



KNITTING TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Narratives from Migrant Women and Children in Tijuana, México

2023

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES
IN THE AMERICAS

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FINAL REPORT **2023**

Mapping Project, Connecting
Communities in the Americas



CONNECTING
COMMUNITIES
IN THE AMERICAS
CONECTANDO COMUNIDADES
EN AMÉRICA



Fundación Internacional
de la Comunidad A.C.

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Tijuana, Baja California, México. Marzo, 2023

We dedicate this work to all the women, boys, and girls who are in mobility anywhere in the world, may their walk have the collective rhythm of hope for a better life, and may they have the strength of a community that sustains them.

We appreciate the support of the Civil Society Organizations of Tijuana for their work in containing and accompanying migrant women and their sons and daughters. We would like to extend special appreciation to the following organizations:

Center 32 FMT, Al Otro Lado, Migrant Integrator Center, Don Bosco Salesian Refuge, and Circle of Learning of Escuela Nueva Activa (CAENA). As these organizations provided extensive support during this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Glossary	5
Technical Data Sheet	6
Introduction: Why Is Studying Transnational Migration of Children and Women in Tijuana Important?	7
1. Contextual Notes: Why the Waiting Time in Tijuana?	11
2. Methodological Notes: Mapping Change in Migrant Children and Women’s Waiting Time in Tijuana	15
Study Participants	15
Challenges Faced in our Study: How to Research Processes in Constant Change?	16
Collaborative Community Work: Cultivating Relationships Based on Trust	20
Results	21
3. How do you get to Tijuana? Migrant Women and Children’s Travel Trajectories and Experiences	22
3.1. Stories, Memories, and Narratives: An Overview of the Conditions of Departure and Journey to Tijuana	23
3.2. Mourning Processes and Agency: Migrant’s Right to Community Care	36
4. Living Conditions in Tijuana	43
Housing and Food	44
Education for Migrant Girls and Boys	45
Health	46
Urban Mobility	47
Laboral Activity	48
4.1. Knitting Migrant Communities Together: Information Circuits as Key Resources	49
4.2. Civil Society in the Containment of Migrant Women and Children in Tijuana	52
4.3. Tool Case: Mapping Tijuana’s Migrant Community for Support and Resources	54
Conclusions: Addressing the Needs of Tijuana’s Migrant Community	56
References Consulted	58

GLOSSARY

ACNUDH	OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
ACNUR	UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
CAENA	CIRCLE OF LEARNING FOR ACTIVE NEW SCHOOL
CCA	CONNECTING COMMUNITIES IN THE AMERICAS
COMAR	MEXICAN COMMISSION FOR REFUGEE AID AND HUMAN RIGHTS
DIF	INTEGRAL FAMILY DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM
FIC	INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
INM	NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MIGRATION
NNA	GIRLS, BOYS, AND ADOLESCENTS
OIM	INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION
ONU	UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION
OSC	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
SAT	TAX ADMINISTRATION SERVICE
SESNSP	EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT OF THE NATIONAL PUBLIC SECURITY SYSTEM
SRE	MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TIJUANA

TECHNICAL DATA SHEET

Study Name	Knitting Transnational Communities: Narratives from Migrant Women and Children in Tijuana, Mexico
Period	January 7th, 2022 to January 7th, 2023
Objective	Understanding and diagnosing the met and unmet needs of mothering women and migrant children in school years (6-15 years old) in migrating conditions is crucial for designing effective actions and negotiations to improve their living conditions. In this case, the studied population was recipients of various social programs while sheltered in Tijuana during the research period
Specific Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze the experiences of women and children in shelters to recognize their learnings 2. Identify how support networks and community practices work within migrant women and children integrating programs and services operating in the city's shelters 3. Identify the priorities for the attention of migrant women and children 4. Create a map of the covered and uncovered needs of women and children in migration situations in Tijuana
Research Methodology	A process of attentive listening was carried out based on empirical information about the everyday living conditions in the voices of the people involved in the study. The snowball technique was used to search for collaborators, starting with contact with key informants in shelters and community programs in Tijuana
Study Participants. Sample Specifics	The study involved the participation of 20 mothering women (11 of them permanently) and 25 school-aged girls and boys between the ages of 6 and 15 (10 of them permanently) in a migration situation, at the time of the field research, they were living in Tijuana and had experiences with care programs and/or staying in shelters in the city. Additionally, personnel from community and government programs collaborated in interviews during field visits
Research Techniques	Through documentary research, a map and a database were created to map shelters, programs, and services in Tijuana that assist migrant women and children. This mapping exercise aimed to gather information about the locations and types of available resources to facilitate support for the target population

INTRODUCTION

Why Is Studying Transnational Migration of Children and Women in Tijuana Important?

In November 2021, during our “Signos Vitales”¹ fieldwork activities, our research team made an exploratory approach which discovered a group of five women seated on the floor in an improvised room at the CAENA facilities, knitting scarves and beanies for the upcoming winter. At first glance, they were comfortably talking, laughing, and teaching each other how to cast-off stitches with such ease that astonished us. We soon figured out that while the women were knitting, they shared experiences, memories, worries, and know-how knowledge. To add to our state of wonderment, they shared fairly simple instructions with us and handed us needles and yarn to start knitting with them. We were introduced into the migrant women’s world by knitting.

Metaphorically speaking, building and knitting are not the same processes. A building is a firm construction, which is expected to remain solid and resistant, yet when put under systematic, calculated, institutionalized processes it could be just a bit flexible. However, knitting is a flexible, discontinued, intermittent, historical, and diverse process; that can be intertwined by different hands at any given moment. There are also knitting fabrics that break, some can be repaired and some cannot.

Essentially, this report aims to share what we observed: a collective creation of a community that migrant women shaped during their transnational journeys, which started even before they stepped out of their homes in their

¹ Vital Signs was the first diagnosis on the population in mobility carried out by the FIC during the year 2021 in Tijuana.

origin countries and that did not simply end with their arrival in Tijuana. We found a knitted community fabric that happens to change during the transit and is permanently reconfigured, even during the waiting time, something that can last from weeks to years. And that, particularly, if the women are mothers, this fabric integrates their sons and daughters and enables the creation of community networks broadening among migrant children as well.

Here, we present the final results and discoveries of our research conducted between January and October of 2022, as part of the community mapping initiative within the Connecting Communities in the Americas (CCA) project, led by Community Foundations Leading Change. Primarily, our findings shake predominant views that frame migrants as passive, self-seeking, impassible and resigned to waiting for a solution to their migratory status. On the contrary, when we observed the migrant community engaged in knitting, we saw how they bonded with each other and created a space that allowed them to thrive not only during their journey but also during the waiting period in Tijuana. These observations shed light on how migrants knit their capacities for agency and resilience. Accordingly, we introduce our report by addressing the importance of studying migrant populations every year to capture the dynamic processes they must adapt to.

During our fieldwork phase, our research work focused on the mobility of women and children, which deserved singular attention, given that women were providing care, ensuring the well-being and survival of the whole community on

According to Layton and Schalla (2021:2), CCA's main objectives are:

- *Promote shared understanding about transnational communities in the hemisphere*
- *Strengthen relationships between community organizations and transnational parties to solve common pressing issues*
- *Increase and exchange knowledge about the practices of community foundations with their local communities*
- *Promote more efficient donor funding in Latin America and the Caribbean*

a daily basis. Therefore, we strived to gain a broader understanding of the migrant communities we studied through their exceptional experiences, practices, and challenges. At the same time, we followed the principles outlined by CCA.

This report was carried out by the International Community Foundation (FIC) as part of its interest in researching transnational migration of women and children arriving in Tijuana, which in most cases represented a waiting process surrounded by a context of uncertainty concerning their foreseeable futures and the limitations of their realities. One of FIC's priorities was to ensure the improvement of the conditions of vulnerable populations or groups through coordinated actions among various local, national, or international actors. With this work, we acknowledge the needs and pressing issues of the migrant population that is waiting in Tijuana and recognize the community resources that mitigate these needs in order to favor key alliances that advocate for people in transnational mobility processes.

In this sense, our diagnostic framework assumes the understanding that human mobility is not limited to individuals migrating from one point to another, but to community fabrics that are shaped before leaving the place of origin, reconfigured during transit, and transformed in the condition of waiting in Tijuana. In other words, we seek “to gain a detailed understanding of the relationships and interconnections between people and institutions, as well as the practices that keep them active and dynamic” (Layton and Schalla, 2021:3).

In the beginning, our initial goal was to identify the unmet needs of mothers and school-aged children (ages 6-15) who were affected by migration and were connected to programs and/or shelters in Tijuana. By doing this, we aimed to collectively design actions that allowed us to diversify both problem-solving strategies and public advocacy of their general well-being. Nevertheless, we found more than that, we found that communities formed by women collectively solved most of their basic needs, we saw how migrant women's agency was capable of transforming their violent context by prioritizing caregiving and protecting their families. Moreover, we found that migrant women, adolescents, and children often experience recurring violence similar to what they have faced both in their country of origin and during their migration journeys, including

violence from public institutions, governmental offices, the army, local mobs, and organized crime.

