



ROBERT STRAUSS CENTER
FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND LAW



El Colegio
de la Frontera
Norte

CENTRAL AMERICA & MEXICO POLICY INITIATIVE

CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES IN MEXICO: BARRIERS TO LEGAL STATUS, RIGHTS, AND INTEGRATION

FALL 2018 – SPRING 2019



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

POLICY RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT

206



Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
Policy Research Project Report
Number 206

Central American Refugees in Mexico: Barriers to Legal Status, Rights, and Integration

Project Directed by
Stephanie Leutert

A report by the
Policy Research Project on
Mexico's Migratory Policy
June 2019

The LBJ School of Public Affairs publishes a wide range of public policy issue titles.

ISBN: 978-1-951006-01-3

©2019 by The University of Texas at Austin
All rights reserved. No part of this publication or any corresponding electronic text and/or images may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover design by Alison Prince

Cover photograph "at the Mexican border" by Erik++ is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 ,
and is free to use on public materials.

Report does not reflect views of, nor is endorsed by, photographer.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

Policy Research Project Participants

Authors

John Gormley, B.A. (Political Science), University of Chicago

Carlos Hornedo, B.A. (Political Science), Texas A&M University

Sam Lee, B.A. (Foreign Languages, Spanish), B.S. (Business Administration), University of Southern Mississippi

Sadie Smeck, B.A. (Latin American Studies and Spanish), Washington University in St. Louis

Project Director

Stephanie Leutert, M.A. Global Affairs, Director, Central America and Mexico Policy Initiative, Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law; Lecturer, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin

Acknowledgements and Partnerships

The following report is from a year-long investigation by M.A. students at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin in collaboration with FM4 Paso Libre, a civil society organization based in Guadalajara, Jalisco that is dedicated to the defense and promotion of migrant and refugees' human rights through comprehensive humanitarian assistance, advocacy, and research. The project emerged from a shared binational interest and concern for pressing public policy challenges related to migration, and the direct impact that these challenges have on migrants, refugees, and civil society.

The Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF) participated in the project through the pioneering Research Center, which studies migration throughout Mexico and works closely with FM4 Paso Libre. COLEF's involvement in this project created the possibility to continue fostering greater understanding around migration, provide information for decision makers working on these topics, and sensitize communities regarding migration.

The project and corresponding travel and field research was made possible by the Robert Strauss Center for International Security and Law and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

Table of Contents

Table of Acronyms	ix
Forward	xi
Chapter 1: Central American Refugees in Mexico	1
Economic Instability and Structural Violence	2
Gang Violence	3
Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	4
LGBTI Refugees	5
Political and Social Conflict	6
Chapter 2: The Refugee Application Process	8
Legislative Underpinnings	8
Legal Process to Solicit Refugee Status	9
Refugee Status Applicant Demographics	12
Chapter 3: The Role and Structure of COMAR	15
Personnel Analysis	18
Budget	21
Chapter 4: Guaranteed Rights for Refugees	24
Introduction to Mexico’s Refugee Legal Framework	24
Chapter 5: Obstacles for Refugee Integration	27
Institutional Barriers to Refugee Integration	27
Obstacles to Accessing Basic Services	27
Discrimination and Ignorance	31
Chapter 6: Policy Responses	33
Expand COMAR’s Operational Capacity and Address Staffing Concerns	33
Expand and Improve Refugee Integration and Support Services	36
Reduce Violations of Rights and Discrimination	40
Appendixes	42
Endnotes	52

Table of Acronyms

CEDH	State Commissions for Human Rights, Mexico (<i>Comisiones Estatales de los Derechos Humanos</i>)
CICIG	International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (<i>Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala</i>)
CIPAC	Center for Research and Promotion of Human Rights in Central America (<i>Centro de Investigación y Promoción para América Central de Derechos Humanos</i>)
COMAR	Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (<i>Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados</i>)
CPI	Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index
CURP	Personal identity number (<i>Clave Única de Registro de Población</i>)
IMUMI	Institute for Women in Migration, Mexico (<i>El Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración</i>)
INEA	National Education Institute for Adults, Mexico (<i>Instituto Nacional de la Educación para los Adultos</i>)
MIRPS	Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (<i>Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones</i>)
NTCA	Northern Triangle of Central America
PNC	National Civil Police, El Salvador (<i>Policia Nacional Civil</i>)
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RENAPO	National Public Register, Mexico (<i>Registro Nacional de Población</i>)
SEGOB	Ministry of the Interior, Mexico (<i>Secretaría de Gobernación</i>)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees

Foreword

The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs has established interdisciplinary research on policy problems as the core of its educational program. A major element of this program is the nine-month policy research project, in the course of which one or more faculty members direct the research of ten to twenty graduate students of diverse disciplines and academic backgrounds on a policy issue of concern to a government or nonprofit agency. This “client orientation” brings the students face to face with administrators, legislators, and other officials active in the policy process and demonstrates that research in a policy environment demands special knowledge and skill sets. It exposes students to challenges they will face in relating academic research, and complex data, to those responsible for the development and implementation of policy and how to overcome those challenges

The curriculum of the LBJ School is intended not only to develop effective public servants, but also to produce research that will enlighten and inform those already engaged in the policy process. The project that resulted in this report has helped to accomplish the first task; it is our hope that the report itself will contribute to the second.

Finally, it should be noted that neither the LBJ School nor The University of Texas at Austin necessarily endorses the views or findings of this report.

Angela Evans
Dean

Chapter 1: Central American Refugees in Mexico

For the past 70 years, Central Americans have moved to and through Mexico, either to settle in the country or to reach the United States. Specifically, most have come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, also known as the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA).^a These movements have been influenced by a range of factors, including both direct and structural violence, and shifts in economic, political, and social realities. In recent years, the factors driving individual decisions to migrate or flee have become more complex and intersectional. Unlike in previous decades, it is now increasingly difficult to separate out the different forces—such as gang or gender-based violence, discrimination, or lack of economic opportunity—that drive hundreds of thousands of Central Americans to leave their countries each year.

Throughout the late twentieth century, millions of Central Americans fled their homes to seek refuge from civil wars, genocide, natural disasters, and unstable or oppressive governments. From 1954 to 1996, Guatemala experienced Central America’s longest and most violent civil war, during which the insurgent left clashed with a series of military-backed governments. In the 1980s, leftist insurgency was on the rise in the Mayan highlands and the military government began destroying entire villages, murdering more than 200,000 people and displacing another 1.5 million. About 200,000 of the displaced Guatemalans fled to Mexico, where they settled in informal refugee camps along the Mexico-Guatemala border.¹ Some also continued on to the United States. According to the 2010 census, Guatemalans made up one of the United States’ largest foreign-born populations, with an estimated 850,000 residents.²

In the late twentieth century, both political and natural disasters took place across other parts of Central America. In 1980, authoritarianism and social unrest in El Salvador culminated in a bloody civil war that lasted 12 years and displaced one million people (one-fifth of the country’s population).³ While in 1988, 1.5 million Hondurans fled the devastation of Hurricane Mitch, which was the deadliest hurricane to hit the Western Hemisphere in more than 200 years.^b Since then, Honduras also experienced the influx of 30,000 refugees from El Salvador’s civil war in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of regime changes and coup d’états (most recently in 2009), an election that was perceived to be fraudulent in 2018, and dips in the price of major agricultural exports.

Beginning in 2011, there were demographic changes in Central American migratory flows through Mexico. Particularly, there was a sharp increase in the numbers of women and children who were leaving Central America, both as part of families and as minors traveling alone. In 2014, the number of unaccompanied minors from the NTCA who were apprehended at the United States’ southern border peaked at 52,000.⁴ More recently, the number of families migrating from the NTCA has grown significantly, with family unit apprehensions and inadmissibles at the U.S. border reaching nearly 128,000 in 2018, up from around 86,700 the previous year.⁵

Among the growing number of migrants are also Central Americans of minority sexual orientations and gender identities and others fleeing violence, discrimination, and social exclusion

^a In general, references to Central Americans in this report refer to citizens of the Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras). In some cases, as indicated, the report also refers to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan refugees.

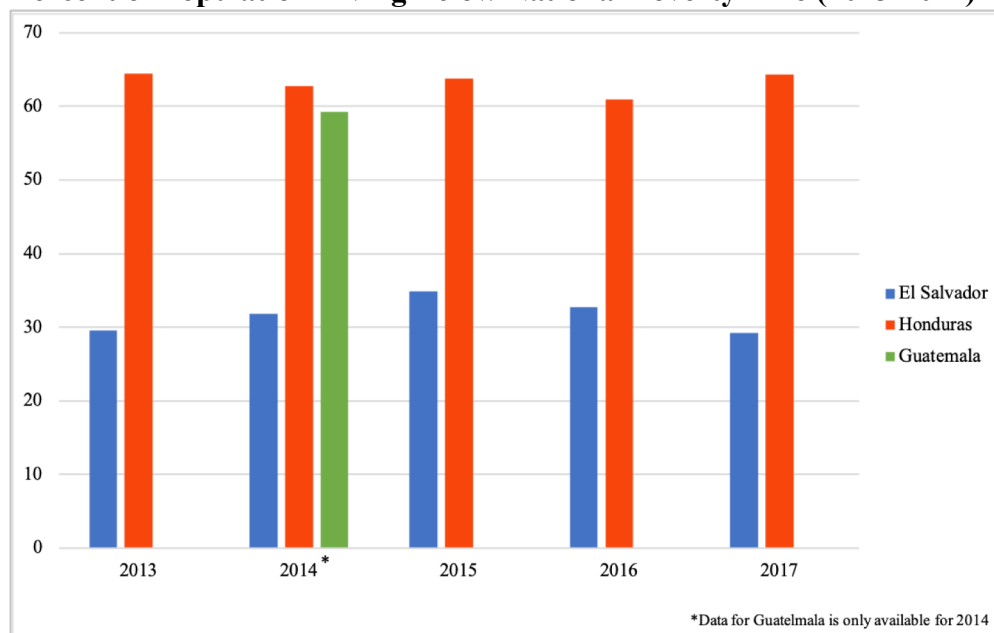
^b Hurricane Mitch killed more than 11,000 people across the region.

for a broad range of reasons.⁶ These individuals have increasingly sought refugee status in Mexico and asylum in the United States. In Mexico, refugee status applications from Central Americans have spiked since 2013, with 886 applications submitted that year and 11,808 applications submitted in 2018 (through September).⁷

Economic Instability and Structural Violence

Economic factors play a significant role in migration decisions. The NTCA is one of Latin America’s poorest regions, with 32.7 percent of Salvadorans, 59.3 percent of Guatemalans, and 65.7 percent of Hondurans living below the national poverty lines in each country (defined as US\$1.90 for all three NTCA countries), according to 2016 World Bank estimates.⁸ A lack of economic development and opportunity underlies the major crises that the NTCA’s nations have experienced, including the rise of gang membership and influence. Furthermore, tax revenues in the NTCA are among the lowest in the region, limiting the quality and reach of public services, and deepening inequality.⁹

Figure 1
Percent of Population Living Below National Poverty Line (2013-2017)¹⁰



Source: World Bank Data

Most economic migrants from the NTCA hope to reach the United States, given the wage differential. In the United States, the federal minimum wage is more than five times what a minimum-wage worker could earn in the NTCA. Additionally, state and city minimum wages vary widely, reaching up to US\$15.00 per hour in certain cities such as Seattle. Despite a higher cost of living, these high wages are particularly attractive to migrants seeking to send remittances back to their home countries.

