; and preference for family honor and obligation” (2023, Chapter 4). Something which, although it can be viewed as a strength in creating a support system, also has the risk of consequences by affecting women’s decision-making negatively in cases of abuse or assault. Either from family members or others outside the family - making it harder for the women to speak out and/or leave due to fear of the family’s reaction or dishonor (Aellaneda & Torres, 2023). As previously stated, the family is valued highly in Mexican society and culture, where men and women follow different roles and expectations, with women taking the role of caregivers and the man being viewed as the primary breadwinner. Hence, this division of roles within the family can come with restrictive ‘implications’ for women on both economic and social fronts. Further, Avellaneda & Torres (2023) relate the family structure to the terms *machismo*, and *marianismo*, the former which views the man as the family’s protector, and with its traditional characteristics being hypermasculine, aggressive, chauvinistic, and sexist. The latter term views Mexican women as submissive, self-sacrificing, and nurturing - these views on gender norms are complicating factors for women who have become victims of gender-based violence.

Furthermore, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations urged countries to enhance protective measures in regard to domestic violence during lockdowns, as lockdown had the risk of enhancing intimate partner violence, with the risk of having fatal consequences. This encouragement was denied by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who argued that the Mexican family values would shield women from abuse, whereas he stated, “They said there was going to be domestic violence, and there wasn’t” (Kitroeff, 2020). Hence, denying the violence which his own government had justified through statistics on received calls to the emergency call line with 26,000 reports of violence against women and an estimated 10 femicides daily (Kitroeff, 2020). The violence against women occurring throughout the country is also something that is touched upon during the interview with Padilla and Icaza, Pastor from the Institute for Women in Migration when discussing their work and the vulnerability of migrant women in Mexico. During the interview, Mexico was described as a dangerous country to be a woman, where gender-based violence is visible throughout society, making migrant women additionally vulnerable due to their precarious situation and difficulties in receiving help from authorities, including medical attention (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023).

Although there are vast amounts of research, and statistics on the rise in violence against women and femicides, with identified factors being connected to societal aspects which need government intervention, such as access to healthcare and education, the government's responses have still been 'mixed' and 'inconsistent' (Kheinle, 2020). This is due to the president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, having both been accused of being dismissive of protests and the general crisis of gender-based violence and femicides that the country is facing. This has been evident through statements of either undermining the importance of the causes or focusing on the violent occurrences during protests, in addition to stating that 'the issue of femicides has been "manipulated" by critics of his administration (BBC, 2020). The lack of engagement from the president in finding solutions to minimize violence against women is further supported by the government's approval of a 75% budget cut for the federal women's institute, in addition to proposing a withdrawal of state funding for women's shelters operated by NGOs (Agren, 2020). This perspective not only has dangerous consequences for women residing in Mexico but also, as described by Wendy Figueroa, who is network director at the National Network of Shelters, "What's also serious is that he's doubting the word of women in situations of violence" (Agren, 2020). Figueroa's statement highlights something which has been discussed by a variety of scholars researching gender disparities, the repeatedly reinforced perception of women being *less than* men, both in terms of actions, worth, and credibility. As described by UNESCO (2022), "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world," here the perspective of gender equality and 'women's issues' has to be shifted to 'issues for *all* people'.

A Sanctuary Promise and Hopes of a Safe-Haven for Women

As previously stated, migrant women, whether in transit within the country or transnationally, may be at higher risks of gender-based violence, with dynamics of migration making it harder for the women to seek help or feel secure in trusting authorities - this especially counts for those who are non-status migrants (IOM UN Migration, n.d.-b). In situations like these, a city becoming sanctuary has the potential to make it safer for migrant women to seek help from authorities in case of gender-based violence or other crimes. This will not solve the problem of violence against women, and there most likely would be a large number of migrants who

would still be too afraid of deportation or other sorts of punishment from contacting government officials - but it has the potential of being a step in the right direction. The success of creating a city where migrants feel safe enough to seek assistance from government officials relies on the effort and trustworthiness of the given government. Additionally, to provide policies and practices which aim to protect migrant women and minimize gender inequality in a given municipality, substantial knowledge of the gendered perspective is needed, as described by UNESCO (2022),

“A key challenge for policymakers is the lack of sex-disaggregated data to give a clear, overall picture of the state of gender equality within the cultural sector, which often conceals gender gaps and challenges”

The sanctuary city and the promise that it entails protecting even the most precarious within its society, even if it means going against federal law - can, to some, seem like a utopia and more difficult to carry out in practice. A necessity in the process of turning utopia into reality is, as described by David Harvey, “without a vision of a Utopia, there is no way to define that port to which we might want to enter” (Bauder, 2016a, p. 254). Hence, combining the present, existing conditions with the necessary requirements for future change - something which can be viewed as a negotiation to reach a desired societal goal.

When considering the application of this perspective to Mexico City’s sanctuary declaration, the inclusion of a gendered lens with a particular focus on supporting migrant women becomes crucial. This entails the formulation of policies, the creation of forums, and the development of a comprehensive framework that addresses both their current and future needs. These measures are essential for the establishment of a more equal vision for a desired future utopia to be established. According to Carolina Carreño Nigenda, the Mexico City government’s Declaration of Mexico City as a sanctuary city in 2017 has not been followed with substantial changes. In addition, more of the city’s protective and assistant efforts are being focused on returning Mexican migrants and less on international migrants (C. Carreño Nigenda, personal communication, April 17, 2023). Still, efforts in favor of migration are identified through policies, e.g., the Political Constitution of Mexico City from 2017 and the 2019 Protocol for Emergency Humanitarian Attention to Migrants and/or Persons Subject to International Protection, created by the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, as a tool

for local governments to protect the rights of ‘persons in context of mobility’ (C. Carreño Nigenda, personal communication, April 17, 2023). Nevertheless, despite the efforts made to protect the rights of migrants through policy implementation, and the Declaration of a sanctuary city, notable challenges and inconsistencies emerge. When comparing the aforementioned policies to findings derived from interviews conducted in relation to this research paper, a lack of alignment between local stances towards migration, issues in broader immigration policies between Mexico and the U.S., and the consequences thereof are apparent. Moreover, the inconsistent prioritization of migrants on the political agenda is evident, as reflected by the inconsistency and contradicting approaches to immigration. As stated by Carreño Nigenda,

“Although people in mobility is considered a priority group, in the political agenda of the city it has not been a priority, only in some conjunctural moments such as when there has been the presence of massive groups of people, for example, in the caravans 2018, 2019, 2021 and now with the increase of people requesting the recognition of refugee status in 2023.”
(C. Carreño Nigenda, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

Additionally, when focusing on migrant women, a gender perspective does not seem present, and the intersectional experience of migrant women does, therefore, not appear to be taken into account. Nonetheless, while a gender perspective might be present through some policies concerning, e.g., violence against women, on the contrary, the previously mentioned statements from President Andrés Manuel López Obrador emphasize an additional obstacle in fighting gender disparities for migrant women - for women in general. Through his statement, President López Obrador both undermines the severity of the violence against women that is happening throughout the country by stating that ninety percent of the calls to emergency call centers were fake, agreeing to large budget cuts for the federal women’s institute in addition to saying the media has manipulated the focus on femicide (Kitroeff, 2020). The perspective shown by the president works against future visions of a society safe for any women, especially not for migrant women. It portrays a society where issues regarding women are not seen to be of importance, not relevant enough for demanding change - it is even denied.

Mexico City, Prospects of a Desired Space for Refuge

Throughout its history, Mexico City and its urban region, with a population of more than 20 million residents, have served as a prominent destination for the country's internal migration. Furthermore, as the country's capital, the city hosts a significant number of foreign representatives, including embassies, consulates and institutions specializing in foreign affairs (Faret, 2021, p. 187). The majority of migrants who stay in Mexico City are there due to one or two reasons according to Faret (2021), firstly; due to lack of financial or social resources (cost of travel, unfamiliarity with migration itineraries, and limited support from a network of acquaintances) in connection with the migrants journey from the southern to northern part of the country. Secondly, as the result of either an interruption in their journey between Central America and the United States, or their expulsion from the United States without being able to return to their country of origin (p. 188). Therefore, for migrants traveling from the northern border towards the south, including those who have been deported from or been denied entry to the United States, Mexico City as a large urban area becomes an alternative place to seek "refuge". A place where the risks the migrants are fearing by either continuing their journey towards their initial country of destination or the journey to get back to their country of origin is deemed less than staying in Mexico City. Some may still keep hopes of continuing on their original journey in the future and therefore only view Mexico City as a temporary place of refuge and settlement, although the duration can vary between months and decades (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 2).

Furthermore, for a city to create an independent, safe space for its residents, not depending on federal law, it needs to define its view on urban belonging and access to city services. This need can be argued to be legitimate, through supported research from the 2018 World Migration Report, which states that 'nearly all migrants, whether international or internal, are destined for cities' (Bauder & Landau, 2018). Therefore, the response of municipalities to migration, whether they be welcoming and including or restrictive and excluding will have large consequences for migrants. Hence, for a city to become a safe space for migrants, and for a sanctuary promise to be followed the divide in the *haves* and *have nots* needs to be eliminated and a perspective on presence rather than nation-state citizenship should be applied. To minimize this gap, the cities shall 'assume responsibility in addressing and reducing the vulnerabilities in migration', as part of including migrant issues in the political

agenda (Bauder & Landau, 2018). A method by which this can be accomplished is by promoting inclusion and equality, working against the idea of migrants and especially precarious migrants becoming ‘hidden populations’ within cities. Following the perspective of Mark Purcell “it is the everyday experience of inhabiting the city that entitles one to a right to the city, rather than one’s nation-state citizenship” (Bauder, 2016a, p. 255). Hence, as described by Bauder (2016a), the ‘domicile principle’ of belonging is implemented, which while still categorizing residents it is done in a manner which does not segregate people in the same territory. The idea of a sanctuary city, a protected space for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers is as argued by Domenic Vitiello (2022) much more than a city’s efforts protecting migrants from deportation but something which is performed through collaboration from community and civic organizations, social movements - solidarity through responsibility sharing between ‘family, friends, and neighbors’. This extended view on the sanctuary city is further explained by Vitiello (2022) as;

“In this broader perspective, sanctuary cities are the places, the safe spaces, where immigrants, refugees, and their allies help one another rebuild their lives and communities” (p. 4)

Therefore, while the city cannot promise complete protection, the sanctuary promise commits to protecting migrant’s through policy, and working against deportation, and segregation through placing limits to the city’s assistance in the federal authority’s apprehension of migrants without status (Garcia, 2009). Due to the division of a city’s inhabitants into *legal* and *illegal* categories, the domicile principle is highly selectively applied, leading to an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities. This segregation is further perpetuated by the absence of access to urban amenities, services, and citizenship status, which creates a distinct separation between those who have said privileges and those who do not. As a result, an ‘in’ and ‘out’ group is formed, leading to increased social stratification and alienation. This selection also implies what is described by Mark Purcell as a ‘hegemonic nation state’, as it has the ability to either accept or deny individuals ‘membership’ on both a nation and urban level (Bauder, 2016a, p. 255). This idea is further transferred to the urban context, where Purcell argues that the urban space can take the nation-state’s role of formal belonging, hence creating an ‘urban-hegemonic’ system of political membership (Bauder, 2016a, p.

255). The difference in responsibility, position and even approach to migration between the nation state and the city, has been described by Harald Bauder as,

“Cities have a different approach to migration. They are not in the business of controlling who crosses and settles within their boundaries, or ordering their communities based on where residents are coming from. Rather, their role is to be inclusive and provide access to resources and services for all residents”
(Bauder, 2016b).