“Vital Signs of Migrant Women and Children in Tijuana” published in 2021 serves as a precedent study to this report; in this first diagnosis, we documented the living conditions of migrant women and children during the second year of the Covid-19 confinement. The report can be read at: https://comunalia.org.mx/portfolio_page/signos-vitales-tijuana-2022/. To follow up on our efforts, this report describes the waiting conditions experienced by migrants in Tijuana during 2022. Additionally, it includes an interactive map of the city’s shelters and a directory of the different programs available.

Closing this introductory section, we extend our gratitude to the women and children who participated in this study not only because they shared much of their experiences and wisdom, but also for revealing to us the invisible threads that unite them as transnational migrant communities. We also recognize the social organizations and shelters that put into effect humanitarian aid and provide the spaces needed to knit communities of containment.



Image 1. Community Mapping Collaborative Session with Migrant Women under “Centro 32” program. Tijuana, August, 2022.

1

Contextual Notes: Why the Waiting Time in Tijuana?

In this section, we provide contextual notes to describe the foundation behind our decision to focus on the waiting time experienced by migrants in the Tijuana-San Diego region and the implications of policies and regulations on their journeys.

The border city of Tijuana is known for holding the title of having the highest record of daily bi-national crossings worldwide. Essentially, the city serves as a hub for

commercial trade, work, tourism, and family visits. Likewise, is one of the most visited cities by migrants from all over the world who wish to enter the United States. Tijuana's geographical location and its border with San Diego, California, make it a crucial city for a range of cross-border activities, contributing to its reputation as a major focal point for migration processes. Due to the increasingly restrictive immigration and security policies implemented by the United

What does the data have to say?

According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a total of 41,303 asylum seekers were received in Mexico in 2020, which represents a significant increase compared to previous years. Out of this total, 38% were women, 62% were men and about 19% of the total number of asylum seekers were children and adolescents. Most of these applications were submitted by people from countries such as Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, fleeing violence, insecurity, and political persecution in their countries of origin (UNHCR, 2021). Many of these people head to Tijuana to wait for their paperwork or to find a way of crossing the border into the United States.

To these numbers of international migrants, we must add those corresponding to the Mexican population escaping violence in their places of origin. The total number of displaced persons in Mexico between 2016 and 2021 was 379,322, according to the Mexican Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (CMDPDH, 2021). 75% of those displaced in 2020 lived in Guerrero, Oaxaca, or Chiapas and their departure was a result of a violent event, however, these figures do not take into account the silent and anonymous relocation of entire families fleeing organized crime. As is well known, the data on the migration phenomena is only approximate as it excludes undocumented migration that eludes governmental records.

States government between 2020 and 2022, a large number of asylum requests have accumulated in the offices of the Customs and Border Protection Agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and migrants have extended their time waiting in this border city. During the study period, the exposure to risks related to human rights violations, the risk of becoming victims of crime, the difficulty of accessing basic resources, and the experience of uncertainty, anxiety, and frustration made the wait challenging for both the migrants and the city that received them.

Migrant women and children are the most vulnerable to criminal groups and are often victims of abuse by authorities. Compared to men, they face an increased risk of sexual violence and human trafficking and encounter significant challenges in accessing basic health and protection services in Mexico. As a result, they are more likely to experience poverty due to limited access to employment opportunities, discrimination, and low schooling.

One of the main reasons why migrants from national or transnational origins must wait in Tijuana before entering the United States is because of the enforcement of immigration laws and policies, primarily under Title 42 (T42), which was put in place in March 2020 as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Title 42 did not represent a particularly

innovative policy in immigration matters, as it authorized immediate deportations for individuals involved in illegal immigration, citing the order as a ‘public safety measure’ to contain the spread of disease. Nonetheless, this order has effects that go beyond deportations. Migrants who have sought asylum in the United States were unable to wait for their legal status to be resolved on United States soil during the enforcement of Title 42. In response to these measures, the Mexican Government agreed to receive both deported individuals and asylum seekers, allowing them to await the resolution of their status on Mexican soil. This situation has left thousands of people stranded in borderland cities in the northern part of the country.

While T42 was in effect, the Customs and Border Protection Agency (CBP) spent nearly three years systematically deporting individuals under unclear criteria. Specifically, in 2022, migrants from Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Haiti faced harsh challenges as they became the primary targets of T42, despite the U.S. government’s announcement of new temporary permits for individuals from these four nationalities. The issue arose from the fact that these new permits had eligibility criteria that varied from strict to illogical. Notably, three criteria stood out: firstly, individuals previously deported were considered ineligible; secondly,

migrants needed to have a sponsor who could financially support them and take responsibility for their well-being; finally, the applications had to be processed from the applicants' country of origin.

In April 2022, it was the CBP itself who announced that the order would end, explaining that with the current public health conditions and the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, T42 was no longer necessary. Regardless of this surprise and President Biden's campaign promise to end the order, T42 remained in effect until May 11th, 2023. Under this panorama, in the busiest border crossing located in Tijuana, a wide network of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) focused on a variety of vulnerable groups within the migrant community. During 2022, these organizations proved to be crucial as they provided the opportunity to generate exceptions to T42 for women, unaccompanied minors, members of the LGBT+ community, racially marginalized migrants, and families through the concentration of each specific group carried out by these CSOs. As a result, during July, August, and September of that year, there was a significant flow of migrants who requested asylum and, through an exception to T42, they could wait for their resolution in the United States as established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and as it occurred previously to the implementation of T42.

Eventhoughthiswaspartof2022'spanorama, during the last days of December, Biden's administration established an extension to Title 42 and on January 5th, 2023, the United States Government announced that there would be a new system for processing asylum applications through the "CBP One" application. Although this did not happen in 2022, it is important to mention it as it centralized all processes for the CBP, eliminating the possibility for CSOs to obtain exceptions to T42. Since its launch the "CBP One" application has been highly criticized, mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, the new system does not make categorical distinctions of any kind. As a result, women with dependent children and other vulnerable groups who formerly relied on expert civil society organizations to help them find exceptions to T42 now enter into fierce competition for the limited slots administered directly by the CBP through the application. Secondly, the new system treats each individual as a separate case, disregarding the fact that there may be families involved. This is particularly painful for women and dependent children who now have to compete not just for one slot but for one slot per family member.

During the year 2022 and the beginning of 2023, civil society showed the importance of the work done to support the human dignity and integrity of the mobile population in Tijuana, Mexico. By examining the

complex, ever-changing, and sometimes unyielding roles of immigration policies in both the United States and Mexico,

CSOs gain a clearer understanding of how legal frameworks reconfigure migration dynamics.



Image 2. Workshop on Travel Narratives with Migrant Girls and Boys. Don Bosco Facilities, June of 2022.

2

Methodological Notes: Mapping Change in Migrant Children and Women’s Waiting Time in Tijuana

In this section, we describe how we conducted the study and mapped the changes in waiting times for migrant children and women in Tijuana. Selecting a qualitative research approach, this work focuses on the depth of information and data shared by the key population of the study. In other words, it explores the lived experiences of the waiting conditions in Tijuana and the community fabric that emerges in this process. This report includes a community mapping that allowed us to explore the conditions experienced by migrant women, children, and girls who were located in Tijuana at the time of the study. In this case, the mapping focuses on the migration process and the waiting conditions. Community mapping requires the collaboration of various voices expressing diverse experiences, as well as experiential knowledge within the designated territory.

Study Participants

Our research sample was formed by 20 mothers (11 of them as a consistent group) and 25 school-age children between the ages of 6 and 15 (10 as a consistent group)

who were in a migration situation and residing in Tijuana, Baja California at the time of the field research participated in this study. The sample population already had experience with care programs and/or staying in shelters in the city. The collaborating participants came from various countries, including Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Haiti, the United States (specifically, individuals deported from California), and Mexico (due to forced internal displacement caused by violence).

Similarly, personnel responsible for community and governmental programs collaborated through interviews and field visits. The connection with these collaborators was established through contact with community organizations. The mapping of social organizations serving the migrant population was done through documentary research, resulting in the creation of a map and database that document the distribution of shelters and programs catering to the key population. The mapping of social organizations that serve the migrant population was carried out through documentary research. Based

on this, a map and database were created that recorded the distribution of shelters and assistance programs for the key population.

Challenges Faced in our Study: How to Research Processes in Constant Change?

Addressing the sustenance of life in a community within the context of migration in Tijuana involved facing significant challenges during our fieldwork. The gradual return to normality after the COVID-19 confinement in 2022 made it difficult to access certain shelters and spaces where we wanted to engage in conversations with women. Additionally, our approaches to the migrant communities coincided with the third wave of COVID-19 infections in the city (Omicron variant).

Considering that the population participating in the mapping was the most vulnerable within the migrant universe, we decided to contact them through specific assistance programs rather than closed and overcrowded shelters. We engaged with small groups and implemented necessary safety measures.