Figure 2
Minimum Wage by Country¹¹

Country	Minimum Wage
Guatemala	\$1.34-1.47/hr
El Salvador	\$1.25/hr
Honduras	\$1.43/hr
Mexico	\$0.55/hr
United States	\$7.25-\$15/hr

Source: Wage Indicator Data

Gang Violence

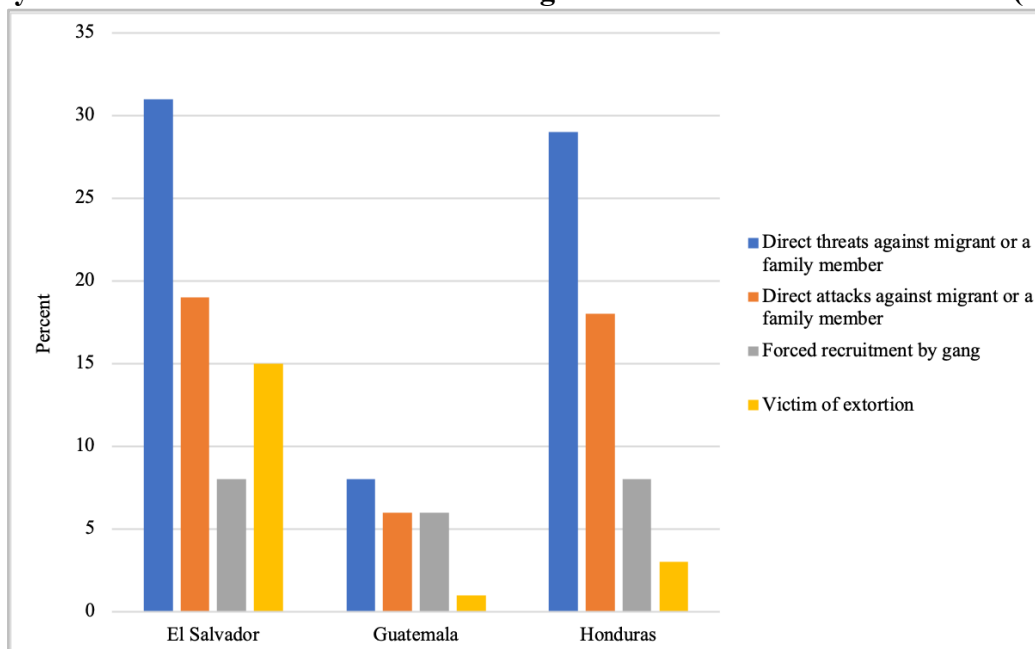
Over the last five decades, the NTCA’s economic and political instability created an environment that was ripe for a surge in violence, corruption, and crime. Today, gang violence, drug trafficking, and weak institutions make the region one of the world’s most insecure.¹² In 2015, El Salvador was the world’s most violent country not at war, with an annual homicide rate of 103 per 100,000 inhabitants.¹³ By 2018, that figure had dropped to 51 per 100,000 residents, which still places El Salvador as Latin America’s second most violent country (eclipsed in 2017 by Venezuela). In the same year, Honduras also had a high homicide rate of 40 per 100,000 people.¹⁴ These rates remain higher than neighboring countries in Central America or Mexico, which had a homicide rate of 25.5 per 100,000.¹⁵

Actors associated with transnational gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 carry out much of the violence in Central America. These criminal groups were formed in the United States in the 1980s by Salvadoran refugees who fled the civil war and were systematically disenfranchised. Living in marginalized areas and often denied legal paperwork, some of these immigrants turned to gang activity as a survival strategy. Yet in 1996, the United States passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act as part of an effort to address growing crime rates. The Act hardened immigration laws, adding penalties for undocumented migrants who commit crimes or remain in the United States for certain periods of time, and allowing for their deportation.¹⁶ As a result, thousands of Central Americans were forced to return to their home countries, including hundreds of MS-13 and Barrio 18 gang members.¹⁷ Once back in Central America, the gang members regrouped and solidified their power, enabled by weak state institutions, corrupt law enforcement and political regimes, and a lack of economic opportunity across the region.

Today, the gangs maintain a significant presence in the NTCA and continue to flourish. Violent crime, extortion, and kidnapping have become commonplace as local and federal governments fail to protect their citizens. A 2015 International Crisis Group report found that Salvadorans in poor, urban neighborhoods paid an estimated US\$400 million in extortion fees annually to criminal actors, and Hondurans and Guatemalans paid US\$200 million and US\$60 million respectively.¹⁸ These threats and violence drive migration. According to a 2017 report by Doctors Without Borders, 40 percent of surveyed Central American refugees in Mexico had left their country

because either they or their families had experienced direct violence or threats from criminal gangs.¹⁹

Figure 3
Surveyed Central Americans in Mexico - Migration Related to Direct Violence (2017)²⁰



Source: Doctors Without Borders Data

Certain policy responses in Central American countries have exacerbated these conditions, particularly through hardline policies toward the gangs. For example, former President of El Salvador, Salvador Sánchez Céren, liberally expanded the permissible use of force in what came to be known as “iron fist” (*mano dura*) policies. Police were given latitude to perform extra-judicial executions of gang members, search and seizures, and joint operations with the military.²¹ Other NTCA countries have pursued similar hardline punitive policies to combat gang violence, including the Sweep-Up Plan in Guatemala and Zero Tolerance in Honduras, which codified tactics including mass incarceration and extrajudicial killings.²² Rhetorically, El Salvador and Honduras labelled MS-13 gang members as “terrorists.” These approaches not only failed to address underlying social and structural causes, but in some cases actually strengthened the criminal gangs by solidifying a common outcast identity and opposition to the government.²³

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Women. The phenomena of increasing numbers of women fleeing Central America is in part linked to staggering rates of sexual and gender-based violence. In 2015, El Salvador and Honduras had some of the highest rates of femicide globally, ranking third and fifth in the world respectively.²⁴ Other forms of violence against women are also common. A 2008 National Family Health Survey by the Salvadoran Demographic Association found more than one quarter of all women in El Salvador reported that they have been victims of sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner, a number that would increase if it were to include male family members or acquaintances.²⁵ A 2013 survey showed that approximately 30,000 women report sexual violence

each year in Honduras, with one woman reporting sexual violence approximately every three hours.²⁶ In Guatemala, a 2015 study found that a new case of sexual violence was reported every 46 minutes, and 64 percent of the victims were minors.²⁷ In 2017, the Guatemalan Public Ministry received over 50,000 reports of violence against women and over 10,000 reports of sexual assault.²⁸ All these figures represent a fraction of total instances, due to significant underreporting.

According to a 2017 report by Kids in Need of Defense, women and girls from Central America reported in interviews that gang members use sexual and gender-based violence to intimidate and exercise control over communities, and are seldom held accountable.²⁹ Some of the most common crimes include sexual assault and rape, domestic violence, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation, as well as the sexual abuse of children.³⁰ Teenage girls, often younger than 16 years-old, are forced to become gang members' "girlfriends," and many experience sexual or other forms of violence, even murder, if they try to resist.³¹ Many victims of sexual crimes do not report them to authorities out of fear and a lack of faith in local justice processes, which in many cases have been co-opted by gangs. Oftentimes victims of sexual violence do not even report instances to loved ones, given a broad culture of blame and stigma.³²

Once women leave their homes, they are among the most vulnerable migrant populations and are at high risk of experiencing horrific violence similar to that which they are fleeing. In a Doctors Without Borders survey conducted in 2015 and 2016, nearly one-third of women in Mexican migrant shelters reported they had been sexually abused in transit.³³ Along the migration route, women might also feel unable to seek recourse for crimes they experience given their irregular migratory status, and may be reluctant to halt their journey to file and follow-through on a complaint, given the desire to continue moving onward. In addition, given widespread corruption throughout Central America and Mexico, migrants and refugees have little trust in successful crime prosecution, and women may even fear that officials themselves will be the perpetrators of violence.

LGBTI Refugees. Increasingly, members of minority sexual orientations and gender identities are migrating from the NTCA given cultural stigmas and high levels of abuse and discrimination by gangs, criminal groups, and government authorities. Within the LGBTI population, gay men and transgender women are particularly at risk, given a deeply ingrained and pervasive culture of hypermasculinity or *machismo*. This cultural stigma leads not only to discrimination, but often also to physical violence, extortion, and social and structural exclusion, making it difficult to secure stable, dignified work, education, and health services.³⁴

According to available statistics, the NTCA is among the most dangerous regions in the world for individuals of a LGBTI sexual orientation and gender identity.³⁵ In Honduras, the NGO Lesbian Network of Cattrachas (*Red Lésbica Cattrachas*) collected 264 reports of murders of LGBTI individuals from 2009 to mid-2017.³⁶ In Guatemala, 40 transgender people were killed in 2016 alone, according to the NGO Transgender Europe.³⁷ While in El Salvador, 28 attacks against LGBTI individuals, including three murders of transgender women, were recorded from January to September 2017.³⁸ These statistics are almost certainly underreported by media, community members, and the victims themselves, in part due to fear and a lack of confidence in the justice system. This mistrust is rational. A 2014 survey by the Center for Research and Promotion of Human Rights in Central America (*Centro de Investigación y Promoción para América Central*

de Derechos Humanos, CIPAC) found that nearly 70 percent of Federal Police in El Salvador did not think LGBTI individuals have the same rights as other citizens under the law.³⁹

As LGBTI refugees flee from these contexts in Central America, they often seek clandestine routes to avoid detention, and are therefore at higher risk of becoming victims of violence and crime. Once in Mexico, LGBTI refugees are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), two-thirds of LGBTI Central American refugees reported that they had been the victims of violence within Mexico.⁴⁰ This violence occurs not only in transit, but also within shelters and particularly detention centers, where both women and LGBTI refugees may become victims of the same kinds of discrimination and violence that they are fleeing.