With this statement, Bauder (2016b) emphasizes the opportunity for individuality on an urban level, with cities not having to necessarily partake in the decision-making and enforcement of who is allowed legal access to stay in a given country, but to focus on the local level and provide assistance to those who are already there. This is done by the city choosing to resist exclusionary policies towards migrants, creating communities where they are welcomed independently of whether or not they have been denied status by the nation state. The need for cities to resist the exclusionary approaches applied by some nation states through border regimes is explained as being intensified, ‘nation states are increasingly failing to cope with the human need for security and desire to migrate’ in a globalized world (Bauder, 2016b). When bringing this into the context of Mexico City, as explained by Lorena Cano Padilla the municipalities options regarding migration and asylum issues are limited due to the themes being controlled by the federal level, taking away the opportunity of the local state to make legislation for migrants (Bauder, 2016, p. 255). It was further acknowledged that the city therefore is restricted to decision-making regarding local issues such as e.g., health, education, and work. Therefore, it can be argued that the need for sanctuary cities, and in this given case of Mexico City, that the city sanctuary efforts ought to be enhanced in regard to migrant protection. As stated by Dr. Raúl Delgado Wise, the sanctuary city provides a new possibility of starting to think and envision possibilities of an alternative way to look at immigration and migrants (R. Delgado Wise, personal communication, January 24, 2023). In addition, Dr. Delgado Wise also views the sanctuary city approach as a way to work against what he defines as the ‘new trend’ from right-wing governments, describing the negative narrative blaming migrants for the societal problems of host cities.

Border Policies; Independent Actions or those of a Follower

With Mexico being a country of both transit, sender and receiver migration - affected by restrictive migration laws at the US border, and large numbers of migrants entering the country from the southern border - it puts urban spaces such as Mexico City in a position to take action. Whether the migrants entering the city's limits are traveling internationally or internally, their situation is vulnerable and brings topics for discussion which the city cannot deny.

Further, looking at a broader perspective the question of whether Mexico's border policies are a direct result of influence from the immigration policies of the United States or whether the country worked independently, as expressed by the Mexican government, does not receive a uniform answer. On the Government of Mexico's website, it is stated that,

“Mexico respects the sovereign right of the United States to carry out its immigration programs, but we have acted and will continue to act independently and in our sovereign right when determining our own migration policy” (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019).

The statement of sovereignty and independence had also been pointed out by President Lopez Obrador in 2018 during his final campaign speech, where he stated that Mexico would never be ‘the pinata of a foreign government’ – a statement which as argued by Leuter (2020), contradicts his position of ‘not wanting confrontation’ with the United States (p. 37). Leuter (2020) point on contradictions has been shared through conversation with both the Institute for Women in Migration, and specialists Dr. Jorge Morales Cardiel and Dr. Raúl Delgado Wise, who perceive the United States as a dominant actor in deciding immigration policies - not only regarding the U.S.-Mexican border, but also beyond - with Mexico taking the role as the follower (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 2). Further, control has been exhibited in e.g., 2019 under the Trump administration through threats of tariffs on Mexican imports until undocumented immigration was ‘remedied’ (Horwood et al., 2020, p. 45). This resulted in intensified efforts from Mexican border security, and rising numbers of soldiers deployed to highway checkpoints (p. 45). This is a part of the hardening of Mexico's policies regarding migration that has taken place during the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, while contradicting his initial

campaign and promise for more humane migration (Leutert, 2020). Something which according to Lorena Cano Padilla has placed additional pressure on migrants, and especially migrant women, making all the traditional difficulties connected to migration worse (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 2). However, the blockades of migrants at the country's borders, and efforts to move them to either the center of the country or the southern border does not deter the migrants from re-attempting to cross the northern border into the United States in the hopes of a better life. Instead, now a circular movement of crime has occurred,

“Now the crime has all the control. In Mexico, the authorities are very corrupt. They have a lot of connections with the gangs and with the organized crime. And I think one important effect in the last four years is that the intervention of the crime because the people have no documents. If they have documents, migration break their documents, they detain them and get them to the south. They try again the transit. It's like a circular movement. And the crime is constantly committing violence against them” (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 2).

The described circular movement of crime and discrimination which has intensified since the Trump administration, Covid-19 pandemic, and border restrictions intensifies an already vulnerable situation, which as in other instances are worse for women and children (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 2). Something which emphasizes the importance and urgency of the work from organizations like the Institute for Women in Migration.

Solidarity and Responsibility-Sharing Traces of the Mexico Plan of Action in Later Policies

The Mexico Plan of Action employs solidarity and responsibility-sharing, and states that “humanism and solidarity are fundamental principles that should continue to guide State policies on refugees in Latin America” (Bauder & Godoy, 2022, p. 230). Something, which

can be argued to be reflected in the 2011 Migratory Act (*Ley de Migración*) which as stated by Lorena Cano Padilla,

“(…) all migrants, no matter their migratory status, they have the right to receive all that basic services and rights, like education, health, work, etc.” (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 8).

However, while this expresses intentions of reaching equality and securing rights of all migrants - breaking down the segregation between internal and international migrants - problems of e.g., misinformation or unwillingness to provide said services to migrants in need is still a current issue. Additionally, the inclusion of migration on the political agenda is further seen in connection with the Constitution of Mexico City from 2017, which emphasizes the positive aspects of migration and migrant’s presence in the city. The Constitution describes that the city “is made richer by the passage, the settling, and the return of national and international migration” (Faret, 2021, p. 190). Something which can be said to follow the ideas of inclusion as were presented with the Mexico Plan of Action and its Solidarity Cities Programme.

Furthermore, additional factors are present when viewing migration policies of both Mexico as a country and Mexico City at the urban level. Mexico as a country that assumes the role of both sender, transit and receiver of migrants. The country faces various issues, highlighted by the interview with Lorena and Luisa from the Institute for Women in Migration. These include the lack of resources to facilitate the integration and resettlement of migrants arriving in Mexico. In addition to migrant’s reluctance to remain in the country, and therefore resulting in recurring attempts at crossing the border.

The reluctance for migrants to view Mexico as a country of destination is explained by Lorena Cano Padilla, as being based on negative similarities to the migrant’s countries of origin,

“people don't want to stay in Mexico because here we have probably the same problems that they have in their own countries of origin. So, they are looking for a best option. All the people think that US is the option they have and the only option

they have” (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 4).

This results in a collision between migrants and Mexican authorities trying to block them from the border, whether it be at either of the country’s borders or throughout their journey. This issue is further worsened by the lack of support for migrants entering the country, leaving them in an additionally vulnerable state, which can only be assumed to increase the desire to follow the dream of a better life in the U.S.

When viewing the treatment of migrants, in the context of the aspirations that were proposed in 2004 with the Mexico Plan of Action, a number of contradictions are present, with the lack of assistance, deportations, and discrimination being just a few. The emphasis for additional efforts needed in the protection of precarious migrants in Mexico is further visible through implemented policies and applied approaches in the context of immigration. Hence, president Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s change from what is described by Leutert (2020) as a humanitarian approach to migration towards a primarily enforcement-based strategy, contradicts the aspirations of the MPA. Due to the fact that the Mexico Plan of Action states to ‘develop policies and pragmatic solutions to provide effective protection to those who need it’. In addition to describing humanism and solidarity as fundamental principles, that should be guiding for State policies. Including recognizing the *jus cogens* principle of non-refoulement, which is described by OHCHR (n.d.) as forming,

“an essential protection under international human rights, refugee, humanitarian and customary law. It prohibits States from transferring or removing individuals from their jurisdiction or effective control when there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would be at risk of irreparable harm upon return, including persecution, torture, ill-treatment or other serious human rights violations”.

This includes non-rejection at the borders, in order to guarantee protection to those in need fleeing persecution and violence, something which contradicts the deportation and the assistance which the Mexican government has provided to the United States in the form of blocking migrants from reaching the Mexican-U.S. border through the use of e.g.,

checkpoints. An additional example of contradictions in approach to immigration is president López Obrador and the Mexican Congress' creation of the National Guard in 2019 to combat violence throughout the country (*Ley de la Guardia Nacional*) (Leutert, 2020, p. 18). With troops from Federal Police, Navy, Army, and new recruits deployed directly to the National Guard, their work focused mostly on border zones, customs enforcement areas, and federal highways (Leutert, 2020, p. 18). And while the National Guard does not have orders to detain migrants, they are authorized to support the INM in migration enforcement, and their areas of focus are all points which will connect their work to migrants and displaced individuals. However, while the implementation of the National Guard was built on reasoning that focused on public safety, the force had, as described by Amnesty International (2020), been accused of hundreds of human rights violations in its first year. Further, the force has had a large role in the efforts of attempting to stop Central American migrants and asylum seekers from reaching the Mexican-U.S. border. In these cases, Amnesty International (2020), describes severe instances of abuse, murder, violence, sexual assault and excessive use of force performed by the force towards migrants.

The previously mentioned change in strategy by the Mexican government is something which according to Leutert (2020) has impacted state and local governments, civil society organizations, Mexican citizens, and migrants whether they are waiting in or in transit through the country (p. 43). It also further highlights the need for sanctuary efforts on the urban level, where not only in the case of fighting against deportation of migrants but also in creating spaces where solidarity, responsibility-sharing across various fields and where the general public is focused on the protection and care for vulnerable migrants and their safety. The focus on shared responsibility throughout society is apparent from the following passage from the Mexico Plan of Action,

“(...) the decisive contribution of non-governmental organizations and other sectors of civil society to the protection and assistance of refugees and other persons in need of protection, including their work in providing advice for the development of policies regarding protection and durable solutions”
(Organization of American States, 2004).

As stated in the previous quotation, the MPA acknowledges and highlights the work of organizations like Institute for Women for Migration, and how their work in protecting

migrants and their rights, while also providing information in the development of and bettering policies on the matter. Further, the declaration also contains a statement regarding the media's influence and to some extent power through framing - something which Institute for Women in Migration also works to influence in a more positive direction. Here, the Mexico Plan of Action requests that the media will promote 'values of solidarity, respect, tolerance and multiculturalism, underscoring the humanitarian plight of victims of forced displacement and their fundamental rights' (Organization of American States, 2004). The influence of media narratives plays a large part in shaping political will and policy regarding asylum and immigration (McCann et al., 2023, p. 2). Something that has an additional power to influence the general public's perception and can be further used in political agendas to reach a specific goal. The media's either positively or negatively framed narrative of asylum seekers, and migrants are as described by McCann et al. (2023) either,

“(...) sympathetic coverage highlighting asylum-seekers as victims of conflict and the benefits to destination communities arising from the integration of migrants, while negative coverage recites and expands upon themes of migrants as threats to the national security, cultural identity, economic security, and health of the destination community” (p. 6).

This use of media, and the power, and influence of information and framing of knowledge is further visible from the work of the Institute for Women in Migration. The organization has extensive efforts in advocacy and education, in the hopes of changing the narrative on migrants and displaced individuals - something which is part of the overall protection of migrants.

Furthermore, an important focus throughout the Mexico Plan of Action is solidarity and responsibility-sharing, something which is highlighted both amongst countries in Latin America but also on both an international level with international organizations and on a local level with civil society. Here, the plea is to all partake in the inclusion of 'uprooted populations' when designing and implementing assistance and protection programmes to recognize and value their human potential (Organization of American States, 2004).

The Circular Movement of Discrimination

The issues regarding the mistreatment of refugees, migrants, and other displaced individuals are complex and visible throughout society. From the interview conducted with the Institute for Women in Migration, it became apparent that the system is not easily navigated for migrants to receive protection and assistance. A number of specific examples were mentioned; firstly, a rise in crime has become a significant influence on the lives of migrants in Mexico, with them stating that crime now has all the control. A factor that was emphasized is that crime has infiltrated authorities in the form of corruption, exposing migrants to an even further vulnerable situation. The vulnerable situation of migrants while on their journey towards their country of destination, risking gang violence, different types of assaults, and human trafficking, is further intensified by crime also being part of e.g., detention centers, and other government instances (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, paras. 2–3). This has been described by the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, “Organized crime has become a central perpetrator of disappearance in Mexico, with varying degrees of participation, acquiescence or omission by public servants” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). The States parties are further described as being directly responsible for enforced disappearances through acts of public officials but are also said to be accountable for disappearances carried out by criminal organizations (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022). The corruption from authorities is tied to gangs and organized crime, creating a dangerous and insecure society - adding to the fear of and distrust in authorities held by migrants (Amnesty International, 2010, p. 12). Secondly, a point which was emphasized by Lorena and Luisa from the Institute for Women in Migration was the influence of crime in detention centers. Here, the circle of violence and discrimination is visible through authorities destroying immigration documents of migrants, in addition to intentionally keeping the detained migrants unaware of their rights and without contact with lawyers (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, paras. 2–3). Leaving migrants without someone to defend them, even if they have been victims of crimes in Mexico, they are deported to their countries of origin or being transported to the southern border. This has further complicated the work of NGOs like Institute for Women in Migration, with authorities making it more difficult for them to gain access to detention centers in order to communicate with detained migrants - in this context, Lorena and Luisa stated that access to a detention center takes at least five months to get approved (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza

Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 7). Therefore, by limiting the migrant's contact to lawyers, and NGOs in addition to not informing them about their rights and options, they are kept scared and vulnerable.