Additionally, the conditions of violence in Tijuana directly affecting the population, especially migrants, also posed challenges when establishing the conversations we sought. The outbreaks of violence in Tijuana and the presence of federal forces and the military framed the fieldwork conducted for this study. We encountered security measures implemented by some NGOs and religious organizations responsible for assisting individuals in mobility, which limited access to information and protected individuals.

Research Methods	Lines of Research
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary research in digital spaces • Participant observation • Focus groups • Narrative workshops through drawing • Mapping of shelters and available programs for the migrant population • Individual interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility trajectories, travel transitions • Community network of women, girls, and boys • Relationships with the environment (Tijuana) • Response from social organizations

Another challenge was creating safe spaces for conversation, which are not always available in shelters². We aimed to create comfortable, low-noise, and as private as possible spaces where women, children, and adolescents could freely express their thoughts and feelings with confidence. Since such spaces are scarce in shelters, we opted to visit the headquarters of certain programs (training centers, legal or psychological counseling centers) where women and their children reside or are in the process of settling in Tijuana.

In this context, we developed this community mapping study through four stages:

- 1 Creation of a baseline, which aimed to gather previous studies and knowledge generated regarding the migrant population, as well as the continuation of community work initiated in 2021 during the “Signos Vitales” research report.
- 2 Design of the methodological strategy, which involved a process of reflection on precedent studies, engaging in conversations with other social

organizations, and visiting shelters and programs focused on children and women’s care to identify the field conditions and adjust the methodological strategies that would allow us to conduct the research.

- 3 Fieldwork was conducted with a community collaboration approach, strengthening the fabric of trust and care among study participants. We focused on opening conversations and initiating a process of attentive listening that continuously adapted to the existing space conditions and the feelings of those involved.

- 4 The last stage consisted of a process of community reflection within the foundation, as well as with other international foundations participating in the Connecting Communities in the Americas program. This phase was of great value for assimilating learnings, identifying similarities and differences among migrant communities in the Americas, as well as exchanging knowledge with initiatives from other territories on the continent. (go to Fig. 1)

² In 2022, Baja California was one of the places in the figures of forced disappearance, homicides and femicides (Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System, 2023). The attacks against many migrant shelters in Tijuana are rising, whether by organized crime, the common crime or xenophobic attacks; the truth is that migrants and personnel who work in these spaces are systematically besieged. (Wola, 2023).



Figure 1

Our methodological approach was guided by an **ethic of effective listening** that placed significant emphasis on recognizing diverse factors such as gender, age, condition, migratory experience, and ethnic-cultural affiliation, among others. This ethical framework played a central role in the design of research instruments and the analytical process. Throughout our work, we prioritized listening and understanding the experiences shared through testimonies, paying attention to the conditions of the daily life of our research participants. Our

commitment to effective listening ethics was evident in every stage of the project, including the selection of techniques, the development of interview and observation guides, community engagement, and the recording, analysis, and presentation of the information we collected.

In addition to the ethics of attentive listening, we recognize the importance of building trusting relationships based on an ethics of care and respect for Human Rights, which was applied based on five key points:

- 1 Reciprocity:** The research activities and techniques implemented aimed to contribute to community needs. Throughout fieldwork, voluntary work was carried out, and support networks with social organizations were adopted.
- 2 Community involvement:** The instruments and techniques used were adjusted to the everyday conditions of those who collaborated, to conduct dialogues in environments that are familiar and safe to them. This implies a gradual integration process of the fieldwork team, which has been carried out since December 2021.
- 3 Anonymity and confidentiality:** Audio recordings were made mainly for analytical purposes and only with the explicit permission of the study participants. Visual records respected the anonymity of the collaborators, and therefore, alternative names and modified data that could reveal their identities were used in this report.
- 4 Emotional support:** Differentiated strategies were considered for children and women. Work with children was conducted in short and creative sessions. In the case of women, dialogue sessions lasted a maximum of two hours, including breaks. In situations where the emotional burden was high, the time was reduced, and emotional support activities were conducted. To achieve this, we implemented supportive resources during workshops, focus groups, and interviews, such as coloring mandalas, knitting and/or embroidery sessions, and graphic storytelling of journeys.
- 5 Health protocols:** The FIC team had a complete vaccination scheme and adhered to health measures (use of masks, temperature checks, rapid Covid detection tests, and use of hand sanitizer, among others).

Collaborative Community Work: Cultivating Relationships Based on Trust

Given that the stay in some shelters is temporary, ranging from one to three months, and the waiting time to cross to the United States can last much longer, there is a constant mobility of people within the city who are seeking a place to establish their housing. This need for internal mobility is made possible through the management of information provided by new actors and the creation of new networks that, on the one hand, meet these needs, but on the other hand, leave some previously established bonds adrift. Therefore, we focused on establishing networks and maintaining communication with the individuals who participated in this assessment, sometimes with success and other times not. At times, we lost contact with them and were unable to locate them again to continue our work.

Despite the above, we observed that there is an opportunity in the programs offered by NGOs in Tijuana to strengthen the bonds among migrant women. Although this is not done programmatically but rather as a consequence of coexistence, sharing, and the relationships formed in the process, we consider it important to provide information about the organizations and programs that, through their activities and services, facilitate the creation of a community network among migrant women. Hence, we consider it important to develop an updated map and database of assistance and well-being programs for migrant women and children offered by social organizations and government programs in Tijuana, to create a useful record for migrant communities.

RESULTS



“ From Tapachula, one comes, as I say, kicking and screaming. And if you go back to your town, your hometown, they kill you because you’re already marked... they demanded taxes, which are really extortions, we had to pay a certain amount weekly, but then the crisis came, and we couldn’t afford to give them that money anymore. When they saw that we were failing in our payments, they started threatening my husband. They would say, “By such and such date, we want this much,” and if we didn’t meet the deadline, if we didn’t fulfill the payment, they started using methods against us. They gave us 24 hours to leave the country or leave the house where we were staying. They were always wherever we were, so we left when things became too tough, and we decided to come here [Mexico]. We arrived in the city of Guatemala and ended up here [in Tijuana]. ”

(Travel account by Mónica, 59 years old, originally from Honduras, grandmother of two children aged 9 and 12, with whom she remains in Tijuana)

3

How do you get to Tijuana? Migrant Women and Children’s Travel Trajectories and Experiences

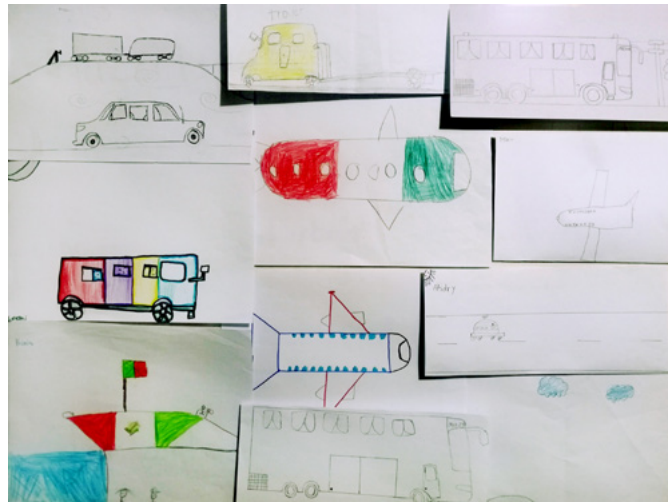


Image 3. Drawings made by migrant girls and boys during the narrative workshop “How did I get to Tijuana” in CAENA facilities, July 2022.

We have identified that the transit experiences preceding the arrival in Tijuana are crucial in understanding the decision-making processes, agency, and transitional needs of the study participants. These experiences highlight how migrant women and children have encountered and overcome systematic obstacles to their mobility within Mexican territory, adapting and surviving in various ways.

These difficulties are manifested in two main forms: mobility/displacement and waiting, both of which involve encounters with vertical and horizontal borders (Anguiano,

2007). Horizontal borders (waiting spaces) refer to the political-administrative territorial boundaries between transit countries, which regulate and restrict mobility across national borders. These borders are characterized by ever-changing migration policies (increasingly rigid), limited information about bureaucratic mechanisms and available strategies to continue the journey, and uncertainty regarding the reception conditions in the country, particularly at Mexico’s southern and northern borders. The main barriers are also experienced within the administrative complexities of public institutions and the

limited access to mechanisms protecting their human rights.

On the other hand, vertical borders (crossed spaces) can be found throughout the national territory and are characterized by securitization³ mechanisms employed during transit, such as surveillance posts, migratory checkpoints, persecutions, and harassment through militarization programs and the presence of the National Guard in Mexico (Rodríguez, 2016). The repressive actions and abuses carried out by Mexican government agents responsible for detaining and discouraging migratory transit within the country are well-known,

at the expense of protecting migrants' human rights (El País, 2022; Silva, 2015; Anguiano and Trejo, 2007). Vertical borders also encompass the actions of organized crime and criminal groups involved in drug trafficking and human trafficking, exerting pressure and punishment on migrants along the Mexican route.