Political and Social Conflict

Finally, political instability and social conflict throughout Latin America has continued to shape the region's migratory context. The Northern Triangle region has had an average score of 30 out of 100 for three consecutive years on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)—zero being completely corrupt and 100 being free from corruption.⁴¹ Transparency International also highlights the connection between corruption and inequality, which feed one another in a vicious cycle as power and wealth become increasingly uneven within a country.⁴² While income inequality has declined in Latin America, it is still the most unequal region in the world. According to Oxfam, in 2014 the richest 10 percent of Latin America's population possessed 71 percent of the total wealth.⁴³

This trend has been coupled with unequal distribution of social and political power, and high-profile abuses of that influence. In 2017, claims that fraudulent electoral activity had led to Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández's reelection reignited unrest. Tensions had already simmered since President Hernández assumed power in 2009 through a military coup, and in 2015 his party was caught in a social security embezzlement scandal.⁴⁴ In response to the perceived electoral fraud in 2017, Hondurans took to the streets to protest Hernández's legitimacy. Police and soldiers killed dozens of Hondurans participating in the democratic protests, which deepened tensions across the country.⁴⁵ As people have lost confidence in the country's political and social institutions, the urge to migrate has only increased.

Political corruption extends across the region. In Guatemala, there have been a wide range of scandals, involving former President Otto Pérez Molina and current President Jimmy Morales. The UN-backed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (*Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala*, CICIG) uncovered these corruption schemes and has helped decrease impunity levels, from 95 percent impunity in 2009 to 72 percent in 2012.^{46c} In El Salvador, following the end of the civil war in 1992, the National Civil Police (*Policía Nacional Civil*, PNC) was established to replace the highly corrupt National Police, Financial Police, and National Guard. While the PNC was created to restore democracy and peace in El Salvador, it has not fulfilled its mandate and has in fact become co-opted by criminal organizations, enabling their growing influence in the country.⁴⁷

^c In late 2018, President Morales announced that the CICIG would be terminated in September 2019.

Notably, the number of refugees coming from Nicaragua and Venezuela is also on the rise due to political conflict and humanitarian crisis. In Nicaragua, violence and social unrest increased in 2018 as the Daniel Ortega administration enacted sweeping economic changes to the country's social security program that derailed the economy.⁴⁸ Nicaraguans who speak out against the administration have been met with targeted violence from the government, causing many to flee. Data from the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (*Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*, COMAR) indicates that in the first nine months of 2018, 566 Nicaraguans had applied for refugee status in Mexico, up more than 900 percent from the previous year.⁴⁹

In Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro's authoritarian regime has driven over three million people to flee the country since 2014, according to the UNHCR.⁵⁰ Maduro's 2018 reelection, broadly perceived both nationally and internationally as illegitimate, has deepened public distrust and unrest, and power outages and shortages of food, medicine, and other basic supplies have pushed the country into a severe humanitarian crisis. From January to September 2018, Venezuelans accounted for 25 percent of all refugee status applications in Mexico (4,249 applicants)—nearly 19 times more than the number of Guatemalan applicants.⁵¹

Chapter 2: The Refugee Application Process

Legislative Underpinnings

The Mexican Constitution (*Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*) forms the basis of the country’s migratory and refugee policy and guarantees protections for all individuals within Mexico. It also grants the federal government substantial discretionary authority to determine who can enter, stay, and pass through the country.⁵² Drawing on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a 2011 reform of the Mexican Constitution brought human rights to the forefront of Mexico’s legal order. Revised language throughout the Constitution guarantees human rights and dignity to all people, including foreigners in the country.⁵³

Alongside the constitutional reform, Mexico passed sweeping legislation that transformed the country’s migratory and refugee policy. The 2011 Law of Migration (*Ley de Migración*) cemented migrants’ rights and acknowledged Mexico’s role as a sending, transit, and receiving country. Passed the same year, the Law of Refugees, Complementary Protection, and Political Asylum (*Ley de Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político*, “Law of Refugees”) expanded the definition of a refugee under Mexican law, streamlined the application process, and bolstered refugees’ rights in Mexico.

Both the Law of Migration and the Law of Refugees were accompanied by Implementing Frameworks that strengthened their provisions. The Law of Refugees and its Implementing Framework outline the 11 categories under which ‘well-founded fear’ (*temor fundado*) is defined with respect to refugee claims.⁵⁴ These changes are based on international laws and treaties to which Mexico is a signatory member, namely the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which justifies refugee status for those facing persecution. Mexico is also a signatory to the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which outlines generalized violence and other macro-level conflicts as potential claims for asylum. These agreements helped lay the foundation for Mexico’s domestic policy, and a 1999 Supreme Court ruling established that international conventions take precedence over all other laws except the Constitution.

Figure 4
Grounds for Well-Founded Fear⁵⁵

Fraction I. Based on 1951 Convention (except gender)	Fraction II. Based on 1984 Cartagena Declaration (legitimizes gender as basis for claims)	Fraction III. Relating to “sur place” refugees
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Race 2. Religion 3. Nationality 4. Gender 5. Social group 6. Political opinion 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Generalized violence 8. Foreign aggression 9. Internal conflicts 10. Massive human rights violations 11. Other circumstances that have gravely disturbed the social order 	All of the previous may also apply to migrants outside of their home countries as conditions in that country change

Legal Process to Solicit Refugee Status

Application for Refugee Status. The Law of Refugees creates a roadmap for migrants to obtain refugee status (see Appendix I). Once a migrant has entered the country, he or she may apply for refugee status at one of the four COMAR offices.⁴⁵⁶ If a refugee status seeker is not in a city with a COMAR office, INM will accept the application and deliver it to COMAR for processing. By law, INM must also process refugee applications from anyone in its custody.⁵⁷ INM must inform migrants of their right to seek refugee status and send any application to COMAR within 72 hours. They must also aid COMAR at each stage of the process (detailed below), up to the final step of notifying applicants of their cases' resolutions.

The principle of non-refoulement guarantees that INM will not deport an applicant while his or her case is pending.⁵⁸ Both the Law of Migration and Law of Refugees specifically prohibit immigration authorities from returning a refugee to a country where his or her “life would be threatened or where there are reasonable grounds to believe that they would be in danger of being subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.”⁵⁹ During the adjudication process, INM grants applicants a continued presence document known as a *constancia*, which is intended to prevent INM from pursuing deportation proceedings. Applicants are not allowed to leave the state where they file for refugee status. If they do, INM has the legal grounds to cancel their refugee application and deport them.⁶⁰

Adjudication Process for Refugee Status. Once the application is submitted, COMAR protection officers have 45 business days to make a decision on the case, with the option to file for an additional 45-business day extension if needed. Currently, filing this extension has become almost automatic. However, a September 2018 interview with an immigration lawyer based in Mexico City suggests that the timeline for processing refugee status applications is now closer to a year.⁶¹ The combination of increased processing times and a restriction on freedom of movement deters some potential refugee status seekers from filing an application, and has been grounds for others to abandon their applications.

Once COMAR receives an application, the first step is an intake interview, which determines whether the applicant has a well-founded fear of persecution, as defined by the Implementing Framework for the Law of Refugees. Legally, COMAR must provide translation and interpretation services as needed during the intake interview to ensure the applicant's complete and thorough understanding of his or her rights and the process.⁶² In 2018 (through September), there were nearly 200 applicants for refugee status from countries where Spanish is not the dominant language, and some indigenous Central Americans also have a limited ability to speak and understand Spanish.⁶³

There are certain categories of behavior that make an applicant ineligible for refugee status. These include 1) committing a crime against peace, genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes, as defined by the international treaties ratified by Mexico, 2) committing, outside of national territory, a crime that is categorized as serious both in Mexico and the country where it was

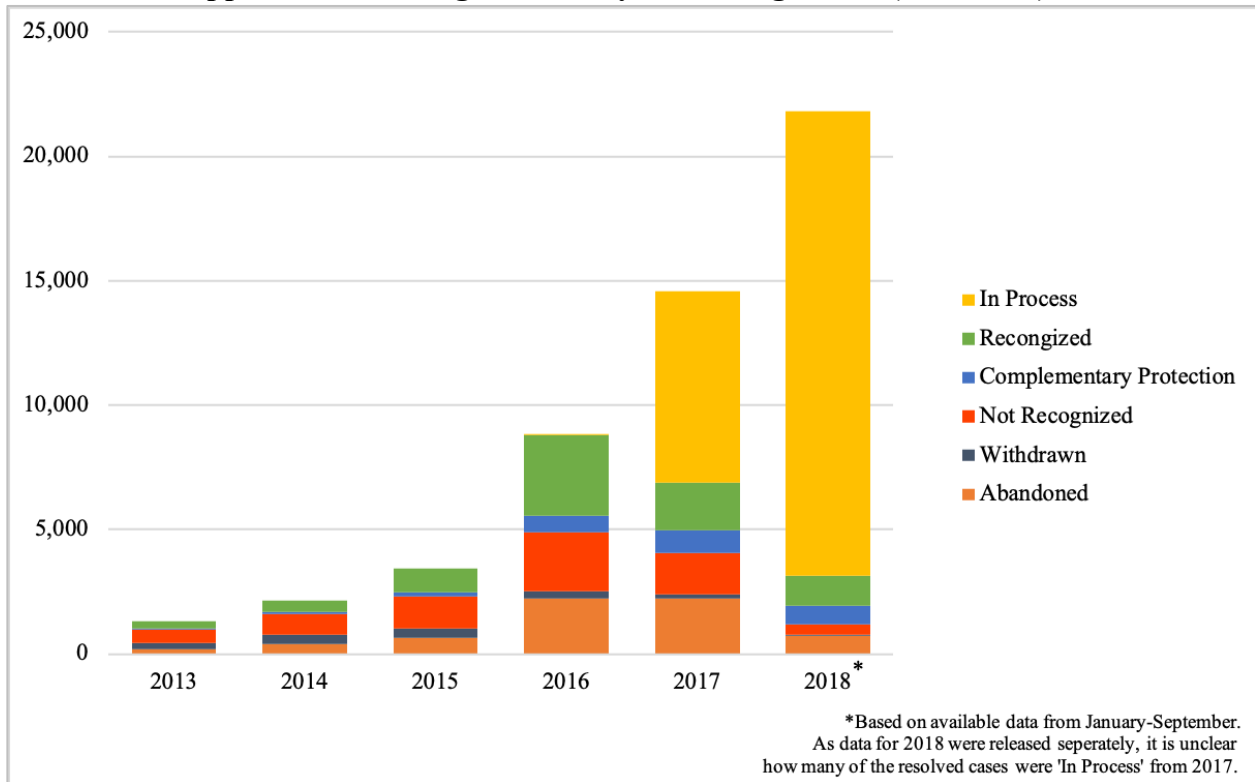
^d The Law of Migration requires that individuals apply for refugee status within 30 days of entering Mexico. In March 2019, this 30-day deadline—which could only be extended when the applicant demonstrated exceptional circumstances—was declared unconstitutional. Additionally, there is no fee to apply for refugee status.