Thirdly, an additional aspect in which the circle of discrimination is visible in society, is in the context of health services, where receiving assistance from public health centers without immigration documents is deemed as difficult and most likely to end in rejection (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 7). IMUMI then presented examples of health facilities either not being able to provide translators to assist the non-Spanish speaking migrants or denying the existence of opportunity for help in the city as reasoning to send migrants to the south - and closer to the border (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 7). Something which contradicts the previously mentioned Migratory Act from 2011, which states that all migrants no matter migratory status should have the right to access and receive basic services, including health care,

“Migrants also have the right to receive any type of public and private medical care, independent of their migratory status and in accordance with the applicable regulations and legal provisions” (Senado de la República, 2011, p. 8).

This is further elaborated on to emphasize that there shall be no inequality between Mexican nationals and foreign migrants, “no administrative act will establish restrictions on foreigners that are more extensive than those generally established for Mexicans” (Senado de la República, 2011, p. 8).

Fourthly, lack of information about the change in immigration policies, and needed documents for immigration and asylum is something which is argued to be due to two separate causes. On the one hand, the given authorities do not know how changes in immigration policies affect their jobs and the situation of migrants. On the other hand, it became apparent through the interview, that from the experiences of IMUMI, at times authorities will intentionally not provide the migrants with the needed information, and their options - hence using the withholding of knowledge as a way to keep migrants vulnerable. Something which can result in them ending up making decisions, that goes against the guidelines for asylum and therefore can result in deportation (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 7).

And lastly, gender violence, is something which Institute for Women in Migration defines as a severe issue that affects migrant women throughout society whether it be on the street, detention centers, or contact with authorities. The examples of continued discrimination against migrants indicates a system that does not wish for them to succeed - by repeatedly worsening the conditions and emphasizing an already vulnerable and risk filled situation for the migrant.

In conclusion, this section has presented an analysis of the Mexico Plan of Action, which comprises a combination of acknowledgements of both current issues and processes. In addition to goals which it encourages the committed countries to pursue. Nonetheless, the declaration only provides guidelines for desired approaches to the protection of refugees, migrants and displaced individuals without mandating any specific action. A review of later policies and approaches to migration, reveals that contradictory actions and approaches exist, which casts doubt on the effectiveness of the MPA and suggests that it may have a more symbolic or performative value. Furthermore, a circular movement of discrimination is described, where the continued either rejection, abuse, or control that is used against migrants throughout society is creating an image of an eternal battle against the system. While policies are in place that repeatedly emphasize the right of migrants to be protected, assisted and have equal treatment with Mexican nationals, the reality is not aligned.

Discussion

The outcome of this research has provided insight into the influence of the 2004 Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action and how it has impacted later policies and approaches to migration, focusing on Mexico City's 2017 sanctuary city declaration. An additional aspect of the paper's research has involved the work of the Mexico City-based NGO Institute for Women in Migration, where the conducted interview with two employees of the organization's legal team has shed light on the intersectional experience of migrant women in the Mexican context. The interview further focused on the organization's work toward assisting migrants and advocating for gender equality through different approaches and platforms. Lastly, an interview with psychologist Carolina Carreño Nigenda who has been working with migration issues for almost 20 years, with some being for the government of Mexico City (C. Carreño Nigenda, personal communication, April 17, 2023). The

aforementioned dimensions explored offer valuable insight into the lived experiences of migrant women in Mexico, shedding light on past and current perspectives, aspirations, and challenges. These findings have implications for Mexico City's efforts in establishing itself as a sanctuary for precarious migrant women.

A War on Women

As a country, Mexico is facing a crisis immersed in trafficking, torture, disappearances, femicide, censorship, and corruption - a string of human rights violations that, as argued by Anaya-Muñoz & Frey (2019), has a silent, invisible aspect as well, the offenses that specifically targets women (p. 86). This has, as previously mentioned, resulted in protests, with the head of government in Mexico City, Claudia Sheinbaum, referring to protests as "provocations," seeking a more violent response from the state, generating more attention and public condemnation as described by Amnesty International (2021). Yet, action has been taken from both the public and international organizations, e.g., Amnesty International and local organizations similar to Institute for Women in Migration - all demanding a society that is safe for women and girls. At the same time, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been undermining the severity of the violence and discrimination directed at women in Mexican society - which can be argued to hinder the process of action. The Presidents' previously mentioned decreased budgets for social services supporting women include reduced funding to shelters that assist survivors of violence, in addition to decreasing the attorney general office's budget by 73 percent, funds which are responsible for attending to cases of violence against women (Alvarez-Pineiro, 2021). As stated in an article by the Latin American Bureau (2023), has made the Mexican feminist movement the greatest voice of President López Obrador's opposition (Alvarez-Pineiro, 2021).

Concurrently, it is argued by UN Women Americas and the Caribbean (n.d.) that Mexico, while still struggling with gender disparities, discrimination, and femicide, has made significant progress in the fight for gender equality at the federal level. Here, the focus is on the following key areas: strengthening national laws to ensure women and men equality, strong gender institutionalism, and increased public resources dedicated to gender equality (UN Women, n.d.). Additionally, in a candidature for the 2021-2023 reelection to the Human Rights Council, the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Relations (*Secretaría de Relaciones*

Exteriores) states a number of pledges and commitments focused on the topics of policy, human rights, gender, and equality. Amongst these is a reference to the country's immigration policy, which is described as being based on; first, 'the protection of the human rights of migrants and the promotion of development in the communities of origin to reduce structural causes of migration' (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2021, p. 4). The latter can draw parallels to the Mexico Plan of Action, where efforts are placed on assistance for migrants in the receiving countries and assistance to the countries of origin aiming at prevention (Organization of American States, 2004). However, while the intention of promoting the protection of the human rights of migrants and pledging to place people at the center of all policies, it does not align with the documented human rights violations carried out by authorities in detention centers or deportations of those same vulnerable migrants that the country pledges a commitment to protect (Leutert, 2020, p. 41).

Furthermore, contradictions are apparent, where on the one hand, there is a repeatedly stated sign of aspiration and dedication to commitment regarding both the protection of the human rights of migrant women and general gender equality. On the other hand, the various statistics on discrimination, sexual assaults, femicide, and violence against women occur on a national basis. Nevertheless, the Government of Mexico is acknowledging the 'regressive tendencies' that still exist in its society, working against the applied efforts of progress,

“Despite the improvement, there are regressive tendencies that threaten gender equality achievement and had left aside the needs and concerns of women and girls, particularly of those in vulnerable situations” (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2021, p. 4).

Although acknowledgment is essential in building trust in the government's reflection of the situation and its efforts, I would argue that from the testimonies conducted in connection with this research paper, the Government's aspirations and implemented policies do not live up to the portrayed image or intended result. Additionally, on the international scene, Mexico has been receiving praise for its 2020 Feminist Foreign Policy, which ranks in the top three in the world, creating an interesting aspect of consideration - the balance between international efforts and domestic reality (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2023). It has been stated by Director General of Human Rights and Democracy Christopher Ballinas that, in addition to

being a recognition, the high ranking of the country's Feminist Foreign Policy also reflects a great responsibility (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2023). It is something to reflect on and ensure that it will impact domestic politics and help reduce gender-based violence and femicide in Mexico.

Moreover, different approaches to make Mexico City a safer urban space for women and girls, including the participation in the 2017 global forum UN Women's 'Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Flagship Programme Initiative' and providing options for segregated forms of public transportation for women and men (UN Women, 2017). Yet, an estimate from INEGI (2022) proposes 60.9% of women aged 15 or older in Mexico City have experienced violence in the community during their lifetime, numbers which present an issue of severity without indicating a satisfying change. As has been previously stated throughout this paper, the risks facing women in Mexico and Mexico City are intensified for migrant women, as their position is more vulnerable, and the trust in authorities often is less due to the risk of deportation and past experiences of violence and discrimination.

When justice discriminates, injustice dominates

Although the Mexican Government emphasizes its dedication to humanitarian approaches in improving the treatment of precarious migrants and displaced individuals by both being the first country to adopt the United Nations Global Compact for Migration, which seeks to 'ensure a safe, orderly and regular flow of migrants, contradictory acts are still present in the approaches to immigration (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019). Following this, a press release argues that under the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, policies have broken with the approaches of previous administrations and have now, as stated in the previously mentioned press release, stopped deporting hundreds of thousands of Central American migrants in addition to having adapted a new migration policy. Said policy follows two main pillars, defending migrants' rights and working to address the structural causes of migration by adopting a humanitarian approach to economic development (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019). Yet, it can be argued that while the government is highlighting the protection of migrants, segregation is occurring through the emphasis on 'regularization' - 'those who are allowed to be there, and those who are not.' In connection with sanctuary cities, this can be argued to still not fully translate to the thought of equality,

and even goes against the humanitarian perspective, which the government mentions - due to the inequality between those who are documented and have been granted somewhat 'right' to be in the country, and those who have not. Because while on the one hand, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*) have stated that the implementation of the country's new migration policy is to be seen as a 'sovereign' and 'independent' decision to place focus on human rights and the expansion of egalitarian economic development in the region (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019). On the other hand, it is contradictory to the experience that Luisa and Lorena express from the Institute for Women in Migration, who, through their work in Mexico City and by the country's borders, described national and city governments who had taken a more passive approach, with statements that to some degree could seem performative, as a means of upholding an image to other countries, and international organizations (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 6). An example displayed in the following quotation from the Mexican government, "Mexico's migration authorities are in ongoing communication with their U.S. counterparts in order to ensure that people cross our shared border in a safe and orderly way" (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019). This portrays a narrative far from that expressed by both the interviewees from the Institute for Women in Migration and from researcher Dr. Morales Cardiel, who all express another reality that encompasses a system that is shaped by gang violence, xenophobia, corruption, and hostile policies - all which intensifies the already vulnerable and precarious states of the migrants.

Further, the relationship between the immigration policies of the United States and Mexico reveals a notable inconsistency, characterized by an unequal power dynamic as expressed through discussions with IMUMI and Dr. Jorge Morales Cardiel. It becomes evident that Mexico follows the strict immigration laws implemented by the United States, resulting in consequences that the country then struggles under (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 6). These consequences include a rise in returned and deported migrants from the United States, some stranded in border towns, others transported further south in the country. Nonetheless, the narrative presented by the Mexican government depicts a nation acting independently and following its sovereign rights in formulating its migration policy (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019).

When viewing the sanctuary city efforts and the intentions of the Mexico City government, Dr. Delgado Wise views the declaration as mainly being a formal instance from the city's 2017 political constitution (R. Delgado Wise, personal communication, January 24, 2023). He describes the situation's complexity due to the city's size of more than 20 million residents in its urban area. This is further based on the city's large huge metropolitan area deriving from and being largely influenced by international and internal migration. An additional influence is, as previously mentioned, that international migrants arriving in Mexico City often seek towards the U.S. as their country of destination and therefore do not view Mexico City as a place for their full integration and settlement (R. Delgado Wise, personal communication, January 24, 2023).

A Shared Dream, but is the Struggle Equal?

A Comparison of Mexico City and Toronto

While the concept of sanctuary cities can be argued to be ambiguous and differ depending on the country, its financial opportunities, the given politics and commitment of the municipality in question, available resources, and culture, among other factors. Still, for the sake of this research paper, I would like to point out both similarities and differences between the work of organizations assisting migrants in Toronto, Canada, and Mexico City. I have previously conducted research regarding Toronto's sanctuary efforts with an additional focus on two organizations, FCJ Refugee Centre and Skills for Change, that work to help precarious migrants in the city. The case of Toronto is a favorable case for comparison, as the city has been declared a sanctuary city since 2013, with a more publicly communicated framework, e.g., through the city's 'Toronto for All' campaign, presenting a contrast to the more passive approach of Mexico City (Drejer-Jensen, 2023).

