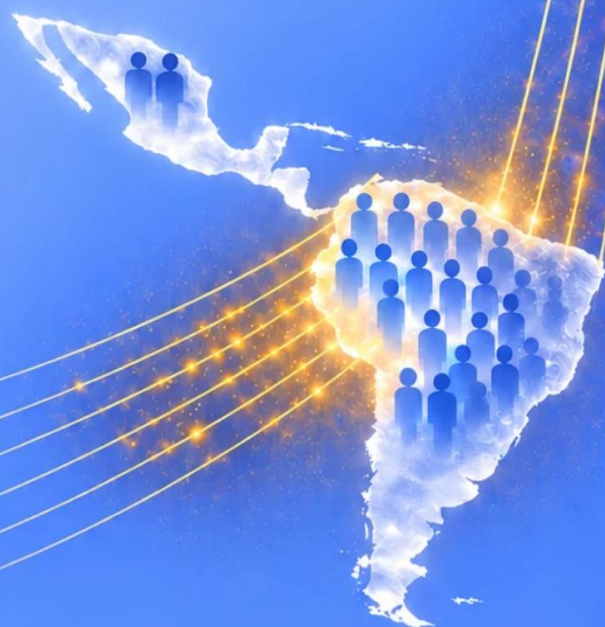


Handbook of Best Practices

Towards the **socio-economic
inclusion of migrants** and their
integration into the **social
security system**



CENTRAL AMERICAN SUBREGION

Handbook of best practices: towards the socio-economic inclusion of migrants and their integration into the social security system

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FOREWORD

The Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), the Inter-American Conference on Social Security (CISS) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) present the *Handbook of best practices: towards the socio-economic inclusion of migrants and their integration into the social security system* as part of a sustained effort to analyse the social, economic and humanitarian implications of migration flows in the contemporary regional context, as well as the emerging challenges posed by the effective integration of migrants into social protection systems.

This first edition features contributions from experts from various social security institutions across the region, such as the Regional Network of Civil Society Organisations for Migration (RROCM), the Independent Monitoring Group of El Salvador (GEMIES), the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS), the Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI) of Mexico, the State Distance University (UNED) of Costa Rica, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS) and the National Institute of Migration (INAMI) of Mexico, in line with their commitment to promoting cooperation, integration and sustainable development in the region, fostering spaces for dialogue, technical analysis, consultation and the promotion of public policies that enable a comprehensive approach to the links between human mobility, productive development, social inclusion and institutional strengthening.

This approach is fully aligned with the commitments made in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as with the principles and objectives of the [*Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*](#) (GCM, 2018), alongside the forthcoming “[International Migration Review Forum \(IMRF\)](#)”.¹

In this vein, for our institutions, promoting a holistic view of human mobility is a fundamental aspect that can play a positive role in the

¹ The *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2018, through *Resolution A/RES/73/195*. It is the first intergovernmental agreement to address all dimensions of international migration in a holistic manner across its 23 objectives. Its follow-up mechanism provides for the quadrennial convening of the intergovernmental “Global Migration Review Forum (GMRF)”. The second GMRF will take place from 5 to 8 May 2026 at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

development of our societies, for both migrants and host communities. It is for this reason that this Handbook of Best Practices forms part of a sustained effort to analyse the implications of human mobility on the international stage, as well as the emerging challenges posed by social security in the current context, with the aim of contributing to the regional debate through a rigorous analysis of the contribution of migrants to sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Human mobility is one of the most dynamic and complex phenomena facing Latin America and the Caribbean in the 21st century. Migration flows reflect profound economic, social, environmental and political transformations that have a direct impact on our region's development trajectories. In this context, migration should not be understood solely as a management challenge, but as a structural component of regional integration and a strategic opportunity to move towards more inclusive, sustainable and resilient development.

Taking an evidence-based and rights-based approach, the document highlights the role of migration as a driving force for economic growth, the development of human capital, innovation and social cohesion, while identifying the main public policy challenges associated with the management of human mobility and the integration of migrants into the social security system.

Furthermore, this report highlights the importance of strengthening migration governance and regional cooperation as fundamental pillars for maximising the benefits of migration and mitigating its risks. Aligning migration policies with agendas on employment, social protection, productive development, gender equality and climate action is essential for developing comprehensive responses that address the multidimensional nature of human mobility.

At SELA, we reaffirm our commitment to continuing to promote political dialogue, technical cooperation and the generation of knowledge aimed at formulating public policies that strengthen regional integration and contribute to the achievement of the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. The aim is to make better use of the opportunities presented by cooperation among countries of origin, destination and transit, with a view to positively impacting the development opportunities offered by human mobility, understood from a holistic perspective that encompasses socio-economic development processes.

In this context, we reaffirm our role as a forum for regional consultation and coordination, promoting political dialogue, the exchange of best practices, and the formulation of proposals that strengthen coherence among migration, environmental and sustainable development policies. Through intraregional cooperation, SELA will continue working to promote comprehensive approaches that recognise human mobility as a structural component of development and as a priority area for collective action in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We trust that this publication will prove a useful resource for governments, regional and international organisations, the academic sector and civil society, and that it will contribute to a broader and more strategic understanding of the role of migration in the development of our region.

Finally, we wish to reiterate our deep gratitude to the institutions, experts and stakeholders who have contributed to the preparation of this report, as well as to SELA's Member States for their ongoing support for initiatives aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and building a more integrated, inclusive and sustainable Latin America and the Caribbean.

Ambassador Lesly David
Permanent Secretary
Latin American and Caribbean Economic System
(SELA)



The contribution of migrants to sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean: an integration strategy

Gustavo Herrera Caballero

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International migration has now taken centre stage in the political debate. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, all countries in our region are part of migration cycles, whether as countries of origin, destination, return or transit. In this sense, migration becomes a cross-cutting issue in the 2030 Agenda that relates to the impact on the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) in general.

Human mobility is one of the most significant structural trends in Latin America and the Caribbean today. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the region has experienced a sustained increase in intra-regional and extra-regional migration flows, driven by economic, social, environmental and political factors. This phenomenon is set against a backdrop of growing development disparities, the impacts of climate change and transformations in labour markets.

From an idealistic perspective, human mobility should promote the circulation of knowledge and the expansion and diversification of professional skills and experience, thereby helping strengthen regional human capital. Furthermore, effective integration into the labour market would allow for a more efficient utilisation of the migrant population's skills, with positive impacts on productivity, innovation and knowledge transfer. However, the reality is quite different.

In this context, migration must be addressed not only as a management challenge, but also as a strategic driver of sustainable development, in line with the United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (which explicitly recognises the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and economic and social development). In particular, Target 10.7 (UN, 2015) of the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) calls on states to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies,”² highlighting the structural dimension of human mobility in development.

² In its *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the UN recognises the contribution of migrants to inclusive development, setting out in SDG Target 10.7 a commitment to

In social and cultural terms, migration contributes to diversity, intercultural exchange and the strengthening of the social fabric. Promoting policies of inclusion and non-discrimination is essential for building more cohesive societies and for preventing exclusion, xenophobia and social fragmentation.

As argued in the [*Migration Data Portal*³\(IOM, 2017\)](#), the central reference to migration in the SDGs appears in the aforementioned Target 10.7, which forms part of Goal 10 (UN, 2015) : “Reduce inequality within and among countries.” Other targets are also directly linked to migration issues, including labour migration (8.7 and 8.8), the mobility of international students (4.b), human trafficking (5.2, 8.7 and 16.2), remittances (10.c), and migration data, among others.

In this regard, we can confirm that the contribution of migrants is manifested through entrepreneurship, remittances, tax contributions, the labour market, demographic trends, and even through culture; this raises analytical challenges in public policy aimed at achieving greater practical and symbolic recognition of these contributions.

Economic and productive contributions of the migrant population

At present, the economic contribution of migrants is one of the most evident and widely studied aspects, given its direct impact on the revitalisation of labour markets, the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the diversification of production, and the generation of revenue through taxes and remittances. Migrants play a crucial role in the labour market, particularly in sectors where there is a shortage of local labour.

Migrants make a significant contribution to the economic vitality of their countries of origin, transit and destination. Their participation in labour markets helps achieve SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth), particularly in terms of expanding productive employment, formalising employment and ensuring the sustainability of labour-intensive sectors.

facilitate safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration through appropriate migration policies.

³ A single-point portal providing access to comprehensive and reliable migration statistics, managed by the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) of the *International Organisation for Migration (IOM)*.

In many cases, migrants take up jobs in the informal economy in sectors such as construction, agriculture and basic services. Their presence not only contributes to filling vacancies but also boosts productivity and drives the local economy. In contrast, their participation in the labour market acts as a complement to the local workforce, thereby helping sustain economic activity and reducing structural unemployment.

In the same vein, migrants promote the diversification of the local economy by setting up their own businesses in a range of sectors, including the informal sector, thereby increasing the supply of goods and services and creating jobs, boosting value chains and enriching the economic culture.

Furthermore, international remittances represent a significant source of foreign income for many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, contributing to the SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities). According to data from the World Bank (2023), remittances have shown high resilience in times of crisis, serving as a key mechanism for income protection for millions of households.

However, there are a number of challenges that limit migrants' economic potential and prevent them from entering the formal sector, thereby restricting their full contribution to the formal economy; in short, xenophobia and prevailing negative perceptions affect the sustainability of their economic activities.

In this regard, it is a priority to strengthen the financial inclusion of migrants and their families, in line with SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals), by providing access to formal financial services, reducing remittance costs and promoting instruments to channel these remittance flows into productive activities.

Social dimension, human capital and social cohesion

Migration also contributes to strengthening human capital and the exchange of knowledge, in line with SDG 4 (Quality education) and SDG 5 (Gender equality), particularly when policies are promoted that recognise skills, certify qualifications and ensure equitable access to education and training opportunities.

The effective social integration of migrants is an essential component of achieving SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), insofar as it

contributes to reducing urban segregation, ensuring access to adequate housing and providing inclusive basic services.

In this regard, the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* (UN, 2018) sets out specific commitments to promote social inclusion, combat xenophobia and strengthen social cohesion, recognising migration as a multidimensional phenomenon that requires comprehensive, human rights-based responses.

Migration governance, regional cooperation and institutional frameworks

Strengthening migration governance is key to maximising the contribution of migration to sustainable development and is in line with SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), which, in turn, promotes the strengthening of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

At regional level, mechanisms for dialogue and consultation, such as the Regional Conference on Migration (CRM), the South American Conference on Migration (CSM) and other subregional forums, have contributed to the harmonisation of approaches, the exchange of best practices and capacity-building for the comprehensive management of migration flows.

In this context, the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) can play a strategic role in linking migration, economic integration, productive development and regional cooperation, by fostering synergies among migration policies, competitiveness agendas, social inclusion and the fulfilment of the commitments of the *2030 Agenda*.

Cross-cutting approaches: gender, children and climate change

Migration must be addressed through a comprehensive and cross-cutting approach that integrates, in a coordinated manner, gender perspective, the protection of children and adolescents, and the growing impact of environmental and climatic factors on the dynamics of human mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean. These dimensions are aligned with the commitments made by the region's states under the *2030 Agenda*, particularly with regard to SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 13

(Climate action), as well as with the principles and priorities set out in the [*Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*⁴\(UNISDR, 2015\)](#).

In this context, recognising the displacement associated with extreme weather events and environmental degradation requires strengthening the link between migration policies and national and regional strategies for climate adaptation and resilience. Integrating human mobility into sustainable development planning and disaster risk management frameworks is a fundamental step towards coordinated, solidarity-based and sustainable responses, in line with existing multilateral commitments and the need to consolidate regional migration governance based on cooperation and shared responsibility.

General remarks

Migration is a structural component of sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean. When managed effectively, within the framework of the *2030 Agenda*, the *Global Compact for Migration* and regional cooperation processes, it can transform human mobility into a driving force for inclusive growth, the reduction of inequalities and institutional strengthening.

Moving towards evidence-based integration policies, with a rights-based approach and regional coordination, will enable us to maximise the contribution of migrants as key actors in development, while simultaneously strengthening regional integration processes and ensuring compliance with the multilateral commitments undertaken by the region's states.

Regional and international evidence confirms that the effective integration of migrants into labour markets, social protection systems and financial inclusion frameworks has a positive impact in terms of economic growth, productivity, fiscal sustainability and social cohesion. Furthermore, strengthening policies aimed at maximising the impact of remittances through financial inclusion mechanisms, reducing transfer costs and channelling funds towards productive investments represents a concrete opportunity to enhance their contribution to territorial development, poverty reduction and household resilience.

⁴ The *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030*, adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held from 14 to 18 March 2015 in Sendai, Japan, sets out four priorities for action: understanding disaster risk; strengthening governance; investing in resilience; and enhancing preparedness for response. It expressly recognises the vulnerability of migrants and the role they play in disaster risk reduction.

From an institutional perspective, strengthening migration governance is emerging as a critical factor in transforming human mobility into an asset for sustainable development. The harmonisation of regulatory frameworks, the systematic exchange of information, the building of technical capacity, and the strengthening of inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms are essential elements for ensuring the orderly, safe and regular management of migration flows.

At the regional level, it is a priority to deepen cooperation and policy coordination among States, recognising the transnational nature of human mobility. Regional consultation mechanisms provide a strategic platform for moving towards common approaches, promoting minimum protection standards, facilitating the portability of rights, and strengthening coherence among migration, labour, social and productive development policies. In this regard, SELA is in a privileged position to contribute to the coordination of agendas across migration, economic integration and sustainable development, promoting a comprehensive approach that reinforces both regional competitiveness and social inclusion.

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Perspectives of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM/UN Migration) on the impact of social security and other rights on migrants' integration process in Mexico

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Talking about migration means talking about different worlds that are interconnected through people who move for a variety of reasons. The causes of migration are very diverse and include persecution or violence, environmental disasters and family reunification, amongst others. However, according to the *International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2024)*,⁵ the main reason why people move around the world is the search for better job opportunities, which, in turn, is closely linked to the pursuit of personal development and better access to resources and services.

In Mexico, a country of origin, transit, destination and return, these movements present both challenges and opportunities. This article addresses the following topics: how the inclusion of migrants can contribute to economic growth and sustainable development; the challenges they face in accessing social security; the specific obstacles faced by migrant women; and the protection of migrant children. It also makes a number of recommendations aimed at optimising coordination among different levels of government, the private sector, civil society organisations and other relevant actors in the effective socio-economic integration of migrants.

How can the inclusion of migrants contribute to economic growth and sustainable development?

The IOM states that orderly migration carried out under humane conditions brings benefits to both migrants and the societies of origin and destination (*IOM, n.d.*). In Mexico, these benefits are evident in the following ways:

⁵ The [*Global estimates on international migrant workers: international migrants in the labour force*](#), now in its fourth edition with 2022 as the reference year, is the world's leading statistical source on labour migration and a key tool for guiding evidence-based migration policies.

- 1) **Contribution to the labour market.** By 2025, migrants will be working in highly developed countries in essential sectors where there is a shortage of local labour, whether in agriculture, services, construction or other sectors. The employment of migrants fills gaps in productivity, reduces labour costs for certain sectors and promotes competitiveness. In this regard, IOM promotes ethical recruitment so that labour migration benefits all stakeholders and works systematically with public and private sector actors to strengthen such integration (*IOM, n.d.*).
- 2) **Innovation, entrepreneurship and human capital.** Migrants do not merely work as employees; they also set up their own businesses. In Mexico, certain initiatives—such as those promoted by the IOM with migrant women—focus on seed capital funds, which aim to transform informal businesses into formal ones, as well as to inform the target population about the opportunities available to them (*IOM, 2023*).⁶ The formalisation of businesses adds value not only in economic terms, by reducing the gap between supply and demand and creating new jobs, but also by fostering social and cultural cohesion in host societies through the inclusion of diverse skills, new networks and ideas, which in turn generates connections and even opportunities with other countries.
- 3) **Remittances and the development of communities of origin and destination.** As mentioned earlier, migration patterns in Mexico are diverse and include flows of returning migrants and those in transit. Remittances therefore play a key role in local development, health, education and housing. Even in the case of internal migration, migrants send money back to their places of origin, purchase services, generate demand, and so on.

⁶ The ["Women Entrepreneurs Without Borders"](#) campaign, a joint initiative aimed at formalising the businesses of migrant women in Mexico.

- 4) **Social cohesion and institutional strengthening.** When migrants are included, social tensions, discrimination and xenophobia are reduced, and integration is promoted. The IOM works to raise awareness among the public and private sectors, as well as civil society, of the need to respect the labour rights of migrants, which also strengthens the institutions that safeguard their rights.
- 5) **Sustainability and comprehensive development.** The IOM's health and education programme maintains that only when migrants enjoy physical, mental and social well-being will they be able to contribute fully to the sustainable development of both host and home societies. Furthermore, institutionally well-managed migration is beneficial to all stakeholders and even enables the effects of climate change, disasters and forced displacement to be addressed, which has direct implications for sustainability.

It can therefore be said that the inclusion of migrants in host communities strengthens human capital, boosts local economies, improves social equity and contributes to the achievement of the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), including those relating to decent work, quality education, health and reduced inequalities. The key, according to the IOM, is that this inclusion should be orderly, safe, regular and based on human rights.

Challenges faced by migrants in accessing social security systems in their destination countries, and successful policies and practices with the potential to replicate

Key challenges:

- 1. Irregular or unrecognised immigration status.** Many migrants lack immigration permits and formal documents to reside, work or prove their identity, which is the primary reason for being unable to access social benefits, contributory health insurance or formal social security. In Mexico, as in other countries, a lack of documents or restrictions on obtaining them are the main barrier to accessing further resources.
- 2. Lack of awareness of their rights and complicated procedures.** This hinders the integration and socio-economic independence of migrants, as does a lack of awareness of the rights they are entitled to, the benefits available to them, and the requirements they must meet. Added to this are complex bureaucratic procedures, minimum residence requirements, proof of registration within the country, documents in an incomprehensible language or using unfamiliar terminology, as well as the requirement to have local references for various procedures and processes.
- 3. Legal or regulatory exclusion.** In some countries, the law explicitly excludes migrants without regular status from certain social benefits. In other cases, although the law does provide for them, administrative practices exclude them.
- 4. Discrimination and stigmatisation.** This applies both to social services staff and to the general public. Migrants may face rejection or be treated differently.
- 5. Costs, infrastructure and geographical access.** Even if a migrant is entitled to these services, they may not be available in their region or nearby; there may be associated costs (transport, medication, fees), as well as language or cultural barriers.
- 6. Interruption in contribution history.** In the case of contribution-based social security, migrants may not have accumulated sufficient periods of contribution in the host

country, or there may be difficulties in recognising contributions made in other countries.

Successful practices and policies in Mexico and elsewhere

The IOM, in collaboration with governments, civil society and other organisations, has launched a number of initiatives and programmes aimed at reducing these barriers, such as:

1. **Labour migration and inclusion.** The IOM works with various government bodies to strengthen ethical recruitment processes that provide formal employment opportunities for migrants, thereby increasing their chances of joining the formal social security system.
2. **Partnerships with the private sector.** Cooperation between the IOM and various business chambers to promote the inclusion of migrants in the labour market helps raise awareness within the private sector, as well as fostering best practices that include social benefits and guarantee decent work, sustainability and occupational safety (*IOM, 2023*).
3. **Programmes for migrant women.** Economic empowerment initiatives that enable migrant women to access formal enterprises or micro-businesses can facilitate access to social security for the women entrepreneurs themselves and, eventually, for those who employ or work with them.
4. **Federal health and education programmes without discrimination on the basis of immigration status.** In Mexico, the IOM promotes the right of migrants, regardless of their immigration status, to access health services (including mental health care) and education. This principle is reflected in specific programmes and collaborations with federal, state and local stakeholders, and is internationally recognised as a sound human rights-based approach (*IOM, n.d.*).⁷
5. **Improvements to shelter infrastructure and specialist services.** Projects funded by other countries, in collaboration with the IOM, have provided a means of improving shelters and other civil society organisations that serve migrants in Mexico.

⁷ [Health and education](#) is the IOM's institutional section in Mexico, which documents its work to ensure access to health services (including mental health and psychosocial support) and education for migrants, regardless of their immigration status, from a human rights and non-discrimination perspective.

This enhances the capacity to provide adequate basic services, including healthcare, education and information (*SRE, 2020*).⁸

6. **Return and reintegration programmes.** For repatriated migrants, the IOM supports the National Institute of Migration (INM) by providing assistance at airports (transport, guidance, basic services) and supporting their economic and social reintegration. Although this does not always involve formal social security, efforts are made to facilitate access to national social support schemes (*IOM, 2014*).
7. **National legal policies on inclusion.** In Mexico, legislation allows certain health authorities to treat medical emergencies regardless of immigration status. Furthermore, the Mexican constitution recognises the right to health, and there are federal and state policies that reinforce this. Although the details of implementation vary, the IOM highlights the importance of identifying administrative barriers to the provision of healthcare for people on the move, which implies full recognition of their rights.
8. **Promote employment placement schemes.** Through the Employment Placement Scheme (MECAL), the IOM strengthens processes to connect migrants with employers, formalise working conditions and promote formal employment benefits. It also seeks to prevent fraud and promote the human and labour rights of migrants.
9. **Orderly labour mobility.** As part of one of its three institutional priorities under the 2024–2028 strategy, the IOM promotes regular channels for labour migration in order to reduce vulnerability and enhance migrants' ability to access rights such as pensions, contributory social security and health insurance, among others.

Outstanding challenges:

1. In many regions of Mexico, programmes do not achieve high levels of coverage, particularly for people without clear immigration status, indigenous migrants, and remote or transient communities.

⁸ The [*Project for strengthening the capacity of shelters and other facilities on Mexico's southern border*](#) (IOM, 2020) is an example of international cooperation in this field, funded by the Government of Japan with US\$ 1.9 million, which enabled improvements to the infrastructure of shelters and services for migrants in southern Mexico between 2020 and 2022.

2. Informal employment is another key barrier: many migrants can only find informal jobs with no access to benefits, social security, opportunities or services.
3. Legal loopholes and discrepancies persist between what the law permits and what is implemented locally.
4. There are limited resources, both from the government and from organisations, to implement, monitor and scale up best practices in migration governance.

Considering the promotion of economic autonomy for migrant women and the prevention of gender-based violence

Migrant women face a double vulnerability: due to their migrant status and their gender. The IOM has identified numerous specific barriers and has promoted policies and practices to overcome them, such as the following:

1. **Multiple discrimination.** Migrant women may face discrimination on the grounds of their migrant status, their gender, their indigenous or Afro-Mexican heritage, their sexual orientation, gender identity, language, etc. This can manifest itself in the form of: unequal access to employment, exclusion from certain sectors, lower pay, workplace harassment and gender-based violence.
2. **Violence along migration routes and structural violence.** Many migrant women are exposed to physical violence in general, sexual assault, exploitation and human trafficking whilst in transit. Furthermore, once in their destination country, they may face domestic violence, gender-based violence, institutional discrimination and abuse by authorities and employers.
3. **Legal, administrative and immigration status barriers.** Without valid documents, they cannot fully access formal employment, social security services or welfare programmes. They may also face restrictions when it comes to opening bank accounts, formally setting up businesses, or obtaining the necessary licences or permits on their own, despite often being the breadwinners of their families.

4. **Care responsibilities and family obligations.** Many migrant women travel with children and teenagers or have to take on care responsibilities (for children or the elderly), which limits their ability to work long hours, travel, or take on jobs that are far away or in the informal sector.
5. **The gap in formal entrepreneurship.** Although many migrant women start businesses, these tend to be informal, small-scale ventures with limited growth potential and no access to credit, formal financing or support networks. In Mexico, the IOM has noted that a high percentage of women-led businesses operate in the informal sector (UN Mexico, 2023).
6. **Limited access to social and health services tailored to their needs.** Services related to sexual and reproductive health, and mental health. In general, services for the prevention and care of gender-based violence are often unavailable or inaccessible (due to location, cost, discrimination, language or lack of awareness). Social services may fail to take their migration context into account or lack a gender perspective that addresses their specific needs.
7. **Lack of support networks.** Migrant women often face social isolation, a lack of information, and linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as a lack of training or mentoring opportunities to improve their skills or learn about the legal system and their rights. This is due to their role as carers or to the fact that they migrate as dependants without access to the formal labour market or recognition of their role in migration processes.

Successful policies and practices in Mexico

1. **Intergovernmental partnerships.** Through these partnerships, programmes are promoted to support the economic empowerment of migrant women in Mexico, and support is provided for formal business ventures, seed capital and the dissemination of clear information on rights. This includes providing opportunities for women to lead economic initiatives on a more regular basis.
2. **Awareness-raising and institutional capacity-building programmes.** These programmes are not only aimed at migrant women, but also at authorities, civil servants and public service

staff in general, to enable them to identify gender-based barriers, discriminatory practices and situations of violence, and to address them effectively. For example, by incorporating a gender perspective into health services and through the training of institutional staff.

3. **Conscientious businesses and the private sector.** The partnership between the IOM and business chambers is key to promoting the labour market inclusion of migrants and also incorporating a gender perspective, which opens up market opportunities with a gender perspective and breaks glass ceilings for women in certain sectors.
4. **Promote the regulation and formalisation of businesses run by migrant women.** It is essential for migrant women workers to have access to formal registration, financing, seed capital, technical training and legal advice. If a business is formally registered, the migrant businesswoman can access benefits, hire staff legally, create jobs and contribute to the formal economy.
5. **Legal protection and support mechanisms for victims of violence.** Although many challenges remain, inter-agency collaboration must strengthen inter-agency coordination mechanisms to address cases of gender-based violence.
6. **Access to sexual and reproductive health services and psychosocial care.** The IOM works to ensure that migrant women have access to these services, including in emergency situations, mental health support, psychosocial care and risk prevention.

Proposals to strengthen these initiatives:

1. Labour and immigration laws must explicitly recognise the rights of migrant women, including work permits, recognition of their immigration status, access to social security and protection against violence.
2. Care services (childcare, care for dependants) should be tailored to the needs of migrant women, thereby enabling them to combine motherhood or caregiving with paid work.

3. Efforts should be made to increase public funding for training programmes, microcredit schemes and support for migrant women's businesses, and ensure that these programmes remove legal and administrative barriers to access.
4. It is necessary to strengthen mechanisms for reporting, protecting against and addressing gender-based violence, including safe routes, specialist centres, legal and psychological support, and counselling, etc.
5. Community awareness-raising to reduce stigma and gender discrimination, curb irregular migration, and build more inclusive communities that recognise and benefit from labour migration.

Ensuring access to healthcare for migrant children

Migrant children (girls, boys and adolescents) deserve special attention: their fundamental rights include the right to identity, education, healthcare and comprehensive protection. From the IOM's perspective, this requires proactive, cross-sectoral policies based on a human rights approach and non-discrimination.

Specific challenges:

1. Lack of identity documents: without identity documents, migrant children cannot enrol in schools or access certain health services, grants or educational support.
2. Discrimination, xenophobia, linguistic and cultural barriers: migrant indigenous children face cultural and linguistic discrimination; school curricula are not adapted to cultural diversity, and, in many cases, there is a lack of teachers trained to deal with both cultural and migratory diversity.
3. Trauma, interruptions to education, constant movement: in situations involving transit, return or displacement, migrant children may experience interruptions to their schooling, face difficulties in having their qualifications recognised, and encounter significant challenges in adapting to different curricula.
4. Unequal access to healthcare, including mental healthcare: migrant children may require medical care, vaccinations,

nutrition, psychological support, etc., yet provision of such services is very limited in shelters, transit centres and, more generally, in the emergency situations in which they frequently find themselves.

5. Vulnerability to exploitation and violence: migrant children face an exponentially higher risk of trafficking, labour exploitation and abuse, particularly when travelling unaccompanied. Their protection must address specific issues that are reviewed and assessed in line with the changing context of migration.
6. Psychosocial support and mental health: recognising the importance of psychological and emotional support and trauma care for migrant children. The IOM incorporates mental health and psychosocial support into its health interventions.
7. Coordination with child protection agencies: the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA), federal and state authorities, and international organisations are working to strengthen protection systems, care protocols, the detection of cases of abuse and exploitation, and the provision of specialist support.

Recommendations:

1. Establish clear legal frameworks to ensure that all migrant children and adolescents are effectively protected by their right to attend school, receive timely medical care and be protected against discrimination.
2. Ensure sufficient funding for programmes relating to educational mobility, scholarships, school transport, and materials adapted to different languages and cultures.
3. Strengthen teacher training on cultural and migration diversity to better support migrant students.
4. Establish mechanisms to track the educational and health situation of migrant children in order to monitor gaps, dropout rates, non-compliance and emerging vulnerabilities.
5. Ensure that healthcare services include vaccinations, nutrition, and the prevention of common diseases, as well as mental health support and care for trauma and violence in all its forms.

How can we ensure coordination between different levels of government and social actors?

IOM in Mexico operates on the basis of cooperation and coordination with all levels of government (federal, state and local), civil society, academia, the UN and other organisations. It also generates data and evidence to inform public policy, assessments and research, and to identify barriers, while ensuring that interventions across various sectors are properly monitored.