3.1

Stories, Memories, and Narratives: An Overview of the Conditions of Departure and Journey to Tijuana

The migrant women who participated in this study experienced two modalities of displacement, both of which were characterized by direct violence towards them and their children.

- *Internal forced displacements are the result of national security policies, widespread violence deep-rooted in organized crime, and the consequent armed conflicts that prevail in a large part of the Mexican territory. These contexts become vertical borders that threaten the integrity of migrant women and children.*
- *Transnational forced displacements involve crossing horizontal borders of one or more countries, and Mexico presents the greatest obstacles and threats to migrants' integrity.*

³ Securitization is a term in Spanish that represents understanding of the migratory phenomenon as a threat for national security. This materializes in “norms, laws, rules, institutions, authorities and practices migratory agencies to control this potential security hazard” (Treviño, 2016).



Imagen 4. Drawing from the Travel Narrative Workshop “How did I get to Tijuana?”
Made by Raul, 7 years old, CAENA facilities, June 2022.

The migratory environment reported by women, girls, and boys offers valuable data about how vertical and horizontal borders are experienced daily and their multiple expressions represent a constant risk to personal integrity.

In the experiences shared, the following appears as the main actors in the exercise of violence: organized crime, gangs (Maras)⁴, human traffickers; Mexican state security forces with practices such as corruption, racism, and discrimination; close relatives such as parents, partners, or parents of their children who exercise intra-family violence (economic, emotional, physical, and/or sexual) .

“ Yes, we had a business and some gang gunmen came to us and told us that if we didn’t pay the taxes, they would kill us. ”

(Travel account of Julissa, 38 years old, originally from Guatemala, mother of four children. She lived in Tijuana for 2 years, crossed the border into the United States in 2023, and her current migratory situation is unknown)

⁴ Refers to the “Mara Salvatrucha”, the international criminal organization made up of cells or gangs, whose territory of action extends through part of Central America and Mexico.

Harassment, threats, and extortion are among the most common incidents in this type of violence against migrants' integrity and that of their families. On the other hand, roads, buses, shelters, and hotels in specific territories such as Chiapas, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, Chihuahua, and Baja California were identified as high-risk areas during their journey through Mexico.

“ *I had my business, tamale stands ... when we reached a time when we were growing, they asked us for taxes, which are extortions, we had to pay a weekly amount, and when the crisis came, we no longer had any money to give them. When they saw that we were falling behind on our payments, my husband began to be threatened, they said; ‘on such a date we want so much’ and we did not comply with the date, we did not comply with the money and they began to use harassment methods, they gave us 24 hours to leave the country or to leave the house where we were, they were watching our every move. We left when we saw things were already too dangerous and we had to come here .* **”**

(Travel account of Rosaura, 52, originally from Honduras, mother of one son, decided to stay in Tijuana)

The conditions of vulnerability accumulate as the journey progresses, starting from the place of origin. Here are Ivan's (a 10-year-old) recommendations for those who embark on the traveling journey:

“ ***Ivan:** For the trip, they need to bring water, as they will get very thirsty. Food, some fruit, and a jacket in case there is cold and they need to protect themselves from the bad guys*
***Interviewer:** Who are the bad guys?*
***Ivan:** Those who step us down (from the trucks), steal from us, touch us. They should be careful.* **”**

(Travel account of Ivan, 10 years old, originally from Guatemala, arrived in Tijuana in 2021 with his mother. Student at CAENA, currently an asylum seeker in the United States)

Migrating Advice from Girls and Boys

- 1. Bring food: chicken, flour tortillas, dehydrated tortillas, and fruits*
- 2. Wear a jacket in case of cold, bring extra clothing and comfortable shoes*
- 3. Do not separate from your family and care for each other*
- 4. Protect yourself from the bad guys*
- 5. Do not talk to strangers, do not get close to unknown people*
- 6. Carry your ID, your passport as you will be asked to show it*

It is important to consider the processes before the trip that affect the physical and emotional health of children. Rosa, 11 years old, originally from Guatemala, shared through drawings and short stories, the memories of her trip to Tijuana. In 2020 her mother traveled, accompanied by her youngest son, to Mexico intending to reach the United States and then return for her and her sisters. However, the crossing was not possible due to the COVID lockdown. Rosa stayed with her grandmother and two sisters in Guatemala, where they received threats from members of a Mara gang, the family explained that they did not have the money that was demanded. Then, in 2022, Rosa witnessed the tragic killing of her older sister, and the family received further threats to their lives if they did not comply with the extortion demands. The grandmother decided to escape with her two granddaughters and arrive in Mexico to be reunited with the girls' mother.

Rosa and her granddaughters began a bus journey that lasted around four days. The departure was abrupt, with limited resources and no access to justice in their home country. They carried the weight of mourning for Rosa's sister and the ongoing threats they faced.



Image 5. Drawing from the Travel Narrative Workshop “How did I get to Tijuana?”
Made by Rosa, 11 years old, CAENA, June 2022.

Rosa recounted her journey in fragments:

- 1 *We left Guatemala at night; it took between 3 and 5 hours by bus to reach Chiapas*
- 2 *Mom sent money to take two buses to Tijuana, the journey lasted 3 days*
- 3 *We arrived at my mom’s boyfriend’s house in Tijuana*

Upon arriving in Tijuana, Rosa reunited with her younger brother, mother, and her new partner, who had settled in the city and had been waiting for a response to their asylum application in the United States for 20 months.

Given that departures from the place of origin are unexpected and filled with uncertainty, fear is a prevalent feeling in the migration process. Alliances are formed out of fear, both to leave and to stay safe during the journey and upon arrival in Tijuana. Networks are thus strengthened, sometimes providing protection and other times becoming abusive, replicating conditions of vulnerability in the face of violence in Tijuana. This is the case with Rosa’s mother, who entered into a romantic relationship with a Mexican man upon arriving in Tijuana because he offered her protection, but has become her aggressor through physical and verbal violence and labor exploitation.

“ That’s the problem, I can’t even go back to my country. They just killed my daughter there. How can I go back if I can’t be safe there? I would arrive only to be killed, along with my mother and my daughters. They were already after them to kill them as well, and here I am threatened a lot. If I leave the house, they threaten me too. If I try to file a complaint for the beatings and everything I have, they threaten me as well. So, I feel even more lost. ”

(Travel account of Julissa, 38 years old, originally from Guatemala, mother of four children. She lived in Tijuana for 2 years, crossed the border to the United States in 2023, and her current migratory status is unknown)

Rita, 16, originally from Honduras, arrived in Tijuana with an advanced pregnancy after a months-long stay in Monterrey. In May 2022, she was taken in by DIF⁵ after the activation of the Amber Alert⁶ and it took her eight months of processing to be reunited with her parents.

Rita’s journey began in 2021 when she left Honduras with her parents and four sisters and brothers. Her mother, 37-year-old Nicole, made the trip pregnant. The reason for leaving was to escape extortion and threats from the gangs.

Travel time varies

With participants reporting days to years to reach the northern border of Mexico and a wait of at least eight months in Tijuana to begin the asylum process. Mar, 45 years old, left Colombia along with her son and arrived in Tijuana in 2016, they are still in the process of waiting to apply for asylum in the United States. On average, people come to live in between two and eight cities in Mexico before arriving in Tijuana.

⁵ National System for the Integral Development of the Family in Mexico. This institution has the responsibility of protecting the rights of children through care programs.

⁶ It is a Unique Search Data Registry System with massive distribution at the municipal, state and national, in charge of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR) through the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Violence against Women and Human Trafficking (FEVIMTRA). Support for activation can be requested at number 01 800 00 854 00.

The family’s strategy to confront the administrative obstacles and insecurity was to arrive in Tapachula to begin the procedures for a temporary stay in Mexico, where they first spent 6 months living in shelters. After doing temporary work without social security, they saved money to relocate to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, where they were told that the application for asylum in the United States could be processed quickly. They rented a house in Monterrey and stayed for a year until a neighbor kidnapped Rita and they received threats from local criminal groups. The family fled to Tijuana and reported the incident. They obtained information about their daughter four months later, when Rita was rescued and stayed another four months in a DIF shelter with a high-risk pregnancy. Rita is currently the mother of a daughter and the family is still waiting for a response to her request for asylum. There was no reparation of damages in this case.

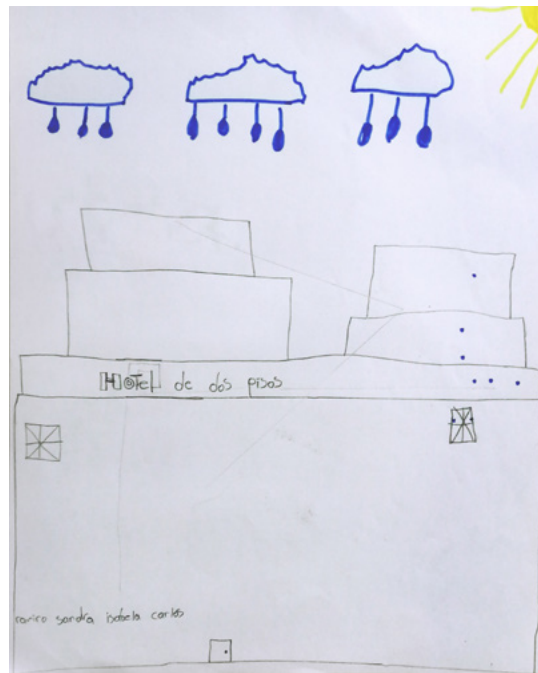


Image 6. Drawing from the travel narrative workshop “How did I get to Tijuana?” made by Claudio, 12 years old. CAENA, June 2022.