committed, or 3) committing acts contrary to the ends and principles of the United Nations.⁶⁴ Data acquired through a transparency request from COMAR's Chiapas delegation cited reasons for refugee case resolutions and showed that only 42 individuals were denied refugee status because of "exclusion" between 2012 and 2018, which may include cases from these statutes.⁶⁵ This represents less than 1 percent of the 16,739 cases included in the dataset.

COMAR makes one of three official determinations on a refugee status application. If a refugee's application is approved, then the refugee is granted permanent residency and a path to citizenship. Refugees also then have the right to request to be reunited with their families. If a claim is denied, the applicant is automatically considered for complementary protection, a status for individuals in need of international protection but who do not legally qualify to become refugees. Complementary protection grants the individual non-refoulement and permanent residency but does not grant the right to family reunification. Legally COMAR must also provide a clear and personalized written explanation for the denial, and the applicant remains eligible to appeal the resolution for up to 15 days after the final decision.

Beyond these official determinations, COMAR has increasingly reported that applications are abandoned, withdrawn, or left pending without a resolution. An analysis of COMAR resolution data from the Tapachula, Chiapas office revealed that as the most common reason cited for abandoned cases was "inattention" (*inasistencia*), typically meaning failure to comply with the weekly check-in appointments that COMAR requires of refugee status applicants. This suggests that factors such as long wait times may influence some individuals to abandon their cases. Others may have decided to continue migrating north to other parts of Mexico or the United States. During the same time frame, the number of pending cases has also increased. By November 2018, more than two-thirds of all refugee status applications in Mexico were pending (see Appendix II).

Figure 5
Applicants for Refugee Status by Processing Status (2013-2018)⁶⁶



Source: COMAR Data

Those granted refugee status or complementary protection may apply for permanent resident cards upon the conclusion of their cases. Until last year, however, they could not obtain a personal identity number (*Clave Única de Registro de Población*, CURP) until they held this permanent residency card. The CURP is required for school enrollment, medical attention, employment, and other basic services, making it a crucial asset to facilitate integration into Mexican society.⁶⁷ In June 2018, after pressure from several civil society groups that lobbied the National Public Register (*Registro Nacional de Población*, RENAPO), INM and COMAR began issuing temporary CURP numbers to refugee status applicants at the time of their application.⁶⁸ This allows them to access basic services while their applications are being processed. A total of 4,995 temporary CURPs were issued between June 20, 2018 and September 30, 2018, indicating the relatively quick adoption and implementation of this new program.

Once an applicant has been recognized as a refugee, Mexican law outlines a process for facilitating his or her integration into Mexican society. The Implementing Framework for the Law of Refugees requires that COMAR develop and implement an integration assistance plan for each recognized refugee and provide corresponding follow-up services, although these terms are vague and there are no clear frameworks.⁶⁹ Within COMAR, assistance officers are charged with this responsibility. Yet the overwhelming backlog of cases means that the agency's primary focus has been on adjudicating new cases, and personnel and resources have not been dedicated to providing support to recognized refugees.

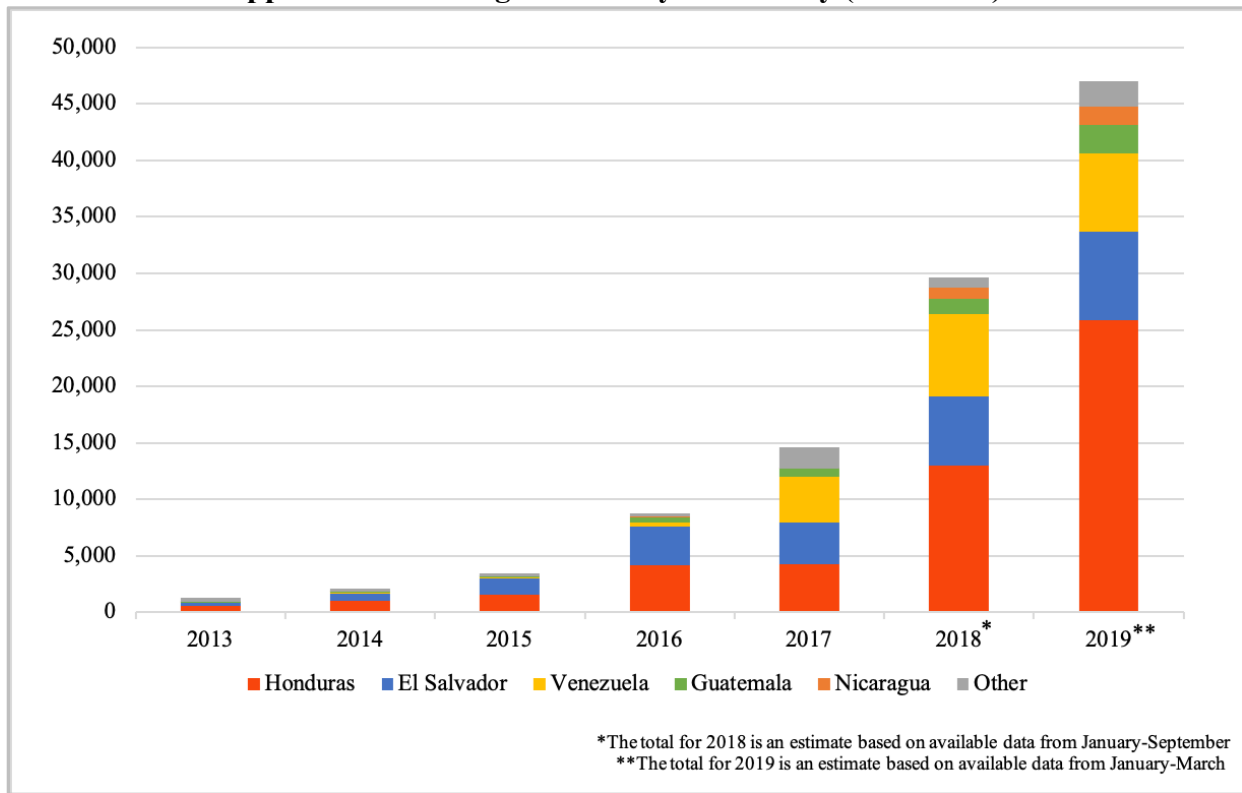
Mexico's legal framework assumes a robust relationship between the government and civil society for providing refugee integration assistance. However, in practice, cooperation varies in its magnitude and nature. Nearly all refugee integration efforts in Mexico are currently carried out by civil society organizations—including legal support, job training, and healthcare—and do not receive government funding. The large workload and limited, inconsistent funding streams constrain civil society groups' ability to provide the support that Mexican law guarantees to refugees, which is a federal responsibility.

Demographics of Applicants and Refugees

Overall, Central Americans submit more refugee status applications to COMAR than any other group. During the first three months of 2019, three out of every four applicants were from the Northern Triangle. Hondurans have increasingly submitted a larger percent of the applications. In 2017, Hondurans submitted 29 percent of all refugee status applications, while during the first two months of 2019, that number had risen to 53 percent. According to Mark Manly, the UNHCR Representative in Mexico, these applicants are not all from the majority-Honduran migrant caravans.⁷⁰ In fact, in 2018, less than 15 percent of refugee status applicants reported that they were part of a caravan. This trend has continued through February 2019, with less than 10 percent of applicants reporting to be part of a caravan at that time.⁷¹

The number of Venezuelan and Nicaraguan applicants is also increasing. In 2013, there was only one Venezuelan applicant for refugee status in Mexico. By 2016, the number of applicants grew to 361, and then increased by over 1,000 percent to reach 4,038 in 2017. By the end of September 2018, there had been 4,249 Venezuelan applicants over the year. From 2013 to 2015, less than 30 Nicaraguans applied for refugee status each year in Mexico. Then between 2016 and September 2018, the number of Nicaraguan applicants increased from 70 to 566, a more than 800 percent increase.