To name just a few, there are key principles and elements that should be included in comprehensive migration policies to ensure that the inclusion of migrants genuinely contributes to sustainable development, that barriers are overcome, and that migrant women and children can fully enjoy their rights, including:

1. A human rights and non-discrimination approach: all migrants, regardless of their immigration status, national origin, gender, or cultural or linguistic identity, must have access to basic services (healthcare, education, protection and employment).
2. Regularity, security and orderly migration: legal channels for labour migration, residence options, work permits, and regularisation of status to reduce vulnerability.
3. Effective labour inclusion: formal employment, a contract, a fair wage, access to social security and protection against labour exploitation.
4. Comprehensive interventions: physical and mental health, social services, education, protection against violence, psychosocial support, and reintegration programmes.
5. Access to documentation and identity: as a gateway to other rights.
6. Involvement of civil society, the private sector and international organisations: as key partners in the design, implementation, monitoring, funding and awareness-raising of these initiatives.
7. Intergovernmental and multi-level coordination: at federal, state and local levels, among government departments responsible for health, education, employment, security and social protection.

8. Data generation and use: monitoring impact, identifying the most vulnerable groups, measuring gaps and adjusting policies.
9. Cultural, linguistic and territorial appropriateness: recognition of cultural diversity, the rights of indigenous peoples, cultural relevance in services and geographical adaptation.

Some specific recommendations for Mexico:

1. Create and/or strengthen legal frameworks that explicitly recognise the right of migrants, regardless of their immigration status, to basic social benefits — for example, access to the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (ISSSTE) or state health schemes, with special enrolment mechanisms for migrants.
2. Promote legislative or regulatory reforms to ensure that formal employment of migrants automatically entitles them to social security, that employers fulfil their contribution obligations, and that there is no discrimination in working conditions.
3. Establish national immigration regularisation programmes that enable migrants in an irregular situation to access temporary work permits, social services -in particular healthcare- and education, while their applications for regularisation are being processed.
4. Expand and fund special education programmes for migrant children: grants, transport, recognition of prior learning, adapted school materials, intercultural schools and teacher training.
5. Ensure that health services, including mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and psychosocial support, are available to migrants without legal or administrative barriers, close to migration routes and at borders.
6. Promote entrepreneurship among migrant women through comprehensive programmes: seed capital, technical training, legal advice, access to markets and formal business registration.
7. Strengthen mechanisms for addressing and preventing gender-based violence among the migrant population, including

reporting channels, specialised medical, psychological and legal support, safe shelter and child protection.

8. With regard to children's issues, ensure rapid access to identity documents, strengthen child protection systems, protocols for unaccompanied children and adolescents, and coordination between shelters, social protection services, and education and health authorities.
9. Establish inter-institutional working groups on migration, health, education, employment and protection at state and municipal level, with the participation of civil society and the relevant international organisations, to ensure that national policies are implemented locally.
10. Improve employment placement mechanisms and coordination with the private sector to create decent work opportunities for migrants.
11. Maintain channels for international funding and cooperation to support interventions.

Conclusion

At the IOM, the leading intergovernmental organisation in the field of migration, we believe that migration presents an opportunity for economic growth, social innovation and sustainable development, provided it is managed in accordance with the principles of human rights, inclusion, equity and justice.

In Mexico, barriers (administrative, legal, cultural, discriminatory, related to immigration status and gender) persist, limiting many migrants' ability to fully enjoy their rights. However, significant progress has already been made that can serve as a solid foundation for replication: there are programmes and cross-sectoral partnerships to promote labour market inclusion and access to healthcare and education. Such programmes promote the economic autonomy of migrant women; appropriate care for migrant children; infrastructure improvements; and the strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation.

Strengthening an inclusive migration policy that contributes to sustainable development requires the commitment and coordination of

multiple stakeholders, adequate resources, and an approach that considers human rights, gender, children's rights and intersectionality; this, in turn, will demonstrate that safe, orderly and regular migration benefits us all.

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Social security for migrants: an overview of the measures implemented in Guatemala

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Summary

There are many challenges involved in addressing the complex realities of international migration. This issue is, once again, making headlines in Latin American countries and the United States. Developments in this area have economic, social and cultural implications stemming from migration flows and the forced return of migrants residing in the United States, under the threat of a judiciary-driven immigration policy. The analysis, within the framework of social security, focuses on strategies to address the significant rise in migration figures, the need to strengthen a labour market structure capable of integrating migrants in their countries of origin, and the recognition of the importance of migrants as part of the productive structure of both countries (sending and receiving countries).

The mechanisms put in place must cover the migrant population living abroad, migrants in transit and return migration, in the context of an economic, cultural and social security analysis. In Guatemala, the migration phenomenon has been addressed by identifying migrant population groups based on age, work experience, the status of their stated needs and the principles of the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)*; all within a comprehensive planning process that bridges the individual and the social spheres. To cover all aspects, the development of institutional programmes has been promoted to provide returnee groups with support for employment and entrepreneurship, access to education, social protection benefits in health and education, and assistance with basic living needs. These programmes include enrolment in the social security scheme for migrants living abroad and equal treatment in social security matters for foreigners living within the national territory.

Introduction

In 2025, international migration once again takes centre stage in media reports and on the agendas of Latin American governments, but this time not only from the perspective of receiving countries, but also in the discussions of the governments of sending countries. On this occasion, the concern stems from the migration policy of Donald Trump's administration during his second term, whose measures are expected to have a greater impact on the economies of Latin American countries, where remittances have become a significant component of national accounts. Although migration flows have grown steadily since they were first recorded in 1965, this time the issue is not about migration flows, but rather the forced return of established migrants.

Although the liberal rhetoric of capitalist countries, such as the United States, promoted the migration industry and led to a situation where, by 2020, the number of migrants rose to 281 million international migrants worldwide, equivalent to 3.6% of the global population (IOM, 2024, p. 19), and that over 80% of migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean are in the United States and Canada (IOM, 2024, p. 90), it is important to remember that the rise in migration is primarily driven by labour demand in destination countries; and although political discourse tends to focus on the climate of violence in countries of origin, the migration phenomenon is beneficial to both sides, which contradicts the severe controls imposed, for example, in the first half of 2025 in the United States.

According to the international migration data portal, there were 52.4 million international migrants in the United States by mid-2024 (UN DESA, 2025). Compared to a figure of 23.3 million international immigrants in the same country in 1990, there has been significant and steady growth, indicating that the phenomenon under analysis is not a temporary one but forms part of the country's labour structure. Migration can be measured by comparing it with the total population of the United States; in this regard, in 1990, migrants accounted for 9.2% of the population, and in 2024 this figure stood at 15.2%, indicating growth that outstrips the population increase in the United States.

In the case of Guatemalan migrants living abroad, the consular network recorded a total of 3,346,399 people, of whom 97.3% (3,256,047) were living in the United States in 2024 (Asociación El Observador, 2025, p. 11) and of this number, a total of 750,000 people were unauthorised immigrants (Baker & Warren, 2024, p. 5). Outside the United States, the

remaining Guatemalan migrants are spread across 47 countries in the Americas, Europe, Africa and Oceania.

How to tackle the challenges of migration

Given the data presented from a social security perspective, it is clear that the analysis of migration must focus on at least three key areas. The first must be geared towards ensuring social protection for Guatemalan workers living outside the country. This includes guaranteeing social security benefits within the legal framework that provides such protection to Guatemalan nationals. In order to support them abroad, 43 Guatemalan consulates have been opened, 25 of which are located in the US (MINEX, 2025). A major challenge for this population group is ensuring social security benefits in the face of family separation, that is, for migrants abroad and for their families in the country of origin.

The second aspect of the analysis concerns migrants in transit, who intend to settle abroad but lack the legal means to do so and therefore travel alone or in caravans towards their intended destination. This approach requires international cooperation to ensure the human rights of this population are protected as they pass through transit countries and reach their destination. The third aspect must address return migration, the main challenge of which is to reintegrate this population group into a labour market that was initially unable to retain them.

In this regard, between 2009 and 2024, some 1,194,532 Guatemalans were recorded as having travelled to North America but failing to reach their destination because they were deported from the US and Mexico; of this total, 1,053,316 adults and 141,216 children and adolescents have been deported. This information, published by the Department of Statistics and Archives of the Guatemalan Migration Institute, presents a table showing that, from 1 January to 31 December 2024, 508 flights carrying 56,525 returned adults entered the country. The report indicates 5,033 accompanied children and adolescents and 122 unaccompanied children and adolescents (IGM, 2025). This information highlights the need to implement measures targeting three distinct population groups: children, adolescents and adults.

As part of the measures aimed at addressing the aforementioned challenges, the Guatemalan Migration Institute conducted a voluntary survey of returnees who had previously lived in the United States, finding that 62.45% worked in the construction industry, 14.73% as cooks,

10.65% in agriculture, 7.19% in gardening, and 4.97% in house painting (MINEX, 2025). Based on the statistics and qualitative data collected, the Government of Guatemala developed a plan to reintegrate returning migrants into employment, education and entrepreneurship opportunities. The *Return Home Plan: Economic and Employment Strategies* was implemented, following the principles of the *Global Compact on Migration*, in conjunction with the *Inter-institutional Protocol on the Reception and Care of Guatemalans Returning by Air*, published in 2021, and the *National Migration Policy*, presented in 2023.

Guatemala's plan involves connecting every returnee with a decent job or establishing institutional mechanisms to help them develop their business ideas, which includes providing training to certify their technical and academic skills, as well as advice on business management. The spirit of mediation and referral that stems from this plan is to facilitate access for returning Guatemalan migrants to programmes and services in education, health, training and technical certification, as well as study grants, entrepreneurship programmes, micro, small and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) programmes and loans. In some cases, this includes housing, psychosocial and psychological support, food and nutrition, legal advice, the identification of potential victims of human trafficking, assistance with obtaining identification documents, access to employment opportunities, guidance on accessing labour mobility programmes, and access to social programmes, among others.

In order to address a potential problem of mass deportations, the remit of the National Coordination Agency for Disaster Reduction (CONRED) has been extended to include CONRED-Migrant. This allows for the activation of the Emergency Operations Centre and the Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Aid and Assistance, bodies capable of providing temporary shelter and humanitarian, psychological and psychosocial care in the event of potential emotional crises. The strategy includes transport to their place of origin, information on educational and/or skills certification programmes created by the Ministry of Education and the Guatemalan Technical Institute for Training and Productivity (MINEDUC/INTECAP).

Returning migrants who undergo a social work interview will be eligible for a grant towards building a new home or repairing an existing one, a grant for the purchase of land, access to the *My First Job* grant, or the Ministry of Labour's (MINTRAB) job placement service to secure temporary work abroad with official authorisation. They will also have access to a financial literacy training programme.

When addressing the issue of access to social security for foreign migrants within the country, it is important to note that Article 24 of the *Guatemalan Migration Code*, Decree 44-2016 of the Congress of the Republic, stipulates that migrant workers and their eligible family members are entitled to the services and benefits provided by the Guatemalan Social Security Institute. To this end, they must be registered and must pay contributions in accordance with the regulations issued by the Institute. This requirement is not difficult to meet when Guatemala acts as the host country, as the Guatemalan social security system allows workers to make contributions regardless of their immigration status, provided they are working within the country. Currently, the social security system has sought to provide coverage for micro-enterprises by approving Agreement No. 1529, the *Regulations on Registration in the Social Security Scheme*, a legal mechanism that allows the social security system to protect these enterprises from a single employee onwards, which includes social security benefits on an equal footing for the employer.

The legal framework for providing social protection benefits to migrant workers living in Guatemala is based on the provisions of Article 43 of the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families*. This article stipulates: “Migrant workers shall enjoy equal treatment with nationals of the State of employment in relation to access to social and health services, provided that the requirements for participation in the relevant schemes have been met.” However, the recognition of the human right to social security is fully consistent with the provisions of Article 22 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*; Articles 9 and 10 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and Articles 1 and 9 of the *Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, the *Protocol of San Salvador*.

This recognition in the approach to migrant issues is consistent with the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* and the *International Labour Organisation Convention No. 97*; all of which have been incorporated into Guatemalan law. In accordance with international legal practice, they were interpreted in accordance with Article 46 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala* and Article 3 of the *Law on Amparo, Personal Appearance and Constitutionality*.

Now, extending social security coverage to Guatemalan population groups not covered by the social security system in Guatemala because they reside abroad is a key objective for the promotion of social protection, and therefore, the creation of a programme for migrants living in another country and their families was an important step and a key objective of the Guatemalan Social Security Institute's *Institutional Strategic Plan 2023–2027*. To expand coverage to this population group and ensure that their immediate families residing in Guatemala also benefit, the Guatemalan Social Security Institute's Board of Directors approved Resolution No. 1543, the *Regulations for Enrolment in the Social Security Scheme for Guatemalan Migrants Abroad*.

The protection provided to migrants living outside the country focused primarily on families who lack access to healthcare services and financial security within the country, and on offering them—given their status as migrants, which often prevents them from contributing to a pension scheme—the guarantee of a pension in their old age. In this case, Guatemalan migrants abroad are guaranteed a monthly lifetime old-age pension with a replacement rate of 60%, a monthly survivor's pension in the event of the migrant's death, calculated at 50% of the average monthly social security income, on which the contribution is calculated, and a death benefit to be paid to the beneficiary within the national territory in the event of the Guatemalan migrant's death.

Upon registration, the family of a Guatemalan migrant living abroad is entitled to the following social security benefits: general and specialist medical care, medical examinations, medication and treatment for chronic conditions, hospitalisation and surgery, pre- and post-natal care, paediatric care and a full course of vaccinations for children under the age of 7, and dental treatment. These benefits also apply to the migrant workers should they enter the country when their immigration status permits.

Challenges to overcome

The main challenge in providing social protection for returning migrant workers, whose experience abroad is in agriculture, relates to the seasonal nature of crops and employment arrangements in their country of origin. Although there are reportedly 2.4 million migrant agricultural workers in California alone, according to the British newspaper [*The Guardian* \(2024\)](#), agricultural work in countries such as Guatemala is in decline due to the automation of harvests for export crops and, on the other hand, the specialisation in agricultural products in the United States

that are not grown in the countries of origin due to natural conditions is also a factor that does not support labour integration strategies and, consequently, maintains the likelihood of further encouraging international migration. With this in mind, the Guatemalan Ministry of Labour has implemented the *Temporary Work Abroad Programme*, administered by the Department of Labour Mobility.

This programme promotes agricultural and non-agricultural work visas in collaboration with US employers and the US Embassy, with the involvement of the International Organisation for Migration; however, the scope of these measures does not address the problem in its entirety.

There are other factors that are also important to consider, such as the case of returning migrants who left the country as children and therefore lack a social network that would enable them to achieve a successful cultural integration. There are also cases of children who do not meet the requirements for school admission, or who are deported due to legal problems with the host country's justice system, or who are part of the population in conflict with criminal law. What the Guatemalan migrant support plan enables is the design of an inter-institutional organisational model that includes all facilitating institutions, although it is difficult to gauge its full scope. Likewise, it will also be necessary to include a social security fund for those returning migrants who are unable to participate in the contributory scheme due to their age.

As for other challenges that need to be addressed, these include the situation of returning migrant women, who, for cultural reasons, face greater difficulties in having their work skills recognised; they may encounter greater barriers to accessing vocational certification, and may find it impossible to re-enter the labour market quickly or to secure fair pay. In this regard, it is necessary to consider that the lack of sufficient labour market infrastructure to absorb Guatemalans reaching working age each year further hampers opportunities for returning migrant women. Finally, it is considered appropriate to analyse the need to address the psychological impacts of an unplanned return, which may occur in conditions of violence, all with the aim of transforming challenges into opportunities.

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Overview of the IV High-Level Dialogues (IV DAN) on Social Security and Human Mobility: a structural agenda for regional sustainability

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Social security and human mobility: a structural agenda for regional sustainability

In the current migration context of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), social security can no longer be viewed as a sectoral component of the state or as a policy isolated from labour or health systems. Social security in the context of migration has established itself as a strategic institutional framework for sustainable development, social cohesion and democratic stability. This reality takes on an even more complex dimension when human mobility is incorporated as a structural variable that cuts across economic, labour and demographic dynamics throughout the region.

Within this framework, the “IV High-Level Dialogues on Social Security and Human Mobility: a structural agenda for regional sustainability” (hereinafter referred to as IV DAN), held from 24 to 27 March 2025 (CISS, 2025) in a hybrid format, provided a hemispheric forum for technical exchange aimed at reflecting on these challenges. Beyond its value as a forum for exchange, the meeting highlighted a cross-cutting conclusion: social protection systems face simultaneous pressures arising from persistent labour informality, demographic transition, technological transformations, climate change and intra- and extra-regional migration flows.

However, the debate highlighted a significant structural gap. Although migration was explicitly addressed in panels dedicated to return and the portability of rights, the discussion continues to focus on specific stages of the migration cycle, rather than being integrated as a cross-cutting dimension within the social security framework. This fragmentation is not merely conceptual; it results in administrative disorganisation and limited interoperability among systems, as well as concrete obstacles to ensuring the effective continuity of social protection.

From a regulatory perspective, this situation contrasts with the current international framework (UN, 2018). The PMM proposes a

comprehensive approach that requires consistency across all stages of the migration process and all areas of public policy. In particular, Objective 22 of the PMM recognises the need to establish effective mechanisms for the portability of social security rights and acquired benefits, whilst Objective 23 underlines the importance of strengthening international cooperation. Consequently, these commitments cannot be implemented in isolation or on a sectoral basis but require sustained institutional coordination and operational regional convergence.

In this regard, the region faces a strategic dilemma. On the one hand, human mobility continues to be a driving force behind national economies, boosting remittances, the transfer of skills and transnational social support networks. On the other hand, the lack of effective mechanisms for the recognition, accumulation and portability of rights leads to exclusion, affecting both migrants and the financial sustainability of the social security systems themselves.

The technical evidence discussed at the IV DAN suggests that the main obstacle lies not in the absence of regulatory frameworks, but in institutional fragmentation. Migration, consular, labour and social security systems often operate according to disconnected administrative logics. This disconnect hinders the traceability of contributions, the accumulation of entitlements and the effective reintegration of returnees. Consequently, human mobility ends up being treated as an administrative exception, rather than being integrated as a structural variable in social and financial planning.

From the perspective of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), this gap represents both a challenge and a strategic opportunity. As part of its recent agenda on human mobility, the organisation has promoted the comparative systematisation of regulatory frameworks, the strengthening of consular cooperation and the creation of regional information platforms, including the Migration Observatory, accessible via its website, and the projects and activities related to human mobility set out in the [*Work Programme for 2026–2029*](#) (SELA, 2025). Such projects and activities facilitate coordination between decisionmakers and regional technical authorities in this field. These initiatives are based on a shared assessment which highlights that LAC governments need to move beyond programmatic declarations towards the consolidation of common operational tools that enable regional commitments to be translated into concrete and verifiable results which, in turn, are perceived by the population as significant economic, social and cultural benefits.

Regional governance of social security and human mobility: from the global mandate to the challenges of implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Once the structural gap between human mobility and social protection systems has been identified, the analysis must shift to the level of regional governance. The challenge is no longer merely to recognise the need to integrate the migration dimension into social security, but to assess how such integration fits within the existing institutional framework in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Since the adoption of the PMM, the region has developed a highly sophisticated regulatory framework, which has established a set of commitments that promote policy coherence, international cooperation and mechanisms for the portability of rights. However, the existence of global standards does not automatically equate to their operational implementation at national and subregional levels.

Of the 23 objectives adopted by states within the framework of the PMM (UN, 2018), Objective 22—concerning the portability of social security rights and benefits—and Objective 23—aimed at strengthening international cooperation—are particularly relevant to the regional social security agenda. These commitments take on greater significance when linked to Objective 16, which focuses on social inclusion and cohesion, and Objective 7, which aims to reduce vulnerabilities. Together, these four objectives form the normative core that links human mobility with the sustainability of social protection systems in the region.

In institutional terms, since 2020, a technical framework has been established in the region to support Member States, coordinated through the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean (RCP-LAC), comprising 19 agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system. Furthermore, 18 national networks on migration have been established in countries across the region, demonstrating a progressive process of localising multilateral commitments and an effort to strengthen state capacities for implementation and monitoring (RIB,2024).

From a quantitative perspective, Latin America and the Caribbean account for 182 practices recorded in the [*Migration Network Hub*](#), representing 51% of the global total (RIB, 2024). This figure is politically significant, as the region is not passive when it comes to migration governance. However, the concentration of practices in social inclusion

and vulnerability reduction does not necessarily imply the existence of consolidated structural mechanisms for the effective portability of social security rights or administrative interoperability between national systems.

When the analysis is applied to the field of social security, more complex challenges emerge. Globally, there are 169 million migrant workers (ILO, 2024), many of whom face barriers to accessing social protection schemes or accumulating contribution rights across countries. This figure highlights the scale of the problem: these are not isolated cases, but a structural phenomenon that requires coordinated responses.

The comparative experience discussed at the IV DAN suggests that the main constraints stem not from a lack of regulations, but from operational fragmentation. Labour, migration, consular and social security authorities continue to operate, in many cases, within poorly integrated administrative frameworks. This lack of coordination prevents the traceability of contributions, hinders the mutual recognition of contribution periods and leads to gaps in coverage, particularly in situations of return or circular mobility.

From a regional perspective, the Inter-American Conference on Social Security (CISS) has strengthened a subregional coordination framework that facilitates the exchange of experiences and the discussion of solutions tailored to different circumstances. However, the next step requires moving beyond technical exchanges towards the establishment of minimum standards for procedures, the strengthening of interoperable digital infrastructure, and the consolidation of permanent administrative mechanisms for cooperation.

Consequently, Latin America and the Caribbean face an institutional paradox: on the one hand, a high density of regulations; on the other, persistent gaps in technical coordination, interoperability and administrative implementation. Overcoming this paradox requires a shift from declarative commitments towards the consolidation of verifiable operational capabilities.

The strategic challenge we have analysed does not lie in producing new regulatory instruments, but in ensuring that the commitments made are translated into effective mechanisms for portability, the accumulation of entitlements and continuity of contributions. Only by shifting our focus towards technical implementation will it be possible to fully integrate labour mobility into the structural planning of social security and ensure

that social protection supports transnational career paths in a sustainable manner.

A strategic analysis of the IV DAN: the architecture of dialogue, panels, cross-cutting themes, structural tensions and a vision for resolving the event

The IV High-Level Dialogue can be interpreted as a deliberative framework structured around the logic of progressive systemic pressure. Its design was not based on a random sequence of panels, but rather on a conceptual framework that enabled social security to be examined from its structural constraints right through to its areas of greatest operational complexity. The thematic progression—financial sustainability, labour informality, digital transformation, return migration and the portability of rights—reveals an implicit hypothesis: effective inclusion, particularly in contexts of human mobility, can only be rigorously analysed if the structural limits of the system are first examined.

The starting point was financial sustainability, viewed not merely as actuarial balance but as a prerequisite for institutional stability. The discussion highlighted that social security systems in the region are facing a sustained increase in demand for protection, driven by demographic changes and shifts in the economy, whilst at the same time experiencing constant pressure on their contribution base. This imbalance is not a temporary phenomenon. It stems from a combination of an ageing population, low contribution density and labour markets characterised by high turnover and fragmentation.

From this perspective, sustainability was conceptualised as a dynamic balance between financial viability and social legitimacy. A system that maintains its budgetary balance through restrictions on access or by tightening contribution requirements may undermine social cohesion and create disincentives for formalisation. Conversely, a rapid expansion of coverage without structural adjustments to funding may jeopardise future actuarial stability. This tension constitutes the structural framework within which policies targeting migrant populations must be assessed. However, restricting coverage undermines social legitimacy and contradicts the logic of progressive universalisation promoted by the SDGs.

This dilemma was not resolved, but it was made explicit. The IV DAN (2025) demonstrated that sustainability cannot be analysed solely as a

fiscal variable and must be understood as a dynamic balance between financial viability and social cohesion.

The discussion focusing on labour informality emphasised the formalisation of employment as the basis for sustainability. Informality was addressed as a structural feature of the regional labour market, rather than a temporary anomaly, since informality is not a marginal phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean, but a persistent characteristic of the labour market. In systemic terms, informality has three critical effects: (i) it reduces contributory income, (ii) it fragments career paths, and (iii) it limits the accumulation of entitlements.

The traditional social security framework, designed on the assumption of stable and continuous formal employment, contrasts with a reality characterised by sectoral mobility, temporary contracts, and frequent gaps in employment. The significance of this lies in the fact that informality acts as a point of intersection between sustainability and human mobility. Migrant workers tend to find employment in sectors characterised by high levels of precariousness and informality, which exacerbates gaps in their contribution records.

In this context, human mobility is not an external factor to the problem, but rather a broader manifestation of the fragmentation of the social security system. Transnational career paths reproduce, at a regional level, the same discontinuities that already exist at the national level, revealing that social security systems continue to be designed on the assumption of stable formal employment, while the regional labour market, including the migrant labour market, is characterised by sectoral mobility, temporary employment and discontinuous career paths. Consequently, the effective inclusion of migrants cannot be achieved solely through portability agreements. It requires a review of the contributory framework and the design of adaptive mechanisms that recognise fragmented career paths.

Digital transformation and interoperability emerged as enabling factors in this context, as digitalisation is not merely technological modernisation, but a structural prerequisite for ensuring tax traceability, reducing administrative barriers, facilitating the exchange of information among institutions, and enabling cross-border portability.

Interoperability among employment records, social security systems and immigration databases was presented as a necessary condition for translating statutory rights into effective continuity. Without a record of

social security contributions, portability becomes a formal declaration devoid of practical application. In this sense, digitalisation is not a peripheral component of administrative modernisation, but a strategic infrastructure for ensuring the accumulation, recognition and validation of rights in contexts of mobility.

However, it also became clear that the digital divide among countries, regions and subregions can lead to disparities in access to and the capacity to implement social protection. Interoperability requires common standards, secure information-sharing protocols, data governance mechanisms and institutional trust – elements that cannot be resolved solely through technological investment. Without these elements, digitalisation may reproduce institutional inequalities rather than correcting them.

The analysis was most detailed in the panels devoted to return migration and the portability of rights. Return migration was examined from a comprehensive perspective that included labour market integration, recognition of accrued rights and inter-institutional coordination. The main limitation identified was administrative fragmentation: the management of migration flows, labour policy and social security administration often operate according to parallel logics. This lack of coordination creates gaps in coverage and hinders reintegration into the social security system.

The debate highlighted that the main difficulty lies not in the lack of return programmes, but in institutional fragmentation. Immigration authorities manage migration flows; labour authorities manage employment; and social security authorities administer contributions. Without integrated protocols, the return process results in gaps in protection.

Furthermore, a significant conceptual question arose: should access to social security following return be based on nationality, residence or contribution history? The diversity of responses across the region reflects differing models of the welfare state and makes it difficult to find harmonised solutions. From a solution-oriented perspective, the panel implicitly pointed to the need for predefined institutional pathways that integrate employment, social security and public services. Without such integration, reintegration will remain reactive rather than structural.

One particularly significant point is that return was recognised not only as a humanitarian issue, but also as a phenomenon with direct economic

implications. Successful reintegration broadens the future tax base, whereas failed reintegration leads to exclusion and a loss of human capital.

This was followed by the panel on the portability of entitlements, which was the focus of the transnational debate. The panel directly addressed the need for mechanisms to enable the accumulation and cross-border recognition of social security entitlements.

Unilateral instruments, bilateral agreements and multilateral conventions were identified as formal mechanisms for the reciprocal recognition of rights. However, it was emphasised that the legal existence of these instruments does not guarantee their practical effectiveness. Differences in eligibility criteria, administrative delays and a lack of interoperability limit their actual impact. A particularly significant strategic tension emerged here: it was noted that the extension of transnational rights can give rise to fiscal concerns in systems subject to structural pressures. At the same time, the absence of effective portability exacerbates tax fragmentation and discourages formalisation. Significant intra-regional mobility turns this tension into a structural problem, rather than a marginal dilemma.

The key point is that there was a clear consensus that intra-regional labour mobility requires coordinated responses. In the absence of effective portability mechanisms, migration tends to lead to fragmentation of social security contributions and cumulative exclusion.

Regional forward-looking agenda: from conceptual convergence to verifiable implementation

From a regional perspective, the IV DAN sets out an agenda for structural consolidation that extends beyond the forum itself and has implications for the institutional architecture of Latin America and the Caribbean. One of the priority areas lies in the need to deepen the analysis of the specific fiscal impact of human mobility on social security systems. Although the debate enabled sustainability to be situated within a macro-structural framework, considering demographic pressures, labour informality and fiscal constraints, the region now faces the challenge of incorporating comparative modelling that more accurately estimates the actual contribution of migrant workers in different national and subregional scenarios.

At the same time, formal employment was recognised as a structural prerequisite for the sustainability of social security. However, the regional agenda needs to evolve from recognising informality as a systemic fracture towards designing adaptive mechanisms that enable fragmented employment histories to be integrated into viable contributory schemes. Intra-regional mobility, characterised by successive occupational transitions and administrative discontinuities, highlights the need for hybrid models that combine contributory principles with flexible inclusion instruments. The region thus faces a challenge of institutional innovation rather than mere regulatory expansion.