Through comparison of the case of Mexico City and Toronto, with a focus on respectively Institute for Women in Migration and FCJ Refugee Centre, similarities are detected in the obstacles met by the two organizations. Firstly, lack of information on front-line staff in charge of providing migrants with services or information about their rights. Although the city of Toronto has been more outspoken about its sanctuary status and approach, a gap was still identified by Edgar Valderrama Medina from FCJ Refugee Centre, resulting in the battle

of miscommunication (Drejer-Jensen, 2023, p. 15). Hence, misinformation deriving from different individuals in the system and those the migrant encounters elsewhere results in obstructing the organization's efforts to assist the migrant in navigating the system. In addition, in the case of Toronto, Hudson et al. (2016b) further identifies the need for improvement in both knowledge and training,

“The absence of adequate front-line training is a critical barrier that needs to be addressed if Access T.O. is going to work. More funding is needed to clarify specific kinds of knowledge and skill sets, learning outcomes and objectives, and means of delivery and assessment” (pp. 17-18).

The lack of information and, to some degree, skill in assisting migrants from front-line staff is also stated in the conducted interview with IMUMI. The organization provided two examples: first, front-line personnel lacking knowledge of the rights of migrants and the current status of policies relating to their job. Second, a lack of training and tools to assist migrants in service institutions, e.g., translators to assist non-Spanish speaking migrants and make sure they are able to communicate their needs and understand their rights (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 7). In concerns to whether the personnel genuinely did not know or purposely withheld the information did not receive a uniform answer by the two interviewees. Where on the one hand, Luisa Alvarez Icaza Pastor suggested that from the frequent changes to migrant policies in the U.S. and Mexico, some front-line staff will be unaware of how the given change affects their job and unintentionally misguide migrants or deny them services they legally have the right to receive. On the other hand, as pointed out by Lorena Cano Padilla, information is used as a tool to indirectly block migrants from reaching the Mexico-U.S. border, whether it be through providing misinformation or having them sign documents they have not received full knowledge of what entails (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 7). The reasoning for attempting to hinder migrants in reaching the northern border, are described by the interviewees as a result of the pressure from the United States, that as previously mentioned have placed pressures on the Mexican government to assist them in limiting the number of migrants that reach the U.S border.

Furthermore, when comparing and evaluating the sanctuary efforts of Toronto and Mexico City, the difference in whether the migrants view the cities as a country of destination or transit is influential in creating the most suitable approach to assistance. In the case of Toronto, the city is a 'major world center for immigration' and an 'emblematic of a new stratum of global cities,' as Daniel Hamlin and Scott Davies (2016) assessed. They further state that this has made Toronto one of the world's most 'ethnically diverse cities, represented by over 200 ethnicities' (Hamlin & Davies, 2016, pp. 186–188). Something which can be argued to differentiate Toronto's position regarding sanctuary cities from that of Mexico City: additionally, migrants choosing a specific country and city as their final destination will, in contrast to the most frequent scenario where Mexico serves as a transit country, signify the migrant's intent to settle and consequently look for long-term solutions, instead of their decisions being based on prospects of onward migration. Henceforth, being the country of destination for many migrants representing different nationalities, and societal layers, it gives an incentive and needs for the municipality to dedicate time and resources to establish an approach to tackle migration, assistance, and integration of new migrants.

To sum up, the research of both Toronto and Mexico City has highlighted the dependency and collaboration that a city's sanctuary efforts, declarations, and policies have on multiple actors from different parts of the community in order to succeed. This includes the work and commitment from the general public and non-governmental organizations.

What is next? Mexico City's Sanctuary Journey

From the interview with IMUMI, it became evident that Mexico City's migrant policies are tied to the federal government to the degree that hinders the city's progress and does not consider urban factors. From my perspective, a general urban sanctuary policy would not be sufficient as a guideline for cities to provide a safe environment for precarious migrants. Instead, policies and guidelines would have to be created focusing on the specific city - in this case, Mexico City. To cater to the given city's needs, limitations, struggles, and possibilities.

A further aspect of consideration in the aim of improving Mexico City's efforts towards migrants and reaching its aspirations of being a sanctuary city, welcoming and protecting all

migrants, is looking at urban belonging. The influence of in-and exclusion and how this in different variations can play an essential role in the integration and well-being of migrants into the host communities. This has been described by Mora & Piper (2021),

“Whether or not marginalization is rationalised in terms of race, persons lacking the full legal recognition of the state in which they live find themselves identified as a potential risk, and treated as undeserving of protection” (p. 13)

This leads to the topic of deservingness - *the haves and have-nots*, something which, as described by Sònia Parella and Thales Speroni in the context of social protection, too often eludes migrant workers in the receiving countries (Mora & Piper, 2021, p. 13). Moreover, to limit the gap between *the haves and have-nots* of the city, the network established among several social institutions and non-governmental organizations helps migrants navigate the system by providing them with accurate information and support to be heard in order to make informed decisions. Hence, combating misinformation by collaboratively aiding migrants and displaced individuals and assisting them in their access to essential services (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 12). Such include navigating the legal system, providing support at healthcare facilities, and establishing contact to detention centers. This manifestation of responsibility-sharing across fields presents a distinct advantage in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations from the perspective of the individual city at an urban level. Hence, the number of options for assistance in the city was one of the arguments as to why Mexico City, in the opinion of Lorena Cano Padilla, is the city with the best options for migrants to receive assistance in Mexico. Still, it can be argued that a municipality like Mexico City, with a size and number of inhabitants on a scale comparable to that of counties, makes it difficult to make a uniform strategy to carry out future sanctuary efforts.

In comparison, while the collaborative network of social institutions and non-governmental organizations may appear more informal than that of the Canadian Council for Refugees (henceforth, CCR), in which FCJ Refugee Centre takes part - it still represents strength through shared responsibility and collaboration in the protection of migrant rights. Further, as was argued by Edgar Valderrama Medina, the CCR aims to use its work in the council to assist the government in establishing ways to regularize status for precarious individuals on the basis of the experiences and knowledge from the collaboration of its members

representing different sectors (Drejer-Jensen, 2023, pp. 16–17). A manner in which influence from the perspectives of multiple service providers and specialists on different areas of the assistance and protection of rights for a specific marginalized group can be included to provide the best and most inclusive assistance. For instance, this would allow for an effort to be placed on the enhanced risks that migrant women face when arriving in the urban context of Mexico City compared to their male counterparts, concerning, e.g., gender-based violence, reproductive health, and childcare.

Conclusion

Although Mexico has pledged to protect women's right to a life free from violence and the rights of migrants for decades with a number of policies and initiatives, the authorities do not act accordingly, and the issue persists - especially placing migrant women in a vulnerable position. The aim of this study was to analyze the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action's impact on Mexico City's journey to become sanctuary, in addition to how the non-governmental organization Institute for Women in Migration works towards assisting migrant women. The analysis of the chosen policies presented in this study, in connection with the responses from the interviewees, has revealed a system where changing immigration policies and contradictory actions by authorities are making it impossible for migrants to succeed. As described by Mariana, a Honduran migrant who had been attempting to migrate to the U.S. for two years

“I don't understand what I am supposed to do, where I am supposed to go. I have been trying for two years to follow the rules (...) I don't know what to do. I can't go back to Honduras, I am afraid to be in Mexico, and I'm not allowed to request protection at the border. I feel lost”(Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, 2022a, p. 7).

The uncertainty places migrants in a vulnerable and precarious state, where the authorities who swore to assist and protect them now have turned their backs on them - creating an environment of uncertainty and danger, where even the legal ways of migration become dangerous.

Furthermore, while Mexico's regulatory framework categorizes migrant women as a "vulnerable population" and states that actions shall be directed towards improving their social conditions and eradicating gender-based discrimination, it has been evident through both the conducted literature and interviews that with the country's high rates of violence against women and femicides. It is still far from eradicating gender-based violence and gender disparities. The additional acts of harassment and assault performed by corrupt immigration authorities in detention centers are just one in many ways in which the system fails migrant women, and therefore as stated by Lorena Cano Padilla, have migrant women choose the dangerous journey of further migration towards the United States (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 11). Because while Institute for Women in Migration assists migrant women in accessing different services throughout the city, the system works against them. This is especially an issue in the case of gender-based violence, where authorities attempt to deter and victimize the women reflecting a society where the opinions and safety of women are valued as less than that of men (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 11).

This study's consideration and examination of the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action and its possible influence on policies leading up to Mexico City's 2017 sanctuary declaration has proven not to have played a direct role in the implementation of later policies. Instead, the declaration relied on providing guidelines and desired approaches instead of mandating specific action, making its influence more 'inspirational' or 'encouraging' (C. Carreño Nigenda, personal communication, April 17, 2023). In addition, analysis of later policies and statements shows a continuity of pledges and commitments proposed by the Mexican government towards migrant protection and even the acknowledgment of the need to incorporate a gender perspective into future policies and approaches. Yet, this pattern proves to be more symbolic and performative as the issues persist and the actions of both authorities and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador either contradicts or undermines the significance and urgency of the vulnerability and dangers faced by migrants and women in Mexican society.

Furthermore, from the conducted interview with Padilla and Icaza Pastor, the perspective of this research inspired them to further considerations on bringing additional focus to the protection of migrant women down to the urban level, opposed to the national (personal

communication, March 23, 2023, p. 12). Hence, by separating the federal policies from those of the municipality regarding migrant protection and thus including the individuality of each city and the possibilities and limitations it holds. Something that could entail the connection of different actors, starting the conversation from a bottom-up initiative, from a non-governmental organization like the Institute for Women in Migration to the local congress who, would have access to additional authorities in the hopes of creating a local policy regarding access to fundamental rights for migrant women in Mexico City (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 12).

Moreover, the comparison between the sanctuary city framework of Toronto has provided insight into different municipal responses to being a sanctuary city. It has highlighted that both cities are, while in different ways, still facing obstacles in their frameworks to becoming a sanctuary for precarious migrants. Nonetheless, it is evident that although the city of Toronto expresses a more openly communicative dedication towards the matter through campaigns, repeated public statements, and proclaiming a day for non-status residents, areas still need improvement, e.g., battling misinformation among staff in various service sectors. Further, the more openly communicative approach to a city's position as a sanctuary city engages the remaining residents more and, therefore, through the inclusion of a wider community, spreads awareness, which can create a safer environment for migrants and battle misperceptions and the risk of migrants becoming an 'invisible population' within the city. Additionally, by the municipality communicating openly about its stance on protecting precarious migrants, it makes it easier for non-governmental organizations and the general public to point out where the city's efforts are insufficient and hold it accountable (Drejer-Jensen, 2023).

Conclusively, throughout this study, it has become apparent that while intentions and plans are established for assisting and protecting migrants, and also the incorporation of a gender perspective, it is not followed by substantial changes and sustainable solutions. The actions of the Mexican government do not reflect a country where the well-being of migrants is kept as the primary concern in the execution of policies (L. C. Padilla & L. A. Icaza Pastor, personal communication, March 23, 2023, para. 10). The adopted research methodology, based on social constructivism, has offered valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of people closely connected to the topic. By highlighting social interaction and cultural context,

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the thesis has emphasized the importance of co-construction through shared experiences, also implemented in creating knowledge - stressing the importance of the individual's role as an active agent in shaping the society in which they engage. Further, the research does not aim to provide an objective truth but rather seeks to present perspectives derived from a combination of relevant literature and experiences of people in close connection with the subject matter. It aims to be a component for future discussions of the inclusivity of a gender perspective in migrant protection on the urban level in the establishment of sanctuary cities.