Figure 6
Applicants for Refugee Status by Nationality (2013-2019)⁷²



Source: COMAR Data

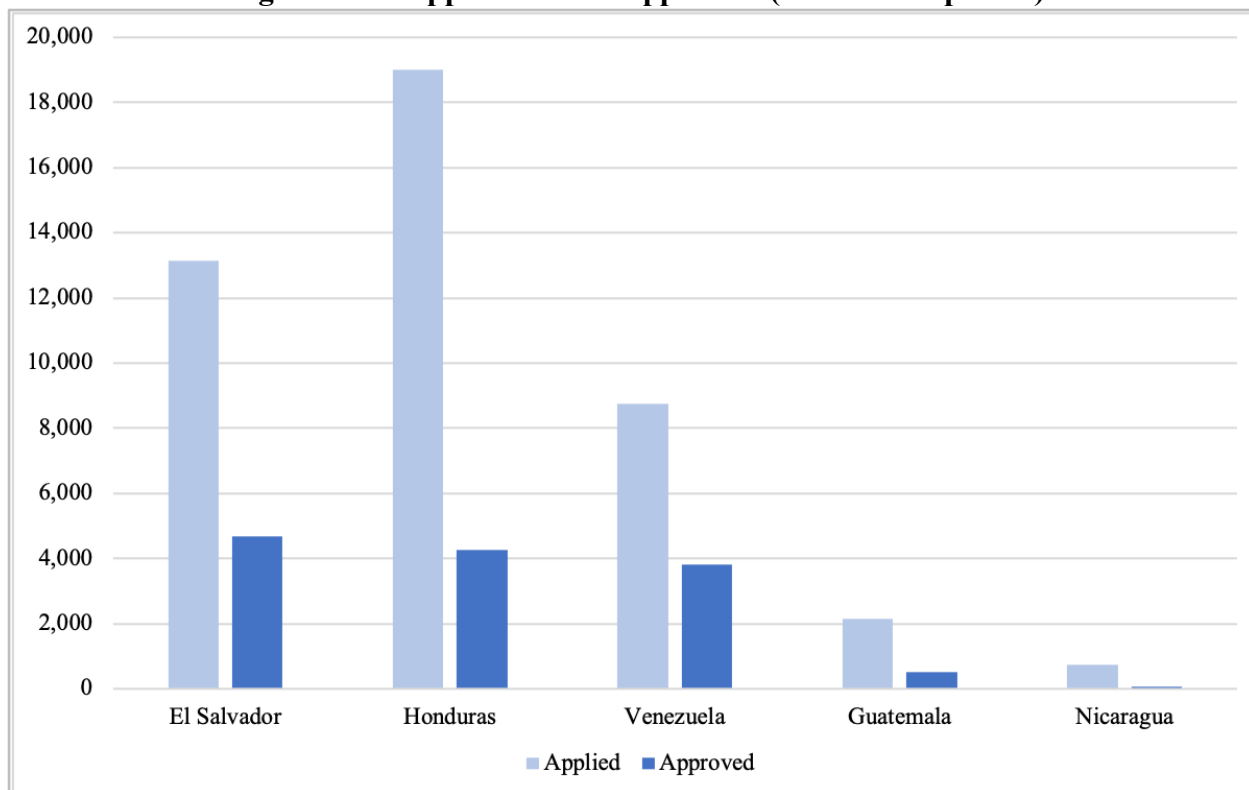
Overall, minors are not highly represented among refugee status seekers in Mexico, nor among recognized refugees. Minors aged 14 years and under consistently account for approximately one in five refugee status applicants. However, unaccompanied minors—defined as children or adolescents under the age of 18 and travelling without a parent or legal guardian—apply in even lower numbers. From January 2015 to September 2018, only 1,279 applicants were unaccompanied minors, making up only 3 percent of total applicants. In the same time span, INM apprehended more than 50,000 unaccompanied minors across Mexico.⁷³

There are various reasons that minors do not apply for refugee recognition in Mexico. First, many minors’ ultimate goal is to reunite with family members in the United States. If these children receive refugee status in Mexico, they become ineligible to claim asylum in the United States, given they have already received protections in another foreign country. In addition, minors may not have sufficient information about the refugee application process and INM officials can exacerbate this issue if they fail to alert minors of possible protections. In 2016, a Human Rights Watch study found that INM had only informed 1 of 61 detained children about their right to seek refugee recognition.⁷⁴

Since 2013, COMAR has recognized approximately 13,000 applicants for refugee status or complementary protection. Over the past five years, there has been roughly equal number of recognized refugees from El Salvador, Honduras, and Venezuela, with about 4,000 refugees from each country. However, the application recognition rate varies significantly by nationality. In

2017, for example, only 27 percent of Honduran applicants were approved for refugee status or complementary protection, compared to 43 percent of Salvadorans and 28 percent of Guatemalans. These approval rates are lower than for other nationalities.⁷⁵ For example, approximately 67 percent of Venezuelan refugee status applicants were approved in 2017.^e While more than half of Central Americans who received protections were approved for complementary protection (and not refugee status), all approved Venezuelans received refugee status, with none deferred to complementary protection.

Figure 7
Refugee Status Applicants and Approvals (Jan 2013-Sep 2018)⁷⁶



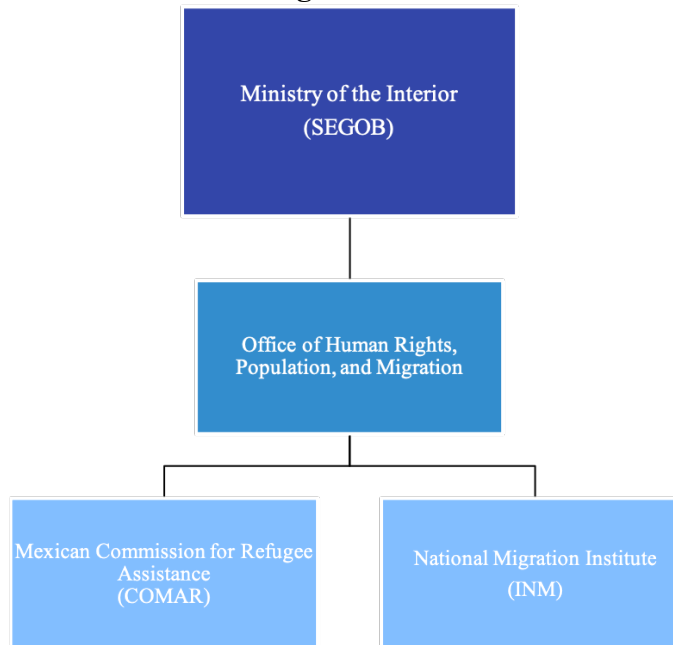
Source: COMAR Data

^e Unlike Central American applicants, Venezuelan refugee status claims are granted under the guidelines established in the Cartagena Declaration.

Chapter 3: The Role and Structure of COMAR

The executive branch of Mexico's federal government is broadly responsible for all migratory and security policy. The Ministry of the Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*, SEGOB) determines procedural migratory policy, and COMAR is the agency within SEGOB that is responsible for processing refugee status claims and managing their cancelation or revocation. COMAR is also charged with providing social services to applicants while their claims are pending and assisting with recognized refugees' social integration.

Figure 8
SEGOB Organizational Chart



COMAR has three fully functional offices, located in Mexico City; Tapachula, Chiapas; and Acayucan, Veracruz; as well as a smaller delegation, or “representation,” in Tenosique, Tabasco.⁷⁷ All of these locations are in the southern half of the country, as seen in Figure 9. These locations aim to reach migrants crossing into Mexico at the southern border. However, the limited geographic reach hinders COMAR’s ability to attend to those traveling further north. Some migrants are not aware of their right to claim refugee status, while others decide to apply when they are closer to the northern border.

As previously discussed, INM offices may accept applications for refugee status, which are then forwarded to COMAR. However, INM does not provide other forms of assistance—such as social services—that are available at COMAR offices. The limited number of COMAR offices also hinders the agency’s ability to conduct in-person eligibility interviews. Instead, the agency must rely on over-the-phone interviews, which are often less effective in garnering a complete picture of the refugee status seeker’s history, current situation, and particular needs. In collaboration with INM, COMAR seeks to gather background information and verify country conditions through databases.⁷⁸ However, an applicant’s credibility is assessed primarily during the eligibility

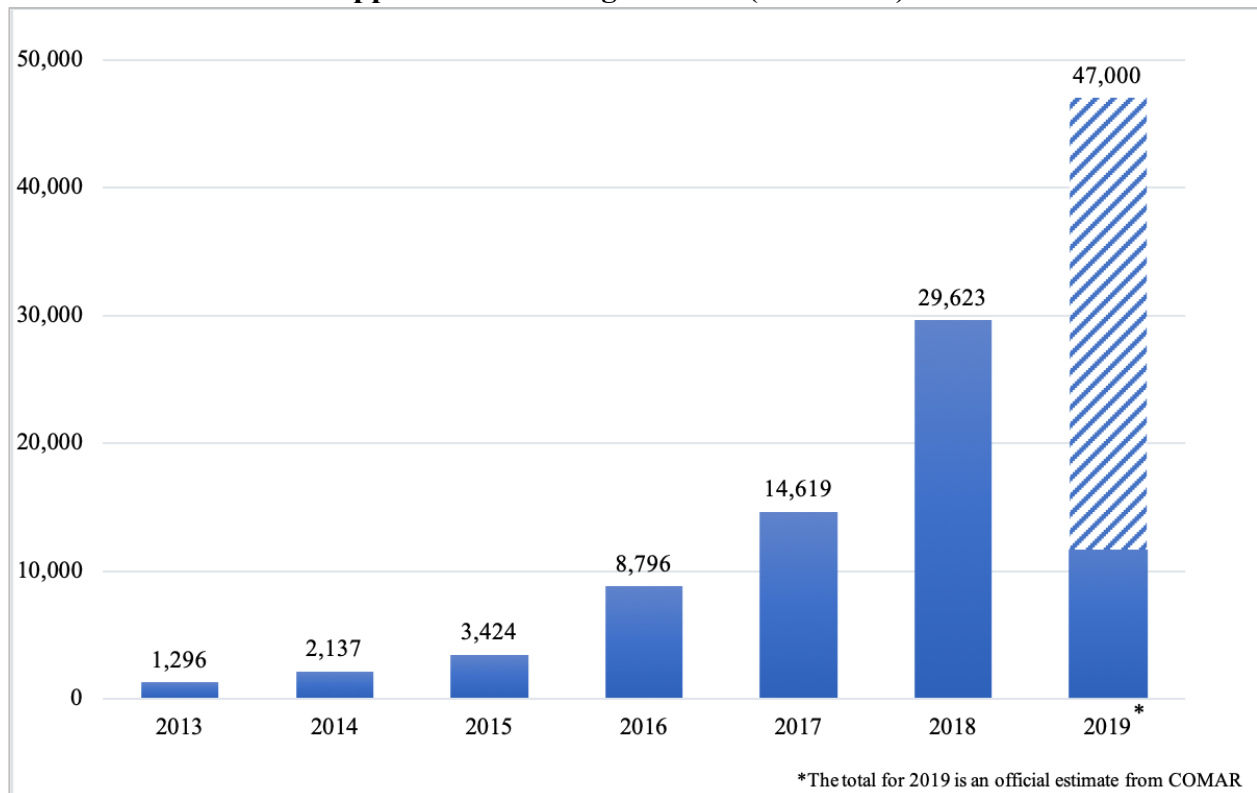
interview, and judgments on the veracity of an applicant's case are more reliable in-person.⁷⁹

Figure 9
COMAR Offices



Over the past six years, the number of people applying for refugee status with COMAR has increased exponentially. In 2013, 1,296 people submitted refugee status applications to COMAR. By the end of 2018, that number had climbed to 29,623, and during the first three months of 2019 alone, the agency received applications from 12,716 people. The Chiapas office received 60 percent of these applications, while Mexico City, Tenosique, and Acayucan, received 24 percent, 10 percent, and 6 percent of applications, respectively.⁸⁰ At the end of 2017, 53 percent of COMAR's refugee status applications remained unresolved, and by the end of September 2018, that number had increased to about 86 percent.