A comparative analysis of the panels reveals robust structural consensus. Firstly, the progressive universalisation of social protection remains a shared policy objective, even in contexts of fiscal constraints and demographic transition. Secondly, regional coordination emerges as a structural requirement in the face of migration flows that exceed strictly national capacities. Finally, digital transformation is establishing itself as an enabling tool for tax traceability, the secure exchange of information and the continuity of rights in transnational contexts. These points of consensus reflect a conceptual convergence that views social security as critical infrastructure for sustainable development.

However, alongside this consensus, the IV DAN highlighted structural tensions that shaped the regional agenda. There remains a need to balance the expansion of coverage with actuarial sustainability, to harmonise access criteria based on nationality or residence in contexts of mobility, and to adapt traditional contribution schemes to labour markets characterised by informality and circular migration. Furthermore, a persistent gap was evident between regulatory density and effective administrative capacity, where the existence of bilateral agreements or multilateral frameworks does not always translate into interoperable and verifiable mechanisms.

A detailed analysis of the panels reveals significant nuances in the level of technical progress. The sections on financial sustainability and informality provided sound structural assessments, with an emphasis on demographic pressures and tax revenue imbalances, although specific operational tools were less fully developed.

In contrast, the panels on digitalisation and portability moved towards more tangible proposals, particularly regarding interoperability and the cross-border recognition of rights, although their implementation depends on sustained technical cooperation and administrative harmonisation. For

its part, the panel on return and reintegration highlighted the need for integrated protocols linking employment, social protection and consular coordination, leaving the task of standardising comparable implementation mechanisms still to be addressed.

Far from representing limitations, these differences reflect the varying degrees of maturity of the different thematic areas. The region already has a significant body of legislation and a wealth of experience in the field of cooperation; the challenge now is to integrate these experiences within a regional framework that can be verified in practice. In this regard, the transition from conceptual convergence to shared technical tools lies at the heart of the forward-looking agenda.

From the strategic perspective of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), this stage calls for strengthening the comparative and operational dimensions of regional cooperation. The existence of multilateral frameworks, the commitments made under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the subregional experiences gained to date form a solid institutional foundation. However, reducing fragmentation requires the following elements: (i) data standardisation; (ii) administrative interoperability; (iii) institutional focal points; and (iv) shared protocols for the recognition and accumulation of rights.

Consequently, the IV DAN can be interpreted as a hemispheric platform for convergence among three structural dynamics: i) the preservation of the financial sustainability of the systems; ii) institutional adaptation to fragmented labour markets; and iii) the progressive incorporation of human mobility as a systemic variable in social planning. The inclusion of migrants is neither a parallel agenda nor a regulatory exception; it is the result of a more rigorous measure of the structural coherence of social security systems.

For those responsible for migration policy and social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean, the strategic conclusion is clear: human mobility does not place pressure on the system from the outside but rather reveals the extent of its internal integration. Addressing this issue with a regional vision, inter-institutional coordination and harmonised technical tools will enable progress to be made, building on the conceptual convergence already achieved, towards a verifiable operational framework capable of sustaining both social cohesion and financial stability in the context of ongoing structural transformation.

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On a steady course: advocacy strategies to ensure that people on the move can exercise their rights

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Summary

Drawing on our advocacy work to promote the rights of people on the move, we share three case studies. The first emphasises the importance of involving people directly affected by restrictive regulations and policies in advocacy strategies that enable them to exercise their rights – in this case, the right to education. With the right to identity as our goal, the second case study sets out three basic principles that guide our advocacy work: clarity of objectives, evidence-based proposals and hopeful patience. The third case study highlights the importance of advocating at state level, where regulatory changes introduced at federal level are implemented, thereby ensuring that they benefit people on the move.

Introduction

Reflecting on migration these days means entering a world of ethical contradictions and political absurdities. The universal value of human rights is called into question when it comes to people on the move. As in medieval times, one's place of birth stands as a verdict that determines the possibilities and limits in shaping our lives. Discourses on sovereignty, security and even national culture, articulated at the highest levels, underpin regulations and policies that call into question the dignity of migrants, condemning them to uncertainty about their present and their future and, worse still, questioning their very right to belong.

Now more than ever, in times like these, it is essential to celebrate the progress made in the exercise of their rights. That is why the Inter-American Social Security Commission's initiative to draw up a *manual of best practices* on the inclusion of migrants is so timely. At IMUMI, we want to demonstrate that the challenges faced by mobile populations can be overcome if we listen to them carefully and foster spaces for cross-disciplinary collaboration, in which those directly affected, civil society organisations and public officials work together.

We will present experiences that have shown us inclusive ways to promote the exercise of these people's rights to education and identity. We have organised them into three case studies. The first emphasises the importance of including people directly impacted (PDI) by restrictive regulations and policies in advocacy strategies that enable them to exercise their rights – in this case, the right to education. Using a specific example, the second approach presents three basic principles that guide advocacy: clarity of objectives, evidence-based proposals and hopeful patience. The third highlights the importance of working at state level, where regulatory changes at federal and state levels are implemented. We conclude with a brief reflection on the lessons we have learnt from supporting women and families on the move over the past fifteen years.

First case study

Advocacy in partnership: civil society organisations and those directly affected working together to promote the right to education in contexts of mobility

A valuable approach in policy advocacy processes aimed at ensuring the exercise of rights has been the collaboration between civil society and people directly impacted by migration (PDI). Two outcomes of this collaboration, between 2016 and 2017, were the amendments to the *General Education Act and Agreement 286 of the Ministry of Public Education*, aimed at removing legal barriers that restricted children and young people in situations of mobility from exercising their right to education.

The political climate created by Donald Trump's presidential candidacy in 2015, with its openly anti-immigrant agenda, marked a key moment for this movement. He promised to suspend the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme⁹, which protected more than 750,000 young migrants. The resulting upheaval led to the forced departure of thousands of programme beneficiaries, the majority of whom were of Mexican origin (*CONAPO, 2022*).

⁹ President Barack Obama established the [*Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)*](#) programme by executive order in 2012 to offer temporary protection to immigrants brought to the United States by their parents before the age of 16 who are living in the country without proper documentation. Under this policy, beneficiaries are granted temporary work permits, driving licences and a social security number.

Faced with the challenges they encountered in Mexico, young returnees – both women and men – soon made their needs for integration into educational settings heard. This led to a fortunate alignment of objectives with civil society organisations (CSOs), which provided them with opportunities for participation, supporting them in forums and technical working groups with the authorities, where they shared their experiences, highlighted their needs and worked together to develop the necessary proposals. Directly affected by existing regulations, they had first-hand knowledge of the barriers they faced in continuing their education. The apostille and certified translation of their academic documents from abroad, as well as the lack of recognition that the studies completed there were equivalent to upper secondary education, stood in the way of their plans.

Between 2015 and 2017, as a result of coordination among IMUMI, deported individuals and the network of civil society organisations within the Identity and Education Group (GIE),¹⁰ we secured *Ministerial Agreement 286 of the Ministry of Public Education* (SEP, 2016), which allows for the recognition of knowledge and work experience to obtain a secondary school certificate or higher education qualification through an expedited process. Meanwhile, amendments to the *General Education Act* and the *School Control Regulations* removed the requirement for an apostille and the presentation of an identity document and school records for primary and upper secondary levels as prerequisites for access to, continuation in, and certification of education (*IMUMI, 2016*).

Although regulatory reforms stipulate that there should be no distinctions in the procedure for accessing education for children born abroad, in practice, families face the same barriers as before the changes. This is because local education authorities are unaware of these reforms or lack clear guidelines on how to implement them.

¹⁰The Identity and Education Group (GIE) is a network of civil society organisations committed to advancing the right to education and identity for people and families on the move in Mexico. Its achievements include amendments to the General Education Act and the School Control Regulations, as well as the removal of the requirement for an apostille on school documents and birth certificates, all secured through policy advocacy at federal and state level. IMUMI is part of this network, as is the Centre for Support to Indigenous Migrant Families (CAFAMI) in Tlaxcala, amongst other organisations.

There is still a great deal to be done, but we have much to celebrate. Although limited in scope (COLMEX, n.d.),¹¹ the participation of PDI in advocacy processes proved crucial in strengthening proposals for policy change, as the needs and solutions of social life are best understood by those who experience them first-hand. Equally important, the benefits of their participation in advocacy strategies, in coordination with CSOs, have contributed to their political education and the strengthening of their capacity for collective action. For example, among the returnees who contributed to the changes described, some went on to form the organisation *Ostros Dreamers en Acción* (ODA, n.d.). ODA¹² seeks partnerships with other social sectors to advocate for changes to policies that hinder the integration of returnees and deportees and, more generally, the exercise of rights by people on the move. There are also PDI that engage in community initiatives or within the private sector.

Their low level of participation, however, warrants attention. For returnees, the very process of integration or reintegration into the country requires time and a great deal of effort. They are building a new life in a place to which they returned unplanned and which was not part of their life plan. Day-to-day challenges, a lack of time and other factors make it difficult for them to participate in advocacy processes. So, if we are to maintain inclusive advocacy processes, it is crucial to promote political education initiatives that recognise the constraints faced by PDI and strengthen their capacity for agency; or, alternatively, it is sufficient for us to understand their experiences and needs, which can serve to legitimise proposals for change.

It is essential that we move towards democratisation and the expansion of opportunities for participation in forums for discussion and decision-making that directly affect their lives.

¹¹ According to data from the [National Information System on Return Migration](#) at Colegio de México, a total of 559,416 returnees were recorded in 2015.

¹² Information on ODA and its projects can be found on its [official website](#).

Second case study

Principle-based advocacy: clarity of objectives, up-to-date information and identification of allies.

In reviewing the advocacy practices we carry out at IMUMI, we have identified three basic principles that guide us. The first is clarity of objectives. From the very start of our work, we realised that access to identity is the foundation for exercising other human rights. Facilitating this right for people on the move became a strategic objective. Furthermore, through our work supporting families on the move, it became clear that access to education was another fundamental need for their social integration. We have focused part of our work on bringing about regulatory changes that ensure the exercise of both these rights.

To that end, it was necessary to compile up-to-date and reliable information. Generally speaking, information on mobile populations is not always available. It may exist, but it is not accessible to the public; it may also not even be recorded, or it may not be systematised. We therefore had to compile and systematise this information ourselves, through formal requests for information to institutions at different levels of government. As well as underpinning our advocacy proposals, we contributed to the necessary practice of evidence-based decision-making.

In order to propose amendments to the *General Education Act and the School Control Regulations* described above, we requested disaggregated data from the education departments of each of Mexico's federal states on girls and boys born abroad who are enrolled in basic education. Based on our analysis of this data, we were able to estimate that, in 2014, there were approximately 600,000 children in this situation. This figure amply justifies the need to amend the regulations to ensure their full integration into the education system.

This effort to document and systematise data has had a significant impact. Given the continuing lack of disaggregated public data on the population in situations of mobility, this and other information produced by civil society has subsequently been used by various government bodies. Sadly, ten years on from the amendment of the basic regulations governing school enrolment, there is still no consolidated and up-to-date register of how many children and adolescents born abroad are enrolled in the national education system. The failure of these bodies to produce public data on this population hinders their own mandate to design evidence-

based public policies and suggests that, for public education institutions, mobile populations are not a priority.

That probability does not deter us. Drawing on our own experience of providing support, the work of our Legal Clinic and reliable, up-to-date information, we promote the establishment of technical working groups with federal, state and local authorities, taking a legal and operational approach. In these meetings, we analyse proposals and assess their feasibility, draw up concrete plans and propose pathways for their implementation. This strategy involves the ongoing mapping of stakeholders (at all three levels) and the strategic use of opportunities. Our day-to-day work on specific cases brings us into contact with public officials, amongst whom we identify potential allies. With legitimate arguments and clear objectives, we are able to raise their awareness and secure their cooperation.

From the outset, we would like to make it clear that we have no intention of seeking recognition for our involvement in these processes. We derive satisfaction from bringing about and implementing changes, and from enabling people to exercise their rights.

A clear purpose and a great deal of patience take us a long way. For fifteen years, IMUMI has been campaigning for the abolition of the apostille requirement for identity documents issued by a foreign authority. A birth certificate underpins the right to identity, which is the foundation for the exercise of other rights – indeed, practically all other rights. Since 1961, the *Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH)*, in its Convention of 5 October, had agreed to abolish the requirement for the legalisation of foreign public documents (*HCCH, 1961*). Despite being a member of this international body, Mexico maintained the requirement in the form of the apostille. Through the Advisory Council on Migration Policy (CCPM),¹³ IMUMI met with officials from the National Population Register (RENAPO) and others, arguing that the requirement for an apostille to authenticate documents issued abroad prevented thousands of people from accessing their right to identity. It also prevented access to the right to education, as we saw above.

We spent more than two six-year terms pushing this issue with RENAPO, putting forward legal, ethical and procedural arguments. The authorities

¹³ The Advisory Council on Migration Policy (CCPM) is a forum that brings together representatives of the three branches of the Union, state governments and organised civil society, with the aim of formulating public policy recommendations.

at RENAPO and the Ministry of the Interior listened but took no action. Our strategy, therefore, was to disseminate the information and arguments we had developed over the years amongst the organisations concerned. In this way, while we continued our work at federal level, each organisation would have the opportunity to carry out advocacy work at local level, according to its intentions and capacity, to push for changes to civil registration regulations or laws in their respective states.

This is what CAFAMI did in Tlaxcala and, in 2023, working in collaboration with allied officials and with the necessary political will at the highest levels of the state government, it succeeded in having the apostille requirement for birth certificates abolished.¹⁴

On this occasion, success at local level was crucial to achieving it at federal level. Back in 2015, we had already made progress in eliminating the requirement for an apostille on educational documents, and in 2023, we succeeded in removing the apostille requirement for birth certificates in Tlaxcala. Against this backdrop, advocacy at federal level to safeguard the right to identity for people on the move was more likely to bear fruit. The result of this work was that, on 4 June 2024, with the involvement of RENAPO and other institutions, we secured substantial amendments to Articles 314 and 1144 of the [*National Code of Civil and Family Procedure* \(2023\)](#).

A paragraph was added to Article 314, stipulating that, in order to register a person born abroad, it is not essential to submit a birth certificate:

... In the case of birth certificates proving the nationality and identity of Mexican nationals born abroad or returning migrants of Mexican nationality, consular legalisation or an apostille will not be required. It will be sufficient to present the foreign birth certificate and the birth certificate of the Mexican father or mother to prove their identity and Mexican nationality in order to have their birth registered with the country's Civil Registry, in accordance with the applicable regulations (p. 81).

¹⁴ We share our experience in the next section.

A paragraph has been added to Article 1144 which also facilitates the registration of births:¹⁵

... In the case of birth certificates proving the nationality and identity of Mexican nationals born abroad or returning migrants of Mexican nationality, consular legalisation or an apostille will not be required. It will be sufficient to present the foreign birth certificate and the birth certificate of the Mexican father or mother to prove their identity and Mexican nationality in order to have their birth registered with the country's Civil Registry, in accordance with the applicable regulations (p. 257).

The process of removing the requirement for an apostille on birth certificates did not follow the usual course. Achieved first at local level and then at federal level, it taught us that advocacy depends on recognising the right moment – when legitimate and well-founded proposals raise awareness among key stakeholders and, collectively, capitalise on the political will of decisionmakers.

Third case study

Local action brings about change in everyday life: the right to identity.

Mexico's federal structure presents us with major challenges in ensuring the full exercise of rights. The harmonisation or adaptation of federal regulations at state and municipal levels is not always legally mandatory; however, a certain rigidity in local practices makes it necessary. Consequently, work at these levels is essential to ensure their effective implementation. At IMUMI, we recognise that removing the requirement for an apostille on birth certificates issued abroad is essential. Working alongside the GIE and CAFAMI, in 2023 we succeeded in securing an exemption from the apostille requirement for birth certificates in Tlaxcala. We continue to work towards ensuring that the right to identity for people on the move becomes a reality in other states across the country. In June this year, we achieved this for San Luis Potosí.

Prior to the changes that have been made, the *National Code of Civil and Family Procedure (CNPCF)* required that, in order to register a minor

¹⁵ In accordance with Article 30 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (*Mexico, 1917*), Mexican nationality is acquired by birth, amongst other cases, when a person is born abroad and at least one of their parents is Mexican.

born in another country to Mexican parents, the signature on the document had to be authenticated by means of an apostille on the birth certificate issued by that country. For returnees and deported individuals and families, this requirement is difficult to meet. They may not have had time to gather their personal documents when they were deported, or they may lack the money or other resources needed to process the application (such as time, knowledge of the procedures, access to electronic means, and so on).

We began promoting these changes at a local level in Tlaxcala, supporting the work of the Centre for Assistance to Indigenous Migrant Families (CAFAMI), a local partner organisation and fellow member of the GIE. This organisation collaborated in coordinating with RENAPO and, at a local level, with the state's civil registry, where its coordinator proved to be a sympathetic and attentive listener. We held working sessions, with the participation of the legal department, and once we had drawn up the proposed amendments, these were forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior for approval.

On 4 July 2023, the Official Gazette, in its Special Issue No. 1, published the Rules of Procedure of the Directorate for the Coordination of the Civil Registry for the State of Tlaxcala¹⁶ (*Mexico, Tlaxcala, 2023*). The second paragraph of Article 60 reads:

... For the purposes of proving Mexican nationality, it shall be sufficient to present a foreign official document certifying the applicant's birth and parental lineage, accompanied by the birth certificate of the Mexican mother or father, or of both, as applicable (p. 31).

The specific procedure is set out in "Chapter X: Procedure for Direct Verification of the Authenticity of Foreign Documents." Following the amendment to the Regulations, officials at the Tlaxcala Civil Registry now have clear and precise guidelines on the procedure for registering minors born abroad, including the responsible parties, specific actions to be taken, the documents required, and the deadlines for submitting the document proving their Mexican nationality.

Tlaxcala was a pioneer in guaranteeing access to identity for people on the move and, following its example, similar measures were taken at

¹⁶ The public policy resulting from this legislation took the form of the [Tlaxcala Apostille Waiver Programme](#), which was launched at a public ceremony chaired by the state governor and other senior officials on 4 August 2023.

federal level, with the changes to the CNPCF described in the previous section. Although one would expect the states to take ownership of these federal changes and implement them in their civil registries, the practices of local institutions reveal a different reality – one that is understandable but problematic. The first problem is that the RENAPO has not issued the guidelines corresponding to the changes to the CNPCF. In other words, civil registry officials across the country do not have specific procedures to follow, unlike their counterparts in Tlaxcala. We know, however, that even if federal guidelines were in place, these would need to be adapted at state level to suit local circumstances. This will not happen automatically. That is why advocacy at the local level is essential.

This year, we achieved significant changes in San Luis Potosí. According to the information we gathered, over the last 15 years, 106,000 residents of San Luis Potosí have been deported. The population that could potentially benefit from these changes was substantial. Drawing on our experience from previous cases, IMUMI and the GIE identified a potential ally and approached her. She was a federal senator representing the state who, being familiar with IMUMI's work and aware of the issue, included the information we provided in a request to her local congress to review the matter and implement the relevant amendments to the state's *Civil Registry Act* (2012).

The local Congress took up the matter and, on 30 June 2025, the Home Affairs Committee approved the proposed amendments, which were published in the State's Official Gazette in Decree 0222 (*Mexico, San Luis Potosí, 2025*), comprising a single article, "which adds a third paragraph to section I of Article 154 of the Civil Registry Act of the State of San Luis Potosí, to read as follows:

... In the case of birth certificates for persons born abroad to a Mexican mother or father, or both, or for returning migrants of Mexican nationality, consular legalisation or an apostille shall not be required; it shall be sufficient to present the foreign birth certificate and the original birth certificate of the Mexican father or mother for the registration of their birth, thereby establishing their identity and Mexican nationality, in accordance with the provisions of the National Code of Civil and Family Procedure and other applicable regulations (p. 19).

The next step is to ensure that the amendments to the Act are translated into specific guidelines; in other words, the Regulations under the Civil Registry Act of the State of San Luis Potosí must set out the responsible

parties, procedures, documents and timeframes. Only then will the officials who deal directly with members of the public know what they are required to do.

This is just the beginning. We are confident that, following the example set by Tlaxcala and San Luis Potosí, other states will come to understand the importance of making these changes to their civil registration regulations to ensure that the right to identity is guaranteed for their entire population.

Conclusion

Bringing about changes that have an impact on the exercise of rights by people on the move requires long-term commitment. It also involves adhering to principles which, despite the difficulties and setbacks, form the cornerstones of coherent and ethical work. Involving those directly affected in advocacy is one of the principles that guide us at IMUMI. We believe that their needs and proposals must form an integral part of the regulations and public policies that affect them. The work must be transdisciplinary: each stakeholder contributes, from their own position and using their own capabilities.

The ever-changing nature of human mobility and the diversity of stakeholders who need to be involved teach us that advocacy strategies do not follow a predetermined path. Seizing opportunities in a creative and decisive manner is what enables us to make progress. For our part, guided by clarity of purpose and the conviction that dignity for all must become a reality, we will continue to defend rights and support individuals and families on the move.

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Successful experiences of government and multilateral programmes: a focus on human rights and sustainability

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Return migration: challenges of reintegration and social security for repatriated Mexicans

At present, Mexico is one of the few countries that experiences all phases of the migration cycle: origin, transit, destination and return. Mexico is a key player in the field of international migration. It is particularly worth noting that between 2018 and 2023, 1.2 million people emigrated from the country. The majority (87.9%) moved to the United States, 6.0% went to Canada, 1.3% to Spain and the remaining 3.5% to other countries (INEGI, 2018 and 2023).

Inequality is defined as the absence of similar conditions of access to and exercise of rights for individuals and groups of people in various areas, which may relate to resources such as income and wealth (ECLAC, 2024), or to life expectancy, as well as to the ease with which people can access basic health services, quality education and public services in general. Inequalities exist between genders and between social groups. Similarly, inequality can lead to social and political instability. In highly unequal countries where the best opportunities are reserved for historically privileged minorities,¹⁷ people are plagued by dissatisfaction and anger, leading to despair, uncertainty, a lack of trust in the state and even violence (Ríos and Campos, 2024).

The search for better employment and educational opportunities, as well as the desire to escape violent environments, are some of the key factors driving migration worldwide, and Mexico is no exception. Consequently, tackling inequalities and promoting the economic inclusion of rural communities are, to name but a few, two of the major challenges facing our country with regard to the socio-economic inclusion of migrants.

¹⁷*That is not how it is* is the title of a socio-economic analysis of inequality in Mexico, written by the economist Viri Ríos and the researcher Raymundo M. Campos Vázquez. The authors examine how structures of historical privilege perpetuate inequality of opportunity in the country (Ríos and Campos, 2024)

The Mexican Government and the Ministry of the Interior, through the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation of the National Institute of Migration, have put in place measures aimed at the socio-economic reintegration of Mexican nationals returning from the United States, whether they have been repatriated or are returning voluntarily.

It is for this reason that, on 20 January 2025, the comprehensive care and reception strategy *México te abraza* (SEGOB, 2025) was launched, which welcomes repatriated individuals with warmth and compassion as a measure to address the eventual repatriation of Mexicans currently in the United States. The three components of the strategy are as follows:

1. Consular assistance and protection: through its consular network, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, via its 50 consulates in the United States of America, offers advice and support in carrying out the necessary procedures and formalities to repatriate those nationals who request to return to the country, on a voluntary basis, whether they find themselves in a situation of vulnerability or extreme emergency; This work is carried out with the support of United Nations agencies and organisations to safeguard the rights of Mexican nationals.
2. Reception and support: with 11 repatriation points located in the six states bordering the country's northern frontier (Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas), 10 reception centres were set up with the capacity to accommodate up to 25,000 people simultaneously, following an agreement with the state governors.
3. Reintegration, to meet basic needs through social service initiatives, as well as integration into employment and welfare programmes.¹⁸

State governments along the northern border are assisting with cleaning and sanitation services; waste collection; support with reception and logistics; the supply of drinking water and power generators; and civil protection tasks. They are also helping with perimeter and road safety around these centres.

¹⁸ The Ministry of the Interior presented the *México te Abraza* strategy on 21 January 2025, one day after its launch. The official presentation outlined the objectives, scope and mechanisms of the strategy's three components (SEGOB, 2025).

Similarly, 189 buses are available to transport Mexican nationals from the border repatriation points to the 10 reception centres, and a further 100 vehicles to take them to their home states

Furthermore, the "PRIM Piloto" Procedure for Repatriation within Mexico was implemented at the international airports in Villahermosa, Tabasco, and Tapachula, Chiapas, in which authorities from all three levels of government collaborate to receive and assist repatriated Mexican nationals, providing them with access to the various programmes implemented by the Mexican Government to ensure a dignified, orderly and safe repatriation, in strict compliance with their human rights. Under the PRIM programme, from 1 October 2024 to 15 April 2025, a total of 13,110 repatriated Mexican nationals were received.

On the instructions of the President, Dr Claudia Sheinbaum, the centres will keep a register of beneficiaries who are provided with hygiene and personal care items, as well as medical care, reintegration services, food, and accommodation.

Figure 1.

Medical care at reception centres for repatriated nationals



Source: Photographs taken by INM/Directorate for Dignified Repatriation, Government of Mexico, 2025.

The Ministry of National Defence and the Ministry of the Navy are supporting the food programme by setting up mobile kitchens, offering five different menus for each meal (SEGOB,2025).

"The Mexican Government is ready to welcome them with open arms. The country they left behind is different from the one we are building; today it is fairer and more equal. Repatriation is a return home, to our

roots, to our culture and to the brotherhood that unites us" (SEGOB, 2025).¹⁹

Figure 2.

Issuing of CURPs and birth certificates at repatriation centres



Source: Photograph courtesy of the INM/Directorate for Dignified Repatriation, Government of Mexico, 2025.

One of the key measures undertaken by the Mexican Government, through the institutional efforts carried out by the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation, is to guarantee repatriated Mexicans who so request the right to identity, by issuing the Unique Population Registry Code and birth certificates at authorised repatriation points. As a result, people returning to Mexico (whether forcibly and/or voluntarily) have identity documents that enable them to access various financial services, enrol in the National Employment Service, obtain certification of their work skills and be referred to medical services. The aim of this is to promote the socio-economic inclusion of repatriated people.

In coordination with various social welfare organisations, the aim is to ensure the widest possible coverage of rights and opportunities for returnees. One example of this is the involvement of the National Population Register and the National Electoral Institute in the reception of returnees. The aim is to provide them with easy and timely access to identity documents that enable them to exercise their political and electoral rights, by issuing documents such as the Voter Registration Card, amongst others, to those who may have lost them whilst living

¹⁹ [Statement issued during the official launch of the "México te Abraza" strategy](#), held on 21 January 2025 and led by the Minister of the Interior, Rosa Icela Rodríguez, at President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo's "Mañana del Pueblo" press conference.

abroad or during their journey there. The ability to influence decision-making and participate in the political life of their country is a fundamental tool for promoting inclusion and equity.

Prioritising support for vulnerable groups, and facilitating access to employment and educational opportunities, are measures being taken by the Mexican Government with the aim of reducing the persistent inequality gaps that give rise to migration. However, the challenges are even greater. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines informal employment as "any paid work, whether self-employment or wage employment, that is not registered, regulated or protected by legal or regulatory frameworks" (*ILO, 2013*).

People in informal employment lack the basic protection offered by a formal contract, leaving them exposed to various vulnerabilities, such as late payment, unfair dismissal, a lack of clarity regarding their duties, and the absence of legal recourse in the event of potential breaches of their labour rights (*OXFAM Mexico, 2024*). These conditions also affect workers' sense of identity and self-worth, exposing them to situations of humiliation, harassment and coercion, amongst other factors, which, although difficult to measure quantitatively, have a significant impact on their daily lives (*ILO, 2002*).²⁰

The National Institute of Migration, recognising the problems associated with informal employment, has signed cooperation agreements with public and private sector institutions with the aim of enabling repatriated individuals to have their work skills –acquired abroad or throughout their lives– officially recognised. Mexicans living abroad have work experience in a variety of sectors, as they constitute one of the largest population groups in the United States, according to the US census for 2010–2017, which estimates that, of the 57 million Hispanics living in the United States, 63% are Mexican. That is to say, around 35.9 million. It is important to highlight the role of Mexicans in US industry, who, through their labour and skills, have become an integral part of the US economy.

²⁰ The ILO developed the concept of decent work precisely to take account of the qualitative and intangible aspects of work that are not reflected in conventional economic indicators, including conditions of dignity, safety and recognition in the workplace.

The US agricultural industry relies heavily on Mexican workers, both immigrants and those born in the US, according to data from the *Partnership for a New American Economy*,²¹ based on official figures from 2016. More than 30% of all workers in the agricultural sector are Mexican or of Mexican origin. In other sectors, such as construction, hospitality and leisure, Mexicans account for 19.5% and 14.5% of jobs, respectively (*Sulbarán, 2019*).

Table 1.

Main occupations of repatriated Mexicans in 2025 (as a percentage)

Main occupations of repatriated Mexicans in 2025	
WORK EXPERIENCE	%
Construction	40.46%
Agriculture	18.22%
Cook/Waiter	15.05%
Gardening	7.46%
Services	6.38%
Trade	2.27%
Automotive	1.54%
Maintenance	1.28%
Painting	1.22%
Other	6.12%
TOTAL	100%

Source: Figures expressed as percentages. Source: INM, Comprehensive Migration Operations System (SIOM) – repatriated persons, 2025. Preliminary figures subject to statistical validation.