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Appendices

Interview guide:
Institute for Women in Migration, Mexico City

Main Question	Follow-up Question	Intention
<p>Can you tell me a little about the organization?</p>	<p>How long have you been part of the organization?</p> <p>What are some of the main difficulties that the organization faces in assisting migrant women?</p>	<p>To get a brief introduction to the organization from an inside perspective.</p> <p>Gain further knowledge in what fuels the need for their work - highlighting why it is important to have a focus on the intersectional experience of migrant women.</p>
<p>What would you deem the biggest challenges faced by migrant women opposed to their male counterparts?</p>	<p>Are there specific experiences or difficulties that migrant women face in an urban setting? (with Mexico City as the example)</p> <p>Are aspects of gender stereotypes/gender norms still present in laws regarding migrants in Mexico City?</p> <p>What are some of the positive aspects of migration that IMUMI is working towards migrant women will be able to take part in?</p>	<p>To focus on the gender inequalities in the experience of the migrant woman.</p> <p>Again, background for their work but also something which can influence the need for future policies concerning migrant protection.</p> <p>What are they working towards, not only focusing on the struggles and difficulties but also the positives which they are working towards?</p>
		<p>To identify which steps have been taken since the Mexico Plan of Action was implemented and whether or not</p>

Interview guide:
 Institute for Women in Migration, Mexico City

<p>Has the Mexico Plan of Action - with its 'Cities of Solidarity' component - affected your work? If so, how? (Government commitment, funding for social programs, etc.)</p>		<p>these have played the organization's work, or what they have experienced from their research or migrant women they work with.</p> <p>To gain insight into how a member of a non-governmental organization views Mexico City's acts towards protection of migrants, with focus on the Mexico Plan of Action and the declaration of the city as sanctuary.</p> <p>In addition to its transparency, which is important as IMUMI has a large amount of advocacy and research efforts.</p>
<p>What do you predict will need to change for the lives of migrant women in Mexico City to improve?</p>		

Interv



Research Project/Master's Thesis:

Mexico City as a Sanctuary City with a focus on migrant women

Researcher: Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen,

Master's student at Aalborg University, mdreje21@student.aau.dk

AALBORG UNIVERSITET

Please tick the appropriate option

Taking Part

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

Yes No

I agree to be interviewed as part of the project.

Yes No

I agree for the interview I give to be recorded (audio).

Yes No

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.

Yes No

Use of the information I provide for this project only

I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs.

Yes No

I agree to be quoted directly with my full name.

Yes No

I agree to be quoted if a pseudonym is used and if I will not be identified or identifiable in any resulting report or publication.

Yes No

Use of the information I provide beyond this project

I understand that other researchers may have access to, and may use, this data, but only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Yes No

Luisa Alvarez-Icaza Padilla
~~Lorena Cano Padilla~~

03-23-23
Date

Name of Participant (Printed)

Signature

Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen

03-23-23

Name of Researcher (Printed)

Signature

Date

Interv



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Yes No

Lorena Cano Padilla

Name of Participant (Printed)



Signature

23/03/23

Date

Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen

Name of Researcher (Printed)



Signature

23/03/23

Date

Interviewer: Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen (MGDJ)

Interviewee 1: Lorena Cano Padilla (LCP)

Interviewee 2: Luisa Alvarez Icaza Pastor (LAIP)

Date and time: March 23, 2023, 15:00

Location: Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, headquarters in Mexico City

Online transcription tool: Good Tape

To ensure readability and simplify referencing within the thesis, the interview transcript has been divided into 12 different sections. This approach aims to improve comprehension and organization, making it easy to navigate and analyze the interview content. These sections allow for precise citation and discussion of specific points and excerpts from the interview, promoting a coherent and structured analysis of the interview content. Parts have been highlighted for emphasis.

Section 1: Introduction to IMUMI and Interviewees

MGDJ: So, can you tell me a little about the organization and your role?

LCP: My name is Lorena Cano Padilla, and I am the lead coordinator of the Institute for Women in Migration.

LAIP: And my name is Luisa, I am a junior lawyer at the Legal Clinic of IMUMI.

LCP: And this NGO was created 11 years ago. I think, like 11 years ago. And what we do is we provide legal services for women in migration, no matter if they are foreign women. We also make legal procedures for Mexicans deported principally from the US. And we are working very hard to make psychological work also with women and their families.

LCP: We have a legal clinic where we provide services directly to women. And we also have other areas like investigation, communication. We make full service for trying to change laws, to make legal decisions at the Supreme Court, etc.

LCP: And in the legal clinic we have different areas for providing assistance like family law, like the asylum seekers area in Mexico. But also, we have a US law area where we try to help women in some cases in the United States. Also, that US area helps them to make some identity rights and education

assistance for having the rights to study and have identity in Mexico. When they have kids that were born outside Mexico.

LCP: And we have a migratory law area that provides assistance for having a legal stance in Mexico.

LAIP: We have a psychological area where we have two different psychologists. One is specializing in women that have been victims of violence, gender violence. And the other one is specialized in children. And as well we have a social worker that provides resources to help the users access different rights like health, education. And we also try to work all the areas combined together to have a work that takes into consideration the different aspects of migration. Like the legal aspect but also the psychological and even the social aspect.

LCP: Strategic litigation. Children's area. I don't know how to say it. There are lawyers that are working for children. No matter if they are here alone or with their families. They provide legal assistance for making asylum cases or helping them to get to the US for family units. It has been like one year since the law changed. Nowadays children cannot be detained in migratory detention centers. But one year ago, they used to also help them to go out to these places. And I think that's all the areas we have.

MGDJ: There's a lot of different aspects that are being covered.

LCP: I think the director, Gretchen Kuner, when she started this NGO, she thought in all the aspects that women can need legal assistance. That's why I think there are different areas just to think of helping them in all the aspects they need help with.

MGDJ: Can I just double check the recording?

LCP: Yes of course.

LCP: Also, if you need to repeat something or like that, it's okay.

MGDJ: Okay, perfect.

LAIP: We have time. If you want us to clarify something, you can.

Section 2: Migration Issues Intensified

MGDJ: I'm really glad that you elaborated so much on that question. I was also wondering, what are some of the main difficulties that the women you are assisting are facing? e.g. is it mostly women having faced gender-based violence or family separation? What is the most frequent?

LCP: I don't know how to start that answer because I think all the classic difficulties that they face in the migration transit are important. And all the difficulties are worse...are worse now than, I don't know, five years ago. What I mean is since Trump's administration in the United States, some of the things have changed, not only in the US, but also in Mexico. The impact was obviously because we are the neighbors and the ones who should do the dirty job for the US government, right? So when Trump decided to close the US border for asylum seekers and for migrants with the COVID issue, all the people started to stay in Mexico.

LCP: Historically, transit was from south to north and then people used to take legal ways or illegal ways to cross the border. But now people are staying in the north and migration in Mexico is taking the people and getting them back to the center or to the south of the country. But they are also going out of the country. So they are just blocking them. And the people are trying again to go to the north in any way. People are not going to change the idea of continuing the transit to the north.

LCP: There's a thing in Mexico, now the crime has all the control. **In Mexico, the authorities are very corrupt. They have a lot of connections with the gangs and with organized crime.** And I think one important effect in the last four years is the intervention of crime because the people have no documents. If they have documents, migration breaks their documents, they detain them and get them to the south. They try the transit again. It's like a circular movement. **And the crime is constantly committing violence against them and of course in women it's worse.**

Section 3: Detention Centers

LCP: In children and in women it's worse. I don't know, the thing about detention in Mexico it's also a very big problem because in Mexico they don't have the right to ask for a free lawyer, a pro bono lawyer as in other areas like in criminal law. All people have the right to have a pro-bono lawyer. In the migratory system there's no way to have a telephone of a lawyer, lawyers from the state. So they are alone, they are having their processes alone and that's a very huge problem because they have no defense. No matter if they are victims of violence in Mexico, they are deported to their countries.... I don't know, a lot of things.

LCP: I don't know if you think of something else?

LAIP: Yes, I also think that especially in detention it's a very obscure thing because they also try to justify it, the access based on security, like national security and also for NGOs or social society it's very hard for us to get in and monitor if they're having access into their rights, if they're being fed well, if the conditions are well. But everything, the access is very hard. Just for an example, we had to wait, well we first had to make a petition to go into specific detention centers and it took at least five months to get it approved.

LAIP: And even if we go and we started asking them if their rights are being guaranteed, the answer is no because the authorities don't explain the rights that they have, the other options that they have if they wanted to stay in Mexico or the other options they could have to exit the migratory detention center.

MGDJ: Okay, so the one controlling the detention centers makes it difficult for NGOs to come in and try to even talk to people that would need the help...?

LAIP: Yeah, and to represent them as well.

LCP: Yes, they don't want us to be over there watching. The conditions, also another thing that is worse now in the migratory centers for detention is that they usually have telephones inside the population areas. That way they can phone to their houses, to lawyers, to whatever, or to their consulates and now they put away those telephones. So now they just have the right to have one call, but when? It's not very clear when they get that right to have that call. So they are withheld from outside communication.

Section 4: Lack of Resources and Changing Immigration Policies

LCP: Another thing is that people don't have access options to stay in Mexico. It is supposed that they can ask for asylum in Mexico, but this country can't support all the asylum petitions and also Mexico, I think, doesn't have enough resources to give or to provide humanitarian assistance to all the people that are crossing into the country. And that's a very big problem because **people don't want to stay in Mexico because here we have probably the same problems that they have in their own countries of origin**. So they are looking for the best option. All the people think that the US is the only option they have, and the only option they have.

LCP: And they don't want to stay here. So that's a big problem because Mexico, it's not allowing them to cross the border because of US directions, policies, and also relations, but they are not supporting them. Just they leave them on the border with Guatemala and the people need to do the movements by themselves, no matter the nationality.

MGDJ: Yeah, because Mexico is in the position of being both a transit and sender and receiving country for migrants..?.

LCP: Yes.

MGDJ: So all that intensity, cities and borders.

LCP: Yes, that's true.

LAIP: Yeah, I would add that one of the main difficulties is the constant change of immigration, public policy change in the United States. Because they are constantly making new programs. That is, in my personal opinion, new obstacles for the people to get there and it is also for us, as lawyers it is hard to...well, we have to be actualized in understanding the new procedures.

LAIP: And, so for us it can be harder to access this information - for the population it can be even more hard. Because also in the way, that I don't know if you have heard about the new app? CBP-1, its an application that the U.S. created for people to present themselves at the border. And they present their asylum petition or present their petition to go inside, but of course it's against all human rights law. Because it is an application, and what does that make? It excludes a lot of people who don't have the means to have a phone. It's very far from the reality of people in the context of migration, because Mexico can be a very dangerous country and robberies can happen, phones can get lost, and these apps need to be, to have like...not the latest technology but atleast a smartphone, which not all have access to.

MGDJ: And there is a limited number of people who have the opportunity to even get it or try.

LCP: Also, another thing is the discrimination in Mexico, no? It is a very big issue in Mexico. People used to be, how to say it in english xenophoba? And women are also facing those intersectionalities so they face all these things, when they don't speak spanish, because of the color of their skin, because of the school preparation they have, it depends if they cross the border with kids. You know? Who is going to help them while they work? Ehm, a lot of things. That's how I think a very big problem in Mexico is media is not helping so much, we constantly see in the news, printed online, constantly they

are making like publications to refuse migrants and to see them as a problem, like criminals, like I don't know. That is a very big problem.

Section 5: The National Guard Law

LCP: Now the national guard has faculties to make migratory control in Mexico. So militaries can detain migrants nowadays.

MGDJ: The national guard?

LCP: The national guard, yes. It is like a new but not new kind of military in Mexico. I think it is not new because the figure of that national guard was in the constitution but now the president decided to...

LAIP: To constitute the figure, that was in the constitution into reality. But allowed them with a military constitution as well. Like, it used to be in the constitution that it was with civil guard, but in reality it is ex military - people who were in the military that are taking into these positions, so of course the attitudes and practices that they are taking into the job is of military conduct.

MGDJ: And is that also in the cities? So it will also be here in Mexico City?

LCP: Yes, it is. Of course, they can be found all over the country. They created and published a new law of the national guard. And with that new law they can make migratory control, at the border, inside Mexico - anywhere, you know? And that is very bad because it seems like the migration theme is something *so bad*, that the National Guard needs to be controlled.

MGDJ: What is the name of the law?

LCP: It is the National Guard Law, *Ley de la Guardia Nacional*, Sí.