Figure 10
Applicants for Refugee Status (2013-2019)⁸¹



Source: COMAR Data

To address the growing refugee population, COMAR has limited personnel and the overall number of employees has not increased to meet rising demand for the agency’s services. Over the past few years, staffing numbers have remained largely consistent, with 52 official COMAR employees from 2013 to 2016 and a slight drop to 48 employees from 2017 to 2018.⁸² (A full organizational chart is available in Appendix III.) On October 1, 2016, SEGOB and the UNHCR signed a cooperation agreement to help alleviate these capacity issues.⁸³ The agreement funded an additional 29 COMAR positions at a cost of more than MX\$6 million a year (US\$315,546) and also provided COMAR with technical support. These positions were spread across COMAR’s locations, with each office receiving at least five employees. Each office also received at least one official in each of the areas of assistance, protection, legal work, and psychology.⁸⁴ (See Appendix IV for position chart broken down by type of job and office.) However, the increase has not been sufficient to address the increasing number of applications. In 2013, there was one employee for every 25 applicants. In 2017, despite the support from the UNHCR, that ratio grew to one employee for every 190 applicants.

At the end of July 2018, the agreement between COMAR and the UNHCR expired and was not immediately renewed. Without an official agreement, COMAR can continue to hire UNHCR staff as contractors, but they are not authorized to conduct eligibility interviews with refugee status seekers or provide psychological, legal, or protective services. COMAR’s new general coordinator, Andrés Ramírez Silva, expressed hope that the two agencies would sign a new contract by April 2019, allowing SEGOB to make direct hires and expand its capacity.⁸⁵ In a

February 2019 interview, Ramírez also noted that COMAR receives staffing assistance from other government agencies, such as INM.

The UNHCR plays a vital role in refugee processing and integration in Mexico, and the two agencies have partnered on multiple fronts. The UNHCR has invited COMAR to participate in a “Participatory Assessment,” in which various refugee populations take part in a round-table discussion to better identify the challenges that they face.⁸⁶ The two agencies are also working together to promote cooperation on shared challenges in Central America through the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (*Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones*, MIRPS).⁸⁷ Additionally, they are moving forward on a new quality assurance initiative that involves a UNHCR official working within COMAR’s offices as a consultant to help accelerate eligibility procedures, increase organizational efficiency, and improve staff training and competency.⁸⁸ COMAR’s new general coordinator is a former UNHCR official, suggesting that the two entities may work even more closely in the future.

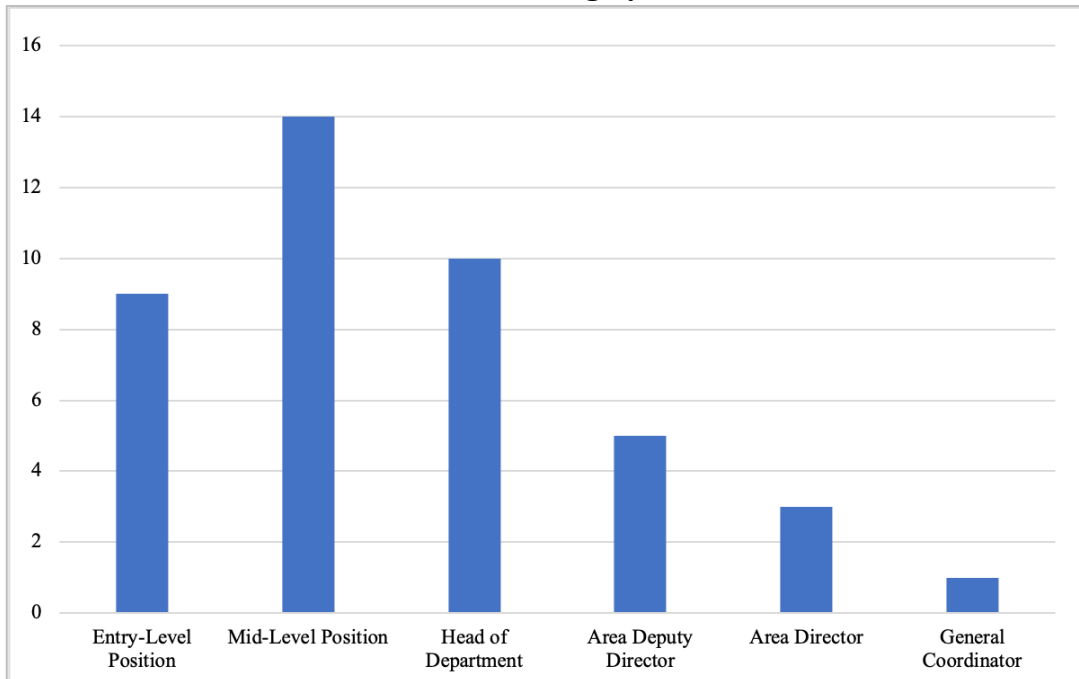
Personnel Analysis

On October 31, 2018, COMAR provided a personnel directory through a transparency request, which included detailed professional information for 42 of the agency’s 48 employees. The following subsection is an analysis of that information.

Staffing at COMAR can be divided into six ascending tiers: entry-level positions, mid-level positions, heads of departments, area deputy directors, area directors, and a general coordinator.^f As shown in Figure 11, COMAR employees are dispersed across the six tiers following a standard organizational structure. Mid-level employees constitute the majority of the staff and the number of personnel decreases proportionately with each higher tier.

^f The terms ‘entry-level’ and ‘mid-level’ have been translated from the Spanish ‘*enlace*’ and ‘*enlace de alto nivel de responsabilidad*.’ In the past, the term *enlace* was used to refer to someone working as a contract worker—that is to say, someone that was not considered an official employee of the agency. The term has since evolved to include certain employees, as is the case with COMAR.

Figure 11
COMAR Staffing by Tier⁸⁹

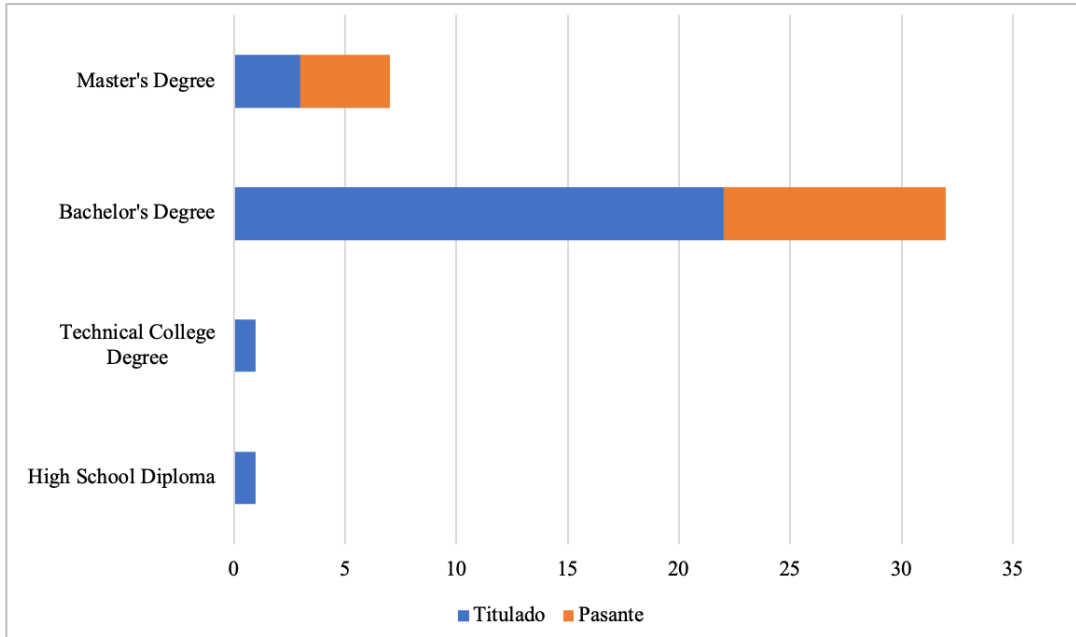


Source: COMAR Data

With the exception of two employees, everyone employed at COMAR has completed the coursework required to earn a bachelor’s degree (see Figure 12). However, in Mexico, students must either present a thesis paper or sit for a final exam before being fully conferred the degree and title of *titulado*.⁸⁹ During the period in which students have completed their coursework but have not yet been fully conferred the degree, they carry the title of *pasante*. More than 25 percent of COMAR employees that hold bachelor’s degrees are still considered *pasantes*. Additionally, four of the seven employees holding master’s degrees are considered *pasantes*.

⁸⁹ Additional steps in the process include registering with the National Registry of Professionals (*Registro Nacional de Profesionistas*) and obtaining an ID number (*número de cédula*).