According to statistical data collected by the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation, the level of specialisation among repatriated Mexicans is evident. From 1 January to 21 May 2025, more than 12,000 Mexicans stated that they had experience in the construction sector, followed by agriculture and the catering sector (*INM, 2025*).

In this regard, it is noted that, in March 2021, a Coordination Agreement was signed between the National Council for the Standardisation and Certification of Vocational Skills (CONOCER) and the National Institute of Migration (INM), which emphasises that, as part of its remit, it

²¹ Data from the organisation *Partnership for a New American Economy* on the participation of Mexican workers in the US economy is compiled and analysed in an article by Patricia Sulbarán Lovera published in BBC Mundo in 2019. The organisation, based in Washington D.C., brings together business leaders and civic leaders committed to evidence-based immigration reform (*Sulbarán, 2019*).

contributes to the social reintegration and economic re-entry of Mexican nationals, returning migrants through the certification of vocational skills, thereby supporting them in the pursuit of their professional activities.

The INM, in coordination with the Mexican Association for Staff and Business Training and CONOCER, carries out the assessment and certification under the following competence standard: EC 1265 – Application of soft skills for employability in the workplace (basic level). As this standard is crosscutting in nature, it enables a process to be carried out that can be applied to migrant nationals, considering their experience in various work environments. Since its implementation, a total of 1,425 repatriated individuals has been assessed and certified.

These measures ensure that repatriated Mexicans have the opportunity to enter the formal labour market, with documents that attest to their experience and recognise their skills, reaffirming the commitment to safeguarding the rights of people in situations of mobility, as well as cooperation with other national bodies and institutions to facilitate the social and economic reintegration of Mexicans returning to the country.

Figure 3.

Integration of repatriated persons into the Mexican Government's welfare programmes



Source: Photograph taken by INM/Directorate for Dignified Repatriation, Government of Mexico, 2025.

As part of the Government's strategy for supporting repatriated persons, 2,495 people have been placed in employment following their repatriation. This represents 4.1% of the repatriated population assisted since the comprehensive repatriation strategy *México te abraza* came into force. In addition, 8,927 returnees have been enrolled in the Mexican Government's welfare programmes, representing 14.93%.

The challenge of reintegrating returnees into the socio-economic life of their places of origin and/or residence centres on fostering a sense of belonging to the local area, reducing school drop-out rates by expanding educational provision, and creating more and better employment opportunities in which returnees can put their skills to use, amongst many other things.

One of the principles of the Mexican State's migration policy is the set of strategic decisions designed to achieve specific objectives in addressing the phenomenon of migration in Mexico in a comprehensive manner, and therefore includes amongst its principles " facilitating the return to the national territory and the social reintegration of Mexican migrants and their families through inter-institutional programmes, and strengthening the links between the communities of origin and destination of Mexican migration, for the benefit of family well-being and regional and national development" (*Mexico, 2011, art. 2*). The purpose of social security is to guarantee the right to health, medical care, the protection of livelihoods and the social services necessary for individual and collective well-being.

In collaboration with the Mexican Social Security Institute, the necessary support is provided for the social solidarity services assigned to it by law, in accordance with the Decree published on 5 February 2025 (*Mexico, 2025*), incorporating, for humanitarian and social solidarity reasons, Mexican nationals who are repatriated and their legal beneficiaries into the compulsory social security scheme.

Between 5 February and 15 April 2025, 21,119 repatriated persons were registered, ensuring their access to the various services and programmes to which both workers and their dependants are entitled. To this end, a range of insurance schemes have been designed to extend social security cover to people who are not in an employer-employee relationship.

As a result of recent changes to US immigration policy, there remains a large number of Mexican nationals who could be returned to our country on a massive scale; it is therefore necessary to coordinate the actions of various departments and agencies within the Federal Public Administration and in the border regions, to ensure their orderly return under dignified and safe conditions.

In this context, the Mexican Government has set out specific measures to receive and support returning Mexicans, seeking to ensure respect for the political, social and human rights enshrined in current legislation, with a

focus on inclusion and prioritising support for this section of the population.

Social security is aimed at protecting and improving the welfare of workers and their families. Following the amendment to Article 1 of the Mexican Constitution on 10 June 2011, social security as a human right is protected by the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, Article 1 of which states:

...In the United Mexican States, all persons shall enjoy the human rights recognised in this Constitution and in the international treaties to which the Mexican State is a party, as well as the guarantees for their protection; the exercise of these rights may not be restricted or suspended, except in the cases and under the conditions set out in this Constitution (*Mexico, 1917*).

For its part, Article 123 of the Constitution also establishes the human right to social security (*Mexico, 1917*), whilst Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

... Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality (*UN, 1948*).

In this regard, the Mexican Government has reaffirmed its commitment to Mexicans who are in the process of returning home, coordinating with the departments responsible for social policy to implement measures that benefit historically underprotected sectors of society.

It is for this reason that, on the President's instructions, the Mexican Government, through the INM, provides protection for deported Mexicans by enrolling them in the *Compulsory Scheme of the Mexican Social Security Institute*, thereby granting them access to sickness and maternity benefits on humanitarian and solidarity grounds for a period of three months, whilst they work towards reintegrating into the labour

market with the support provided by the Mexican Government for repatriated persons (Mexico, DOF, 2025).²²

Under this protection scheme, the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation has registered a total of 32,822 repatriated persons between 5 February and 22 May 2025. This enables repatriated people to access healthcare services at the clinics closest to their places of residence.

Working in close collaboration with the three levels of government, the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation, through its 32 Repatriation Liaison Offices, assists, advises and refers repatriated individuals seeking employment opportunities via job training centres, job boards and special programmes designed to achieve economic and social reintegration, as well as an orderly, safe and dignified repatriation for returning Mexican nationals.

This is without overlooking the dynamics of human mobility as observed from the data collected by the Institute (*INM, 2025*). The importance of this lies in devising, designing and implementing social security projects and programmes with broad coverage and shared funding, as well as operational rules that allow for swift access, without prejudice to the identity, origin and residence of the target population, whilst taking into account the statistical behaviour of the population for whom social reintegration is sought; this is because the repatriated population does not always seek reintegration into their communities of "origin", but instead opts for reintegration opportunities in different localities, as shown in the following figures:

²² The Decree provides for the inclusion, within the compulsory social security scheme – and therefore in respect of the benefits in kind under the sickness and maternity insurance provisions of the Social Security Act – of Mexican nationals who are repatriated and their legal beneficiaries, on humanitarian grounds and in the spirit of social solidarity.

Figure 4.
Distribution of repatriated Mexicans by federal state of origin, January–June 2025.

REPATRIATION OF MEXICANS FROM THE UNITED STATES BY STATE OF ORIGIN JANUARY - JUNE 2025	
STATE	%
Chiapas	8.19
Guanajuato	7.92
Guerrero	7.48
Puebla	6.51
Oaxaca	6.46
Michoacán	6.20
Veracruz	6.10
Estado de México	5.38
Tamaulipas	5.03
Chihuahua	4.66
Sinaloa	3.73
Jalisco	3.42
San Luis Potosí	3.42
Hidalgo	2.69
Zacatecas	2.66
Sonora	2.25
Ciudad de México	2.15
Durango	2.14
Coahuila	2.03
Baja California	1.90
Querétaro	1.81
Aguascalientes	1.24
Nayarit	1.23
Nuevo León	1.17
Morelos	1.15
Tabasco	1.00
Tlaxcala	0.77
Campeche	0.47
Yucatán	0.27
Colima	0.27
Quintana Roo	0.19
Baja California Sur	0.10
TOTAL	100%



Source: INM. Comprehensive Migration Operations System (SIOM) - Repatriated Persons (2025). Preliminary figures subject to statistical validation. Mexico City: INM

Figure 5.

Distribution of repatriated Mexicans by destination state, January–June 2025.



REPATRIATION OF MEXICANS FROM THE UNITED STATES BY DESTINATION STATE JANUARY–JUNE 2025	
STATE	%
Baja California	9.15
Guanajuato	7.30
Chiapas	6.79
Tamaulipas	6.70
Chihuahua	6.69
Guerrero	5.63
Puebla	5.37
Oaxaca	4.96
Estado de México	4.90
Veracruz	4.84
Michoacán	4.78
Sonora	3.16
San Luis Potosí	3.08
Jalisco	2.93
Sinaloa	2.76
Ciudad de México	2.66
Hidalgo	2.40
Zacatecas	2.26
Coahuila	2.07
Nuevo León	2.01
Querétaro	1.91
Durango	1.61
Aguascalientes	1.18
Morelos	1.09
Nayarit	1.02
Tabasco	0.78
Tlaxcala	0.64
Campeche	0.50
Quintana Roo	0.28
Colima	0.25
Yucatán	0.22
Baja California Sur	0.09
TOTAL	100%

Source: INM. Comprehensive Migration Operations System (SIOM) - Repatriated Persons (2025). Preliminary figures subject to statistical validation. Mexico City: INM

One of the tasks of the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation is to assist and refer Mexican nationals returning to any of the 32 federal states through the Repatriation Liaison Officers, who provide guidance, advice and referrals to those who request them. Through the INM, returnees can access a range of services, rights and programmes provided by the state

governments, which deliver these benefits in close collaboration with the repatriation liaison officers.

Figure 6.

Reception of repatriated nationals by liaison officers from the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation²³



Source: Photographs taken by INM/Directorate for Dignified Repatriation, Government of Mexico, 2025

The National Institute of Migration and the Directorate for Dignified Repatriation are therefore open to entering into cooperation and partnership agreements with civil society organisations, the private sector and local authorities, with a view to providing people returning to their home countries with greater opportunities to integrate into their communities of origin and/or residence.

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²³The reception of repatriated Mexican nationals takes place 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. As part of the local repatriation arrangements, the set hours for receiving repatriated people are between 9:00 am and 7:00 pm; for families and unaccompanied minors, the hours are from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. This is to ensure that the necessary referrals and transport arrangements can be made to guarantee their safety.

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Challenges and opportunities arising from local initiatives for the socio-economic inclusion and social security of migrants and refugees. The case of Mexico City, Mexico

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Human mobility is a global issue and one of the main challenges of the 21st century; the efforts made by national governments have been overwhelmed by the increase in the number of movements, changes in the profiles of migrants, and the complexity associated with these mixed migration flows. Mexico is one of the world's leading countries of origin for migrants; its proximity to the US places it in a geopolitical position subject to considerable pressure in its relations with countries both on the continent and beyond, whose citizens are seeking to achieve the so-called American dream.

In Mexico, at federal level, the inclusion of people in situations of mobility is enshrined in the *Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (Mexico, 1917)*. Article 1 states that all people shall enjoy the human rights recognised in the Constitution and in international treaties; it prohibits all forms of discrimination on the grounds of national origin, immigration status or any other grounds that undermine human dignity. Article 4 establishes the right of every person to health protection, and Article 3 recognises the right to education for all people, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.

Article 2 of the Migration Act (*Mexico, 2011a*) recognises that all migrants, regardless of their immigration status, have the right to healthcare, education and justice. Articles 77 and 78 refer to the responsibility of the State and the three levels of government to implement policies on social and labour inclusion. *The Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection and Political Asylum (Mexico, 2011b)* recognises in Article 13 that refugees have the right to work, healthcare and education, as well as access to social programmes on an equal footing with nationals. Article 20 obliges the State to promote their local and social integration, and Article 23 stipulates that the three levels of government must coordinate their actions to guarantee these rights and facilitate the integration of refugees.

At local level, the impact of the human mobility agenda has become particularly significant and has presented enormous challenges, because

it is at this level that humanitarian assistance must be provided and the challenges of medium- and long-term support must be addressed. In most cases, this is done without regulatory frameworks or programmes, with limited budgets and amidst the resulting socio-economic tensions.

There are examples of local initiatives aimed at promoting the socio-economic and social security inclusion of migrants and refugees. Some of these have made progress even in the absence of a regulatory framework; others were civil society initiatives that succeeded in becoming public policies. However, their continuity and implementation have been mixed.

This paper will examine the case of Mexico City: coordinated actions among government, social and civil society organisations, business leaders and the migrant community to address the issue of human mobility. Progress is made in the recognition of rights and areas for improvement within the new context of the city, the country and the world.

In Mexico City, the law recognises that people in situations of human mobility are entitled to access social programmes on an equal footing with the rest of the population, notably programmes such as soup kitchens, grants for children and young people attending schools within the state education system, unemployment benefit, programmes to promote employment and entrepreneurship, support for women and young people, and access to cultural, sporting and recreational activities, amongst others.

The legislation governing this agenda in Mexico City includes the *Law on Interculturalism, Support for Migrants and Human Mobility in Mexico City* (Mexico City, 2011), which recognises human mobility as a right, protects the rights of migrants and persons entitled to international protection, promotes interculturalism and non-discrimination, and sets out obligations for the local government regarding support services. For its part, the *Political Constitution of Mexico City* (2017) recognises migrants, refugees and persons entitled to international protection as priority groups requiring care, guaranteeing them rights under the principles of hospitality, solidarity, interculturalism and inclusion.

In the social programmes providing support for foreign nationals in situations of mobility in Mexico City, which began in 2010, reference is made to the Equity Programme for Rural, Indigenous, Visiting and

Migrant Women,²⁴ which a year earlier was known as the Programme for Indigenous and Rural Women, and the Hospitality, Intercultural and Migrant Care Programme, which in 2008 was known as the Programme for the Care of Migrants and their Families. Both programmes were implemented by the Secretariat for Rural Development and Equity for Communities (SEDEREC) (2009).

In 2011, the programme reverted to the name *Equity Programme for Rural, Indigenous, Guest and Migrant Women*, which included the *Guest and Migrant Women* component comprising 10 grants for migrant women, each of up to \$150,000 (SEDEREC, 2011). With the passing of the *Mexico City Law on Interculturalism, Care for Migrants and Human Mobility* in 2011, the *Programme for Hospitality, Interculturalism, Care for Migrants and Human Mobility* was launched.

Between 2010 and 2018, the funding allocated to the programme ranged from 15 to 19 million pesos per year and provided grants of between 100,000 and 500,000 pesos to civil society organisations to fund initiatives focusing primarily on humanitarian aid and the management of identity documents.

In 2020, the *Hospital City and Human Mobility Programme* introduced a new component focused on engaging with migrants from the capital living abroad, supporting 80 family reunification cases with up to \$5,000 each, and providing 10 grants for productive projects of up to \$50,000 per Project. This programme marked the start of a process to register people on the move, through the *Mexico City Register of Visitors and Returning Migrants*, in order to gather socio-demographic information on the population that would help identify their priority needs and, at the same time, serve as a form of identification.

²⁴ The Programme was originally published under the name “Programme for Indigenous and Rural Women” in the Official Gazette of the Federal District, No. 516, dated 30 January 2009. From 2010 onwards, it was renamed the Equity Program for Rural, Indigenous, Guest and Migrant Women, incorporating support for migrant and guest women (*Mexico City, 2009*).

Good practice. Access to the right to healthcare. Condesa Specialist Clinic.

The Condesa Specialist Clinic (CEC)²⁵ is a public health centre recognised nationally and internationally for its work in the prevention, detection and comprehensive care of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It runs a "Clínica Santuario" public healthcare programme aimed specifically at migrants, as well as repatriated Mexicans in Mexico City, who are HIV positive. From the very beginning, it has been a partner to the organisations serving this population. Between 2023 and 2024, the Clínica Santuario treated 2,671 migrants (CDHCM, 2024). It has been an oasis for the migrant population in Mexico City, a model of inclusive and humane healthcare that provides free care regardless of immigration status; it offers HIV/STI testing and treatment, as well as social and legal support in collaboration with other organisations.

Figure 1

Humanitarian care for migrants at the Condesa Specialist Clinic



Source: CIMAC News Agency (9 October 2017). Available at: <https://cimacnoticias.com.mx/2017/10/09/en-5-anos-mil-ninas-fueron-atendidas-en-la-clinica-condesa/>

²⁵ A public health centre in Mexico City, opened in 2000, which is a national and international leader in the prevention, detection and comprehensive care of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. The "Clínica Santuario" programme specifically caters for migrants, asylum seekers and repatriated Mexicans living with HIV, providing free care regardless of immigration status.

Good practice. Humanitarian Bridge. Assistance for the migrant caravan.

Situations such as that in November 2018, with the arrival of the mass caravans from Central America, marked a turning point for Mexico City in terms of testing the effectiveness of its regulations and programmes, as well as the coordination between the authorities, civil society, United Nations agencies and the private sector.

Humanitarian assistance was provided to around 15,000 migrants, for which a facility was set up with dedicated areas for different population groups (infants, children, adolescents, women, and people from diverse backgrounds, amongst others), offering health, food, legal and recreational services, amongst others (*CDHCM, 2024*). During a period of transition in both local and federal government, the Mexico City Human Rights Commission (CDHCM) (2018) successfully coordinated, through the "Humanitarian Bridge" initiative, the services provided by local and federal government bodies, social and civil society organisations, United Nations agencies, concerned citizens and the private sector. All of this set the stage for re-evaluating the new needs within the city's current context.

Figure 2.

Set-up of the Humanitarian Bridge for migrants in Mexico City, 2018



Source: Photograph taken by Simone Dalmaso for Plaza Pública (2018).

Available at: <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/un-campo-de-refugiados-en-un-estadio-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico>

Over the last 25 years, the city has evolved in terms of its public policy framework, clearly recognising itself as a city shaped by

internal and international migration, where there is a growing number of people on the move with diverse backgrounds – a trend that is set to continue in the coming years. At times, greater emphasis is placed on the dimension of internal migration – whether as a point of origin, a destination, a return, or in search of international protection.

In December 2024, a strategy comprising 10 commitments was launched, aimed at ensuring a dignified life for people on the move, and the General Coordination Office for Human Mobility was established, a body specifically tasked with addressing this issue, facilitating greater institutional coordination, and making provisions for the operation of short- and medium-stay shelters to support this population (*Mexico City Government, 2024*).

Figure 3

Strategy comprising 10 commitments for people on the move, Mexico City, December 2024



Source: Mexico City Government (December 2024). Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DDvjnufdU1/>

Although progress demonstrates an institutional commitment to improving care, challenges remain. Mixed migration flows continue to rise and have become more complex, placing particular pressure on services, social cohesion and security. It is therefore important to create opportunities and identify policies that can be developed to foster positive ties, development and social inclusion within the migrant community, and to create conditions for social, cultural and economic inclusion, as well as to strengthen the community fabric, where the migrant population and the local population share rights, opportunities and responsibilities.

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Building socio-economic inclusion: tailored responses for people in situations of mobility in El Salvador

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Resident migrants: building stability and autonomy

We are facing a complex situation, characterised by rapid changes in the dynamics of human mobility. Over the past year, significant changes have become apparent that profoundly affect its various forms, including the closure or restriction of temporary work visa programmes. These schemes provided some relief from a saturated and precarious labour market, which in many cases fails to guarantee adequate conditions for securing a decent livelihood.

This situation calls upon the various sectors and stakeholders involved in the socio-economic inclusion of people on the move to develop appropriate and tailored responses. It is necessary to design and implement initiatives that improve access to employment opportunities and living conditions, and strengthen the social fabric, whilst also promoting the restoration of rights and the recognition of human dignity.

Every action must be aimed at strengthening individual and collective capacities, contributing to local development whilst remaining mindful of the need for protection and psycho-emotional support, particularly in the most vulnerable cases.

In line with these considerations, the GMIES has adopted a differentiated and progressive approach to its interventions. This involves identifying the primary needs of the people it supports, facilitating access to immediate services and benefits, and subsequently implementing medium-term measures that promote sustainable socio-economic inclusion, whilst strengthening each individual's capacity for self-determination.

In this context, the following section outlines initiatives currently being developed across El Salvador, which have yielded valuable lessons that guide and enrich the work currently underway.

Resident migrants: building stability and self-reliance

- **Target group:** migrants residing in El Salvador.
- **Key actions:** 1) Immigration regularisation processes to ensure legal residency. 2) Promoting collective entrepreneurship as a means of productive integration.

Context and the need for regularisation processes for development

With regard to the immigration categories discussed below, it is considered necessary to provide a brief overview of their implications for the day-to-day lives of foreign nationals in El Salvador, a country that has primarily been analysed from the perspective of return migration, although it also receives a significant number of people of different nationalities who regard it as an ideal place to settle.

When it comes to objective and highly specific data on the number of people living in a country other than their country of birth, we know that this is difficult to ascertain; however, the population census carried out by the *Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador (BCR, 2024)* provides us with a glimpse into this type of data, which can undoubtedly make a significant contribution to decision-making regarding public migration policy, whilst also reinforcing the intervention strategies that our organisation is implementing in specific regions and communities to facilitate regularisation processes that help them shape their medium- and long-term life plans. In this regard, below is a presentation of some systematised data, ranked from highest to lowest prevalence across the 14 departments of El Salvador.

Table 1.

Number of migrants by nationality across the 14 departments of El Salvador

Country of birth	NUMBER OF MIGRANTS BY NATIONALITY ACROSS DEPARTMENTS														Total by nationality
	San Salvador	La Libertad	La Unión	San Miguel	Santa Ana	Chalatenango	Morazán	Sonsonate	Ahuachapán	Usulután	Cabañas	La Paz	Cuscatlán	San Vicente	
Honduras	2,502	1,452	2,542	1,534	402	1,725	1,786	362	138	454	827	196	310	249	14,479
Other	4,058	2,822	2,576	1,887	469	194	436	326	137	467	62	262	195	198	14,079
Guatemala	2,507	1,539	133	305	2,366	212	55	864	1,380	288	83	280	189	122	10,323
United States	1,306	1,173	242	526	483	254	177	214	123	284	154	129	98	134	5,297
Mexico	774	437	45	158	176	50	30	113	73	99	20	71	62	49	2,157
Costa Rica	389	226	33	45	57	8	10	39	11	33	9	31	22	25	938
Spain	212	137	4	20	18	8	3	18	4	5	3	13	10	9	464
Belize	89	85	9	11	51	52	9	20	23	20	26	13	17	7	432
Italy	180	51	1	1	4	36	0	16	5	7	2	37	7	3	330
Canada	73	105	1	14	14	4	7	6	6	17	2	2	2	5	258
Do not know	87	38	41	30	7	6	0	7	1	13	3	5	1	3	242
Australia	12	11	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	31
Grand total by department	12,169	8,076	5,627	4,531	4,039	2,550	2,513	1,966	1,091	1,689	1,191	1,041	913	804	49,030

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the VII Population Census and VI Housing Census, 2024. Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador.

As can be seen, there is a significant presence of people from Honduras, Guatemala, the United States and in the “Other” category. This last category is particularly striking because the figure is very close to the number of Hondurans residing in El Salvador. This finding may lead us to consider various possibilities, some of which could be linked to their status as undocumented migrants in the country or, possibly – though to a lesser extent – to people with refugee status or another circumstance that prevents them from revealing their country of origin.

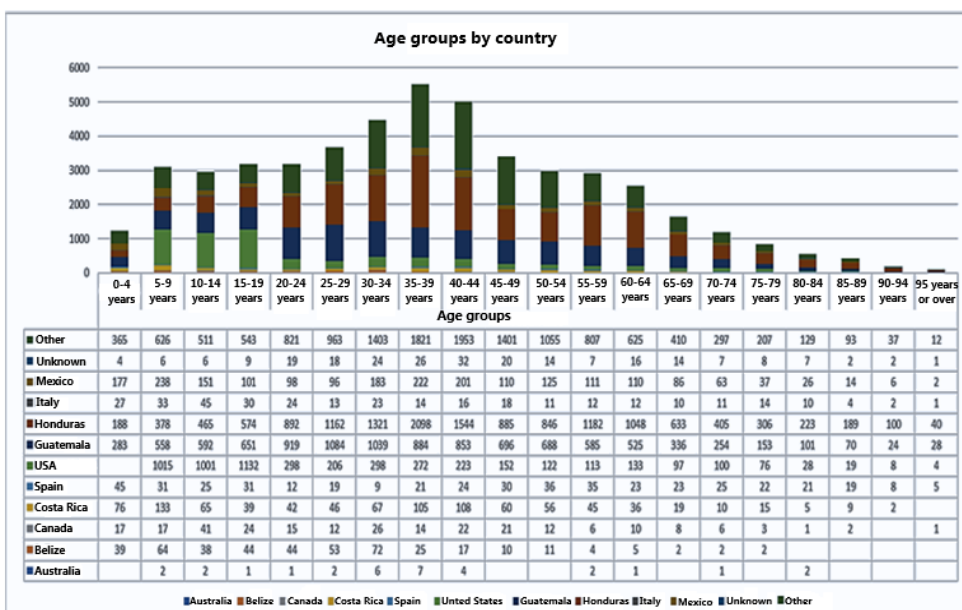
It is also striking that the census does not include people of Nicaraguan origin, who – based on experience, practice and the services provided – are amongst the population groups served in the eastern region of El Salvador; which may also give rise to different interpretations, such as the possibility that they are included in the “Other” or “Do not know” categories, or that they are, for the most part, seasonal or cross-border workers.

This analysis is further enriched by the inclusion of data disaggregated by sex and organised according to specific age groups ranging from 5 to 95 years and over, in five-year intervals, and by its demographic focus.

Chart 1

Age breakdown by country of birth of migrants in El Salvador

Country of birth	Women	Men
 United States	2535	2762
 Canada	118	140
 Australia	14	17
 Spain	196	268
 Italy	127	203
 Mexico	1112	1045
 Guatemala	5584	4473
 Costa Rica	478	460
 Belize	254	178
 Honduras	9006	5473
 Other	6381	7698
 Unknown	125	117



Source: Compiled by the author using data from the VII Population Census and VI Housing Census 2024. Internal Migration Table. Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador.

Analysing this data enables us to build up a picture of the possible socio-economic conditions and living circumstances of migrants in our country, leading to a number of insights which are discussed below:

- In border departments such as Ahuachapán, Chalatenango and La Unión, migration is predominantly female, consisting of women aged between 25 and 39 from Honduras and Guatemala.
- Migrant families with children and adolescents are mainly located in urban and developed areas, with the 15–19 age group being particularly prominent in the United States (1,132 people); there is also an unusual situation in the department of La Paz, where a population of Italian origin (45 people) was recorded, the majority of whom belong to the 10–14 age group, suggesting an established community.
- As regards the working-age adult population, there is a high concentration in the 35–44 age group, particularly amongst Honduran migrants (2,098 people) and those classified as “Other” (1,953 people), who are predominantly concentrated in border and urban areas.

- Ahuachapán stands out for having a majority of female migrants of Guatemalan origin – 844 compared with 536 men – aged between 25 and 29.

On immigration categories

Although the context referred to above may suffer from some under-reporting, it invites us to reflect on the importance of regularisation processes in ensuring that migrants have access to services and rights; for this reason, we consider it important to include data compiled from the public information portal of the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME, 2020-2025), which shows the five-year history of the granting of immigration categories permitting medium-term, long-term and permanent residence, such as permanent residence, temporary residence, transitional residence, nationalisation and naturalisation. The following data is presented below:

Table 2

Historical data on immigration categories granted in El Salvador by the DGME, 2020-2025

IMMIGRATION STATUS GRANTED BY THE DGME									
PERIOD	PERMANENT RES.	RENEWAL PERMANENT RES.	TEMPORARY RES.	EXTENSION TEMPORARY RES.	NATIONALIS.	NATURALIS.	TOTAL NEW GRANTS	TOTAL EXTENSIONS AND RENEWALS	GRAND TOTAL BY YEAR
JAN-DEC 2020	541	2,365	1,513	1,132	232	84	2,054	3,497	5,867
JAN-DEC 2021	745	3,357	2,381	735	377	58	3,126	4,092	7,653
JAN-DEC 2022	1,172	3,335	2,335	1,446	357	65	3,507	4,781	8,710
JAN-DEC 2023	1,185	3,125	2,430	1,544	371	90	3,615	4,669	8,745
JAN-DEC 2024	1,325	3,269	3,320	1,784	.	.	4,645	5,053	9,698
APR-JUN 2025	462	1,010	1,034	549	90	30	1,496	1,559	3,175
G. TOTALS	5,430	16,461	13,013	7,190	1,427	327	18,443	23,651	43,848

Source: Compiled by the author using data from the public information portal of El Salvador's Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME).

The contrast between demographic data and institutional statistics reveals a significant gap in immigration regularisation processes in El Salvador. Whilst the population register identifies 49,030 migrants residing in the country, the DGME has granted 43,848 immigration statuses between 2020 and 2025. This difference of 5,182 people could be interpreted as under-registration or, alternatively, reinforces the previously raised concern regarding a high proportion of people in irregular situations.

The breakdown by type of residence shows that 33.6% of migrants in El Salvador have been granted permanent residence, whilst 26.5% hold temporary residence permits and more than half have applied for

extensions or renewals. Also striking is the rate of naturalisation, which remains low at just 3.5% of the total. These figures indicate that the majority of the migrant population remains in a state of temporary residence or constant renewal, which limits their access to full rights and legal stability.

The limited extent of immigration regularisation can be explained, in part, by the living conditions faced by many migrants, which make it difficult for them to meet the requirements set out in current legislation.