Claudio, 12, left Honduras in 2021 with his mother Sonia, stepfather, and older brother. The family traveled for a year through different cities in Mexico in search of work to endure the wait for the administrative possibilities of processing the asylum application.

“Several companions who were with me went over there and told me “Don’t come over here” they said, because here they are stealing everything. They wanted to take us away, but thank God, we cried, they took things, but not us.”

(Travel account of Sonia, 31 years old, from Honduras, who traveled with two children and her husband, asylum seekers in the United States)

Claudio recounted his trip in the form of a logbook, as also did the children who collaborated in the storytelling workshop. It is noteworthy that in the process migrants focused on the means of transportation, the days and hours of travel, and only some situations they considered relevant.

Claudio’s logbook:

- 1 *From Honduras to Guatemala, one night by bus*
- 2 *At the Mexican border (referring to Chiapas), one day in a hotel and my parents processed papers*
- 3 *From Chiapas to Tabasco, a few hours by bus*
- 4 *I lived in Tabasco for 3 or 4 months*
- 5 *Mexico City, we stayed for a week*
- 6 *From Mexico City to Monterrey by bus, one day*
- 7 *We stayed in Monterrey for a week in a hotel*
- 8 *We arrived in Tamaulipas in a UNICEF transport, we stayed in a hotel and tried to cross (undocumented) they stopped us and took us to an ugly and dirty shelter, they didn’t let us leave if we didn’t pay*
- 9 *We went to Monterrey for two weeks and my stepfather’s grandfather bought us plane tickets*
- 10 *We arrived in Tijuana*

En los casos donde se separan los miembros de la familia durante el recorrido, principalmente separación de hijos/as, la reunificación familiar se convierte en una meta que guía la toma de decisiones durante el tránsito. Se vuelve fundamental la búsqueda de actividades económicas para el envío de dinero, remesas (si ya han logrado cruzar a Estados Unidos) y el ahorro individual o comunitario como tandas o cundinas.⁷ En cualquiera de las modalidades señaladas, se reportan condiciones de vulnerabilidad y riesgo en gran escala por persecuciones, amenaza de violaciones o abuso sexual.



Image 7. Drawings on their country of origin made by migrant girls and boys during the narrative workshop: “Where did my journey begin?” CAENA and Don Bosco Facilities, 2022.

⁷ The tandas or cundinas are a form of community savings that originate in solidarity between people where trust is the integrating factor. It consists of the weekly or monthly contribution of a fixed amount of money to a common fund with a limited number of people who organize themselves to receive, according to a calendar, the payment of all members. In such a way that it functions as collective savings where each one receives the contribution of others on a specific date and agrees to continue with its payments until the last person has received the money that corresponds to him/her.

In cases where family members are separated during the journey, especially the separation of children, the reunification of the family becomes a guiding goal in decision-making during transit. The search for economic activities to send money, such as remittances (if they have managed to cross into the United States), as well as individual or community rotating savings and loan methods like “tandas” or “cundinas”, becomes crucial.

However, in any of these situations, they face prevalent vulnerability and risk due to instability, persecution, the threat of rape, or sexual abuse. When describing their experiences with what we refer to as vertical borders, women have reported that their aggressors are also migrants, and the persecution and harassment they face, along with their families, extends beyond national borders and into Mexican territory. This further exposes them to danger and increases their sense of paranoia and persecution, negatively affecting the mental health of women, children, and adolescents.

“ I was in line to sign, and to my surprise, I saw the two men who beat my son [in Honduras]. I saw them at COMAR (Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance) and I saw them again at the immigration office. I felt as if my life was slipping away from me. ”

(The life story of Samantha, 54 years old, originally from Honduras, who traveled with her youngest son, displaced by Mara violence. They are asylum seekers in the United States)

“ (...) so we were coming, we took a ride to Tijuana, and when we arrived here in Tijuana, the talk, the rumors said: there is a Cartel here. So, there was that fear of thinking, “Could it be the same ones? Do they have copies of our documents?” because they [the maras] made copies of our documents. Could it be that they are looking for us? ”

(Travel story of Estefania, 37 years old, originally from Guerrero, who traveled with her children and husband, a Mexican forcibly displaced due to internal violence)

From the memories of migrant women participants in this report, experiences related to verbal and symbolic violence in their places of origin stand out. They have faced disrespectful discourses and actions towards them, as well as numerous acts of misogyny that devalue them. For them, migration represents an act of agency and empowerment as well as a way to escape from these spaces of violence and transform their reality, even though the journey entails a constant threat to their personal integrity. This leads us to a question: What were the narratives that motivated their displacement, and how do they feel now in Tijuana?

“ My stepfather used to say to me, “If you women are only good for giving birth, tell me, what else are girls good for? You are just abused girls who are not good at anything else.” And I would respond, “Yes, you’re right,” thinking that I was only worthy of giving birth. Well, even my mother took me out of school and told me, “It’s enough for you as you now know how to read to give birth.” She took me out of school. I come from a patriarchal household [...] I couldn’t mix my father’s clothes with my brother’s and ours because my mother would say that we women were very dirty. So, I started to believe in my mind that I was good for nothing, that I was worth nothing, less than nothing. I would cry and ask myself, “Why was I born then? Why don’t I just die?” So many prejudices against girls. But now, I do not believe in any of that. I have overcome it, really, I have overcome it. ”

(The life story of Ana, 65 years old, from Guatemala, who traveled with two adult children and granddaughters, and decided to apply for permanent residence in Mexico)

“ I was married when I was a young girl, my mother said, “She’s good for this and that’s it.” I was only 14 years old when they married me to someone older than me. All of that was difficult for me, but thank God, here in Tijuana, I have managed to overcome it to a great extent, maybe not 100%, but around 85%. Yes, I have overcome it, I have suffered a lot. ”

(The life story of Samantha, 54 years old, from Honduras, who traveled with her younger son displaced by Maras violence, seeking asylum in the United States)

Sometimes, the perception of gaining autonomy is very powerful for women. It is a feeling that is transmitted to their sons and daughters. Women accumulate learning through mobility, acquiring survival skills, managing information, and overcoming adverse situations. However, this feeling is combined in all cases with unease and concern due to the uncertainty of the migration processes and the threats that persist in Tijuana against them and their families. It may seem contradictory at first glance, but it makes a lot of sense when they explain that by migrating, they were able to solve the problem that caused their displacement, even though it involves the continuation of their vulnerability in the face of new hostile scenarios.

“ I am far away from so many things that happened to me in my country. I don’t think they will find me here, I don’t think they will come here to judge me, and I will continue to fight for the dreams that are coming, that I know they are. ”

(The life story of Samantha, 54 years old, from Honduras, who traveled with her youngest son displaced by Maras violence, they are asylum seekers in the United States)

We rarely come across stories where women want to leave their places of origin unless it is as a last resort to safeguard their lives and the lives of their family members. When the situation becomes untenable, they migrate.

“ When I left Honduras, honestly, I had no idea that I would end up in Tijuana. I left Honduras with a lot of pain, to be honest. I didn’t plan on coming here, although my son would ask me, “When are we going to Mexico?” I wasn’t going to leave. I felt like I was born here, and I liked it here. But over time, things happened, and then the economic situation became very difficult, and there were also threatened by gangs. ”

(The life story of Rosario, 38 years old, from Honduras, who traveled with two children, asylum seekers in the United States)

“ After what happened to my son, when he was assaulted along with his father... I honestly didn’t want to come, even though I knew I needed to leave. I didn’t want to come. It was something that happened suddenly, and then they convinced me to come because I haven’t been in favor of just going and grabbing whatever means I can to leave. ”

(The life story of Samantha, 54 years old, from Honduras, who traveled with her youngest son displaced by Maras violence, they are asylum seekers in the United States)

There are departure conditions where migrants could not obtain trustworthy information, yet they need to protect themselves during the journey. These cases involve abrupt exoduses from their homes, fleeing persecution or threats or any form of violence, where they don’t have time to plan their migration and simply proceed, resolving destinations, and movements on the go. This situation can be repeated multiple times during the transit process, and if the violence accumulates.

“ When you have just arrived, you think about what you are facing. How many hours will I be here? At any given moment, I will leave. So, every day is uncertain. You’re not thinking about where you’re going to rent. You’re just thinking, “When am I going to leave?” ”

(Journey story of Estefania, 37 years old, from Guerrero, traveled with her children and husband, internally displaced Mexican due to violence)

What appears as a predominant pattern is that departure conditions determine access to certain networks and resources. For instance, if the departure from their places of origin is abrupt, there is less probability of having a travel plan and arrival, and even though plans constantly change along the way, we observe that having at least a defined destination, money, some contacts, and information often guarantees protection during the journey. The fewer resources are available (information, finances, contacts, etc.), the greater the risk of becoming victims of a crime during the journey. Journey’s experiences

also determine the conditions in which women and children arrive in Tijuana in terms of mental and physical health or economic resources.