Section 6: Progress in Migrant Protection since the 2004 MPA

MGDJ: Yea, because part of my project is also looking at Mexico City as an example with the Mexico Plan of Action and further its cities of solidarity, followed by Mexico City being declared sanctuary in 2017. So I also wanted to look at the progress, like what has been done for migrants in this period of time.

LCP: (Laughs)

MGDJ: Because the Plan of Action was from 2004 and the sanctuary city declaration was from 2017, so it's a long span but since you are mentioning the National Guard Law. Which seems to be contradicting a lot, like at least not helping with painting a better picture of the negative image of migrants and helping the city's solidarity act.

LCP: **I think in some ways, yes, this city is like a sanctuary and we can't say absolutely not right?** Because for example, here in Mexico City, we haven't seen - I haven't seen yet, migration making revisions to people, no. Detaining people, they detain people outside of Mexico City and bring them to the migratory station, yes.

LCP: But, they are not making those revisions for documents in Mexico City. In Mexico City the local government used to provide some economical support for making the migratory papers for people. So they would help people pay for those documents if they did not have the resources.

LCP: **In the Mexico City constitution, yes we have some articles about respecting migrants in the city, and that is why I think it is not absolutely bad, everything.**

LCP: But now, this week we are seeing in the chats we have with other NGOs and shelters, that there are a lot of people asking for asylum, but they are not really asking for the asylum. They go to COMAR, la Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados, and they try to start the petition because they know that they are going to receive an asylum seeker paper and with that document they can go to migration and ask for a humanitarian visa. They are not really trying to ask for asylum in Mexico, they are just getting that humanitarian visa and continuing their trip to the north. That is causing very huge problems, because now it is very crowded on the streets outside COMAR. They are waiting and sleeping on the streets there to make the line and get a turn to apply. They stay there all day, and all night and wait for the next turn. All the neighbors are angry because it is dirty and crowded, some of the migrants now have camping tents over there, and it is a problem. It is a problem for migrants, and of course it is a problem for neighbors over there.

LCP: **Mexico City's authorities are doing nothing to solve the problem.** Now migration is taking the people, I don't know if they are asking them or if they are getting them to move from there, and they are sending them to other states outside of Mexico City - to make those documents.

LAIP: Hmm, I think, right now that the border is closed and people are staying in Mexico although they don't want to, and the only way they think they can be here safe without being detained is through that document. **Due to a lack of response from the authorities, Mexico City authorities, the country is agreeing to the policies of the United States closing the border, receiving the people - but they are not taking any action now that the people are here.** To guarantee a document, that allows them to get a job, and for kids to go to school. Ehm, they are just hoping or allowing...waiting for them to figure it out.

LAIP: Going to COMAR, waiting for hours. and something which I have noticed that is also a difficulty is people are not being informed. They just pass the information around, like you can go here, and you can go here but **it is not being explained to them, what asking for asylum means.** **The obligation of asking for asylum is to stay where you ask for asylum.** For example, the people who ask for asylum at COMAR, they have an appointment and will receive a paper, where they are obliged to stay in Mexico City till their procedure is done. But since they are not being informed well, they are leaving, which puts them at risk for being detained again. And it's a circle.

MGDJ: So there hasn't been implemented informational or actional steps, since they knew more people would arrive to the city due to the border being closed?

LAIP: No, and the NGO Shelters are full.

LCP: And that is obviously a very big problem, because **if Mexico is in complicity with the U.S. and its policies and the U.S. have these programs like CIP-1 etc. they should talk to migration in Mexico and tell them what groups of people are allowed to cross the border to ask for asylum.** Instead Mexican authorities say they don't know about this, and that their order is to block people from going to the north. And that's a very big problem, because if a family with kids have an appointment at the border, they cannot go because they will be blocked and detained by Mexican authorities and sent to the south.

MGDJ: So it is not evaluated on a case by case basis?

LCP: I think at the beginning it was more functional, case-by-case with the exceptions for certain groups but now it is in general that no one can cross.

LAIP: Yes, I think it is a systematic practice. That immigration in Mexico is just trying to block the entrance physically and the U.S. is blocking it technologically. Because even with the online application process, we have heard of cases where people got a date to present their case in court, they

reached the border after a long and dangerous journey and then their appointment suddenly *disappeared*. Leaving people in a limbo.

Section 7: Effects on Migrant Women in Mexico City

MGDJ: And how do you feel this has affected migrants from the perspective of Mexico City, you said the shelters were getting full - what consequence do you see extra for women?

LCP: Of course it is different because they are facing more risks, like when sleeping in the streets. I can't say based on numbers that they are suffering more e.g. sexual violence in Mexico City or whole Mexico. Because last week I conducted research about criminal processes for migrants and apparently there are no cases of criminal cases reported to Mexico in sexual or gender violence. I think from 2016 to last year there were about 7 cases reported.

MGDJ: In Mexico City?

LCP: No, in all of Mexico. In the whole Mexico?! I cannot believe that, but it is the official report we have. I have that research which I can share with you.

LCP: I don't think the numbers are true, because Human Rights First is all the time making interviews with migrants in transit etc. and they have documented a lot of cases of people suffering criminal violations by either immigration or other authorities and by gangs and organized crime.

LCP: I think obviously this makes the situation more vulnerable for women and children sleeping in the streets, they don't have documentation so they often get temporary jobs, not formal jobs and they need to receive what the employee wants to give them. So for work they have no support in taking care of their children. Children are not studying, **they don't have the possibility to be in school; one, they are in constant movement but on the other hand, they don't have documents and without it is very difficult to get into a school, no matter if it is private or public.**

LAIP: Also, access to health, like if they don't have any documents and they try to go to a public health center, it's most likely that they're going to be rejected. And I don't know, specifically in one case, last month I went to the Germagritari Detention Center here in Mexico City, and there was one woman from Haiti, and there was not a translator. We went to monitor, since we got the permit that I mentioned to you that we waited for like five months to get it. But one problem that she had was that since no one was able to communicate with her, nothing was explained to her, and besides, she

was sick. I speak French, so we could communicate, and she explained to me, I was the first person too that she could explain that she had been sick for one month and a half, and she also needed tampons and pads because her period just wouldn't stop. And I think that had to do with being a migrant woman,

LAIP: And I think that had to do with being a migrant woman, and also that she didn't speak any Spanish. She didn't have access to health, or to explain why she was there. She wanted to go to Comar, she actually wanted to go to Comar, what she was explaining to the authorities, and the authorities inside the detention center were like, oh no, she's going to be taken back to the south, and then she can ask for asylum there. I was like, why? There's a Comar here in Mexico City. She then said; it's only for, first, the agent told me it doesn't exist here in Mexico City. I was like, yes, it exists, I have gone there. And she was like, oh, but it's only for emergency cases. And I'm like, no, of course not.

LAIP: Yes, and imagine being a woman that doesn't speak the language, also that is sick, right? And to not have access to these multiple rights.

MGDJ: So even if she had spoken the language, getting help from public hospitals without papers is difficult.

LAIP: Yes. **And also taking into consideration that we, Mexico, it's a country where it's dangerous to be a woman.** Yeah. Gender violence is in a lot of places, in the street, hostile situations, also in public transportation. **So I think women and migrant women are in a more vulnerable context here in Mexico. Also to the situation of the country.**

MGDJ: [03:06 - 03:23] So when you said he, you said first that the place didn't exist. Do you think that there is a lack of information about what's available for migrants, for the people who work at different government institutions or do you think it's more them trying to limit their access? So because they don't know enough about these things or because they actually don't want them to have access?

LAIP: I think it's both. Like the, first, they don't know, for example, when these changes of the public policy of migrant policies from the US, they actually don't know the changes and what it implies for their job. For example, when a person got their appointment for CBP-1 and goes to get a new, a *forma migratoria* multiple, that it's a paper, it's a migratory document that allows you to stay in Mexico for days, up to 180 days. And they try to ask the authorities for this document to arrive in the north. They're like, oh no, I don't know what you need. And I actually think they don't know. Like they don't

know what CBP-1 is at first. Like, **I actually think they don't know the information, but I also think they intentionally don't give the information and the options that the population have either to stay in Mexico or their rights that they have.** Is it convenient for them not to know because they're doing the job to stop them?

LCP: Yes, **I absolutely think that they make it on purpose to not provide information to people, because they have the obligation to give them all the information about the asylum process, about being a victim in Mexico and the rights you should have if you are a victim in Mexico.** I don't know a lot of things. And they used to make all that first step of detention that is to read them their rights, to make them sign the papers that they received all that information. So when we go to a trial and we ask the court, the judge, they didn't give her the opportunity to ask for asylum. They show in the trial, yes, I did. Look, here's her sign. They know, they have all the information and probably they don't care about that information. They just make what they think it's needed and they carry out the job for the US.

Section 8: Network Between NGOs in Mexico City

MGDJ: And also on more of a city basis, is it the same thing? Do you think that would be the same, that it's a combination of maybe not knowing what they have access to, but also trying to limit access?

LAIP: Well, what I also think happens **in Mexico City, there are multiple NGOs and also maybe my response is biased because we are part of that community, but within the city, I do see a net between like the social society and to make agreements.** Well, speaking also from IMUMI, that we are city-based, we make this agreement with health centers so they can attend to our users as well. And I know other NGOs have other types of agreements with other institutions, health institutions, for example, that can make the population attend. But I don't know whether that's true.

MGDJ: How do you mean to be attended?

LAIP: That they get the attention they need.

LCP: Probably it's because we like other NGOs, what we do is that we send emails to the directors or to the bosses in charge of those clinics. And they know they have the obligation to provide the assistance. Because **since 2011, we have had that new law. New migration law. And over there, something important written is that all migrants, no matter their migratory status, have the right to receive all that basic services and rights, like education, health, work, etc.**

LCP: So I think the problem is that when a migrant comes to the hospital or the clinic, what is written is that all migrants, no matter their migratory status, have the right to receive all the basic services and rights, like education, health, work, etc. So **I think the problem is that when a migrant comes to the hospital or the clinic and asks for the assistance, the people that are working there refuse the people because it's easy for them to say, no you don't have papers, you are not a Mexican, so you need to go, we are not going to give you the assistance.**

LCP: But when we make all the formal petitions, they refuse to receive the people because they know that they have the obligation. And I think in other cities it's worse. In Mexico City it's functional, as Luisa said, because here, I don't know, nowadays there are probably more than 30 NGOs working in this, in the migrant theme. But in other places it's worse, it's more difficult. Of course there are some NGOs and they have some contracts, no agreements, informal agreements with authorities and they can do some things, but we should think of the people that don't have any help from an NGO, that are most of the people in transit in Mexico. So that's the point, **the real problem. All the people that are not being assisted by an NGO.**

MGDJ: They have to stand on their own and do these things. Do you know the name of the law from 2011?

LCP: It's the Migration Law in Mexico, because before that year Mexico didn't have any migration law. That's our first law in 2011. Also in the refugee theme, in that same year they created and published the Migration Law, the Refugee Law.

MGDJ: Is it just for Mexico City or is it for the country?

LCP: For the country. But those are the first laws. We used to work with the.. population law. The population Mexican law, that law, it's supposed to work to make numbers of persons in Mexico, how many people we have in Mexico, how many are working, how many are studying. It's for population, not for migration.

MGDJ: That is quite surprising.

Section 9: Connection Between NGOs and Mexico City Government

MGDJ: How is the communication between the organization and policy makers in Mexico City? to influence future policies on the topic of women and migration. And if there is, what kind? Or is it mostly through providing the research and then advocacy, putting it out there?

LCP: It's not very easy to answer that because of course we have relations with the Congress, the local Congress. **But the migratory and the asylum themes are federal in Mexico. So the local states don't have the opportunity to make legislation for migrants.**

LCP: It's not like in the U.S., for example. We just have one federal law and the states, the only thing I think they do is just the local things like health, education, work, all those rights. But it's a little difficult to talk about policies and making advocacy in Mexico City because we have nothing to... I don't know if I'm correct or not.. But what do we do in Mexico City, for example? **We don't need to make new laws or advocacy in that way. What we do is we talk to local authorities for helping people to provide those services, local services. I talked about the migratory documents.**

Obviously the National Migration Institute is the one who is in charge of making the migratory documents. But the local, the Mexico City government helps people to pay for the documents. But **they are not talking to migration to make better conditions or easier conditions for migrants and vulnerability.** So we talk with Civiso, it's the name of the secretary. In Spanish it's Secretaria del Bienestar, I think, Civiso. And they are providing that assistance.