One of the main obstacles is restricted access to financial resources, which prevents one or more members of the same household from covering the costs associated with applying for an immigration status. In practice, initiating a regularisation process involves not only paying the fees set by the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME), but also obtaining documentation in the country of origin, such as passports, birth certificates, and criminal and police records. Added to this may be the need to correct errors in documents, the payment of fines for irregular entry or for carrying out economic activities without authorisation, and the costs of travelling to consulates or embassies, which are often located far from where people live.

In addition to the financial costs, there are social and relational barriers that significantly affect the migrant population. Many people left their countries of origin at a young age and have not returned since, which has resulted in a lack of family or community networks that could facilitate the completion of administrative procedures. This situation is exacerbated when people have remained in specific areas since their arrival, which limits their ability to travel to other areas where they might have access to immigration services. The lack of adequate transport and geographical distance are also factors that restrict access to administrative procedures.

Furthermore, the low levels of education among many people make it difficult for them to understand administrative procedures, as well as to complete forms correctly and meet the requirements set out during the regularisation process. This educational gap not only slows down the process, but also exposes them to situations of abuse, such as scams or excessive charges for intermediary services. Taken together, these factors create a complex environment that limits effective access to regularisation, particularly amongst the most vulnerable groups.

In order to provide an overview of the profiles, requirements and key considerations for those wishing to apply for one of the immigration categories mentioned above, a descriptive table is provided below:

Table 3
Profiles, requirements and key aspects by immigration category in El Salvador

Category	Duration	Who is eligible	Key requirement	Important aspects
Permanent residence	Indefinite	- Central Americans by birth. Temporary residents (3 years) - Spaniards/Hispanic Americans (1 year) - Those married to or cohabiting with Salvadorans (1 year) - People who have been residing illegally for 10 years - Pensioners/those living on an annuity (1 year) - Refugees/stateless persons (2 years)	- Signed application form - Valid passport - Criminal record - PNC financial clearance certificate - Sworn statement of financial standing - Documents proving ties to the country (where applicable)	- Permitted absences: 2 years - Compulsory annual renewal - Fine for late renewal - Loss of residence status if renewal is not carried out within 1 year of the expiry date
Temporary residence	Up to 2 years, renewable	- Investors - Pensioners - Students - Workers - Those married to Salvadorans - Members of religious orders - Refugees/victims of human trafficking - Central Americans	- Valid passport application - Criminal record - PNC credit check - Specific documents depending on category	5-year limit (general) - Maximum absences: 6 consecutive months or cumulative monthly absences over the course of a year - Obligation to leave the country at the end of the period - Exemptions for refugees and victims
Naturalisation	Permanent	- Spanish nationals/Hispanic Americans (1 year's permanent residence) - Any foreign national (5 years' residence) - Those married to Salvadorans (2 years' residence) - Refugees/stateless persons	- Detailed application - Valid passport - Spouse's identity documents (if applicable) - Marriage certificate - Proof of permitted dual nationality - Permanent resident card	- Test of historical and cultural knowledge - Publication of notices - Compulsory swearing-in - It may be forfeited if the holder resides in their country of origin for more than 2 years or outside El Salvador for more than 5 years
Salvadoran by birth	Permanent	Central Americans who have held permanent residence for one year and are resident in El Salvador	- Birth certificate - Identity document from the country of origin - Permanent resident card - Proof of payment	- Simplified procedure - No opinion from the Public Prosecutor's Office - No publication of notices - Same rules on renunciation and reinstatement as for naturalisation

Source: Compiled by the author based on El Salvador's Special Law on Migration and Foreigners (*Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019*).

Implementation of the measure: immigration regularisation processes to ensure legal residence.

Since 2012, the GMIES has been promoting initiatives aimed at strengthening the leadership of the intra-regional migrant population living in El Salvador, particularly in the defence of their rights relating to access to work and the full exercise of their labour rights. In this regard, recognising that one of the main obstacles is irregular migration status, the GMIES has developed a programme offering legal advice and support aimed at foreign migrants wishing to regularise their migration status.

These initiatives enable the GMIES to contribute to improving the living conditions of migrants, creating opportunities and reducing the disparities linked to discrimination, xenophobia and the invisibility that results from irregular migration. An outline of the support process provided is set out below:

Figure 2

Outline of GMIES's support process for immigration regularisation

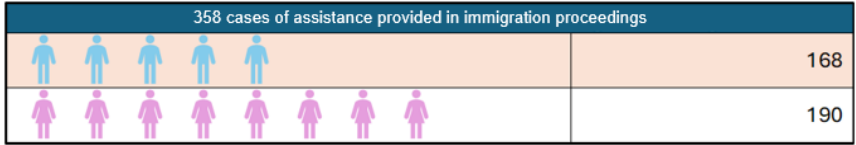


Source: Compiled by the GMIES.

These processes create key opportunities for advocacy and inter-institutional coordination, given that immigration regularisation involves various bodies, such as the consulates of the countries of origin, the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and the Salvadoran Social Security Institute, amongst others. Together with these institutions, the GMIES coordinates efforts both to process applications and to provide advisory services in accordance with their respective remits.

Between 2019 and the present day, 358 people have been supported through their immigration regularisation processes in El Salvador, with legal support also extended to their immediate families to address issues affecting other family members, such as the registration of births of children born in El Salvador, the recognition of dual nationality and the correction of errors in official records. The figures for support in this area are broken down as follows:

Figure 3.
Data on support provided during immigration regularisation processes, GMIES, 2019-2025



Source: Compiled by the GMIES.

Implementation of the initiative: promoting collective entrepreneurship as a means of productive integration.

The key feature of the support processes carried out by the GMIES is the close relationship we build with people, which enables us to gain a first-hand understanding of their expectations and challenges; it is on the basis of this understanding that a proposal is developed to drive the design and implementation of a collective enterprise that contributes to the socio-economic inclusion of a group of Nicaraguan and Honduran migrants living in the district of Santa Rosa de Lima, La Unión. It was also in this way that, in 2023, the process of establishing the enterprise, to be known as *"Sazón Centroamericano,"* began.

It is worth noting that this process has been characterised by being fully participatory and consultative, with the beneficiaries playing an active role in shaping the project. Through community meetings held in April

and May 2023 at the home of one of the beneficiaries, the idea for the project was presented and their concerns, aspirations and suggestions were gathered. This initial dialogue enabled the objectives to be developed collectively, with the aim of ensuring that the initiative met their real needs and strengthened their autonomy.

Besides being a productive space, the dining room emerged as a meeting place and a source of legal advice for other migrants who need to regularise their immigration status, with the migrants themselves able to advise others based on their own experiences and the knowledge shared by the GMIES.

During the process of consolidating the collective enterprise, participants received guidance on their business plan and its management; psychosocial support workshops were also provided, aimed at fostering the development of soft skills to help them integrate and build relationships within their community and organisational environment. The focus of this knowledge transfer centred on:

A. Self-awareness and life planning

- Identifying personal, family, work-related and social achievements.
- Setting short-, medium- and long-term goals.
- Participatory activities aimed at building self-esteem and personal planning.

B. Skills, networks and resources

- Recognising cognitive, emotional and social skills.
- Mapping support networks and available resources.
- Analysing constraints and opportunities in the immediate environment.

C. SWOT analysis and action strategies

- Applying SWOT analysis at individual and group level.
- Defining specific goals and implementation strategies.
- Consolidating the collective vision for the enterprise.

The initiative opened its doors to the public on 10 December 2023 and, from January 2024, began running information sessions aimed at

migrants living in El Salvador without proper documentation. These sessions include legal advice, referrals to relevant organisations and capacity-building to assist with immigration regularisation.

It is worth noting that this initiative has directly benefited 27 migrants who have regularised their status or are in the process of doing so, of whom 17 are women and 10 are men.

Recommendations for implementing measures with a holistic approach.

- 1) Identify the main population groups accessing specific migration categories in order to establish standardised service pathways. This can be achieved through manuals or protocols.
- 2) Digitise the case registration system to streamline the process, facilitate the generation of disaggregated statistics and ensure the traceability of results.
- 3) Organise inter-institutional outreach events in areas with high concentrations of migrants, bringing services to them on a mobile basis
- 4) Expand legal support for families, including advice on nationality, birth registration and the rectification of documents.
- 5) Promote community-based legal advice centres, such as the "Sazón Centroamericano" soup kitchen, where trained migrants can pass on their knowledge.
- 6) Encourage migrant spokespersons to share their experiences in forums, the media and institutional settings, thereby strengthening the rights-based narrative.
- 7) Implement feedback mechanisms with those receiving support to continuously improve the process.

Labour mobility and neighbourhood movement: facilitating access to identity.

In the current context of human mobility in the Mesoamerican region, characterised by complex and constantly changing migratory flows, it is imperative to implement mechanisms that promote the regularisation and protection of people in transit. The issuance of identity cards is emerging as a strategic tool to facilitate access to rights, services and opportunities, particularly in border areas where labour migration, cross-border migration and migration between neighbouring regions is a daily reality. This measure not only addresses the need for migration regulation but also forms part of a rights-based approach that recognises

the dignity and specific characteristics of each population group, with particular attention paid to children and adolescents.

The ID card scheme led by the GMIES, in coordination with organisations such as IOM, UNICEF and local authorities, represents a coordinated effort to bring documentation services to historically excluded communities. By providing free identity cards to seasonal migrant workers and those in transit through neighbouring areas, the initiative facilitates safe, orderly and regular migration, in line with the principles of flexible migration promoted by the OAS. This process not only enables the formal identification of individuals, but also opens the door to socio-economic inclusion, psycho-emotional protection and the strengthening of the social fabric in border areas such as Perquín and Arambala.

Beyond the mere issuing of documents, the process of issuing identity cards serves as a starting point for broader initiatives aimed at restoring rights and fostering local development. By recognising the presence and skills of migrants, their capacity for agency is strengthened and their integration into the labour market and community life is promoted. In this regard, the process of issuing identity cards should be conceived as part of a progressive and tailored strategy that addresses the immediate needs of the mobile population, whilst laying the foundations for sustainable inclusion that respects their diversity.

Target group: seasonal migrant workers, cross-border migrants and those in local transit.

Key initiative: ID card registration drives to strengthen the recognition and protection of rights.

2.1 Historical context and the need for identity cards

The origins of this initiative can be traced back to the historical repercussions of the *1992 ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague*, which resolved a century-old border dispute between Honduras and El Salvador. This ruling resulted in the cession of Salvadoran territory and the consequent separation of families from their jobs and of children and young people from their schools. As a result, more than 5,000 families commute daily between El Salvador and Honduras to work or study. This population, commonly known as the ‘former border communities’, has required constant monitoring by the border authorities and the DGME.

Particularly at the Perquín border, there was a daily flow of Salvadoran children and adolescents who live in Honduran territory but study in El Salvador or cross the border to access medical care. This border enjoyed exceptional treatment, allowing people to cross with only a birth certificate, without requiring a passport. However, the birth certificate was identified as a vulnerable document due to the lack of a photograph of the holder, making it urgent to establish immigration control mechanisms to ensure the safe and orderly transit of minors.

2.2 Legal framework

It should be noted that, in accordance with the principles of legality governing the actions of public administrations, this initiative is underpinned by a robust legal framework based on a rights-based approach. This framework incorporates both the international standards ratified by the Salvadoran State regarding the protection of migrants — including the recommendations issued by treaty bodies with which El Salvador is party — and the national legislation underpinning the actions of the Directorate General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME) and its authority to coordinate with various stakeholders in the implementation of measures such as this one.

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (UN, 1990)

Among its recitals, it states that "workers who are non-documented or in an irregular situation are frequently employed under less favourable conditions of work than other workers and that certain employers find this an inducement to seek such labour in order to reap the benefits of unfair competition" (UN, 1990).

Article 25(3) provides that " States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that migrant workers are not deprived of any rights derived from this principle by reason of any irregularity in their stay or employment." For its part, Article 69(1) provides that " States Parties shall, when there are migrant workers and members of their families within their territory in an irregular situation, take appropriate measures to ensure that such a situation does not persist" (UN, 1990).

Recommendations of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (UN, 2009; 2014)

In its first periodic report on El Salvador, dated 4 February 2009 (No. 40), the Committee encourages the State Party to implement, as soon as possible, the El Salvador–Honduras Pilot Regularisation Plan to improve the situation of cross-border workers (2009).

In its second periodic report on El Salvador dated 2 May 2014, it recommends that the country step up its efforts to ensure that all migrant workers and members of their families who are within its territory or subject to its jurisdiction enjoy the rights recognised in the Convention without any discrimination; and that local authorities, officials working in the field of migration and the general public be made aware of the rights of all migrant workers and their family members and of the importance of eliminating discrimination against migrants (2014).

Special Law on Migration and Foreigners (Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019).

Articles 103, 105 and 106 stipulate the need for a document certifying the transit of minors at the border, thereby guaranteeing their rights and safety during migration (2019).

2.3 Identifying profiles and benefits

It is important to note that the last provision mentioned above is of particular significance, as it defines the target population groups for the intervention, as well as the specific benefits that each type of documentation affords them. These are set out below:

Article 103 regulates local border traffic (*Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019*), which covers Central Americans and foreign residents living in the country's border areas who enter and leave the country on a regular and permanent basis by land, provided that their stay does not exceed three days and they do not have permission to carry out work activities. Among the benefits provided by this documentation are: (i) facilitating a swift, orderly and secure immigration control process; (ii) entering, transiting through and staying for up to three days; and (iii) providing a flexible procedure for children and adolescents, who may be accompanied by their carers without the need to provide proof of legal representation.

For its part, Article 105 regulates seasonal workers (*Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019*), which includes people of Central American origin engaged in the cultivation and harvesting of coffee, sugar cane and cotton, amongst others. The benefits provided by this permit are: (i) to enter, travel through and remain in Salvadoran territory for up to six months, which may be extended; (ii) to carry out paid work with the right to multiple entries and exits during the authorised period; (iii) to travel quickly, in an orderly and safe manner; and (iv) to be entitled to the social benefits set out in the Labour Code.

Article 106 governs cross-border workers (*Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019*), which includes foreign nationals who maintain their habitual residence in the border area of a neighbouring state and who carry out activities, either as self-employed persons or as employees, within Salvadoran territory. The benefits provided by this permit are: (i) to enter and travel through the country, provided they return daily or at least once a week to their place of residence; (ii) to carry out paid work in the country and to be entitled to enter and leave the national territory on multiple occasions; (iii) to streamline the immigration control process so that they may travel quickly, in an orderly and safe manner; and (iv) to be entitled to social security benefits in accordance with the Labour Code.

2.4 Procedures and requirements for each type of documentation

The following describes the procedures and requirements applicable to the issuance of permits for Local Border Transit, Seasonal Workers, and Cross-Border Workers, in accordance with the provisions of the Special Law on Migration and Foreigners (LEME) and its Regulations.

It should be noted that, in accordance with current regulations, these procedures involve costs, including those for certain documents required during the process. However, as part of this initiative, organisations such as the GMIES, the IOM and UNICEF have covered the fees associated with the issue of permits and birth certificate registrations. Full details of the costs will be made public in due course (*Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019*).

2.4.1 Identity card for cross-border migrant workers

Table 4

Requirements and procedure for obtaining a card for cross-border migrant workers

General procedure	The Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME) must register and monitor foreign nationals working as cross-border workers, using its computerised system.
Application requirements	A. Valid travel document: • Honduras: identity card or passport. • Guatemala: personal identification document or passport. • Other nationalities residing in Guatemala or Honduras: passport or valid identity card. B. An original birth certificate, which is legible and in good condition. C. A special permit application form, signed by the applicant. D. Habitual residence in a border area, with daily or weekly returns to the country of origin via authorised border crossings.
Eligibility criteria	• Not to be subject to a residence order in El Salvador. • Not to be subject to any entry restrictions or immigration alerts. • Not to be the subject of an INTERPOL alert. • Not to have an active arrest warrant. • Not to have been convicted in El Salvador of offences relating to sexual offences, human trafficking, document forgery or tax offences.

Source: Compiled by the author based on the *Special Law on Migration and Foreigners* (Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019).

Table 5

Requirements and procedure for obtaining a cross-border local travel permit

Item	Description
General information on the procedure under Article 103 of the Law on Migration and Foreigners.	Registration and ID card: people travelling across the border for local reasons, including minors, must register with the DGME to obtain the relevant ID card.
	Entry requirements: if they do not register, they will not be permitted to enter under this category and must go through the standard immigration checks.
	Validity: the card is valid for five years.
	Cost: the law refers to a cost, without specifying the amount. Exemptions are provided for.
	Exemptions: The following are exempt from payment: • Minors who are studying or receiving regular medical care in El Salvador. • People with disabilities or older people who are receiving ongoing medical care in the country.
Documents required depending on the type of applicant	A. Minors applying for the card for the first time: • Identity document of the father, mother or guardian (depending on nationality). • The minor's original birth certificate. • A sworn statement applying for the card, signed by the guardian.
	B. Minors applying for renewal or replacement: • Expired or damaged card. • Affidavit stating loss, theft or damage. • Original birth certificate (if there have been any changes). • Affidavit applying for the card.
	C. Adults applying for the card for the first time: • Travel document. • Original birth certificate (for foreign nationals). • Sworn statement of application for the card.
	D. Adults applying for renewal or replacement: • Expired or damaged card. • Sworn statement regarding loss, theft or damage. • Original birth certificate (if there have been any changes). • Sworn statement applying for the card.

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Special Law on Migration and Foreigners (Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019).

2.4.3 Identity card for seasonal migrant workers

Table 6.

Requirements and procedure for obtaining a card for migrant seasonal workers.

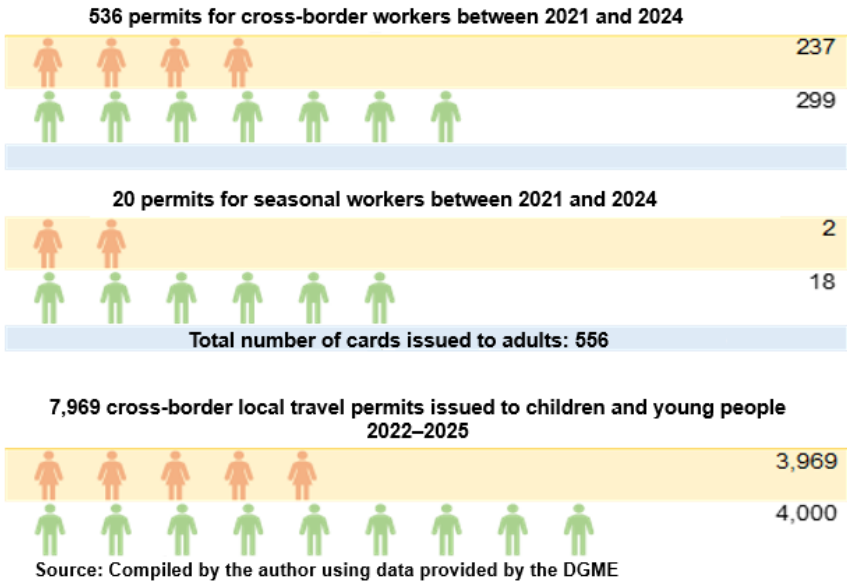
Item	Description
General information on the procedure	Entry authorisation: the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME) may authorise the entry of seasonal workers from Central American countries.
	Proof of status: legal immigration status is evidenced by the Seasonal Worker Card.
	Validity: the card is valid for two years and may be renewed for the same period. Each entry allows a stay of up to six months.
	Registration and monitoring: the DGME must keep a record of these workers in its computer system.
	Cost: • Cross-border workers: USD 8.00. • Other temporary residence permits (in accordance with Article 104, paragraphs 4 to 6): USD 25.00.
Application requirements	• A valid travel document. • An application containing the following details: • The authority to which the application is addressed. • The applicant's name. • Date and place of entry. • A statement of intent to reside. • Address. • Means of receiving notifications. • Place and date of the application. • Signature.
Criteria for obtaining the card	• Not to be subject to a residence order in the country. • Not to be subject to any entry restrictions or immigration alerts. • Not to be the subject of an INTERPOL alert. • Not to have an active arrest warrant. • Not to have been convicted of offences relating to sexual offences, human trafficking, smuggling of persons or document forgery.

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Special Law on Migration and Foreigners (Legislative Assembly of El Salvador, 2019).

2.5 Implementation of the measure

Between 2021 and 2025, 13 ID card registration drives were held, benefiting 8,525 people, including women, men, children and adolescents, broken down as follows:

Figure 4.
People who have benefited from ID card registration campaigns, GMIES, 2021-2025



2.6 Operational costs and financial sustainability of ID card issuance campaigns.

The approximate cost of each ID card issuance event ranges from US\$ 30,000 to US\$ 35,000. This amount covers the costs associated with accommodation, meals and transport for staff from the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME), as well as the purchase of the supplies needed to print the ID cards. It also includes the cost of required documents, such as birth certificates issued by local authorities in El Salvador, and the provision of snacks for the children and teenagers taking part in the registration sessions.

It should be noted that these costs have been covered thanks to a well-established best practice: the building of strategic partnerships and the coordination of resources amongst public sector actors at both national and local levels, international organisations and civil society

organisations. This inter-institutional collaboration reinforces the conviction that human mobility processes must be addressed through a multi-sectoral and multi-level approach, which is essential for achieving relevant, sustainable and comprehensive interventions.

2.7 Strategic benefits of the ID card scheme

The issuance of identity documents is a key tool for the protection of rights, evidence-based planning and institutional strengthening:

- A. Traceable recognition of rights: this enables individuals to be identified as holders of rights, reducing historical gaps arising from a lack of up-to-date and automated records.
- B. Quantification of actual migration flows: it provides disaggregated data on age, gender, occupation and migration routes, which are essential for analysis and decision-making.
- C. Design of evidence-based public policies: it facilitates the implementation of specific programmes, such as health services targeted at identified migrant children.
- D. Debunking stereotypes: it generates objective data demonstrating, for example, the economic contribution of regularised workers.
- E. Fulfilment of international commitments: it contributes to progress towards the targets set out in the Global Compact for Migration and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- F. Impact assessment and accountability: it improves institutional capacity to monitor outcomes and ensure transparency.
- G. Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Compact on Migration. This initiative is directly aligned with key international commitments:
 - Target 10.7 of the 2030 Agenda aims to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration through well-managed and well-planned policies (*UN, 2015*).
 - Objective 11 of the Global Compact for Migration focuses on managing borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner, fostering bilateral and regional cooperation to protect migrants, particularly minors (*UN, 2018*).
- H. Integration of a pan-social and pan-governmental approach. The implementation of this action is based on a comprehensive approach that coordinates efforts amongst multiple stakeholders:
 - Multisectoral participation: this involves central government,

local authorities, civil society organisations and communities, ensuring a holistic and sustainable response.

- Local collaboration: the active involvement of local authorities and communities ensures that the needs and rights of migrant children are addressed appropriately and effectively.

2.8 Challenges, strategies and lessons learnt

A. Inter-institutional coordination as a strategic priority. One of the main challenges of the initiative was to generate effective synergies among various stakeholders: government bodies, local authorities, law enforcement agencies, supranational organisations and civil society organisations. To facilitate this coordination, efforts were made to raise institutional awareness with a view to adopting a comprehensive and cooperative approach to migration, encompassing both social and governmental dimensions.

It was recognised that inclusive migration begins at a local level, which requires close coordination with local authorities and community stakeholders to address the multidimensional challenges posed by migration. This coordination was strengthened thanks to previous experience of collaboration among the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Independent Monitoring Group of El Salvador (GMIES).

B. Communication strategy and information management. Another significant challenge was the implementation of an effective communication strategy. In the run-up to the ID card issuance campaign, the lack of information caused confusion and fear amongst the migrant population, who associated the initiative with possible deportation proceedings or restrictions on entry into the country.

To counter this perception, an information and awareness-raising campaign was devised with the support of local stakeholders, channelled through municipal bodies. The widespread dissemination of information across the region helped clarify the purpose of the initiative, reinforce the institutional message and highlight the prerequisites for the ID card registration process. These measures assisted in reducing the number of incomplete registrations and made it easier to identify situations requiring prior support.

C. Approach to the protection of migrant children and adolescents.

The ID card registration process involved working directly with migrant children and adolescents, which presented operational challenges and opportunities to raise institutional awareness regarding the best interests of the child. The importance of adapting activities to the cultural and social contexts of the communities was recognised, particularly in rural areas such as Perquín.

Fun activities and entertainment were incorporated for children and young people throughout the process, which encouraged their participation and well-being. Furthermore, the active involvement of the communities in the planning and delivery of the sessions was encouraged, strengthening their sense of belonging and commitment to the process.

D. Educational materials and the prevention of irregular migration.

The initiative adopted an inclusive approach at every stage, with a particular focus on children. Educational materials developed by the IOM were incorporated, aimed at preventing irregular migration and highlighting the risks associated with this practice. These resources helped raise awareness and promote informed decision-making from a protection perspective.

2.9 Recommendations for institutionalising the ID card scheme.

A. Review national immigration legislation and existing policies to identify opportunities, based on their mandates, to implement expedited regularisation processes.

B. Promote regional cooperation mechanisms, recognising the transnational nature of mobility.

C. Ensure that these identity cards are legally recognised in other areas, so that they provide an opportunity for inclusion within communities.

Prevention of irregular migration and sustainable reintegration

Against a backdrop of political, social and climatic transformations that directly affect the dynamics of human mobility, there is an urgent need to build resilient territories capable of anticipating, absorbing and adapting to these changes. The closure of labour migration programmes, the rise in deportations and involuntary returns have heightened the vulnerability of people on the move, generating reverse

migration flows and new settlement patterns in countries across the region. This reality calls for comprehensive responses that not only address the structural causes of irregular migration but also facilitate sustainable reintegration processes.

Building resilient communities involves coordinating cross-sectoral efforts to guarantee access to decent livelihoods, the recognition of rights and the strengthening of the social fabric. This requires implementing public policies with a rights-based approach, recognising skills acquired abroad and promoting socio-economic inclusion from a progressive and differentiated perspective. Within this framework, the GMIES has promoted initiatives in El Salvador that aim to create favourable conditions for comprehensive reintegration, thereby contributing to local development and the prevention of new cycles of forced displacement.

Target group: Salvadorans at risk of migrating and returnees.

Key actions:

1. Design and implementation of local development plans with a territorial focus.
2. Promotion of social economy enterprises as an alternative for community integration and reintegration.

3.1 Context and significance of measures to prevent irregular migration and to reintegrate returnees

El Salvador is a country with a long and complex history of migration, the key milestones of which have occurred over the course of several decades. In the 1970s, migration was driven primarily by economic and employment factors, with Honduras and the United States being the most common destinations. Subsequently, during the 1980s, the armed conflict led to mass population displacements as people sought to save their lives, resulting in many people being granted refugee status in countries such as Nicaragua, Canada, Australia, Sweden and, in particular, the United States.

In the early post-war years, protests intensified, driven by the search for decent livelihoods, which were constrained not only by the recent ceasefire but also by events such as the devastating Hurricane Mitch in 1998. With the arrival of the new millennium, these were compounded by

the earthquakes of 2001 and growing insecurity and widespread social violence across the country. Between 2014 and 2017, El Salvador, alongside Honduras and Guatemala, emerged as one of the nations with the highest migration rates in the region, giving rise to new phenomena such as the so-called caravans, as well as a sustained increase in deportation figures.

In recent years, socio-political changes in South America have led to an increase in mass protests, particularly in Venezuela, which has had a significant impact on the transformation of migration routes in the region; this does not mean, however, that migration flows from the region, particularly from El Salvador, have ceased; however, it is worth noting that they have decreased and that the reasons for migration are largely linked to access to livelihoods.

Against this backdrop, we at the GMIES have been working to compile relevant statistical data to understand the movements of the Salvadoran population over the last decade. Our aim is to provide objective information that contributes to the analysis of irregular migration processes, which have had a profound impact on our territories. Historically, these dynamics have been measured primarily on the basis of deportation events; however, it is essential to integrate and cross-reference various sources of information in order to build a broader and more accurate picture of population flows on the move.

In this regard, the following section presents statistics on arrests, refusals of entry and deportations — both at the border and within the host country — as well as applications for asylum or refuge in Mexico and the United States. It also includes data on people who entered the United States irregularly and are currently going through their proceedings without being detained.

The tables presented below have been compiled from ICE reports, which reaffirm the changes in migration flows; however, they also highlight the continued movement of people from the northern countries of Central America. Furthermore, it should be noted that the term “encounters” refers to incidents where people attempting to enter the US irregularly have come into contact with a border official, mainly along the south-eastern border, which comprises: California – from San Diego/Tijuana to the Pacific coast; Arizona – including areas such as Tucson and Yuma; New Mexico: including areas such as El Paso; and Texas, which includes the Rio Grande Valley, Laredo, Del Río and El Paso.

These encounters can lead to a number of outcomes, one of the main ones being that the individual succeeds in demonstrating that their life would be at risk if returned and is therefore granted asylum; another possibility is that the individual fails to fully demonstrate that they are at risk and is permitted to enter the country but is placed in detention whilst their case is reviewed by an immigration court, or is granted an alternative measure to detention; and, as a third possibility, an immediate deportation or inadmissibility order may be issued under Title 8; during the pandemic, until 2024, Title 42 was applied.

Table 7.