“ *I got tested for Covid and it came back positive. I stayed hospitalized for two months, then I was discharged and we waited for some time. After that, we went to Tapachula. Later, we stayed in Monterrey for five months for some paperwork, but they told us it wasn't ready yet because my mom wanted to cross by the river, but it was too deep. So, the soldiers told her to wait until the paperwork was completed. We waited there for about 5 months, but it didn't work out. Then, we came here (to Tijuana in February 2022) with my mom, my sister, and me. My dad came later, he has been here for two months, and my grandmother arrived two days ago.* **”**

(Excerpt from the travel story of Andrea, 11 years old, from Guatemala, CAENA student)

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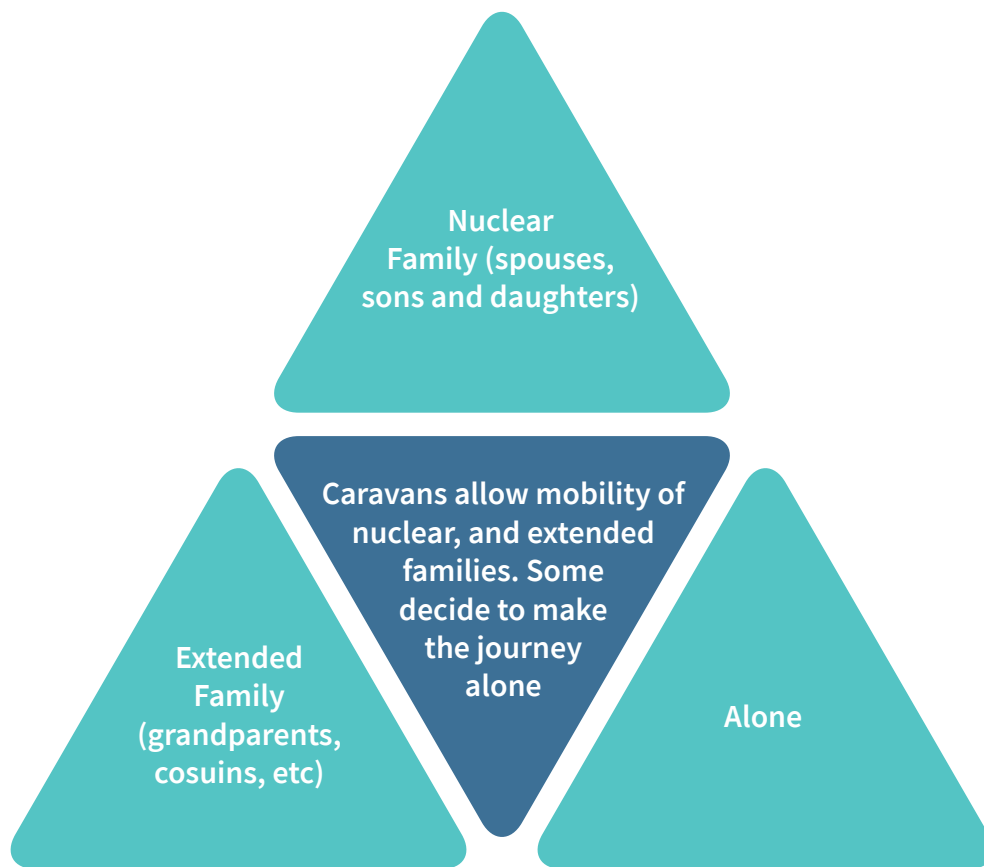
Mourning Processes and Agency: Migrant's Right to Community Care

Women participating in this report recount how, while being victims of violence, they develop agency to seek mobility and protection alternatives, creating networks of solidarity and communities of affection with other women, with whom they become stronger. As stated by Pelaez (2020), these are “emotional communities”, where experiences of unity arise from close coexistence, producing unique characteristics of feeling and defining an ethics for collective action. In the case of migrant women studied, the essential element that united these emotional communities is mutual solidarity, which allows them to access essential resources to change plans during the journey and resolve dangerous situations. Support networks during the migration process, in addition to providing key information that facilitates decision-making along the way, offer support and containment.



These sustaining communities are initially formed by family members with whom women embark on the journey. For example, they may migrate with their nuclear family: younger or older children; or with their extended family, including grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. They can migrate alone as a family group or in caravans with hundreds of other people.

With whom do women migrate?



The pain of separation for women who migrate and have to leave their children or grandchildren with relatives becomes a grief for the entire family group. They long for reunification and suffer from the uncertainty of the conditions faced by those who stay behind.

“ It hurt me to leave my church, to leave my spiritual family, to leave my children, my grandson. Especially leaving my grandson, who used to live with me. I couldn’t make decisions for him because he’s my grandson, and his mother is a stern parent. I couldn’t just say, “Let’s go,” because I couldn’t. I left him with a heavy heart, I left him. ”

(The life story of Teresa, 61 years old, from El Salvador, who traveled with her eldest son, seeking asylum in the United States)

The children who accompany their mothers on sudden departures from their home country and those who are left behind waiting for family reunification experience constant risks in their journeys. Those who stay behind are usually cared for by grandparents or aunts/uncles while their mothers make the journey to Tijuana or the United States. When possible, they return for their children or send money so that the adults caring for the minors can initiate their own migration process for family reunification.

Leaving their place of origin is also motivated by the desire to protect their children from local gangs who pressure them into joining once they reach a certain age.

“ (...) One day, my son went out with his father and his two younger siblings from another relationship, and they were harassed. When they took his money, they said that my son, who was 15 at the time, was at a good age. They said, jokingly, “He’s in the perfect age,” and they knew where we lived. After that, my son hardly went out anymore; he was very scared. Since then, I truly felt afraid, but at that time, I didn’t decide to leave. ”

(The life story of Samantha, 54 years old, from Honduras, who traveled with her youngest son, displaced by gang violence, seeking asylum in the United States)



Image 8. Drawing from the travel narrative workshop “How did I get to Tijuana?”
Don Bosco facilities, August 2022.

En la lógica del cuidado de las madres, uno de los grandes temores es que sus hijos/hijas sean víctimas de la violencia presente en las llamadas fronteras verticales, o bien, que sean afectados emocionalmente por los procesos que implica la migración como los duelos, las pérdidas de sus espacios cotidianos y domésticos y la incertidumbre del trayecto.

“ *When we have young children, as a parent, we expose ourselves even more. It’s harder because we think, “If I’m suffering as an adult, then my children are too.” They left behind friends, they left behind their family, they left behind their pets. So, they also struggle with feelings, often keeping them to themselves so as not to worry Mom and Dad because they see them already suffering. So, when I look at them, I think they suffer more than I do.* **”**

(Journey narrative of Renata, 29 years old, originally from El Salvador, traveled to Tijuana with her children due to forced displacement, seeking asylum in the United States)

“ Look, I’m fearful, but when it comes to defending my children, I’m not! That’s why I work like this, so I don’t leave them alone for long periods. You should see how much it hurts me to leave my daughter who is currently hospitalized. I wake up and pray 3 times during the night, asking the Lord to protect my daughter, and asking for forgiveness because I feel like I’m hesitating a lot. ”

(The life story of Monserrat, 35 years old, from Chiapas, who traveled with her children due to domestic violence. She lives in Tijuana and works in a maquiladora)

Women and children also provide care and have the right to be cared for within communities of affection. When women know key contacts or shelters to facilitate their journey, we have identified that their exposure to violence is reduced, emotional support is stronger, and it allows women, girls, and boys to strengthen themselves in the learning process that migration entails. We have come to find that the accompaniment of emotional communities has the power to transform the assimilation of experiences.

“ When I arrived here [Center 32], that’s when I saw a glimmer of hope, and well, without going into too many details about what I’ve been through, we can’t tell everything, but the thing is that we arrived, and here we have received a lot of care. When I arrived in Tijuana, my heart was broken, I didn’t know what to expect, I had mixed feelings. ”

(The life story of Ana, 65 years old, from Guatemala, who traveled with two adult children and grandchildren, and decided to apply for permanent residency in Mexico)

“ But in these conversations, one enriches oneself, I say to myself, “No, it’s not just me who has suffered. And it’s not that one rejoices in that, no, but one says, ‘I have also suffered, but if she can do it, why wouldn’t I be able to? She is going through a situation, so why wouldn’t I be able to overcome it?’ What I’m going through is nothing compared to what she has experienced, so it encourages me. I think these are like group therapies. ”

(Journey narrative of Clara, 36 years old, from Honduras, traveled with her husband and children displaced by gang violence, seeking asylum in the United States)



Image 9. Drawings made by migrant women during community conversations, Tijuana, 2022.