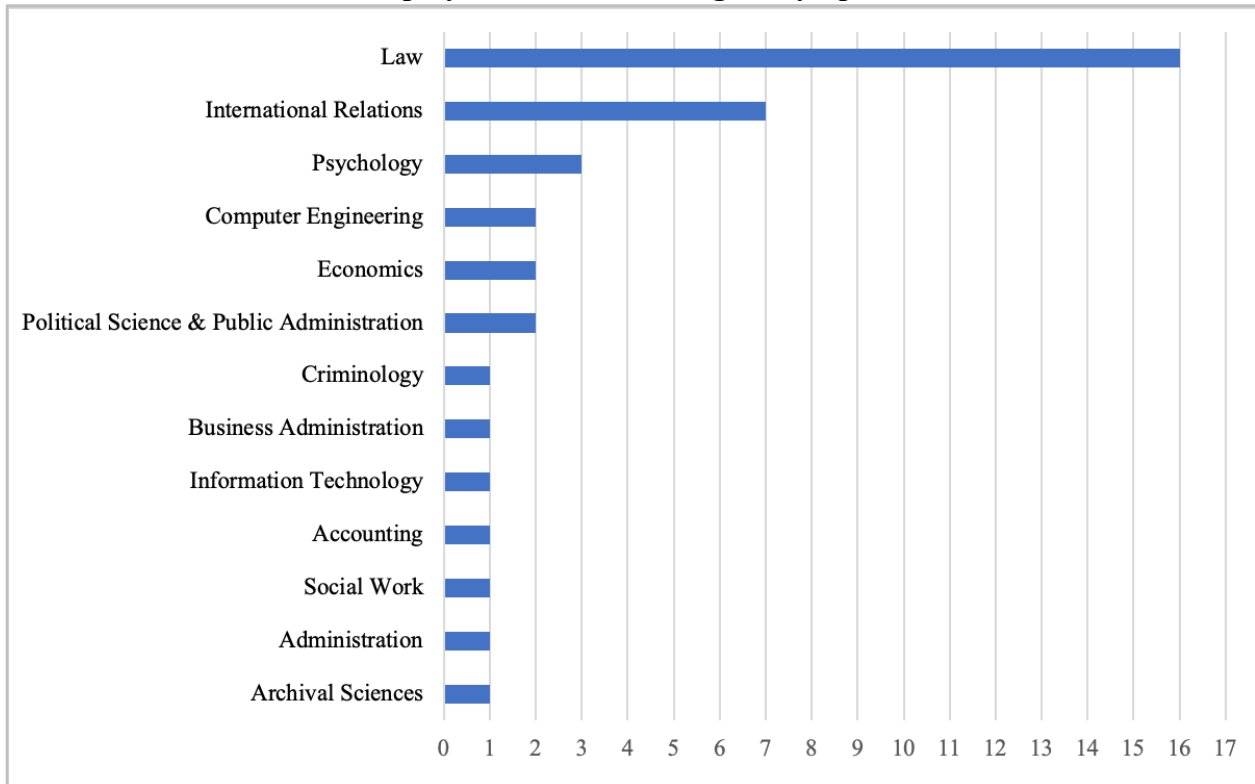
Figure 12
Highest Level of Education Completed by COMAR Employees⁹⁰



Source: COMAR Data

COMAR personnel overwhelmingly hold bachelor's degrees in law (see Figure 13). Unlike the United States' system in which law is only a graduate program, Mexican universities commonly offer legal studies at the undergraduate level. Four of the seven COMAR employees with master's degrees are also focused in law. This high concentration of employees with education backgrounds in Mexican law speaks to the agency's focus on refugee determination and protection work. The average COMAR employee has approximately nine years of work experience, with increasing years at each ascending work tier (see Appendix V).⁹¹ However, there is a broad range of work experience. For example, General Coordinator Andrés Ramírez Silva has over 28 years of experience in refugee work.

Figure 13
COMAR Employees' Bachelor's Degree by Specialization⁹²

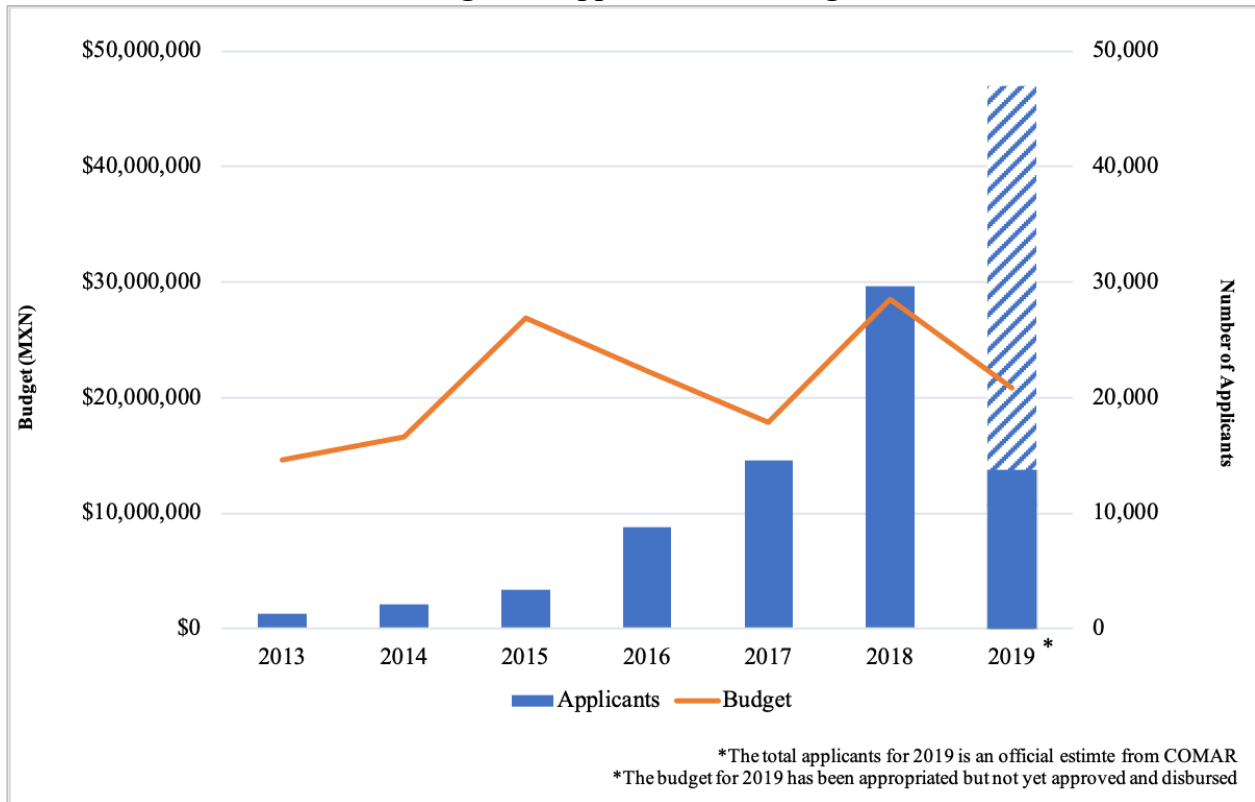


Source: COMAR Data

Budget

As with its personnel, COMAR's budget has not increased in line with the growing number of applications. From 2013 to 2018, the number of applicants for refugee recognition in Mexico increased by more than 2,000 percent.⁹³ Yet over the same period of time, COMAR's budget increased by only 95 percent.⁹⁴ For 2019, COMAR has been appropriated MX\$20.8 million (US\$1.1 million), down from MX\$28.5 million (US\$1.51 million) in 2018. To ensure that refugees' needs are being met, the UNHCR introduced Plan Puente in 2019, a stopgap financial assistance program that allocates an additional MX\$20 million (US\$1.05 million) to COMAR, with the possibility of more funding later in the year.⁹⁵ However, this piecemeal allocation leaves COMAR unsustainably reliant on the UNHCR for financial support and unable to plan efficiently. In February 2019, General Coordinator Ramírez Silva stated that securing a budget increase in the 2020 budget appropriations is a top priority for the agency.⁹⁶

Figure 14
COMAR Budget vs. Applicants for Refugee Status⁹⁷



Source: COMAR Data

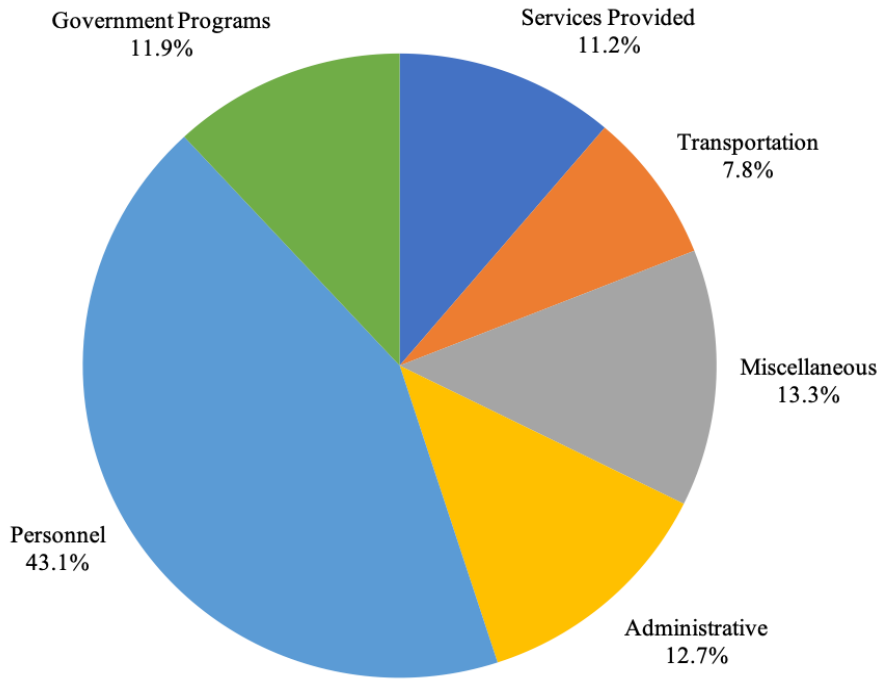
Just as important as COMAR’s overall budget are the agency’s expenditures. From 2012 to 2018, COMAR spent the largest part of its budget on personnel, allocating 43.1 percent to this expense.⁹⁸ From 2012 through 2017, the agency spent less on support services such as translation and cultural activities—with less than 5 percent of its expenses falling into this category.^h In COMAR’s initial 2019 budget there was no money allocated toward these services. However, in previous years, COMAR ended up paying for translation services for non-Spanish refugee applicants, even when it was not part of the agency’s estimated budget.