Encounters at the US border of people attempting to enter the country

Encounters at the border										
NATION	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Mexico	315,476	284,844	251,158	252,570	175,032	210,720	227,071	298,222	664,107	805,518
Guatemala	56,525	85,660	63,289	88,564	78,417	135,268	272,084	49,294	284,049	232,738
Honduras	48,673	97,077	36,643	60,958	54,956	89,520	262,374	42,385	320,079	213,809
El Salvador	38,312	68,968	45,700	81,132	57,824	37,497	92,819	17,463	99,079	97,479
Cuba	15,432	3,724	3,014	3,739	5,076	10,065	36,082	15,048	40,549	233,602
Venezuela	679	640	683	1,333	2,383	4,210	10,465	4,265	52,590	206,075
Nicaragua	2,968	3,228	1,900	2,086	2,005	4,547	15,641	3,123	52,633	175,054
Colombia	3,007	2,568	2,807	3,256	3,491	4,066	4,705	2,970	10,381	140,059
Haiti	3,435	2,796	1,907	7,840	10,793	1,478	4,148	6,316	50,608	60,598
Brazil	2,416	2,353	2,877	6,112	6,643	8,555	22,198	9,228	58,151	60,219

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

With regard to the data presented, it is worth clarifying that the ICE reports for 2023 and 2024 contain data exclusively on deported individuals; consequently, the data on border apprehensions and refusals of entry are detailed up to 2022.

Table 8.

Deportations at the US border of people attempting to enter the country

Deportations												
Nation	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Mexico	306,901	265,039	232,435	236,609	181,962	208,063	202,587	148,706	50,650	62,047	54,056	87,298
Guatemala	47,021	54,406	33,350	33,869	32,850	49,156	53,346	28,367	7,723	6,802	20,179	66,435
Honduras	36,640	40,881	20,243	22,073	22,070	28,397	40,651	20,573	5,053	6,545	22,274	45,923
El Salvador	21,132	26,678	21,823	20,346	18,339	14,931	18,038	12,167	2,790	7,325	8,310	15,284
Colombia	1,479	1,381	1,589	2,097	2,029	2,666	2,879	1,950	3,021	5,823	371	657
Nicaragua	1,340	1,318	929	885	903	962	2,262	1,457	1,034	2,680	834	3,256
Brazil	1,579	996	1,019	1,509	1,718	2,133	2,403	2,295	1,965	2,507	2,320	3,872
Ecuador	1,512	1,586	1,430	1,432	1,376	1,437	2,485	3,119	1,854	1,821	9,866	14,268
Dominican Rep.	2,325	2,080	1,885	1,987	2,021	1,880	2,203	1,923	1,728	1,722	717	792
Haiti	534	399	466	382	5,723	1,026	728	915	398	1,543	1,607	1,859

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Table 9.

Deportations at the US border of people attempting to enter the country

Inadmissibility Title 8 and 42											
Nation	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Mexico	47,742	55,667	63,036	59,601	44,578	55,268	57,535	43,589	55,605	65,596	
Haiti	1,443	986	783	6,727	9,582	660	1,318	496	2,249	25,420	
Canada	24,414	23,661	22,831	18,775	18,901	15,234	11,533	8,202	9,140	19,469	
Russia	252	249	336	322	481	908	1,250	734	3,759	16,581	
Honduras	1,808	5,602	2,795	7,556	7,056	12,392	7,813	1,909	10,915	14,382	
India	3,766	1,815	1,715	2,332	2,008	2,769	1,908	1,696	1,988	7,700	
Colombia	1,020	1,046	1,456	2,047	2,156	2,660	3,101	1,771	3,845	4,704	
Brazil	714	710	966	2,374	2,944	5,745	3,030	1,311	791	4,388	
El Salvador	1,163	2,330	2,136	9,114	7,813	5,861	2,734	836	3,078	4,218	
Guatemala	1,833	4,544	6,129	13,318	11,610	18,460	6,955	1,466	4,769	4,146	

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

To complement the picture outlined above, statistics have been included relating to migration procedures handled through alternatives to detention, as well as to applications for and grants of asylum and refuge. It should be noted that the available information has certain limitations in terms of the time covered, which has necessitated narrowing the historical scope of the analysis.

Table 10.

Migrants processed while at liberty, asylum applications and grants of asylum in the United States

Migrants processed while at liberty					
Year 2022		Year 2023		Year 2024	
Nationality	Total	Nationality	Total	Nationality	Total
Guatemala	764,692	Honduras	878,653	Mexico	1,135,743
Honduras	759,724	Guatemala	877,020	Guatemala	982,669
Mexico	628,509	Mexico	774,974	Honduras	951,188
El Salvador	543,627	El Salvador	554,586	Venezuela	701,678
Cuba	327,423	Venezuela	465,476	El Salvador	569,090
Venezuela	254,736	Cuba	442,624	Cuba	539,400
Nicaragua	235,188	Nicaragua	323,518	Colombia	384,734
Brazil	164,720	Colombia	271,483	Nicaragua	355,122
Colombia	143,133	Haiti	208,565	Ecuador	310,977
Haiti	136,561	Ecuador	201,000	Haiti	292,178

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Table 11.

Asylum applications and the granting of asylum to migrants in the United States

Applications for and granting of asylum and refuge													
Asylum applications					Conditions for granting asylum (formal and substantive)				Refugee status granted				
Nation	2015	2021	2022	2023	2015	2021	2022	2023	2015	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cuba	N/D	6,316	91,179	N/D	0	0	0	470	1,527	0	N/D	N/D	N/D
Venezuela	N/D	14,295	83,915	N/D	N/D	2,068	3,691	3,760	N/D	0	160	N/D	11,350
El Salvador	N/D	13,594	24,492	N/D	2,173	1,459	2,639	5,840	0	200	N/D	N/D	N/D
Guatemala	N/D	21,279	36,361	N/D	2,082	1,336	2,329	2,580	0	0	1,084	N/D	N/D
Honduras	N/D	17,365	37,262	N/D	1,416	1,022	1,536	4,090	0	0	N/D	N/D	N/D
Mexico	9,000	14,361	17,784	N/D	870	670	677	19,320	0	0	N/D	N/D	N/D
Colombia	N/D	4,081	10,695	N/D	N/D	0	464	2,110	N/D	0	N/D	N/D	N/D
Nicaragua	N/D	0	21,144	N/D	N/D	163	0	1,020	N/D	0	N/D	N/D	N/D
Ecuador	N/D	2,996	17,738	N/D	N/D	0	747	1,010	N/D	0	N/D	N/D	N/D
Peru	N/D	N/D	N/D	N/D	N/D	N/D	N/D	19,950	N/D	N/D	N/D	N/D	N/D
Haiti	N/D	7,249	28,198	N/D	N/D	0	0	N/D	N/D	0	N/D	N/D	N/D
Brazil	N/D	3,092	17,288	N/D	N/D	0	0	N/D	N/D	0	N/D	N/D	N/D

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

In the case of Mexico, the analysis has been based on the statistical bulletins published by the Migration Policy Unit of the Ministry of the Interior of the United Mexican States. This source has enabled us to build up a general picture of the dynamics of mobility in the country, with

particular attention to the figures relating to self-presentation, referral, deportation and the granting of asylum. The data considered covers the last five years and has focused on the nationalities from the Americas with the most significant figures.

Table 12.

Irregular migrants apprehended in Mexico, main nationalities 2020-2024

Presentation of irregular migrants in Mexico						
Country	Years					Total, general
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
Colombia	503	1,971	4,075	12,196	22,989	41,734
Cuba	1,179	9,732	30,595	15,225	38,850	95,581
Dominican Rep.	45	1,146	4,447	6,863	29,675	42,176
Ecuador	4	6,028	9,054	23,139	52,058	90,283
El Salvador	8,179	14,153	21,950	20,582	72,323	137,187
Guatemala	31,479	69,441	53,065	61,086	67,090	282,161
Haiti	1,411	3,278	2,776	55,346	33,584	96,395
Honduras	35,741	59,575	52,495	83,445	67,991	299,247
Nicaragua	842	10,664	33,320	29,330	59,756	133,912

The presentation is: an administrative measure issued by the National Institute of Migration, whereby temporary accommodation is granted to a foreign national who cannot provide proof of their immigration status, with a view to regularising their stay or assisting with their return to their country of origin.

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Table 13.

Irregular migrants referred in Mexico, by main nationality, 2021-2024

Irregular migrants in Mexico who have been referred					
Country	Year				Grand total
	2021	2022	2023	2024	
Colombia	3,173	14,726	13,829	20,045	51,773
Cuba	972	11,176	5,311	4,168	21,627
Dominican Rep.	25	733	1,189	1,314	3,261
Ecuador	2,374	10,837	12,146	22,573	47,930
El Salvador	10,452	4,584	3,600	5,397	24,033
Guatemala	28,457	16,184	19,771	15,036	79,448
Haiti	5,623	1,727	11,421	8,069	26,840
Honduras	52,893	19,364	24,667	22,106	119,030
Nicaragua	3,546	7,617	1,575	2,593	15,331
Peru	1,013	4,479	4,572	7,060	17,124
Venezuela	12,797	25,731	96,622	116,643	251,793

Referred: foreign nationals in an irregular immigration status against whom an Administrative Immigration Procedure (PAM) was initiated by the National Institute of Migration (INM) for failing to prove their lawful immigration status, and who were referred to shelters within the DIF network for temporary accommodation.

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Table 14.

Irregular migrants deported from Mexico, main groups

Irregular migrants in Mexico who have been deported						
Country	Year					Grand total
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
Colombia	265	5,042	1,452	602	372	7,733
Cuba	77	2,001	5,420	847	35	8,380
Ecuador	272	7,216	1,823	2,537	597	12,445
El Salvador	4,450	14,153	9,011	1,990	356	29,960
Guatemala	26,148	58,006	50,091	25,741	10,442	170,428
Honduras	27,318	76,194	44,737	19,580	8,035	175,864
Nicaragua	452	5,640	5,605	443	40	12,180
Venezuela	30	6,801	1,589	922	281	9,623
Deportation: refers to the administrative decision to return a migrant to their country of origin because they have failed to comply with the provisions of the Migration Act and its Regulations.						

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Table 15.

Migrants in Mexico who have been granted refugee status, by main nationality, 2020–2024

Migrants in Mexico who have been granted refugee status						
Country	Year					Grand total
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	
Colombia	104	90	100	116	167	577
Cuba	1,003	917	319	938	2,961	6,138
El Salvador	2,446	2,165	2,541	2,071	2,104	11,327
Guatemala	576	851	1,149	908	1,316	4,800
Haiti	360	914	1,201	290	1,012	3,777
Honduras	6,054	9,384	10,942	9,485	15,072	50,937
Nicaragua	283	375	297	206	129	1,290
Venezuela	5,854	4,449	3,576	1,602	1,151	16,632
Refugee: a foreign national present on national territory who is recognised as a refugee by the competent authorities, in accordance with the international treaties and conventions to which the Mexican State is a party and the legislation in force.						

Source: Compiled by the author based on reports from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Based on the statistics presented, the data relating to El Salvador stand out; these confirm a sustained trend in irregular migration flows, mainly to the United States and, to a lesser extent, to Mexico, as a result of border externalisation processes. This reality calls for in-depth reflection on the urgent need to promote social development processes that have a direct impact on communities of origin, strengthening their resilience in the face of social, political and climatic dynamics.

The aim is for the majority of its inhabitants to be able to build their lives in their own territories, and for those returning to find a welcoming environment that recognises and makes the most of the skills and knowledge they have acquired whilst living abroad. In this regard, the home territory must be positioned as the first choice for resettlement, ensuring that return does not entail forced relocation to large cities or areas far removed from their support networks, which are essential for facilitating a sustainable reintegration process. With this premise in mind, the GMIES is promoting the initiatives outlined in the following points.

3.2 Measures to promote territorial resilience: the design and implementation of local development plans to prevent irregular migration and facilitate the reintegration of returnees.

The GMIES has launched two major initiatives aimed at strengthening regional capacities – both at institutional and community level – in two areas of El Salvador that share similar characteristics in terms of migration patterns and development indicators.

3.2.1 Masahuat District Local Development Plan

The Masahuat Local Development Plan (PDL) is a strategic instrument that presents a comprehensive territorial assessment and sets out actions aimed at promoting the district's development, with an emphasis on the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as returnees, young people and women. The document is organised into two main sections: an in-depth assessment of the territory and a proposed action plan.

A. Territorial Assessment of Masahuat

Masahuat forms part of the district of Santa Ana Norte, in the department of Santa Ana, El Salvador. Its territory is predominantly rural, comprising five cantons and 17 hamlets. According to the 2024 census (BCR), the population stands at 2,762, with a predominance of women and 85% concentrated in rural areas.

The district has experienced a significant decline in population, with a fall of 18.6% between 2007 and 2024, and more than 50% over the last 24 years. This trend is due to a number of factors: adverse economic conditions (with 48.2% of households living in severe extreme poverty), high levels of migration (77.2% of the population have relatives abroad)

and socio-demographic changes, such as the decline in the fertility rate. Nevertheless, Masahuat retains a young population, with 52.6% of its inhabitants under the age of 35.

Migration is a central feature of the district's social dynamics, which are in line with national trends; a considerable proportion of the people interviewed during the development of the Plan expressed their intention to migrate. The profile of those migrating is predominantly young, a trend that is reflected in Masahuat.

In 2024, 19 returnees were officially recorded, although local estimates put this figure at around 35. Most come from the United States, primarily following detention procedures. The main reasons for migration are economic, followed by family reunification and insecurity.

Remittances represent a key source of income for the district, totalling US\$ 5.22 million in 2024 (BCR). Although this cash flow underpins the local economy, only a tiny fraction is channelled into productive investments.

The assessment included a public consultation phase involving 79 participants, which helped identify challenges in four priority areas:

- **Economic:** tourism remains underdeveloped due to a lack of infrastructure and promotion. Migrants and returnees face barriers to accessing capital, and opportunities for training and employment are limited. The agricultural sector shows low profitability due to production problems and the effects of climate change. Remittances are mainly spent on consumption, and the population prioritises paid employment over entrepreneurship.
- **Sociocultural:** low levels of education are evident among priority groups, which limits their employment opportunities. Returnees face difficulties in accessing healthcare services and are frequently stigmatised. The assessment highlights the interrelationship between education, health and social exclusion.
- **Environmental:** pollution of the River Lempa, limited access to drinking water and agricultural losses due to climate change are persistent problems. Agricultural activity is severely affected, and Masahuat is classified as a district with a high level of drought.
- **Citizen participation:** there is low motivation for community organisation, limited municipal capacity to support it, and poor rural access to basic services. Gaps have been identified in

support for young people, as well as a lack of awareness of legal instruments that could protect these groups.

B. Proposed Local Development Plan

Based on the findings described above, this proposed Local Development Plan has been drawn up with the aim of promoting socio-economic inclusion and preventing irregular migration. It is structured as follows:

- **Strategic framework:** the plan's vision is to position Masahuat as a well-organised, prosperous and inclusive region that promotes the holistic development of its population, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups. The mission rests with the Local Development Committee (CDL), which is responsible for coordinating actions to achieve economic and social inclusion. The strategic objective is to foster a sense of belonging through the concerted implementation of programmes and projects. The overall strategy coordinates efforts between local and national governments, NGOs and the private sector to improve support for the most vulnerable populations.
- **Areas of action:** the plan sets out the following specific interventions in the four priority areas:
 - *Economic:* promoting community-based tourism; strengthening enterprises run by priority groups; promoting job fairs and training programmes; forging partnerships with the private sector; and providing financial education on the productive use of remittances and microcredit schemes.
 - *Sociocultural:* improving the quality of education, access to health services (including mental health); promoting cultural, artistic and sporting venues; revitalising public spaces with support from the diaspora, and programmes to prevent irregular migration.
 - *Environmental:* strengthening Water Boards to improve access to and the quality of water resources; preventive management of environmental risks through partnerships, risk maps and awareness-raising campaigns.
 - *Citizen participation:* support for the organisation of returnees, young people and women; advocacy for comprehensive state support; and strengthening of

political and institutional capacities through dialogue with the state and engagement with the diaspora.

- **Management, outreach and monitoring:** to ensure its implementation, the plan sets out mechanisms for resource management through coordination with the Santa Ana Norte Municipal Council, partner organisations and the private sector. It includes an outreach strategy at local, departmental and national levels, aimed at mobilising financial and political support.

Finally, guidelines are set out for the monitoring and evaluation of the PDL, including the preparation of an Annual Operational Plan, regular monitoring of progress and the publication of reports to ensure transparency and accountability.

3.2.2 Territorial Strategic Plan (PET)

The Territorial Strategic Plan focused on the 13 districts of the department of Chalatenango (10 in Chalatenango Centro and 3 in Chalatenango Norte), which together had a projected population of 110,862 people.

The context of migration in El Salvador is always a decisive factor, as the majority of the population harbours an expectation that they will have to move in order to meet or secure their needs in terms of livelihoods, security and family reunification; and this expectation is often fuelled by the fact that for many Salvadoran households, family remittances form part of their economic dynamics; in the 13 districts of Chalatenango, these remittances exceeded US\$ 301.73 million (BCR, 2024), with the district of Nueva Concepción standing out for receiving almost a quarter of the total. This district ranked amongst the top 25 remittance recipients nationwide. Despite its significance, it was found that the majority of these remittances were directed towards consumption rather than productive investment.

The development of the PET was based on a territorial assessment which identified key issues in four areas:

- **Economic.** Difficulties were identified in accessing capital for start-ups, limited opportunities for vocational training, low profitability in agricultural production and an unattractive local labour market characterised by low wages. Furthermore, the presence of migrants in transit and non-Salvadorans living in

precarious conditions, frequently exposed to labour exploitation, was noted.

- **Sociocultural.** The region faced low levels of educational attainment, limited access to health services, mental health issues and persistent insecurity. There was evidence of growing stigmatisation of returning migrants and emerging xenophobia towards new migrants.
- **Environmental.** Challenges were recorded relating to limited access to clean water, losses in agricultural production due to climatic events and forced displacement. The region, characterised by its agricultural, commercial, tourism and craft sectors, was severely affected by the environmental crisis. Its location within the strategic "El Trifinio" region offered opportunities to tackle these challenges in an integrated manner.
- **Political-institutional.** There was evidence of poor implementation of the national policy on human mobility and insufficient government programmes. The local authorities lacked resources and technical capacity, and there was little social organisation amongst returning migrants.

This participatory and inclusive process, developed with input from the Technical Committee of the Association of Municipalities of Cayaguanca, local authorities, government institutions and 46 migrants and community leaders from the Upper and Lower regions of Chalatenango, has resulted in the PET, which is designed to serve as a guide for efforts relating to human mobility between 2024 and 2029.

The PET recognises people on the move as key stakeholders in the formulation of public policy, valuing their experience and knowledge. The situational analysis also served as the basis for defining the vision, mission, objectives, strategies and actions of the Plan, which is guided by the following management and monitoring principles:

- **Target groups.** The programme was designed to provide comprehensive support to people on the move, with the aim of promoting their economic and psychosocial inclusion. This category includes both returning migrants and migrants in transit, as well as non-Salvadorans in vulnerable situations.
- **Management and dissemination strategy.** It established itself as a key tool for managing resources (financial, technical, human and material) and for coordinating projects. The strategic actions envisaged were:

- Coordination with local authorities: the assessment and the PET were presented to the municipal councils, with a view to identifying areas of mutual support and opportunities for cooperation.
- Communication with institutions: the plan was shared with institutions operating in the area, to learn about their programmes and promote synergies.
- Internal and external dissemination: the significance of the PET was communicated to all stakeholders. Internally, the plan was shared with municipal departments and the local population. Externally, support was sought from departmental, regional, national and international agencies and institutions, and specific outreach materials were produced.
- Strategic partnerships: a mapping exercise was carried out of local and national businesses interested in collaborating, and key contacts were established.
- **Monitoring and evaluation.** To ensure the effective implementation of the plan, complementary monitoring and evaluation tools were defined using a participatory methodology, which included:
 - Analysis and review: the Technical Committee analysed the PET and drew up an Annual Operational Plan (AOP).
 - Progress monitoring: information will be collected and verified to compare what was planned with what was actually implemented.
 - Periodic evaluation: half-yearly and annual evaluations will be carried out, in addition to a final impact assessment.
 - Accountability: consultations will be held with the Municipal Councils, and a public report will be drawn up for citizens and people on the move.

3.3 Promoting social economy enterprises as a means of helping people put down roots and reintegrate into society.

As we have previously stated, at the GMIES we believe that inclusion processes must take a multi-level approach, focusing not only on institutional strengthening but also on the empowerment of individuals and their communities, and it is on the basis of this second premise that initiatives are being developed to strengthen collective enterprises and the social economy, with the aim of helping people who are highly likely to be exposed to irregular migration to put down roots, as well as those who have returned to the country, whether voluntarily or in compliance with a deportation order.

Below is a summary of each of the experiences; it should be noted that the methodology implemented by the GMIES is always based on the participation of the beneficiaries, on understanding their expectations, experiences and skills, and on how these are incorporated into its business model.

3.3.2 Experience 2. Setting up collective enterprises based on the legal entity known as the "Union of People (UDP)"

This report describes the formation of three Unions of People: the UDP Fénix, the UDP Raíces and the UDP Lempa Tours; the first two are made up of returnees, whilst the third comprises people from the District of Masahuat. The latter also arose as a result of the needs identified during the territorial assessment carried out in that area, the findings of which have previously been shared.

- **UDP Fénix.** This group comprises eleven returnee migrants — four women and seven men — who, at different points in their lives, migrated and faced various challenges upon returning to El Salvador. The group aims to facilitate their economic reintegration through collective entrepreneurship and the joint marketing of products, drawing on the mutual support provided by the association.

Its main objective is to strengthen its members' marketing capacity and expand their opportunities in the market. To that end, it operates formally as a registered legal entity, which enables it to offer products and services legally, thereby promoting effective and sustainable economic reintegration

The mission of UDP Fénix is to support the economic reintegration of returning migrants through collective marketing, promoting self-sufficiency and community development. Each member develops a specific product for joint sale.

Thanks to the support of the GMIES and funding from the AVINA Foundation, the UDP operates the 'Rincón Azul' shop at Monseñor Romero International Airport, where it sells 100% handcrafted products with a nostalgic touch, made by returnees. Its main target audiences include international tourists, women aged 18 and over, and the general public. The management of the retail outlet involves personalised customer service, making the most of the kiosk's strategic location, and setting up a common fund to cover unforeseen expenses. Marketing channels include social media, direct sales and word-of-mouth recommendations.

The organisational structure consists of a General Assembly, which acts as the highest authority, and an Executive Committee responsible for administrative and financial management.

- **UDP Raíces.** This group comprises eight returnee migrants — five women and three men — who have come together with the aim of achieving economic reintegration, improving their marketing skills and gaining access to new market opportunities. They operate formally as a registered organisation, which enables them to market products and services legally and sustainably.

Its mission is to position and market, as a collective of returnees, a diverse range of products and services that preserve and revitalise the culture of craftsmanship, both nationally and internationally, using innovative strategies for physical and online sales. Each member develops a specific product for joint marketing.

UDP Raíces has received support from the GMIES, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, through a capacity-building programme comprising eight working sessions held between 13 August and 1 October. These sessions covered topics such as psychosocial support, assertive communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, leadership, drawing up business plans and the steps involved in setting up the UDP.

On 15 November 2024, the "Tienda Rincón Azul" was opened in Santa Ana, a space where ten returning entrepreneurs sell their products. The

running of the shop involves drawing up shift rosters, receiving and sorting products, checking stock, price labelling, daily invoicing, weekly sales reconciliation and individual payments to each entrepreneur.

UDP Raíces promotes values such as responsibility, respect, empathy, loyalty, passion, perseverance, equality, excellence and integrity. Its organisational structure comprises a Collective Assembly and a five-member Board of Directors responsible for administrative and financial management.

- **UDP Masahuat Lempa Tours.** This group comprises four people who, following various experiences of displacement, faced challenges in their economic reintegration. This initiative was launched in response to the needs identified in a local assessment carried out in the District of Masahuat and, since 2022, has been promoting an ecotourism venture.

The organisation has been formally established to improve its marketing capacity and gain access to greater opportunities in the tourism sector. Its mission is to act as an association offering comprehensive and eco-friendly tourism services to domestic and international visitors, whilst preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the community and the municipality.

It receives support from the GMIES in coordination with the Masahuat District Council, as part of the Local Economic Development Plan. This support includes the provision of supplies to strengthen productive initiatives, access to seed capital, participation in legal training workshops and the development of entrepreneurial skills.

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Migration, paid domestic work and the right to care in Costa Rica: best practices and challenges from a gender perspective

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Abstract

This article provides a contextual overview of the situation regarding Paid Domestic Work (PDW) in Costa Rica, a sector in which a large proportion of foreign women are employed. The aim is to identify progress or best practices regarding access to social security, healthcare and the regularisation of the migration status of these women engaged in PDW. However, the article also outlines the most significant challenges facing Costa Rica in terms of the inclusion and strengthening of the human right to care for migrant women in the country and its interrelation with paid domestic work

Introduction

Costa Rica is a country that has historically received migratory flows; however, the dynamics have changed in recent years as a result of socio-political crises in the region – such as those in Nicaragua and Venezuela – and as a consequence of new US migration policies. These developments have led to a significant increase in asylum applications in the country, as demonstrated by data for the period 2018–2024, which show that Costa Rica received some 248,833 asylum applications. Furthermore, the National Household Survey (ENAHU) for the period 2014–2023 revealed that the average percentage of the foreign population was 8.8% and that women accounted for 53.7% of this group (*Fernández Fernández et al., 2024*).

Within this diverse population, there are streams of Nicaraguan women who come to Costa Rica to undertake paid domestic work (PDW). This is a deeply rooted phenomenon in the country because, as they themselves put it, "it is well known that there is work for women in that country," which implies a trend towards the feminisation of migration.

In line with these findings, the report explains the causes of domestic work and the best practices that have been developed in Costa Rica to improve the living conditions of female domestic workers, a group in which migrant women are heavily represented.

Finally, the report highlights some of the most significant challenges facing Costa Rica in terms of ensuring the inclusion of migrant women in the country and strengthening their human right to care, and how this relates to paid domestic work.

Binational care corridor between Costa Rica and Nicaragua: an immediate solution to a care crisis

Costa Rica receives migratory flows of women, characterised by the fact that many of them undertake their migration journey independently, that is, as individuals (rather than as the partner of a head of household), crossing borders with the aim of finding employment in Costa Rica (*Carcedo et al., 2011; Fernández, 2018; Fernández Fernández, 2021*).

At a global level, global care chains (*Hochschild, 2000*) have been studied and understood as a series of interconnections between people across the world based on paid and unpaid care work. In the case of Latin America, several specialists such as Soto, González and Dobrée (*2016*) and Valenzuela et al. (*2020*) have coined the term "binational care corridor" to describe this phenomenon as one that connects territories through a stable process of movement of people who leave one country to settle in another, either temporarily or permanently, motivated, in this particular case, by the emergence of interdependent hubs in relation to the demand for and supply of care in both territories (*Valenzuela et al., 2020*).

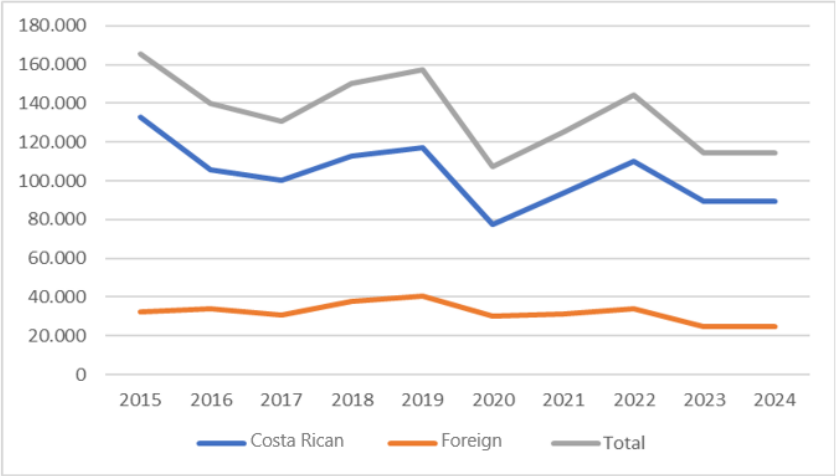
This is a phenomenon that has existed for several decades between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. To understand it, we need to define what we mean by care work. In this regard, it is worth noting that in August 2025 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights established the human right to care as an autonomous right, defining it as: "the set of actions necessary to preserve human well-being, including assistance to those who are in a situation of dependency or require support, whether temporarily or permanently." As such, care also constitutes a basic, inescapable and universal need, upon which both the existence of human life and the functioning of society depend, insofar as it ensures the minimum conditions of care required for a dignified existence, particularly for people in situations of vulnerability, dependency or disability (*Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2025, p. 2*).

It is important to clarify that what we traditionally understand as PDW is included under this definition, as it is assumed to be work because these are activities that can be delegated to a third party. Furthermore, it

involves both tangible and intangible aspects necessary to sustain life and entails physical and emotional labour, as well as a financial cost. It can be carried out directly or indirectly, and on a voluntary or paid basis.