4

Living Conditions in Tijuana



Given that the waiting time in Tijuana is uncertain, ensuring subsistence in this city becomes a pressing issue that involves adaptation, resource-seeking, meeting basic needs, and protection from the threats of organized crime and abuses by government officials. In this section, we will describe the most relevant challenges faced by women while waiting in Tijuana: housing and food, education, health, urban mobility, and work. As mentioned in the previous section, the transit before arrival imposes a physical and emotional strain on women and children, resulting in an accumulation of experiences of violence and harassment, as well as a greater insufficiency of economic resources. However,

it also provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of mobility, access to support networks, and new community tools.

Altogether, the fear of returning to their countries of origin appears in all the stories. Waiting, for all the research participants, becomes the only option at this point in the journey. Participants reported how they have resolved their stay in the city, what resources they have found, what strategies they have used to continue waiting, and what needs they continue to identify. In the following sections, conditions will be described by focusing on four aspects: options, obstacles, strategies, and needs.

Housing and Food

Mobility within the city is high in terms of housing. Stays in shelters and refuges are time-restricted, and women and children have to relocate every 3 or 4 months until

they can rent a house. When that happens, they do so on the periphery or in quarters in the city's downtown, and most cases, sharing space with other families.

Options	Obstacles	Strategies	Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being in government shelters or immigration centers • Being in shelters with higher capacity • Being in smaller shelters with lower capacity • Temporarily staying in shelters • Living in refugee camps • Eating at community dining facilities • Living with relatives residing in Tijuana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant surveillance and government policing controls • Difficulties in obtaining income and paying for housing • Lower rental costs associated with higher insecurity and confinement • Discrimination and risk of rights violation • Limitations in accessing basic services (water, electricity, bed, bathroom, etc.) • Time limits for staying in shelters and refuges • Poor sanitary conditions in shelters, risk of disease transmission • Domestic violence, abuse of children and women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing shelters when the stay deadlines expire • Renting low-cost housing among multiple families • Living temporarily with people they meet while in transit to Tijuana • Sleeping on the streets • Jointly purchasing basic food supplies with other families • Reducing food intake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer stay in shelters and refuges • Sleeping mats, fans, water supply, spaces for charging electronic devices, refrigerators, blankets, and daycare facilities • Milk and storage facilities, cereal, diapers, personal hygiene items, and toilet paper

Education for Migrant Girls and Boys

The condition of waiting makes long-term decision-making difficult. Not knowing how long migrant families will have to wait for the immigration process and wanting to leave Tijuana as soon as possible means that decisions such as enrolling children in school are not a priority. Meanwhile, children become

detached from school dynamics, which results in educational backwardness. As a result, children may go for months or years without attending school, during which time there is a greater risk of them entering the informal labor market or becoming victims of child exploitation.

Options	Obstacles	Strategies	Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enroll in public schools • Enroll in transitional educational programs for academic leveling like CAENA • Enroll in early childhood care programs with pedagogical components like “El Nido” and Border Youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to initiating the enrollment process due to uncertainty about the future • Transitions and sociocultural obstacles • Unfamiliarity with the Mexican education system • Lack of information about leveling and accreditation processes • Insufficient documents to enroll in school • Lack of money for daily transportation from home to school • Due to permanent mobility within the city, it is difficult to identify a fixed school where children can attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek support from PROBEM, the Binational Program for Migrant Education of the State Ministry of Public Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and affordable transportation for children and adolescents • School meals • Availability of slots in schools near shelters and homes • Acceptance without discrimination by the school community • Spaces for early childhood care and extracurricular activities

Health

The most mentioned health problems by the study participants were influenza and stomach infections, which can worsen, especially in children, when follow-up after diagnosis is not possible. Clinical studies and medications are beyond the budget of the population, and the demand for public health care is very high while government resources are insufficient to provide coverage. When women or their children suffer from

chronic-degenerative diseases, they often suspend their treatments during transit, resulting in physical and mental health complications. Regarding preventive health, women reported that they have never or rarely undergone any women's health screenings (such as Pap smears, mammograms, etc.).

Options	Obstacles	Strategies	Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention public health centers • Free vaccination campaigns • Health events in shelters for initial care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The demand for physical and mental health care in shelters is not being met • High costs for private consultations, exams, and medications • Required paperwork and documentation to access public healthcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment for low-cost medical consultations at city pharmacies • Use home remedies • Seek recommendations from family members or fellow residents at the shelter • Pool money together with family members or fellow residents at the shelter • Seek assistance at the General Hospital of Tijuana and/or medical events at shelters, programs, or health centers • Share medications • Not seeking medical attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supply basic medications in shelters and refuges • Expand the coverage of preventive health campaigns • Expand services for clinical studies • Provide care without discrimination from medical and administrative staff

Urban Mobility

According to the interviewed women, transportation within the city is a significant barrier. Tijuana lacks an organized transportation network that is affordable, safe, and adequately covers urban mobility. A recurring comment from women is that they don't know how to get to key places to continue their migration processes, access shelters, or travel to receive certain services. Being confined is a shared strategy among the participants during the first months of their stay in Tijuana.

“ *I don't feel safe, that's why I only go to the small shops there, and here in the downtown area, only for what I need.* ”

(Testimonial from Rafaelina, 23 years old, from El Salvador. She traveled with two children and her partner, displaced by violence. They are asylum seekers in the United States)

Options	Obstacles	Strategies	Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using public transportation • Walking • Cycling in short trips (Though this is only a viable option for women with no children) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high cost of public transportation fares in Tijuana • Lack of information about transportation routes • The design of transportation routes requires taking more than two buses to travel within the city, increasing the cost of mobility • Harassment against women and children in public transportation units and at stops • Limited schedules of routes • Expensive private taxi services • Streets without sidewalks are unsuitable for pedestrian mobility • Unsafe for bicycle use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confinement and limited time spent in public spaces • Taking taxis sparingly and walking for most journeys, which becomes challenging when accompanied by young children • Living in central areas, close to migration offices or shelters where there is more information available about their migration procedures, despite the high cost of the rent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about public transportation routes and itineraries • A comprehensive solution to the city's urban mobility system, which affects not only the migrant population but all residents

Laboral Activity

The uncertainty regarding the waiting time also plays a significant role for women when making decisions about work. They need money to meet their daily priorities, and sometimes they cannot wait until payday to receive an income. Additionally, job opportunities are not accessible to everyone because many places require permits to work in Mexico and documentation that they do not possess. The most common option is informal work.

“ I went to three companies and everywhere I went they asked for my RFC⁸ and that I had my green card legalized, meaning that I would no longer be considered a migrant.”

(The life story of Rosario, 38 years old, from Honduras, who traveled with two children, asylum seekers in the United States)

Options	Obstacles	Strategies	Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal work in selling goods and food • Process work permits in Mexico • Formal employment for those who meet the requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtaining an RFC (tax identification number) to have the possibility of opening a bank account (a requirement in formal jobs) • Lack of support networks for childcare • Work schedules that conflict with childcare responsibilities • Expensive transportation for commuting to the workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal work in the flea market • Reselling clothing and items obtained at a low cost • Practicing trades (sewing, domestic work, food preparation) and offering low prices • Working as security personnel in stores • Employment in maquiladoras (requires RFC) • Childcare services for children of other migrant women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community nurseries • Incorporation of migrant women as collaborators in care programs for the migrant community

⁸ RFC stands for Federal Registration for Tax Payers, which is processed after obtaining a legal permit to stay in Mexico.

“ They offer work, but I don’t have anywhere to leave my children. I came alone and I don’t have anywhere to leave them. ”

(Travel story of Estela, 26 years old, from Guatemala. She traveled with her children and they are asylum seekers in the United States)

“ I work in the street market, but I set up my stall near my house. We go out at 6 in the morning and come back at 2 or 3 in the afternoon. On Sundays, I sell different items like clothes and shoes that are brought from the other side (referring to the border)⁹, I buy it at an affordable price to help myself a little too. ”

(Travel story of Elisa, 32 years old, from Honduras. She traveled with her two children and they are asylum seekers in the United States)

4.1

Knitting Migrant Communities Together: Information Circuits as Key Resources

In our research, we have identified the importance of information flow for women throughout the journey, even during the waiting period in Tijuana. We call it an information circuit because it becomes a valuable resource for women, not only to stay informed but also to participate in sharing their knowledge with other migrant people. In this circuit, data, dates, contacts, hotel names, government offices, experiences, and other relevant topics flow, which help in decision-making during their journey and wait.

Administrative processes and the information that circulates as rumors among migrants are other relevant field for decision-making. The collaborators reported constantly seeking information about cities on the northern border “where it is said” that crossing to the United States is possible, either undocumented or where asylum case reviews are expedited. They also rely on recommendations from other migrants and shared experiences, which help them perceive the danger of certain cities.

⁹ A local expression used to refer to the United States, particularly, San Diego, California.

These information circuits thrive around socio-digital networks, shelters, refugee centers, and organizations that provide services to the migrant community, as well as the direct connections they have built throughout their journey. Socio-digital networks have been mentioned as an effective means to obtain relevant information about their migration processes and entitlements to services. Often, children become technological mediators for their mothers. All the participants mentioned having at least one family cell phone and reported having at least one Facebook account, email, and WhatsApp.