LCP: They also used to give migrants an ID for Mexico City. It was called Tarjeta de Huespe. Like a guest card. That's the name, a guest card in Mexico City. I think they are not making it anymore. But they used to have that. And when they don't have passports or documents for making an ID, they used to use that ID from Mexico City, but just for services in Mexico City, for going to hospitals, to clinics, that type of thing. We also have here, as in the other 31 states, a commission for human rights, a local commission for human rights. And they are supposed to help, but they can't also make anything in, for example, detentions in Mexico.

LCP: They try to make better conditions in shelters, for example, in Mexico City. But those shelters in Mexico City are for people in the streets. That's the reality.

LAIP: But also, what do you want to know on a big scale, on federal or just Mexico City?

MGDJ: My main focus would be Mexico City and what they have, like what they are doing to better the circumstances for migrants and also women.

LAIP: Okay, what I also know is that IMUMI is part of the JTPM, but it's the group of work about migration policy. And I understand that that group, it's also part, it's made out of other NGOs, and it's towards also speaking with legislatives about changing the policy of migrations in favor of women. And of course, IMUMI as being part of it, we also work from a gender perspective and also from a children's perspective. There are different tables and we're part of the work, different tables to bring the subjects that are important for us into the change of loss as well. So we're also part of that group, but that would be like a big scale.

LCP: Yes, that's in the federal congress. Not in Mexico City.

MGDJ: So it can make it difficult also for the city's government to make specific changes for refugees and migrants because it has to happen on the big federal scale.

LCP: I remember now that there's a table, I don't know if it's a table in English, but it's a table for speaking, in Mexico City. And it is supposed, **the secretary of the local government in Mexico City, it is supposed that it's obligated by the constitutional, the constitution of Mexico City to make those like of meetings, local meetings with other authorities from the city, the secretary of war, secretary for education, secretary of health and with civil society.** And it's supposed that those meetings are for talking about making the conditions better for migrants in Mexico City. But I just remember that, I am unsure if it is still working. I don't think it is working anymore because we are part of that. And I think like last year was the last meeting. December.

LAIP: Yeah, December. Yeah, that is the last time I went.

LCP: Okay, Okay, so that probably can be something you're interested in. I don't have a lot of information about those meetings, but probably we can put you in touch with someone that can have more information. Her name is Carolina. She's now working in IDC, in the International Attention Coalition. And she's not working anymore for Mexico City's government, but she used to work in the local human rights commission and she was in charge of those meetings. I can give you her email and you can, she's not going to speak to you in English, but probably you can arrange something to talk to her and she can provide you a lot of information about Mexico City because she was working there for six years. Okay.

MGDJ: Thank you, that would be great.

Section 10: Reducing the Topic of Migration from National to Urban level

LCP: It is very difficult to reduce the topic for me, to reduce the migratory issue to just concern Mexico City, because it's very hard. Mexico City is not facing a real problem until last week, a real problem. **We used to think in the country, in the whole country, in the effects in the north, and what's going on in the south.** Problems are outside. Now, of course they have a very big problem with all the people that are being, it's not deported, like being rejected from the US and sent here. And of course, that's a thing, but we weren't used to thinking in Mexico City to work on.

MGDJ: The people being sent from the border and also Mexico being, we talked about transit, sender and receiver of migrants is also part of this thesis where I would use it as in the analysis of the topic and like, because it all affects the situation that is in the city as well, that the changes have been done in the US where they closed the border, people like you said are getting sent back, and of course a lot of migrants also come to urban centers, so that will also affect the situation in the city in some way or another. But I understand that it's more on the bigger scale, the difference.

LCP: Yes, and it's like very common because it's part of the protocol, with migration, catch people, detain them, they put them in the, I don't know how to say it in English, *estaciones concentradoras*, that are the biggest centers for, the biggest detention centers for migrants, one of them is in Tijuana, the other one is in Mexico City, and the other one is in Chiapas. So what is common is that migration puts people in Tijuana for example, and then they send them to another migratory station more in the center of the country.

LCP: Then the next day or 12 hours later, they send them to another, to another, they are like making those movements by buses, for not paying of course airplanes, and for getting people to the south, that's the point. **I think they are not using Tijuana anymore because what they want is not to send people to their countries, they just want to send them to the south of Mexico and let them go by themselves.** Why? Because they don't want to pay the deportations. They just used to send back to Central American people, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador people.

LCP: Why? Because it's cheap to send them and because Mexico has an agreement with those three countries. They are not being deported; they are going to be voluntarily returned. So of course, they send those nationalities to their countries, the other nationalities like Nicaragua, Haiti, Venezuela and Cuba, they are not sending them to their countries. Now they say they are not deportable, no deportables, I don't know why, but because it's not about the situation in their countries of origin. **I think the authorities don't care about the situation or the conditions in the country of**

origin, they are just sending the people over there just for not asking for asylum at the US border. Because of that, it is supposed that the United States is allowing Mexicans to ask for asylum in the US.

LCP: So now in Mexico City, coming back to your topic, I think yesterday **Claudia Sheinbaum, who is now the mayor of Mexico City. She said that the migrants are our brothers, and we have the obligation to help them, but she didn't say *how*.** They just sent a migration to put the people out of that street in Comar and that's all. They are not really giving solutions for that problem. Because the solution is not to send the people to Hidalgo, to Querétaro, to other places, that's not a solution.

LCP: A guy from migration said like one month ago to me that they are trying to spread the people in other places, that way the frontiers can be 'clear'.

LAIP: What I would say about Mexico City being a sanctuary city, going back, I think compared to other cities or to other places in Mexico, as **in the north, it can be very dangerous because the police has arrangements with the criminal gangs, an organized crime, and a lot of times people are detained and then instead of taking them into detention centers or to jail even, they take them to the narco-trafficantes, the street criminals.** And in Mexico City, so far, we haven't had any *users*, we call them that instead of clients, the population that we give services to. And in Mexico City, I haven't heard of that, that the migrants here do not suffer kidnappings.

LAIP: Kidnappings, and **there is a big net of NGOs, so I think at least in Mexico City people do get legal counsel, and we try to accompany them throughout their asylum process or their regularization process,** and at least here in IMUMI we try to give all of our services with gender perspective, so we take into this account this different, and also the intersectionality characteristics that a story or a person could have, as well as to give attention, psychological attention, that a lot of times women have been victims of gender violence, and we take into the account to accompany them throughout this process in Mexico City.

MGDJ: So there's more help to get for the migrants than by the northern border towns?

LAIP: Yeah, or other cities around Mexico.

LCP: Yeah, that's true, **if you want to be a migrant in Mexico, it's better to be in Mexico City than in any other city.**

Section 11: Influence of Gender Norms, and Stereotypes

MGDJ: When looking at the more perspectives on gender and migration, are there any specific gender stereotypes, gender norms that you feel is affecting, we have talked about laws and stuff, but the views on migrants, something that will give specific difficulties for women as migrants when they're traveling with kids or alone, are there any views on gender or traditional gender roles make it more difficult, or don't you think that that plays a part?

LCP: Well, I think some of our clients or users that are seeking asylum in Mexico, they have been victims of violence in their countries because of gender or because of sexual abuses, and mostly they're, I don't know how to say attackers, or the ones who are the aggressors, the ones who are prosecuting them are their own families, their own partners, their husbands, and those husbands used to be part of gangs or part of the police in their countries. When they arrive to Mexico, what we try to do is to help them to come to the center of the country and not to stay in the south, because it's common that if they stay in the south, they can be detected by their partners or their husbands, because it's easy to cross the border in the south. And what we tried is to move those women to the center, because as Luisa said, **it's more safe to be here than in the south, because in the south it's very common to be a victim of abuse or violence, and because it's very common, it's very difficult to get assistance over there.**

LCP: It doesn't mean that here everything is okay, of course not, but it's easier at least for us to be in touch and to help them to do something. But **when they arrive in here and they see or they face that they cannot live without violence, also in Mexico City or in any other city in Mexico, that's why they decide to continue their way to the US, because they try to go to the ministerios publicos to initiate a case, and they refuse the case because they don't have documents, because they don't have Mexican documents.**

LCP: One of them that is named CURP, clave unica de registro de población, it's a digit number, a number with letters that all the Mexicans or residents in Mexico used to have, for everything, for having a license, for paying taxes, for everything. If they don't have that, for example in pandemia, they aren't able to start a case online, because they don't have that digit, that CURP to do that. **If they go physically to the police and ask them to initiate a case because of violence, they do everything to help her not to make the case, right?** They all the time. And not just with migrants, as Luisa said, all women live in that situation.

MGDJ: So it's a general thing that cases of domestic abuse or gender-based violence will get rejected, or that people trying to come forth with something will just be not receiving the help or consent.

LAIP: Even when they take the testimony they will make victimizing questions, like, why were you there, why were you wearing that? Instead of using active listening, making the victim further victimized.

LCP: And also in the family courts, in the family law courts, it's the same. The lawyer that's in charge of that area, in family law, all the time sees that kind of action from the judges, the local judges, no? They ask for documents, they victimize people, they're not helping women, I don't know, in cases for custody or for making divorce.

LCP: They don't use that perspective. I don't think they are, they prefer to, I don't know, **if you have a family case, and the man is the Mexican one and she is the foreign one, they are going to help the Mexican.**

LCP: They are going to always make all the support for that part. No matter if the woman is a victim of that Mexican.

MGDJ: It must be really tough to work with as well. When it's like the entire system, so many intersectional layers and aspects of this, and their experiences, that it just gets harder and harder. Also, when you said it, when they come here, fleeing from a situation, right at the border, and then see that even here, the help is not just coming and then going on an even more dangerous journey to the border.

LCP: That's true.

MGDJ: Yeah, but it still makes sense why they must feel frustrated and not knowing what to do, if you just keep seeing that there is no way out. Sorry, I was trying to...might have gotten a bit off track.

LAIP: And just to compliment that, actually CBP won the obligation. The justification on that was just not to put the people in danger, because since they closed the border, and a lot of people were still in the border, there were a lot of irregular campsites established in the north, and **narco-traficantes and organized crime went into those camps, and people started to be victims of violence. And of course, women had a different connotation**, and one of the explanations of why they were making CBP online was so that people could get...They didn't necessarily have to be at the border to get their

appointments to present their asylum cases. That was like the justification for the US to create an application online, instead of physical, with people going into.

MGDJ: Looking also on the website, you were mentioning some of the positive aspects of migration, and you mentioned that you're working towards women to be able to take part in, and what positive aspects would you mention that you wish for women to be able to gain from immigration?

LAIP: For me, it would also be for them to take part in the decision-making of what they want, and the options that they have. That's why, when I talk about how IMUMI provides services, I like to say to accompany women, instead of supporting them or helping them, because I think that's very assistentialist. What I have seen in IMUMI, what we try to do, is for women to recognize the tools that they have into decision-making, and also to take an active role to change their situation. Even if they are in a situation of violence, yes, **IMUMI could provide those services, or could show them, you have this option, and option, and option, but at the end, it's the woman that chooses what to do with her life.**

Section 12: Perspectives on Next Steps

MGDJ: Thank you for taking all this time. The last question, what would you think could be the next steps for bettering circumstances in the city for women migrants?

MGDJ: Big question, but I don't know, maybe you had something from the cases you worked with here, where you're like, well, this is definitely something. Of course, there are a lot of aspects where help is needed, but maybe there's a specific field where they could gain access to this, or something.

LCP: Definitely, I think that **the first step we should do is to start talking about migrants in Mexico City, not in Mexico country.** We should get in contact with the local congress, for example, no matter if they are not going to make a law in migration. Probably, if we try to get in touch with them, and talk about the importance of the rights and the opportunities that migrants need to have in Mexico City, they can probably talk with other authorities and make a policy, a local policy, for access to basic rights for migrants, for women in Mexico City, for example.