In this regard, the *Continuous Employment Survey (ECE)* has shown that, over the period 2015–2024, the simple average rate of participation of foreign women in paid domestic work was 23.8%. However, over the last two years, this figure has fallen by 1.7% (*Gatica López, 2025*).

Chart 1
Costa Rica: people employed in domestic work as their main occupation by place of birth, annual average for the four quarters, Continuous Employment Survey (2015-2024)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Gustavo Gatica López (2025).

The PDW is essential for the livelihood of Costa Rican families and has emerged as a result of a care crisis that is particularly prevalent in the country’s central plateau, where two significant phenomena intersect.

On the one hand, the gradual expansion of Costa Rican women’s access to rights (in terms of education, access to employment, political participation and access to family planning), which has led to a decline in the fertility rate (1.2), greater participation by women in the labour market and, consequently, an increase in dual-income families or single-parent families. This, coupled with a well-established universal healthcare system that has led to a gradual increase in life expectancy in the country (81.1 years), presents significant challenges in relation to the ageing of the Costa Rican population, which also requires care solutions.

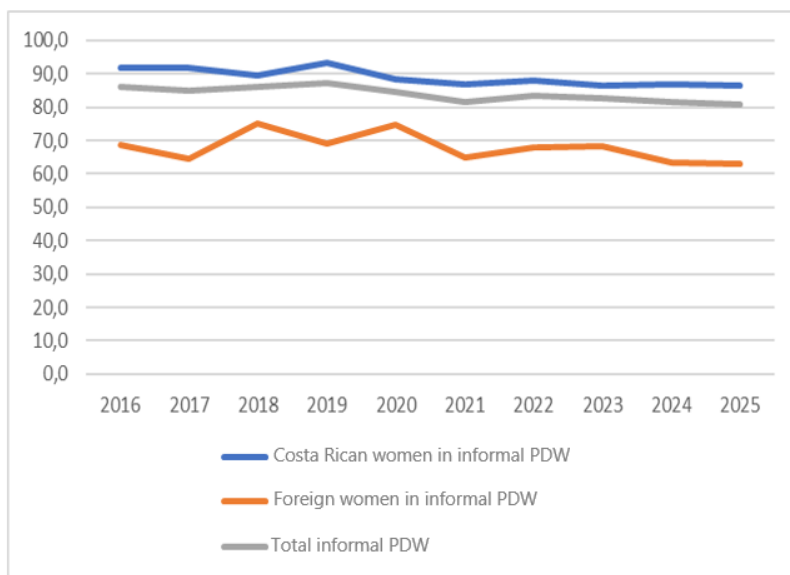
On the other hand, the national *Time Use Surveys (ENUT)* show that men play a minimal role within the household, meaning that the burden of care continues to fall on women. The INEC compared the total workload indicator (people who perform both paid and unpaid work) in the 2017 and 2022 ENUT surveys, with the following result:

The overall workload for women is estimated at 71:27 hours and for men at 67 hours per week – 4½ hours more than for men. Compared with 2017, the overall workload for both sexes increased: by 2.3% for women and by 6.5% for men (statistically significant figures). Despite this trend, the percentage distribution of the workload falls predominantly on women, as the 2022 National Household Survey (ENUT) shows that they account for 51.6% of the total workload, around one percentage point less than in the previous survey period (*INEC, 2023, p. 94*).

These social, cultural and economic changes in Costa Rican society have enabled middle- and high-income households to outsource domestic work. However, an analysis of data from Costa Rica's Continuous Employment Survey (ECE) shows that, for example, by 2024, 81.5% of these workers were employed in the informal sector.

Chart 2

Costa Rica: percentage of people employed in their main job and in paid domestic work (PDW), by formal employment status, place of birth and sex. Annual averages for the four quarters of the Continuous Employment Survey (2016-2025)



Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Gustavo Gatica López (2025).

These figures highlight the precarious nature of this type of work which, given that it is predominantly carried out by women and takes place within the home, is denied its social and economic value. This affects the lives and well-being of those who carry it out, as they lack a regulated legal framework for labour protection, meaning they have no employment contract, no employment benefits, no social protection and no representation for workers.

Nevertheless, and despite all the challenges that remain to be addressed in terms of labour rights and social security for these women workers, several practices are outlined below that have been identified in the country thanks to the campaigns waged by this trade union, with the support of international and governmental organisations.

Achievements, best practices and challenges in advancing the rights of paid domestic workers

The Costa Rican Domestic Workers' Association (ASTRADOMES) is an association founded in 1990 and operates as a trade union. It was established as an association because the majority of its members at the time were foreign nationals, and Costa Rican legislation does not permit non-Costa Ricans to form trade unions (*Fernández Fernández, 2018*). It currently has around 500 female members (*CONLACTRAHO, 2023*).

This is a space for women engaged in paid domestic work who seek to improve their living conditions through organisation, training, advice, awareness-raising, and the political and legal defence and advocacy of their rights as human beings, women, migrants and workers (*ASTRADOMES, 2017*).

One of the association's greatest achievements was the passing of *Costa Rican Law 8726 on Paid Domestic Work* in 2009, which marked the culmination of a struggle lasting more than 20 years for the association. This law amended Chapter Eight of Title Two of the 1943 Labour Code, introducing provisions that recognise basic rights for domestic workers, such as an eight-hour working day and one day off per week (*National Institute for Women et al., 2022*).

Another related initiative concerning progress on social security for migrants in Costa Rica is the recognition of the *General Law on Migration and Foreigners* (No. 8764) of 2009, which requires employers to pay social security contributions and, in principle, is grounded in human rights. However, Article 101 stipulates that migrant workers must be employed in specific occupations recommended by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS).

The problem identified with these provisions is that they extend specific regulations to the PDW sector, which perpetuates the feminisation and racialisation of this type of work by foreign women and, furthermore, prevents them from entering other sectors.

For example, Resolution MTSS-DMT-DVAS-DNE-DML-OF-108-2024 provides for the promotion of the recruitment of foreign women for this type of work, but not in other occupations (*Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2024*), as Resolution MTSS-DNE-DML-OF-340-2023 recommends against hiring for professional, technical and operational

roles across 260 occupations (*Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2023*). This distinction forces foreign women to work in domestic service despite the fact that many of them have higher education qualifications or experience in other occupations, thereby perpetuating gender and racialised stereotypes surrounding domestic work.

A third achievement relating to the advancement of the rights of paid domestic workers was Costa Rica's ratification, in January 2014, of *Law 9169 implementing ILO Convention No. 189* on decent work for workers (*Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2023*). This Convention is of the utmost importance because it establishes minimum standards regarding working hours, rest periods, pay, recruitment, health and safety at work, as well as the privacy of the parties involved (*Rojas Ugalde, 2025*).

It is following this milestone that grassroots social organisations have come together to monitor, exert pressure and advocate for the proper implementation of this agreement. This group of organisations operates under the name of the Working Group on Paid Domestic Work and comprises ASTRADOMES, the Asociación Enlaces Nicaragüenses and the Network of Nicaraguan Migrant Women in Costa Rica, which, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Foundation, have organised themselves to monitor Convention 189 (*Rojas Ugalde, 2024*).

Furthermore, another good practice was the adoption of Resolution CNS-RG-2019 of 24 June 2019 by the MTSS, with the aim of bringing domestic wages into line with the minimum wage. This resolution establishes a procedure to progressively eliminate the wage gap between paid domestic work and the minimum wage for unskilled workers. This is a process that will take 15 years and is expected to be completed in 2034 (*National Institute for Women et al., 2022*).

In this regard, it should be noted that, based on figures for the first quarter of 2024, the average wage for domestic work was estimated at ₡168,149.9 colones (US\$332.62), while the minimum wage set by the MTSS for domestic employment was ₡258,376.22 (US\$511.03) (*Rojas Ugalde, 2025*). Despite initiatives to advance the economic recognition of this work, the reality shows us that there is still a long way to go and that, at the same time, the path to achieving equal pay is proving to be a very long one.

It should be noted that the Board of Directors of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), at its meeting 8914 meeting on 6 July 2017, approved the Regulations governing the registration of employers and the

compulsory social security coverage of domestic workers. This insurance includes health coverage, entitlement to financial benefits, and participation in the Compulsory Supplementary Pension Fund and the Labour Capitalisation and Unemployment Fund (*National Institute for Women et al., 2022*).

Furthermore, this statute established reduced minimum contribution thresholds to cater for the multi-employer contractual arrangement. This change represented a step forward in social security legislation, as many of these women work on an hourly basis in the homes of different employers, and this previously discouraged employers from providing social security cover, since a single employer was required to cover them as if they were working full-time.

In this regard, from 2017 onwards, following the approval of these regulations, data on insurance coverage for paid domestic work for the period 2016–2025 were analysed by nationality. It is worth noting that insurance coverage – whether as an employee, a self-employed person or on a voluntary basis – is much higher among foreign nationals than among nationals. It has been found that insurance coverage for salaried workers stands at 48% for foreign nationals and 15.2% for nationals; similarly, insurance coverage for the self-employed or on a voluntary basis stands at 28.1% for foreign nationals and 17.1% for nationals (*Gatica López, 2025*).

Furthermore, the figures show that this type of insurance cover has been on the rise since 2017, particularly among foreign nationals. The only decline in insurance cover was observed during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conversely, a higher proportion of Costa Rican women are covered by family insurance, at 43.4%, compared with 17.3% for foreign nationals. From this data, it can be inferred that Costa Rican women opt for this type of cover, which might suggest that they avoid confrontation or asserting their basic labour rights with their employers, as they can choose family cover, meaning that someone else in their immediate family takes out that insurance.

Similarly, 15.7% of insured nationals are Nicaraguan women, compared with 5.1% of foreign women. The same applies to other forms of health insurance, where Nicaraguan women account for 8% and foreign women for 1%. These latest figures dispel the myths circulating in the country that Nicaraguans make excessive use of health services or that they are

even over-represented in state-subsidised insurance schemes for the poor (Voorend *et al.*, 2021).

Table 1

Costa Rica: people employed in PDW as their main occupation, by nationality and type of social security reported. Annual average based on data from the Continuous Employment Survey 2016–2025 (percentages)

	Year	Employed	Own business or volunteer	Covered by a family insurance policy	State-insured	Other forms of insurance
Costa Rican	2016	11,8	19,1	56,1	8,2	4,8
	2017	12,8	18,6	48,4	12,9	7,3
	2018	14,1	16,2	46,6	11,9	11,2
	2019	9,2	19,6	49,3	9,2	12,7
	2020	16,0	18,0	40,4	15,1	10,5
	2021	18,3	16,8	45,6	13,5	5,8
	2022	16,5	21,2	40,5	14,9	6,9
	2023	17,5	18,3	36,4	22,3	5,5
	2024	16,7	13,4	35,6	23,8	10,5
	2025	19,5	15,7	34,7	24,9	5,2
<i>Note: "Other forms of insurance" includes: insurance under an agreement (associations, trade unions and cooperatives); CCSS pensioners; teaching staff and others; pensioners under the Non-Contributory Scheme (Basic Amount); private or overseas insurance; other forms: insurance for students or refugees.</i>						
Foreign	2016	47,7	33,5	16,7	1,8	0,3
	2017	53,3	19,3	21,2	5,8	0,4
	2018	38,2	29,1	29,6	2,6	0,5
	2019	47,1	28,1	18,8	4,2	1,8
	2020	42,3	28,3	23,3	4,9	1,2
	2021	50,9	26,1	16,6	4,3	2,1
	2022	48,6	35,6	10,4	4,8	0,6
	2023	48,5	35,6	10,4	4,8	0,7
	2024	53,4	19,7	17,1	9,1	0,7
	2025	51,7	25,2	9,1	12,4	1,6
	CR	15,2	17,7	43,4	15,7	8,0
	EXT	48,2	28,1	17,3	5,5	1,0

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from Gustavo Gatica López (2025).

The health insurance data also remind us that Costa Rica has one of the most inclusive healthcare systems in the region due to its universal nature, which means it is accessible to everyone regardless of class, gender, race or ethnicity, or location. However, the CCSS has been facing a financial crisis in recent decades, which has led to a slowdown in services and care for users, giving rise to controversies and narratives that blame "foreigners" for the strain on the health services.

The social security data reveal that, although foreign nationals are predominantly represented as salaried or self-employed insured people, we continue to find that the overall level of informality in this sector is one of the highest in the country. It should be noted that the national estimate of the informal employment rate for the third quarter of 2024 stood at 39.6% (*INEC, 2024*); however, informality in the PDW for 2024 stood at 81.5%, rising to 86.9% among nationals and falling to 63.3% among foreign nationals (*Gatica López, 2025*).

In short, some progress has been made in Costa Rica in the field of PDW, a sector in which foreign women are heavily represented, particularly those from Nicaragua, a nationality that accounts for around 75% of the population born in another country.

Clearly, the efforts made to secure rights and protect these women are closely linked to the political work carried out by grassroots organisations, with the support of international bodies and institutions working in this field. This section therefore explains this inter-institutional work, which has been organised under what is known as "the Inter-institutional Agenda for Paid Domestic Work in Costa Rica."

The inter-institutional agenda on Paid Domestic Work (PDW) in Costa Rica

As mentioned above, the Working Group on Domestic Work in Costa Rica is a coalition of civil society organisations concerned with domestic work and migration (ASTRADOMES, Enlaces Nicaragüenses and the Network of Migrant Women), which carry out grassroots work based on their own agenda for political advocacy and the training of their members. The working group has its own agenda, which is structured around the following four strategic priorities (*Rojas Ugalde, 2024, p. 4*):

1. Outreach and communication strategy: to raise awareness among employers, governments and the general public of the legal situation facing domestic workers.
2. Policy advocacy at national level: this includes monitoring the Inter-institutional Agenda for Domestic Workers, running workshops to raise awareness of the agenda among domestic workers themselves, and organising a forum for accountability and follow-up with the relevant institutions.
3. Strengthening membership: supporting groups and developing the range of services offered by each organisation (legal advice, literacy and IT training, workshops on labour rights and

immigration regularisation, and handling enquiries by telephone, online or in person).

4. Job board: managing an app featuring a job board function, as well as supporting the process of establishing a care service co-operative for older adults and developing a strategy for self-sustainability.

However, the Working Group on Domestic Work participates in the Inter-institutional Commission on Domestic Work convened by the National Institute for Women (INAMU), with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS) and with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) acting as an observer. These bodies have come together to draw up the 2023–2026 Inter-institutional Agenda for Paid Domestic Work.

Over a four-year period, through various forums for participation, analysis and validation, they have proposed this agenda, which aims to:

To have a national policy framework that promotes and coordinates inter-institutional and cross-sectoral actions aimed at improving the working conditions of domestic workers and reducing the inequality gaps that have historically affected this group, in line with the provisions of ILO Convention No. 189 on domestic workers and the domestic regulatory framework that protects their rights (*National Institute for Women et al., 2022, p. 23*).

The inter-institutional agenda comprises five key areas, each with its own sub-areas, and three cross-cutting components: policy advocacy, promotion and protection of rights. A summary diagram of this agenda is shown below.

Table 2.

Key areas and sub-areas of Costa Rica's Inter-institutional Agenda for Paid Domestic Work. Period 2022-2026

1. Legalisation
• Immigration regularisation • Extension of cover for workplace risks • Extensions to social security cover • Implementation of ILO Convention No. 189 to ensure safe and orderly mobility.
2. Oversight
• Review and improvement of inspection methods: MTSS, INS and CCSS • Establishment of registers of employment contracts
3. Employability
• Upskilling of domestic workers' occupational profiles • Vocational training and skills certification • Employment support – national employment system
4. Promoting a culture of compliance with labour rights
• Compliance with obligations regarding minimum wage, overtime, end-of-year bonus, annual leave, working hours and improvements to pay levels • A workplace free from violence (workplace bullying, sexual harassment, other forms of violence)
5. Social dialogue and strengthening of domestic workers' organisations
• Promoting the creation of a representative organisation for households employing domestic workers • Strengthening organisations representing domestic workers • Promoting forums for tripartite dialogue

Source: National Institute for Women et al. (2022).

As we can see, the inter-institutional agenda comprises a series of priority areas, each accompanied by a roadmap that sets out the indicators and the stakeholders involved for each of the priority areas and sub-areas. The Commission is currently in the process of evaluating this agenda with the support of the ILO. Both bodies are conducting a diagnostic assessment and mapping the critical pathways for these women to access Costa Rican institutions: the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners (DGME); the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS); the National Insurance Institute (INS); the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MTSS); and the Judiciary (*Cordero Camacho, 2025*).

In this regard, we can see that the first of these pillars focuses on formalisation and, to that end, proposes specific actions in collaboration with organisations and institutions to promote the regularisation of migration, which goes hand in hand with labour formalisation and access to basic rights such as social security and employment protection. The latter is linked to a monitoring process designed to ensure that both

national and foreign workers have access to employment contracts, health insurance and occupational accident insurance policies.

Furthermore, themes three and four relate to the recognition of PDW as a form of care work that is essential for sustaining life and societies. For this reason, it is necessary to recognise and redefine this work on a par with any other paid employment, to remove the stigma of its feminisation in order to increase its social and economic value and thereby contribute to the cultural shift required to conceive of societies in a co-responsible manner in terms of care.

It is therefore important to professionalise and specialise this sector, to ensure that labour rights are upheld, and to take concrete action against violence and sexual harassment. These initiatives instil dignity and value in this work and, consequently, in the women who carry it out; moreover, this is one of the outstanding challenges facing our societies.

Finally, pillar five, on social dialogue and the strengthening of organisations, is essential because, in order to implement a genuine political agenda for PDW and care work, the participation of grassroots organisations is necessary. The voices of migrant and working women are key because they are the ones who experience first-hand the discrimination, inequalities and violence resulting from the most feminised work in the region, which is why they are placed at the very bottom of the wage hierarchy.

Consequently, they are the ones who possess the information and the capacity to advocate for the demands of the PDW and the right to care, bringing them into the public agenda, the collective sphere and the community. The aim is to secure further rights but, above all, to position the PDW within the human right to care, which is now considered an autonomous right in three respects: the right to care for others, to be cared for, and to self-care.

Conclusions

An overview of the current situation regarding the PDW in Costa Rica was compiled with the aim of highlighting the progress made and the challenges faced in terms of access to and the exercise of the right to care for women working in this sector, in which there is a high proportion of migrant women, mainly from Nicaragua.

It is important to note that this work has historically been organised in ways reminiscent of the "encomienda" system in our region, as it is racialised and feminised. For this reason, it has been considered the lowest paid work in the country, with the fewest labour rights; moreover, as it takes place within the home, this perpetuates its invisibility.

Nevertheless, we have explained how grassroots movements within this sector and among migrant women in Costa Rica have spearheaded key milestones in the fight for their labour rights, including substantial amendments to the Labour Code, access to specific forms of social security tailored to their needs, proposals to bring wages into line with the minimum wage, the ratification of ILO Convention 189, and specific resolutions by the Ministry of Labour on the participation of migrant women in the PDW.

In addition, processes of social and inter-institutional organisation have been identified to implement not only a grassroots political agenda that strengthens advocacy and participation, but which are also involved in Costa Rica's Inter-institutional Political Agenda on PDW.

However, despite these advances and good practices relating to the PDW in Costa Rica, we can see that the scope of these rights is still very limited when we analyse the data on social security coverage and informal employment.

For this reason, it is necessary not only to continue implementing policy strategies to expand working women's access to these rights, but also to bring these initiatives together under the umbrella of National Care Systems, defined as "a set of policy measures to balance the supply and demand for care based on shared social responsibility among the various stakeholders (households, the market, the State and the community)" (*Pautassi, 2023, p. 5*). In this way, it is possible to coordinate labour policies, care services, the formalisation and professionalisation of this work, the collection of data on the situation in this sector, and cultural communication to bring about a shift towards a society that shares responsibility for care.

Therefore, the following courses of action are recommended to address these challenges:

- **Enhancing the social, cultural and economic value of PDW.** Working to increase the wages of PDWs, integrate them into the economy, promote professionalisation through training and skills

certification, and run campaigns that help redefine this work to endow it with dignity and social value through the human right to care.

- **Speeding up the bureaucratic processes faced by women in the PDW.** Developing technological solutions to ensure access to all necessary information, as well as guidance navigating processes relating to immigration regularisation and access to work permits, claiming labour rights, social security, lodging complaints with the Ministry of Labour, obtaining employment contracts and facilitating access to justice.
- **Reducing informality.** Promoting efficient processes, with the help of technology, to enable labour inspections by the Ministry of Labour; develop campaigns aimed at both Costa Rican households and paid domestic workers to ensure that all those involved are aware of their rights and responsibilities under the PDW. At the same time, promote greater participation by migrant women in other sectors of the economy.
- **Promoting care service provision at both state and private levels.** Broadening the provision of childcare for children aged 0 to 6, as well as care for older people and people with disabilities, both at a state level and through public-private and private initiatives. The aim is not only to ensure that the children of domestic workers have access to childcare facilities, but also to expand shared-responsibility care provision, so that these women can access such employment through the certification and professional development that the scheme seeks to promote.

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Best practices in social security: the socio-economic inclusion of migrants and their integration into the social security system

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Abstract

The Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), established in 1941, is the institution responsible for administering the social security system in Costa Rica, under a tripartite funding model (the State, employers and workers). Its mission is to guarantee universal access to comprehensive health services and financial protection through sickness and maternity insurance (SEM), Disability, Old Age and Death (IVM) and the Non-Contributory Pension Scheme, as well as special cover for vulnerable groups. To that end, it offers various forms of insurance, both contributory and non-contributory, with the aim of achieving universal cover for the country's population. The regulatory framework is based on the *Constitution* and the *Act establishing the Costa Rican Social Security Fund*, which stipulate that insurance is compulsory for salaried workers, the self-employed, volunteers and migrants, as well as non-contributory schemes financed by the State.

The CCSS has developed collective insurance schemes with organisations representing self-employed workers, voluntary policyholders and, more recently, the migrant and refugee population, under agreements with international organisations (the UNHCR, the European Union and the AECID). These agreements have enabled temporary cover for thousands of people in vulnerable situations, guaranteeing access to healthcare services. During the period 2023–2025, the agreements with UNHCR and the UCR Foundation have provided cover for an average of between 2,800 and 4,000 people per month.

Health insurance schemes and collective agreements have enabled the provision of adequate medical services to different population groups. Specifically, in the case of migrants, the main reasons for seeking medical care were as follows: hospital discharges related to pregnancy and childbirth; outpatient consultations for endocrine, digestive and circulatory conditions; and emergency admissions for respiratory, musculoskeletal and infectious conditions. Consequently, the CCSS is the leading institution for public health services in Costa Rica and a cornerstone of democracy.

I. A historical overview of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS)

The CCSS was established on 1 November 1941 by Act No. 17, enacted during the administration of Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia. The bill was the result of an agreement between the government, the Church and the Communist Party, aimed at protecting the working class as a semi-autonomous state institution. However, on 22 October 1943, the *Organic Law of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund* was amended, transforming it into an autonomous institution of the State, dedicated to serving the working class through a tripartite funding system and designed to prevent political interference.

In 1950, the Directorate-General for Medical and Social Assistance was established to act on behalf of the State in coordinating and administering funds allocated to hospitals. The Charity Boards became Social Protection Boards, and other sources of funding –such as the hospital levy, sales tax and the duty on spirits– were added to the revenue generated by the National Lottery.

The Disability, Old Age and Death Insurance (IVM) scheme was established in 1947 but initially covered only public-sector workers employed by autonomous and semi-autonomous institutions and local authorities. In July of that same year, workers employed in administrative roles by private companies were included. It was not until 1960 that the IVM scheme extended its cover to employees in the retail sector, staff at private schools, professionals in private practice and municipal workers paid on a daily wage basis. In 1962, coverage was extended to casual manual labourers (in construction) and those paid on a daily wage basis on public works and railway projects; by 1971, it covered all manual workers in the country.

On 12 May 1961, *Act No. 2738* authorised the CCSS to extend social insurance to the entire population and set a 10-year deadline for its implementation; consequently, from 1971 onwards, the IVM provided cover for all workers in the country.

In 1973, *Act No. 5349 on the Transfer of Hospitals to the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS)* provided that the hospitals of the Ministry of Health, the Social Protection Boards and the banana companies be transferred to the CCSS, thereby enabling the integration of health services. This process took just three and a half years to complete, resulting in a system comprising 29 hospitals that has made universal

health and maternity insurance possible, administered by the CCSS, thus establishing a comprehensive health system.

In 1975, the Disability, Old Age and Death Insurance scheme was extended to agricultural workers, and the CCSS took over the Non-Contributory Pension Scheme to provide protection for those on the lowest incomes who were not entitled to a pension. From the 1990s onwards, the CCSS began to integrate preventive and curative services, removing the division between the Ministry of Health and the Social Security Fund to provide comprehensive care.

In 1994, the Basic Comprehensive Healthcare Teams (EBAIS) were established, thereby implementing a primary care model that improved coverage and access to healthcare services throughout the country. The system evolved from one in which the preventive phase was entirely the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and the related phase was the responsibility of the CCSS, to one characterised by the integration of services in some cases and parallel collaboration in others, with the CCSS being empowered to carry out health initiatives in the field of preventive medicine.

II. Characteristics, mission and vision of the CCSS

From the very outset, the CCSS envisaged establishing a socio-economic framework capable of providing comprehensive protection for the entire Costa Rican population, with equal medical and hospital services for all residents. This vision was definitively enshrined in the 1949 *Constitution* and in the 1961 amendment to Articles 73 and 77 thereof.

The Costa Rican Social Security Fund is the leading provider of public health services in Costa Rica, which is why, year after year, it recruits highly qualified staff from various branches and specialities of the healthcare sector, with the aim of providing users with a high-quality service in the fields of health and social care.

Given the nature of its role and primary purpose, the CCSS is supported by the State, employers and workers, whose contributions make up the fundamental economic basis upon which all its activities are built.

Since its foundation, the CCSS has been formulating policies, designing programmes and making decisions on health matters, in keeping with the

times and the country's development. Efforts have been made to extend medical services to the most remote areas, based on sound judgement and the efficient allocation of resources. The country takes pride in having succeeded in establishing an inspiring institution that prioritises service and responsibility towards patients, and where the preservation of life is the guiding principle for its staff.

Mission of the CCSS. To provide the Costa Rican population with comprehensive health services for individuals, families and communities, and to provide economic, social and pension protection in accordance with current legislation, with a view to:

- 1) Respect for individuals and the philosophical principles of social security: universality, solidarity, unity, equality, compulsory participation and equity.
- 2) The promotion of ethical principles, a sense of purpose, commitment and excellence in the work of the institution's staff.
- 3) The focus of services on user satisfaction.
- 4) The ongoing training and motivation of staff.
- 5) Innovative management, open to change, to achieve greater efficiency and quality in the provision of services.
- 6) Ensuring financial sustainability through an effective system of revenue collection and recovery.
- 7) The promotion of research and development in the health sciences and administrative management.
- 8) Economic sustainability and social and community participation.

Vision of the CCSS. We will be a well-coordinated institution, a leader in the provision of comprehensive health, pension and social security services, responding to the problems and needs of the population by delivering timely, high-quality services that are in harmony with the human environment.

Insurance schemes it administers. The CCSS is constitutionally mandated to administer the following insurance schemes:

1. **Sickness and Maternity Insurance (SEM):** better known as Health Insurance, its main purpose is to provide health, financial and social benefits.
2. **Disability, Old Age and Death Insurance (IVM):** also known as Pension Insurance, its aim is to provide the insured person and their dependants with basic financial protection, such as a pension.

3. **Non-Contributory Pension Scheme:** this is designed to provide financial assistance to those whose monthly income is less than or equal to the current cost of the basic basket of goods and who have not made contributions to any of the above insurance schemes or have not met the required number of statutory contributions.
4. **State Insurance:** its main purpose is to provide health protection to vulnerable sections of the population.

III. Regulatory framework

The following is the hierarchical order of the regulations governing the CCSS for the implementation of mandatory social insurance for the entire population, which, by law, is required to contribute to social security. First, Article 73 of the *Political Constitution of the Republic of Costa Rica* establishes the following:

“Social insurance for manual and white-collar workers, governed by a system of mandatory contributions from the State, employers, and workers, in order to protect workers against the risks of illness, disability, old age, death, and other contingencies as determined by law.”

Next is the *Organic Law of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (1943)*, whose articles 3, 20, and 37 provide the legal basis for the actions of the Inspection Service and read as follows:

Article 3: "Social Security coverage and enrolment in the program are mandatory for all manual and white-collar workers who receive a salary or wage. The number of contributions required to be paid under this law shall be calculated based on the total remuneration paid under any name, arising from or related to the employer-employee relationship."

Article 20: "There will be a body of inspectors responsible for ensuring compliance with this law and its regulations. For this purpose, the inspectors shall have the status of public officials, with the duties and powers set forth in Articles 89 and 94 of the Organic Law of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security."

Article 37: "Once the social security system becomes operational, employers must register their employees with the Fund within the timeframe and under the conditions established by the Board of Directors."

Furthermore, Article 7 of the *CCSS Health Insurance Regulations (1996)*²⁶ states:

Article 7: Compulsory membership. "Membership of the Health Insurance Scheme is compulsory for all salaried workers, self-employed workers and pensioners under the national pension schemes within the national territory, without prejudice to the provisions of Article 4 of the Act establishing the Fund."