The information obtained in these digital spaces can be crucial for family decision-making that directly involves girls and boys, such as the decision to cross the border and the conditions under which it will take place.

Facebook groups and applications of certain migration assistance programs, such as the organization “Al Otro Lado”, are valuable options for obtaining information that provides news and updates about the current situation at the border. In the specific case of social-digital groups, they have access to:

- *Search for shelters or refugee camps in different cities in northern Mexico*
- *Search for people they have lost contact with*
- *Information about the areas where they are accepting requests for migration procedures*
- *Information about areas where undocumented crossings are possible*
- *Information about smugglers*
- *Various service offerings such as asylum application assistance, crossing support, official documentation in Mexico, printing services, and legal advice, among others*
- *Information about the conditions upon arrival in northern cities*
- *Information on how to navigate Tijuana*

It should be noted that internet access is limited because Tijuana does not have an open network, and paid service is costly for the family's economy. It is common for women to visit establishments with open internet networks but with low signal, which

is a problem, especially when they need to follow up on their asylum procedures or stay informed about changes in migration policies and, more generally, for navigating the city.



Image 10. A community conversation with women benefited from the Program or Nursling Children from the organization “Al Otro Lado”, September 2022.

4.2

Civil Society in the Containment of Migrant Women and Children in Tijuana

It is essential to address the role of civil society organizations in Tijuana in supporting migrant women and children. They provide essential services for their well-being and create spaces for the formation and consolidation of supportive communities, which are integral to the emotional support of the population. During our fieldwork, we became more aware of how women who participate in these spaces, form alliances and agreements with other women to give and receive care and support during their time in the city, which results in healing and resilience-building experiences. Women agree to exchange childcare responsibilities while looking for work or during their working hours. They also agree to share living spaces and divide expenses to move from a shelter to a more stable housing situation.

Through these organizations and their programs, women have gone through experiences that enhance solidarity and strengthen their sense of belonging to a community. They initiate resilience processes that naturally strengthen their capacity for action and decision-making regarding the immediate future. In many cases, these communities become new families with deep and solid connections

that are not based on the length of time they have known each other but on shared experiences and mutual support.

“*I have changed so much, and they [referring to Centro 32] has also helped me feel important. When I arrived in Tapachula, I used to say, ‘I am a woman, and I am worth nothing’ because that’s how I was raised. I had to cover and wrap my underwear so that my panties wouldn’t show because my mother said it was shameful to show them... But now, I have changed, and I say, ‘It is a privilege to be a woman; we have great abilities.’*”

(Ana’s life story, 65 years old from Guatemala, traveled with two adult children and granddaughters, she decided to apply for her residency permanent in Mexico)

These organizations can be classified according to the services they offer:

- *Migrant hotels are spaces where families can stay for up to 15 days while administrative migration processes or protection for victims of violence are carried out. They are part of government programs or international and local organizations that assist the migrant population.*
- *Shelters are spaces designed as initial arrival accommodations in the city, offering accommodation and meals for a maximum of three months. They provide purely assistance-based support and serve as a bridge for women to make connections.*
- *Permanent shelters have a longer operational time, and more resources, and are mostly located in strategic areas of the city near the border and migration offices. The permitted length of stay can be up to 6 months, and they offer a greater range of complementary services compared to shelters. These include health campaigns, legal advice, childcare, job training, and cultural and therapeutic activities, among others.*
- *Temporary shelters and/or other spaces such as churches are set up in emergencies. This last category tends to increase and presents difficulties in tracking information and providing follow-up; they are in a constant process of adaptation and learning.*
- *There are civil society organizations that are not shelters or camps but provide services to the migrant community through assistance programs. They work closely with shelters, serving the population residing there.*
- *Depending on the source of financial resources, these organizations can be classified as public (municipal, state, federal), bi-national, private, or mixed.*
- *There are specialized shelters to meet the specific needs of the population, such as those for LGBTQ+ migrants, drug users, and individuals with medical conditions like HIV, as well as exclusive shelters for women and children..*

4.3

Tool Case: Mapping Tijuana's Migrant Community for Support and Resources

Based on the information gathered from documentary research and the references provided by women and collaborators of organizations that offer services to migrants, we have created a **database** with 72 records that consolidate information on shelters, services, and programs for migrant

women and children. To geographically locate them, an open **map**¹⁰ was created on *Google Maps*, which will continue to be updated in a participatory manner.

Based on this information, we have identified the following characteristics:

- *There is a concentration of programs and services in the northern part of the city, very close to the border with the United States. However, many of the shelters are located in areas with difficult access, limited public transportation, and inadequate urban services such as paved streets, water supply, or sewerage.*
- *Mobile programs and services, such as the “Psicomóvil” of Centro 32, which visits the main shelters in the city every week to provide mental health care, play a relevant role in addressing the lack of coverage in various areas of Tijuana.*
- *We have identified a gap in specialized protocols for the care of women, girls, and children who have been victims of intra-family and structural violence in local shelters and refuges.*

¹⁰ Consultarse en <https://www.ficbaja.org/comunidadesmigrantes>



Image 11. Community Mapping. Migrant women writing advice when crossing Tijuana. “Centro 32” facilities, July 2022.

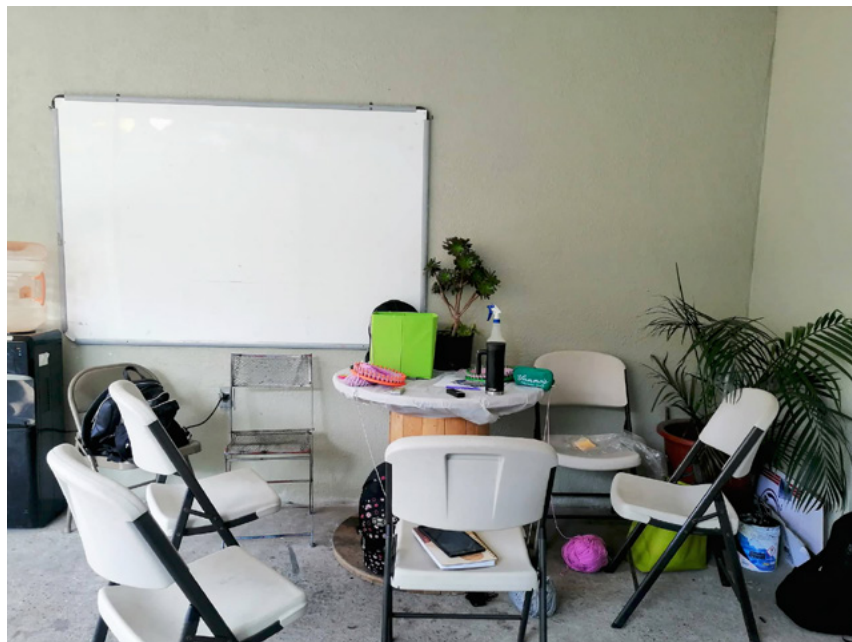


Image 12. Knitting space created by mothers in “CAENA” facilities, Tijuana, November 2021.

CONCLUSIONS

Addressing the Needs of Tijuana's Migrant Community

In this report, we have emphasized the importance of community action in the lives of migrant women and children who are waiting in Tijuana to continue their journey to the United States. In our search for the covered and uncovered needs of women and their children in mobility, which was our initial goal, we have come to find that the formation or knitting of communities provides women with a sense of belonging and helps alleviate the feelings of isolation often experienced when living in a new and unfamiliar place.

By integrating into a community, migrants have the opportunity to establish social relationships and build a support network that enables them to access essential resources and services, as well as obtain information and advice on legal, employment, and housing issues. Additionally, the community also offers them the possibility to maintain and share their own traditions and cultures, which can be of great importance for their emotional and mental well-being.

As revealed in the introduction, knitting communities are key in the integration and success of migrants in a new environment, and they can help them adapt and thrive in their new life. Community processes are essential, yet they do not fully address all the shortcomings, migration policy changes, and unexpected situations that women and their children might face. While the vulnerability is reduced, there are still actions that need to be taken in order to mitigate the precarity of their lives while migrants wait indefinitely in Tijuana.

In conclusion, some of the identified pressing issues and needs in this case that remain unresolved include:

- ▶ *Having a specialized psychological support network for migrant children and women who are victims of violence and persecution*
- ▶ *Implementing a systematic program for remunerated caregivers to support migrant mothers in need of child care*
- ▶ *Ensuring the sustainability of programs that have proved successful in the building of community resilience*
- ▶ *Creating programs that focus on migrant children as cultural, technological, and community mediators, as they are key actors in the integration process*
- ▶ *Expanding distribution of information and services through easily accessible digital platforms and applications made for the community*
- ▶ *Increasing spaces for leisure, listening, conversation, and dialogue, such as therapeutic groups guided by remunerated mental health professionals*
- ▶ *Establishing protocols for providing emotional first aid for victims of violence in each program's community*

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