LCP: I think because we are very busy in the worst part of the migration, we never do that. But probably now that we are talking about this, it's a very important thing to do, to start talking with them, and we should also push the local authorities to do something better for migrants. And also

because of all the history of Mexico City and migrants. Specifically, probably, as IMUMI, we should start with women in migration.

LCP: All of the country also has local migration centers. I don't know how... I think, yes, that's the name, centers for migrants. But they are thought for Mexicans, for Mexicans that are deported, principally from the US. Those centers, what they do is to provide assistance for Mexicans deported. So if there is a Mexican that needs assistance for getting their stuff from US, or if they need to make a working trial in the US because they didn't get their payment, I don't know, whatever. If there are any rights about being a migrant outside Mexico, those centers used to help those people, Mexicans. **But they never do anything for international migrants in Mexico.** So probably we can ask or talk with the Mexico City government to do a center for international women migrants. For helping them in those things that we spoke first, about having access to health, to school, to education for their kids, to formal work, papers. I don't know. Yes, probably that would be great to do something, also because we are here, right?

LCP: It's easy for us. **Something important probably is going to be not to invite migration, the national institute.** Because they are always thinking of controlling people, not providing services. So probably if we are thinking of making something for migrants in Mexico City, we probably better not think of bringing migration authorities to these meetings.

LAIP: I say shelters, to establish humane and dignified shelters. Because people are going to be here. So I think it's their right to have a humane place to be instead of being in the streets. Because by being in the streets I think they are more at risk to everything. Robbery and violence. Also it's harder for them to even rest. So I think shelter is a really, really important aspect to take into consideration of what needs to be done.

MGDJ: Thank you so much.

LCP & LAIP: Thank you so much.

Interview Consent Form

Research Project/Master's Thesis:

Mexico City as a Sanctuary City with a focus on migrant women

Researcher: Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen,

Master's student at Aalborg University, mdreje21@student.aau.dk

Please tick the appropriate option



AALBORG UNIVERSITET

Taking Part

Me han dado la oportunidad de hacer preguntas sobre el proyecto.
(I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.)

Yes No

Acepto ser entrevistado en el marco del proyecto.
(I agree to be interviewed as part of the project.)

Yes No

Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria; puedo retirarme del estudio en cualquier momento y no tengo que dar ninguna razón de por qué ya no quiero participar.
(I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.)

Yes No

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Yes No

Acepto que se me cite directamente con mi nombre completo.
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Yes No

Use of the information I provide beyond this project

Yes No

Entiendo que otros investigadores pueden tener acceso a estos datos y utilizarlos, pero sólo si se comprometen a preservar la confidencialidad de la información tal como se solicita en este formulario.

(I understand that other researchers may have access to, and may use, this data, but only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.)



Carolina Carreño

Nombre del participante (Printed)



Signature

17 de abril de 2023

Date

Maria Genet Drejer-Jensen.

Name of Researcher (Printed)



Signature

12/04/23

Date



Preguntas sobre la Ciudad de México como ciudad santuario y sus esfuerzos para proteger a los migrantes, con especial atención a las mujeres migrantes.

El proyecto se centra en Ciudad de México como ciudad santuario, el Plan de Acción de México y las desigualdades de género en la migración.

¿Podría presentarse brevemente a sí mismo y a su trabajo?

Carolina Carreño Nigenda, psicóloga de formación, llevo casi 20 años trabajando en el tema migratorio. Trabajé en Sin Fronteras, la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Ciudad de México y actualmente soy oficial de proyecto de la Coalición Internacional contra la Detención.

¿Diría que la Ciudad de México ha implementado políticas que buscan estar a la altura del componente "Ciudades Solidarias" del Plan de Acciones de México?

Sin duda la Ciudad de México ha impulsado algunas acciones a favor de las personas migrantes, en 2011 con la promulgación de la Ley de Interculturalidad, Atención a Migrantes y Movilidad Humana, la cual sin duda es una ley de vanguardia que además de reconocer los derechos de las personas en movilidad, considerando a solicitantes del reconocimiento de la condición de refugiados, migrantes en tránsito, refugiados, migrantes de retorno, también orienta sobre políticas públicas que deben implementarse para la protección y garantía de derechos.

En 2017 se promulgó una Constitución Política de la Ciudad de México, en la que se incluye a las personas en contextos de movilidad como un grupo prioritario de atención y también se señalan los principales derechos que deben ser garantizados.

En 2019 se creó por parte de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la Ciudad de México, un Protocolo para la Atención Humanitaria de Emergencia a Personas Migrantes y/o Sujetas de Protección Internacional, considerada como una herramienta para los gobiernos locales para garantizar derechos de las personas en contextos de movilidad.

En 2017, el Gobierno de Ciudad de México declaró a la ciudad "ciudad santuario":

¿Qué medidas importantes se han adoptado para cumplir el compromiso de santuario?

Si bien, ocurrió esta declaración, en la práctica no se identificaron cambios sustanciales y en la práctica se identificó mayor protección a las personas migrantes retornadas, no tanto a las personas en movilidad extranjeras.

¿Los esfuerzos de asistencia y ayuda han sido para todos los migrantes precarios y refugiados o principalmente para los migrantes mexicanos retornados?

En el marco de la declaración si se vieron mayores esfuerzos para las personas mexicanas retornadas, presupuesto, programas de información por ejemplo en los principales puntos de ingreso o por el que son retornadas las personas (aeropuertos, terminales de autobuses) también algunos apoyos para acompañar el proceso de re-integración y consecución de documentos de identidad.

¿Cuáles son los principales problemas a los que se enfrenta el Gobierno del Distrito Federal a la hora de asistir y proteger a los migrantes?

- Con el cambio de gobierno en el año 2018 que implicó un cambio de partido político, además de la nueva constitución de 2017, cambiando de Distrito Federal a Ciudad de México, los retos han sido los siguientes:

- Hasta ahora no ha habido una armonización legislativa entre la Constitución Política de la Ciudad de México y la Ley de Interculturalidad, Atención a Migrantes y Movilidad Humana del Distrito Federal, lo que en términos operativos dificulta la continuidad de los trabajos.
- A partir del nuevo gobierno en 2018, se decidió desaparecer la Secretaría de Desarrollo Rural y Equidad en las Comunidades (SEDEREC) quien estaba a cargo de la implementación de la Ley de Interculturalidad.
- Se crea una coordinación de migrantes, dentro de una nueva secretaría llamada SIBISO (Secretaría de Bienestar Social), que se encarga de implementar todos los programas sociales dirigidos a las poblaciones prioritarias, teniendo un gran impacto en los recursos humanos y económicos para la implementación de los programas que benefician a las personas.
- Aunque las personas en movilidad se considera un grupo prioritario, en la agenda política de la ciudad no ha sido prioridad, solo en algunos momentos coyunturales como cuando ha habido la presencia de grupos masivos de personas, por ejemplo, en las caravanas 2018, 2019, 2021 y ahora con el aumento de personas solicitantes del reconocimiento de la condición de refugiados en 2023.

¿Ha habido un esfuerzo adicional para proteger a las mujeres migrantes?

No considero que haya un esfuerzo adicional, los programas sociales que están dirigidos a personas en contextos de movilidad son dirigidos al grupo en general, quizá algún programa social que tiene alguna secretaría si es dirigido a mujeres se trata de identificar que puedan acceder las mujeres migrantes.

¿Cuáles cree que deberían ser los próximos pasos para proteger los derechos de los migrantes e incorporar las desigualdades de género en las políticas de santuario de la ciudad?

La armonización de la Ley de Interculturalidad con la Constitución Política, quizá en esa armonización recordar que se consideró a la ciudad como santuario pero que fuera una aplicación más amplia, es decir más allá de las personas retornadas.

En la ley se establece que debe existir una Comisión de Interculturalidad, en la que participan la gran mayoría de las secretarías y dependencias del gobierno de la ciudad, en la que se busca implementar las políticas y programas públicos, esta comisión sesionó antes de 2018 y posteriormente en 2021 y no ha vuelto a hacerlo, que también al desaparecer la SEDEREC y haber cambiado el rol ahora desde esta nueva secretaría su impulso ha perdido fuerza, pero sería una buena plataforma para impulsar las políticas públicas.

Translation of Carolina Carreño Nigenda's Interview Responses

Could you briefly introduce yourself and your work?

Carolina Carreño Nigenda, a psychologist by training, I have been working on migration issues for almost 20 years. I worked at Sin Fronteras, the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City and I am currently a project officer for the International Coalition Against Detention.

Would you say that Mexico City has implemented policies that seek to live up to the "Cities of Solidarity" component of the Mexico Action Plan?

Mexico City has certainly promoted some actions in favor of migrants, in 2011 with the enactment of the Law on Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility, which is undoubtedly a cutting-edge law that in addition to recognizing the rights of people in mobility, considering applicants for recognition of refugee status, migrants in transit, refugees, returning migrants, also provides guidance on public policies to be implemented for the protection and guarantee of rights. In 2017, a Political Constitution of Mexico City was enacted, which includes people in contexts of mobility as a priority group of attention and also points out the main rights that must be guaranteed. In 2019, the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City created a Protocol for Emergency Humanitarian Attention to Migrants and/or Persons Subject to International Protection, considered as a tool for local governments to guarantee the rights of persons in contexts of mobility.

In 2017, the Government of Mexico City declared the city a "sanctuary city": What significant steps have been taken to fulfill the sanctuary commitment?

Although, this declaration occurred, in practice no substantial changes were identified and in practice more protection was identified for returned migrants, not so much for foreign people in mobility.

Have the assistance and aid efforts been for all precarious migrants and refugees or mainly for returned Mexican migrants?

Within the framework of the declaration, greater efforts were seen for Mexican returnees, budget, information programs for example at the main points of entry or through which people are returned (airports, bus terminals) also some support to accompany the process of re-integration and obtaining identity documents.

What are the main challenges faced by the Federal District Government in assisting and protecting migrants?

With the change of government in 2018 that implied a change of political party, in addition to the new constitution of 2017, changing from Federal District to Mexico City, the challenges have been the following:

- Until now, there has been no legislative harmonization between the Political Constitution of Mexico City and the Law of Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility of the Federal District, which in operational terms makes it difficult to continue the work.
- Starting with the new government in 2018, it was decided to disappear the Secretariat of Rural Development and Equity in Communities (SEDEREC) who was in charge of the implementation of the Interculturality Law.
- A coordination of migrants is created, within a new secretariat called SIBISO (Secretariat of Social Welfare), which is in charge of implementing all social programs aimed at priority populations, having a great impact on human and economic resources for the implementation of programs that benefit people.
- Although people in mobility is considered a priority group, in the political agenda of the city it has not been a priority, only in some conjunctural moments such as when there has been the presence of massive groups of people, for example, in the caravans 2018, 2019, 2021 and now with the increase of people requesting the recognition of refugee status in 2023.

Has there been an additional effort to protect migrant women?

I do not consider that there has been an additional effort, the social programs that are aimed at people in mobility contexts are aimed at the group in general, perhaps some social program that some secretariat has if it is aimed at women, it is about identifying that migrant women can have access.

What do you think should be the next steps to protect migrants' rights and incorporate gender inequalities in the city's sanctuary policies?

The harmonization of the Interculturality Law with the Political Constitution, perhaps in that harmonization remember that the city was considered a sanctuary but that it should be a broader application, that is, beyond returnees.

In the law it is established that there must be an Interculturality Commission, in which the great majority of the secretariats and dependencies of the city government participate, in which they seek to implement public policies and programs, this commission met before 2018 and later in 2021 and has not done so again, which also with the disappearance of the SEDEREC and having changed the role now from this new secretariat its momentum has lost strength, but it would be a good platform to promote public policies.

POLICY OVERVIEW

REGARDING THE PROTECTION OF MIGRANTS

The Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America

2004

General Law on Women's Right to a Life Free of Violence

2007

General Law on Population

2008 (Reforms to 1974 Policy)

Migratory Act

2011

Political Constitution of Mexico City

2017

Law on Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility

2011 (Mexico City)

Sanctuary City Declaration

2017 (Mexico City)

Change of Government

2018

National Guard Law

2019.

Protocol for Emergency Humanitarian Attention to Migrants and/or Persons Subject to International Protection

2019 (Mexico City)