Furthermore, the *Annotated and Consolidated Workers' Protection Act (2000)* makes it compulsory for self-employed workers to take out insurance with the CCSS, and its Transitory Provision XII provides as follows:

"Self-employed workers shall enrol with the CCSS on a phased basis over the first five years following the entry into force of this Act."

Finally, the *General Law on Migration and Foreigners (2009)*, Act No. 8764, in Article 7, paragraph 7, Article 78, Article 80, Article 86 and Transitional Provision No. 2, establishes that registration with the CCSS is a requirement for the issue and renewal of residence documents, and, in particular, it stipulates:

"... The processing of all immigration procedures must ensure that migrants are covered by social security. This requirement means that all immigration procedures must include, as one of their basic requirements, coverage under the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS)."

In order to fulfil its remit, the CCSS offers various types of insurance cover for the population, tailored to their individual circumstances and ability to pay contributions. These are categorised as contributory and non-contributory schemes, which are described below.

²⁶ Article 7 was amended by the resolution adopted at session No. 8061 of 30 May 2006 of the CCSS Board of Directors.

IV. Contributory insurance schemes (directly insured persons)

In order to carry out quality assurance management for each of the contribution schemes, the following procedures have been duly formalised, standardised and approved:

1. Salaried Worker Insurance (TA)

This is the compulsory insurance applicable to any individual who provides material or intellectual services, or both, to one or more other parties under an express or implied, verbal or written, individual or collective employment contract, in accordance with Article 4 of the *Labour Code (1943)*. In accordance with Article 30 of the *Act establishing the Costa Rican Social Security Fund*, all employers must deduct the contributions corresponding to social security contributions when paying their employees' wages.

Social security contributions collected are divided into two main groups: contributions relating to health insurance and pensions administered by the CCSS, and other social security contributions: the Joint Social Welfare Institute (IMAS), the National Learning Institute (INA), the Labour Capitalisation Fund (FCL), the Compulsory Supplementary Pension Scheme (ROPC), Banco Popular and the Development and Family Allowances Fund (FODESAF), in accordance with specific legislation.

2. Self-Employed Insurance (TI)

This is the compulsory insurance scheme for individuals who independently carry out an economic activity or work without being in a subordinate relationship, and who may organise themselves through an economic unit in order to manage the resources and inputs that enable them to produce goods or services generating non-wage income, while assuming the risks associated with that activity.

A self-employed person exercises control over their activities and takes the most important decisions for a business on their own behalf. They may work alone or in collaboration with other self-employed persons and

may or may not provide work to third parties, in accordance with Article 10 of the *Health Insurance Regulations*.²⁷

In this regulatory context, IT workers, upon being enrolled in the insurance schemes administered by the Fund, are entitled to benefits such as: healthcare benefits, cover for their dependants, disability benefits, paid maternity leave, leave to care for terminally ill patients and seriously ill minors, as well as disability, old-age and death pensions, among others.

For the IT insurance scheme, benefits are payable from the date on which contributions are paid, while in the case of salaried workers (TA), cover commences upon their registration with the Fund; in both cases, the eligibility periods set out in the *Health Insurance Regulations* and the *Regulations on Disability, Old Age and Death* (1995) must be met, depending on the type of benefit in question.

3. Voluntary and Migrant Insurance (AV)

From a contribution perspective, the CCSS established the voluntary insurance scheme as an alternative to extend cover to Costa Ricans who, although not in employment, have the means to make contributions to health and pension schemes, based on the following concept:

Voluntary insurance (AV) is available to Costa Rican nationals who, while not being TI or TA and not engaged in any income-generating activity, wish to be contributors to the CCSS and have access to health and pension insurance, in accordance with Article 2 of the *Regulations on Voluntary Insurance and Insurance for Migrants* (2021).

The main provisions governing voluntary insurance are set out in Articles 5, 29 and 31 of the *Act establishing the Social Security Fund* (1943) and the *Regulations on Voluntary Insurance and Insurance for Migrants* (2021) drawn up by the institution for this purpose. Meanwhile, Article 10 of the *Health Insurance Regulations of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund* (1996) states:

" For the purposes of these Regulations, the following definitions apply: Voluntary insured person: A person of Costa Rican

²⁷ Article 10 has been amended on several occasions: at sessions No. 8061 of 30 May 2006, No. 9090 of 2 April 2020 and No. 9213 of 5 October 2021 of the CCSS Executive Board.

nationality who, while not being self-employed or in paid employment, nor engaged in any income-generating activity, wishes to contribute to the Costa Rican Social Security Fund and have access to health, disability, old-age and death insurance.

Migrant Insured Person: A foreign national legally resident in the country who is not self-employed or employed as a salaried worker, in accordance with the provisions of Article 7(7) of the General Law on Migration and Foreigners, which stipulates that migrants are obliged to hold the insurance cover provided by the Fund."

AVs have the same rights as TAs and TIs with regard to health and pension insurance, except for sick pay and sick leave and maternity leave, as they are either economically inactive or have a fixed period of eligibility. To be eligible for the benefits provided by the health insurance scheme, contributions must be up to date.

4. Pensioners (AP)

According to the *Health Insurance Regulations*, all persons who are pensioners or retirees from any of the state pension schemes are also entitled to the benefits provided by this insurance.

V. Non-contributory insurance schemes (indirectly insured persons)

With a view to extending the coverage of services and achieving the desired universal coverage, the CCSS has defined non-contributory insurance schemes covering persons who are entitled to SEM benefits and whose cover is funded by a third party, including the following:

a) Family benefit entitlement. This refers to the right of dependants of the directly insured person to access services. It is a form of cover provided by the health insurance scheme to people who, in relation to a directly insured person, are financially dependent on them and meet the other requirements set out in the relevant regulations, such as age and other criteria.

b) Non-contributory pensions. Financial support for people living in poverty who do not have access to a contributory pension.

c) State-funded insured person. A direct or family insured person who acquires this status due to their inability to pay health insurance contributions, in accordance with *Act No. 5349* of 1973 and Executive

Decree No. 17898-S. The contributions of these insured people are covered by the State through a special funding mechanism based on household units.

d) Health insurance cover for specific groups. This cover comprises a special protection scheme provided by the CCSS to households comprising individuals who are not required to make contributions to any of the contributory schemes administered by that institution. The regulations governing this non-contributory cover and the target population are set out below:

1. *Act No. 7374*; Article 11 bis of the *Health Insurance Regulations*; Executive Decree No. 17898-S: persons insured at the State's expense who belong to households declared to be living in poverty by the Joint Institute for Social Assistance (IMAS) or who are included in the database of the National Information System and Single Register of State Beneficiaries (SINIRUBE).
2. Protection under *Acts No. 7735* and *No. 7739*: these provide health protection for minors and pregnant teenage mothers through insurance cover until they reach the age of 18, without them having to take out any of the insurance schemes administered by the institution, as detailed below: *Act No. 7735, the General Law on the Protection of Adolescent Mothers* (1997), which covers women aged 12 or over and under 18 who are pregnant, and children of adolescent mothers under the age of 18.
3. *Act No. 7739, the Children and Adolescents Code*: aimed at those under the age of 18 who do not have, or are not entitled to, any form of health insurance, and pregnant women over the age of 18.
4. Other forms of state-funded protection arising from laws and decrees that allow access to healthcare services for uninsured individuals with specific characteristics or medical conditions, such as: *Act No. 8612, the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Young People* aged between 18 and 25; Executive Decrees and No. 33650-S: cervical cancer for women with abnormal smear test results; *Act No. 10619, the Law on the Promotion of Measures Contributing to the Prevention, Detection and Reduction of Mortality from Cervical Cancer in Costa Rica*, for uninsured women aged 20 and over; the *General Health Act No. 5395* and Ministerial Directive 037: persons who have, or are in contact with, diseases such as leprosy, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases and vector-borne diseases; the *General Act on HIV/AIDS No. 9797*; *Act No. 8720*

on the Protection of Victims, Witnesses and Other Parties Involved in Criminal Proceedings: persons who are part of the Programme for the Protection of Victims and Witnesses and other parties involved in criminal proceedings.

In addition, the CCSS has established mechanisms to facilitate the provision of health insurance for the target groups, notably the collective health insurance agreements detailed below.

VI. Group Insurance Agreements

Group Insurance Agreements are arrangements entered into by the CCSS with organised groups of self-employed workers engaged in the same economic activity or other activities of a similar nature, or with organised groups of voluntary insured persons with similar characteristics, so that members of these groups may register to take out insurance on a group basis; the administration of each scheme is responsible for collecting the contributions from each member and transferring them to the CCSS, in accordance with Article 79 of the *Health Insurance Regulations*, which states verbatim:

"The Fund may enter into agreements with social security or healthcare institutions in other countries to provide reciprocal medical care for members of either organisation who are temporarily travelling to another country. Similarly, it may enter into agreements with other entities for the provision or procurement of goods and services that contribute to the Fund's operations. Furthermore, it is authorised to enter into agreements for insurance cover and the collective payment of contributions, whether with organisations or groups of workers who are self-employed or with voluntary policyholders."

To complement the implementation of the agreements, the *Procedure Manual for the Conclusion, Renewal and Monitoring of Collective Agreements with Self-Employed Workers and Voluntary Insured Persons* was issued, approved on 4 October 2011, which defines collective insurance agreements as follows:

"The agreement is a structured arrangement (comprising clauses) entered into by the Fund with organised groups of self-employed workers engaged in the same economic activity, or organised groups of voluntary insured persons with similar characteristics, so that all members may register to take out insurance with the Institution collectively, using a pre-prepared form..."

It should be noted that, while the agreements are aimed at groups of self-employed workers and voluntarily insured persons, the compulsory nature of the insurance is in accordance with the legal framework set out above. To enter into a collective agreement, organised groups may submit their application to regional branches or to the Inspection Directorate; these agreements must first be signed by the Financial Manager or the person authorised to represent the CCSS for that purpose, and subsequently by the legal representative of the signatory organisation or a person duly authorised for this purpose.

Regarding contributions, the contribution structure approved by the Board of Directors applies, based on the reference income defined for self-employed workers and voluntarily insured persons.

A new model has recently been introduced, known as the Cooperation Agreement to Facilitate Insurance and Contribution Billing Procedures, which, in conjunction with the new technology platform, offers organised groups and associations of self-employed workers an updated service to facilitate insurance and contribution billing procedures (enrolment, withdrawal and changes to members' insurance cover), with involvement in the stages of rolling out the model and the presentation of technological improvements by self-managed cooperatives.

In line with the above, another strategy for achieving impact was identified as the transformation of the group insurance agreement management process – framed as a cooperation agreement – using a new tool to streamline enrolment procedures and the billing of contributions for self-employed workers. The main features of this tool are improved information management, simplification of the payment process, and conceptualises the organisation as a strategic entity, with members being registered on an individual basis.

At present, there is a trend towards strengthening management practices that integrate aspects of legal compliance, internal control, simplification and technological innovation, all of which are fundamental to providing a service to users in line with the needs of the various stakeholders involved in the service delivery process (users and the administration). Some of the most important insurance agreements established by the CCSS are the agreements covering migrant insured persons, which are set out below.

VII. Health insurance schemes for migrants and refugees

In recent years, the CCSS, in collaboration with national and international organisations, has implemented two group health insurance schemes to provide healthcare cover for vulnerable migrant populations in our country. Both schemes are described below.

1. Framework agreement on group insurance to provide health insurance cover for asylum seekers, refugees, applicants for statelessness and stateless persons, between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund.

In 2019, the CCSS, in conjunction with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), developed a pilot agreement to provide health insurance cover to asylum seekers or refugees in situations of economic vulnerability. The population to be covered under this agreement comprises: (i) asylum seekers holding a provisional card issued by the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners; (ii) asylum seekers who have requested an appointment with the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners and are awaiting their provisional card; (iii) refugees; (iv) applicants for statelessness status holding a provisional card issued by the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners; and (v) stateless persons who do not generate income through their own economic activity or who are employed as wage earners and are voluntarily insured using financial resources provided by UNHCR. These individuals shall have temporary access to the healthcare services set out in this agreement, for as long as they remain in that status.

The UNHCR is responsible for issuing and providing each beneficiary with the relevant identification card, which is for personal use only, non-transferable, and may only be used to access health services provided by the CCSS. This document contains a recent photograph, nationality, date of birth, address, full name and the insurance number provided by the CCSS.

The project continued in 2020, and the total funding allocated to this project during the COVID-19 pandemic amounted to US\$1,800,000, which enabled the provision of temporary voluntary health insurance for 6,000 asylum seekers and refugees for 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. This experience led to the development of a second project, which provided health insurance cover from April to December 2021 for 10,000

asylum seekers or refugees in situations of economic or health vulnerability.

During the process of identifying the beneficiaries of this pilot scheme, it became clear that the scope of the project needed to be expanded to provide support to asylum seekers or refugees with specific health needs; consequently, a third agreement was signed in 2022 to provide cover for 6,000 people.

In 2023, the unit responsible for administration on behalf of UNHCR changed from *Red Internacional* to the *Fundación Centro de Derechos Sociales del Inmigrante (CENDEROS)*; consequently, the insured persons were transferred to the employer's payroll, a move authorised by the organisation's legal representative in the country, who approved the use of this legal framework for that purpose, with a fourth agreement being signed that year to continue providing insurance cover for 6,000 people, and a fifth agreement being signed in 2024 to continue providing insurance cover for 5,000 people. The total amount allocated to this project since 2019 amounts to US\$9,800,000.

Since its inception, the agreement signed to provide health cover to asylum seekers or refugees in situations of economic or health vulnerability – as defined by UNHCR – has had a significant impact on the beneficiary population; it is therefore considered appropriate to develop a sixth project to extend health insurance cover for the period from January to December 2025, to 4,330 asylum seekers, refugees, applicants for statelessness and stateless persons who are in a situation of economic or health vulnerability.

In June 2025, the agreement's register reported a total of 3,971 persons of interest covered by the scheme; furthermore, from January to June 2025, UNHCR processed 216 applications for inclusion in the agreement, of which 189 new individuals were approved and included. The coordinated work between the CCSS and UNHCR teams enables fluid, constant and transparent communication, always with a view to ensuring that persons of interest under the agreement are properly covered.

Based on information relating to the provision of health services to the beneficiary population, the main results achieved during the period January 2025 to June 2025 are set out below:

Table 1.
External consultations, emergencies and hospital discharges for directly insured persons and their family members, under the CCSS–UNHCR agreement, January–June 2025

Table
 Outpatient consultations, emergency care and hospital discharges for directly insured persons and their family members. CCSS–UNHCR Agreement
 Period: January–June 2025

Description	Directly insured person	No. of covered family members	Total
Outpatient cons.	4,841	653	5,494
Urgent care	1,810	273	2,083
Discharges			100

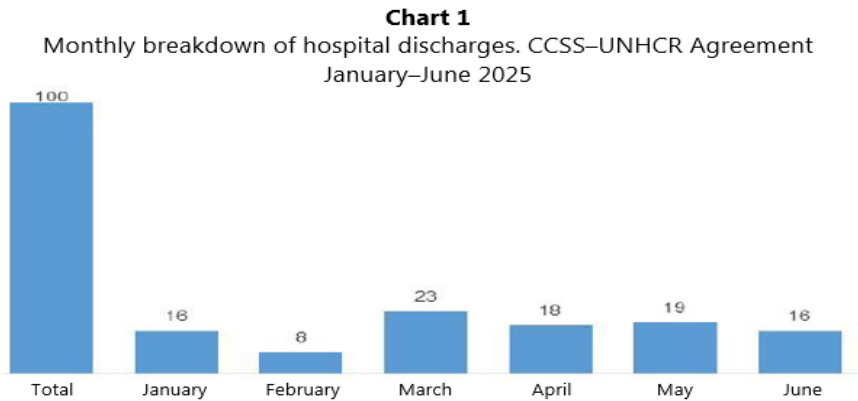
Source: Health Statistics Department. Medical Management. CCSS

The main causes of hospital discharges are:

- Pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period (19 discharges)
- Tumours (12), diseases of the eye and its adnexa (12)
- Diseases of the digestive system (10)
- Diseases of the circulatory system (8)

Chart 1 shows that the distribution of hospital discharges by month is roughly uniform; in other words, except for February 2025, the remaining months fall within the monthly average (17).

Chart 1.
Monthly breakdown of hospital discharges under the CCSS–UNHCR agreement, January–June 2025



Source: Based on data from the health statistics department. Medical Management.

As regards emergencies, the main reasons for seeking medical attention are:

- Diseases of the respiratory system
- Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue
- Certain infectious and parasitic diseases
- Injuries, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes
- Diseases of the genitourinary system
- Diseases of the digestive system
- Factors influencing health status and contact with health services
- Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue
- Diseases of the nervous system
- Mental and behavioural disorders
- External causes of morbidity and mortality

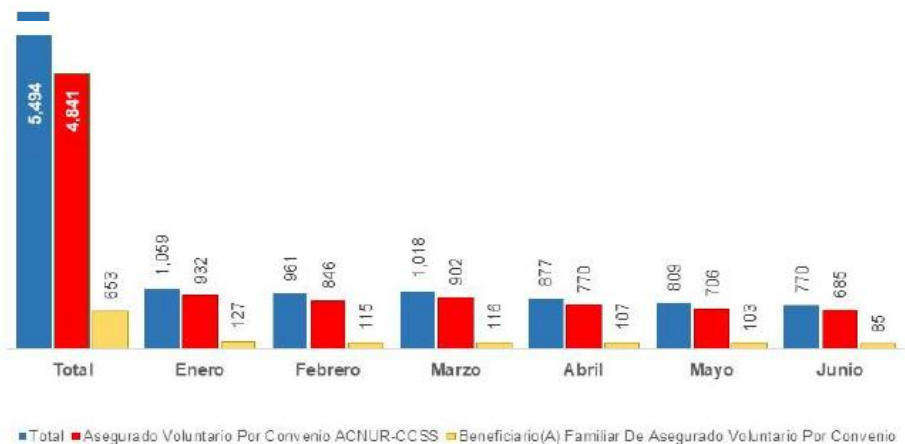
Finally, regarding external consultations, the main causes are:

- Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases
- Diseases of the digestive system
- Diseases of the circulatory system
- Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue
- Symptoms, signs and abnormal clinical and laboratory findings, not elsewhere classified
- Diseases of the genitourinary system
- Mental and behavioural disorders
- Certain infectious and parasitic diseases

Chart 2 shows the breakdown of external consultations by month and, where applicable, by whether they relate to directly insured people or beneficiaries.

Chart 2.

Distribution of external consultations by month, for directly insured patients and those with family cover, January–June 2025



Source: Based on information from the health statistics department. Medical Management.

Of the total number of external consultations (5,494), 88% correspond to those provided to directly insured persons and 12% to their family members.

2. Framework agreement on group insurance to provide health cover for asylum seekers and refugees, between the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy, the University of Costa Rica Foundation and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund

Building on the positive results achieved under the CCSS-UNHCR Insurance Agreement in 2021, the European Union, represented by the European Commission, and the Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation (AECID) signed an agreement aimed at providing a contribution to finance the implementation of the initiative (project), entitled "Healthcare coverage and access to decent work for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in vulnerable situations in Costa Rica."

The institutions implementing this social security project are the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), the University of Costa Rica Research Foundation (Fundación UCR), which administers the allocated funds, and MIDEPLAN, as the beneficiary of the grant awarded by AECID.

The specific objective of the project is to "improve access to comprehensive healthcare services for those covered by the CCSS insurance scheme." Under the terms of the scheme, this insurance does not provide cover under the Disability, Old Age and Death Insurance scheme or the Non-Contributory Pension Scheme.

For the purposes outlined above, the UCR Foundation transferred the sum of US\$729,000 in August 2023 and, in April 2024, the sum of US\$707,000. This agreement was implemented between September 2023 and November 2024; furthermore, it provided cover for up to 3,775 asylum seekers and refugees per month.

Much like the agreement with the UNHCR, the target population to be covered under the agreement comprises: 1) asylum seekers holding a provisional card issued by the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners; 2) asylum seekers who have requested an appointment with the Directorate-General for Migration and Foreigners and are awaiting their provisional card; and 3) refugees who do not earn an income through self-employment or who are not in paid employment, and who enrol in the Health Insurance Scheme using funding from the European Union via the AECID, in order to access only the health services set out in this agreement on a temporary basis, while they retain that status, until 30 November 2024.

The agreement began with the registration of the UCR Foundation as the body designated to administer it, with a total of 488 individuals of interest. Between September 2023 and November 2024, 4,579 applications from "asylum seekers" or "refugees" were processed under the agreement, of which 4,251 people were approved and included, representing a success rate of 92.84% in terms of people being covered in a timely manner.

The *Framework Agreement on Group Insurance for Health Cover for Asylum Seekers and Refugees*, among the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy, the UCR Foundation and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund, enabled, on average per month, health cover for 2,807 persons of interest, on average per month, during the period from September 2023 to November 2024.

VIII. Conclusions

- 1) The CCSS is consolidating its role as the guarantor of universal social security in Costa Rica, offering various types of insurance cover to the population to enable them to access the services it provides.

- 2) The CCSS has extended the scope of its services as a best practice in social security and as a means of protecting the migrant population residing in the country, through measures such as making insurance compulsory for all individuals, regardless of nationality, race, religion, gender or economic status, and by establishing group insurance agreements to provide service coverage for the migrant population.
- 3) National collective agreements and those concluded with international organisations have been crucial in extending coverage to groups that have traditionally been excluded, particularly those within the migrant and refugee population who require the protection afforded by health insurance.
- 4) The main challenges relate to the financing of the system, increasing membership, financial sustainability and the technological optimisation of processes.

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EPILOGUE

Human mobility as a reflection of our times

For years, migration policies were framed in terms of public security or economic management. But the 21st century calls on us to rethink everything: to view migration as a profoundly human phenomenon that challenges our ethical convictions, our protection systems and our very concept of social justice.

To speak of migration in Latin America and the Caribbean is to speak of our times: of their wounds and hopes, of the inequality that persists, and of humanity's immense capacity to seek a better future. Human mobility is neither an exception nor a marginal phenomenon: it is a mirror that reflects who we are as a region and where we want to go.

The history of Latin America and the Caribbean is shaped by migration. Entire families crossed mountain ranges, rivers and borders to cultivate the land, learn, teach and build new lives. That mobility has woven the cultural, social and labour ties that today define us as a region. That is why guaranteeing the rights of migrants is neither a concession nor a gesture of solidarity: it is an act of justice and historical consistency.

At the Inter-American Conference on Social Security (CISS), we maintain that there can be no social justice without inclusion. Migrants are not outsiders in our societies: they are workers, carers, students, mothers and fathers who contribute to the development of their countries of origin, transit and destination. Ensuring their access to social security means recognising their dignity and their contribution to collective well-being.

When social security is universally provided, it becomes a bridge linking rights, opportunities and solidarity. And it is this bridge that Latin America and the Caribbean need to strengthen in order to transform human mobility into a source of shared development.

A partnership for regional cooperation and integration

The Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) and the CISS share a common vision: regional integration is the most inclusive and sustainable way to tackle the contemporary challenges of human mobility. Our cooperation was formalised in 2018 through an agreement signed in Mexico City by the then Permanent Secretary of SELA and the Secretary-General of the CISS.

Since then, this partnership has yielded tangible results: technical meetings,

joint knowledge-building, the exchange of experiences and, above all, a shared agenda that puts people at the centre.

Between 2021 and 2025, SELA strengthened its collaboration with the CISS, consolidating a strategic relationship that continues under the leadership of Ambassador Lesly David. This handover not only ensures institutional continuity: it represents the renewal of a political and ethical commitment to a Latin America that cooperates, learns and acts together.

This partnership is not merely technical; it symbolises a political commitment to a region that views human mobility as an opportunity for integration and shared prosperity, rather than as a divisive challenge.

Lessons learnt from the High-Level Dialogues (HLD)

The development of this *Handbook of best practices* was accompanied by a multi-stakeholder reflection process that brought together a range of voices: from academia, institutions and civil society. The *High-Level Dialogues on Migration and Social Security*, initiated by the CISS with the support of SELA, provided opportunities for active listening and collective decision-making.

At the III Dialogue, held on 7 October 2024 at the CISS headquarters, mechanisms to facilitate the integration of migrants into social security systems were discussed. Representatives from international organisations, academic institutions and civil society organisations took part, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the National System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents (SIPINNA), the State Distance Learning University (UNED), the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS) and the Colegio de México (COLMEX).

A fundamental point emerged there: the need to recognise the diversity of migration pathways and the many factors that influence them: gender, age, origin, economic situation, sexual orientation and nationality. Likewise, the need to guarantee the portability of rights and effective access to healthcare and pension services was emphasised. Migration is not a single story, but thousands of intertwining stories; for this reason, the institutional response must be comprehensive, empathetic and adaptive.

Subsequently, at the "4th High-Level Dialogues," held on 26 March 2025, this comprehensive vision of social security was reaffirmed, with a focus on the challenges of return and reintegration. The discussions linked this agenda to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those relating to the eradication of poverty, decent work, the reduction of inequalities and

institutional strengthening. Participants included organisations such as the Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI), the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS), Siloe Labour Solutions and the National Institute of Migration (INAMI).

The lesson was clear: migration should not be seen as a problem to be solved, but as an opportunity to innovate in public policy and strengthen regional cohesion.

Towards social security without borders: socio-economic inclusion for all

The collection of experiences brought together in this handbook is based on a fundamental principle: every migrant has the right to a life of dignity, with effective access to healthcare, education, decent work and social security.

Socio-economic inclusion requires sustained public policies, flexible legal frameworks and active international cooperation. Within this framework, the portability of entitlements, bilateral agreements and inter-institutional networks become essential tools for ensuring the continuity of social protection for those moving between countries.

Examples such as the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS), which has made progress in recognising cross-border contributions; the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), which provides comprehensive care for migrants; and the Social Security Fund (CSS) of Panama, which promotes education and public communication strategies, demonstrate that institutional innovation can transform lives.

Behind every case there are specific stories: a woman who manages to enrol in a healthcare scheme after years of working in the informal sector; a young returnee who starts a business thanks to the training they have received; a family that now has health cover in a country other than their own. Each individual achievement reminds us that inclusion is not only possible, but essential.

In a region as interdependent as ours, borders must not be barriers to rights. Social security must be regarded as a regional public good, capable of protecting everyone regardless of their place of origin or destination.

Moving towards portability mechanisms, reciprocity agreements and effective institutional coordination is not merely a technical challenge: it is a political and ethical decision. It involves recognising that human mobility is an essential part of our Latin American identity.

Intra-regional migration has woven together family, cultural and labour networks that underpin our economies and our communities. That is why, when a person crosses a border, they should not lose the protection to which they are entitled by virtue of their work and their humanity.

The CISS reaffirms its commitment to an inclusive, flexible and solidarity-based social security system, capable of adapting to the changing nature of work, mobility and life itself. Only in this way can we build systems that are truly fair, sustainable and without borders.

The solidarity-based multilateralism that we promote is a practical tool for strengthening capacities, building trust and translating knowledge into action. This handbook is a testament to that commitment.

The future of social security in Latin America and the Caribbean will depend on our ability to maintain an open dialogue, share experiences and build trust. Integration cannot be imposed: it is fostered through empathy, political will and the conviction that the well-being of one person enhances the well-being of all.

Migration is not just a challenge; it is an opportunity to rethink solidarity. It invites us to ask ourselves what sort of societies we want to be: those that close their doors or those that build bridges; those that exclude or those that recognise diversity as a source of wealth and learning.

If we can ensure that a migrant has access to healthcare, decent work or a pension, we will be strengthening the foundations of equity. If a migrant girl grows up knowing that her wellbeing matters just as much as anyone else's, we will be building a fairer future.

Human mobility, far from being a threat, enriches our communities with diversity, innovation and new bonds of solidarity. Latin America and the Caribbean can become a global example of human cooperation, where social security acts as a driving force for integration and justice.

A shared commitment to the future

The experiences documented here do not mark the end of a process: they mark its beginning. They are the starting point for a path that we must continue to build together with governments, institutions, academia and civil society.

Ensuring social protection for migrants is not only a legal and moral obligation: it is an opportunity to strengthen the social and economic fabric of our region.

As Secretary-General of the CISS, I reaffirm my conviction that a more integrated Latin America and Caribbean is possible if we place human dignity at the heart of our decisions. Our cooperation with SELA demonstrates that when we act on the basis of trust, empathy and shared responsibility, we move towards truly inclusive development.

May this handbook serve as a guide, but also as a source of inspiration. May it motivate our institutions to communicate, innovate and act with empathy. May it remind us that behind every migration statistic there are names, faces and dreams.

Every step we take towards inclusion will also be a step towards more cohesive, diverse and supportive societies. The challenge is great, but the opportunity is even greater.

Latin America and the Caribbean have everything it takes to be a global example of cooperation and humanity. From the Inter-American Conference on Social Security, together with the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System, we reaffirm our commitment to this vision.

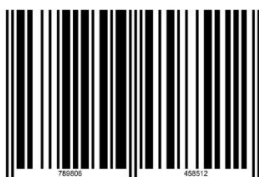
Because human mobility does not only transform those who migrate: it transforms us all. It teaches us that solidarity knows no borders.

Pedro Kumamoto Aguilar
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(CISS)

More and better Integration



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