Overall, COMAR’s lack of budget transparency makes it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions. For example, one budget item that appears each year is “congresses and conventions.” However, the budget does not specify how many conferences were attended or when. In another case, more than MX\$10 million (approximately one-third of that year’s budget) was listed only as “expenses related to cultural activities, sport activities, and extraordinary help.”ⁱ Without clarification, it remains unclear where exactly COMAR is allocating its budget.

^h In 2018, this percent jumped to 35 percent, due to an ambiguous budget item.

ⁱ In Spanish, these expenses were listed as “gastos relacionados con actividades culturales, deportivas y de ayuda extraordinaria.”

Figure 15
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2012-2018⁹⁹



See Appendix VI for details on how categories are determined and yearly breakdowns
Source: COMAR Data

Chapter 4: Guaranteed Rights for Refugees

Introduction to Mexico’s Refugee Legal Framework

Individuals in Mexico who are granted refugee status or complementary protection are entitled to certain legal rights and services from the Mexican government (see Appendix VII). These guarantees span both institutional and social rights, including things like family unity, employment, education, and health. The following tables of rights for each respective category are not meant to be exhaustive in nature, but rather outline some of the most important rights afforded to refugees.

Documentation. Refugees are entitled to receive the following identification documents: a permanent resident card and a personal identity number (*Clave Única de Registro de Población*, CURP). Without this legal documentation, refugees cannot access basic public services or integrate into Mexican society.¹⁰⁰ Refugees have the right to obtain identifying documentation from the Ministry of Foreign Relations and to receive help in obtaining documents through the consulates of their countries of origin.¹⁰¹ Although Mexican authorities must assist refugees in the process of acquiring documents from their country of origin, they must also respect refugees’ right not to solicit help from their previous residence.

Figure 16
Right to Identification Documents

Relevant Law and Article	Description
Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section V	Refugees are entitled to receive an identification document from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as documentation proving permanent residency.
Law of Refugees, Article 57	Mexican authorities must assist refugees in obtaining documentation through the consular services of their country of origin.

Family Reunification After INM grants refugee status to an individual, the refugee may request to be reunified with his or her family.¹⁰² Although the law grants family reunification rights in conjunction with refugee status, refugees must wait for their permanent residency documents before petitioning for family members. Mexico designates as refugees all family members who come to Mexico via the family reunification process, and grants them permanent residency.¹⁰³ Due to procedural delays, this process may take up to six months.¹⁰⁴

Mexico permits refugees to solicit reunification with the permanent resident’s mother or father. It also allows for reunification with the spouse, who is granted temporary residency for two years and can then obtain permanent residency if the marriage remains intact. These requirements are the same for common-law partners or equivalent figures. Children and siblings are also eligible for family reunification, provided that they are unmarried children and adolescents or are under the refugee’s legal representation.¹⁰⁵

**Figure 17
Right to Reunification**

Relevant Law and Article	Description
Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section VI	Refugees may request family reunification. ^j
Implementing Legislation for Law of Refugees, Article 95	Family members who enter Mexico through the family reunification process are legally considered refugees and receive permanent residency.

Right to work. The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee established the legal precedent for refugees’ right to engage in wage-earning employment and receive the same social security benefits as nationals of a contracting state.¹⁰⁶ As a signatory to the Convention, Mexico has also established through its Constitution and Law of Migration a legal mechanism that grants refugees the legal right to work, or the freedom to participate in any lawful activity without punishment.¹⁰⁷ Article V and XXXIII of the Constitution and Article 44 of the Law of Migration entitle refugees the freedom to pursue a career or occupation of their choice. Similarly, the Law of Migration entitles refugees to receive a wage for the work they perform. As previously mentioned, refugees have the right to obtain legal documentation—such as a permanent resident card or CURP—that allows them to obtain employment.

**Figure 18
Right to Work**

Relevant Law and Article	Description
Mexican Constitution, Article V & XXXIII	Refugees are entitled to engage in the profession, industrial or commercial pursuit, or occupation of their choice
Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section IV	Refugees have the right to work and the freedom to participate in all legal activities without punishment.
Law of Migration, Article 54	Permanent residents may work in Mexico in exchange for remuneration, subject to an offer of employment.

Education. The Mexican Constitution and Law of Migration set the foundation for all refugees in Mexico to access public and private education across the country. The educational rights conferred to refugees in Mexico are equal to those granted to Mexican citizens.¹⁰⁸ Article 44 of the Law of Refugees requires that states revalidate foreign credentials and studies so that refugees can access educational services at the appropriate level for additional schooling, or pursue work opportunities for which they are trained.¹⁰⁹

^j This right distinguishes refugee status from complementary protection, which does not confer this right.

**Figure 19
Right to Education**

Relevant Law and Article	Description
Mexican Constitution, Article III & XXXIII	Refugees are entitled to free public education provided by the government.
Law of Migration, Article 8	Refugees have the right to access public and private education, independent of migratory status.
Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section III	The Mexican government must recognize previous studies and degrees earned by refugees, both those received in Mexico and abroad.

Health services. As with the right to work and access education, the Constitution and the Law of Migration grant refugees the right to receive public and private health services.¹¹⁰ For refugee applicants, and everyone in the country regardless of migratory status, the Ministry of Health must provide free health services in emergency situations, including in cases of severe illness or injury.¹¹¹ Legally, this guaranteed care includes both physical and mental health attention.

**Figure 20
Right to Health Services**

Relevant Law and Article	Description
Mexican Constitution, Article IV	Refugees are entitled to receive protection for their health from the government
Law of Migration, Article 8	Migrants have the right to receive public and private medical care. The Ministry of Health must provide free services to migrants in emergency situations, including in cases of severe illness or injury.

Chapter 5: Obstacles for Refugee Integration

Mexico's migratory laws outline a robust framework for refugee integration, but there are challenges with fulfilling the legal mandates. One primary challenge is a lack of institutional support for improving refugee integration at the federal, state, and municipal levels of government. In particular, financial resources and personnel have not kept pace with the increasing number of refugee applications, leaving COMAR without the capacity to fully address the current situation. To fill the gaps, civil society actors have stepped in, but their efforts cannot substitute for developing long-term institutional capacity.

In addition to large-scale structural barriers, refugees face challenges in attempting to access employment, healthcare, and education. These challenges include but are not limited to low wages, informality, job market saturation, difficulty accessing financial institutions, burdensome bureaucracy, and a general lack of information about rights and procedures. This combination of challenges complicates refugees' integration into Mexican society.

Institutional Barriers to Refugee Integration

While COMAR is the Mexican government agency charged with facilitating refugee integration, it faces multiple barriers in fulfilling its mandate. First, as previously discussed, COMAR's budgetary and personnel constraints prevent the agency from effectively fulfilling its legal obligation to assist refugees with integration. Instead, the increasing number of refugee status applications has led the agency to spend its limited resources on application processing. Second, COMAR's procedural guidelines for facilitating integration are not detailed in any federal legislation or implementing guidelines. Lacking clear guidance or specific mandates, COMAR often struggles to develop plans for improving legal, economic, and sociocultural services for refugee integration.

Non-state actors have stepped in to provide resources for refugee integration, but these efforts often fall short. The UNHCR is the most prominent international organization that helps to integrate refugees in Mexico. In 2019, it anticipates that it will "help accommodate 10,000 people of concern, support 6,000 to access employment and 5,700 to receive legal assistance," with those numbers covering both refugees and refugee status seekers.¹¹² Other civil society actors, such as church groups, non-governmental organizations, and individual migrant shelters, also provide certain forms of relief to refugees. These civil society actors can help to fill short-term capacity gaps, but they often act on an ad hoc basis or in response to emergencies. They have relieved some immediate pressure on the Mexican government but cannot replace efforts to strengthen Mexico's government institutions and long-term ability to assist refugees.

Obstacles to Accessing Basic Services

Beyond these institutional barriers, recognized refugees face a range of additional integration challenges when seeking access to employment, education, and healthcare. Many of these challenges stem from a lack of governmental support. For example, neither federal nor state governments provide any systematic program to support refugees seeking to enroll in schools, find housing and employment, open bank accounts, or meet other basic integration needs, as are found

in other countries.¹¹³ Non-governmental actors, such as the UNHCR, lead integration programs, but have limited scope.

Employment. As noted previously, refugees are permanent residents under Mexican law and are granted certain forms of documentation and the right to work.¹¹⁴ However, refugees may find it difficult to obtain a secure job and achieve financial security. Some of the employment barriers are structural, with anecdotes indicating that employers may continue to require the obsolete FM3 migration form for hiring purposes. (The FM3 form was once used to establish temporary residency but has been retired since August 2018).¹¹⁵ Other barriers may emerge from a lack of information about local job markets, with refugees relying heavily on personal networks or physical job postings advertised in public spaces like local markets.

Oftentimes, these jobs are in the informal economy. In Mexico City, refugees frequently work in construction, masonry, and in the restaurant business as waiters or cooks, which can fluctuate seasonally or with changing economic conditions.¹¹⁶ In northern Mexico, particularly in border cities like Tijuana, refugees' main employment opportunities are in industrial factories, or *maquiladoras*.¹¹⁷ These jobs do not always provide refugees with social benefits such as healthcare, social security, and disability or life insurance. Additionally, the positions may involve strenuous or even hazardous work conditions, such as in *maquiladoras*, where refugees have been exposed to chemicals within facilities that lack proper ventilation.¹¹⁸

Refugees in these jobs also generally earn relatively low wages across the entire country. In 2019, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration raised the federal minimum wage by 16.2 percent to reach MX\$103 (US\$5.43) per day or US\$0.68 an hour for an average eight hour work day.^{k119} In Mexico's northern border states—where wages are higher than in any other region in the country—the minimum wage is MX\$177 (US\$9.33) per day.¹²⁰ However, these increased wages remain lower than the minimum wages throughout NTCA countries, which average around MX\$211.21 (US\$11.20) a day.¹ Particularly for families with children or other dependents, these low wages may not be sufficient to cover basic services like food and housing, and can dissuade refugees from settling permanently in Mexico.

There is also a mismatch between Mexico's labor demands and the areas where most refugees live.¹²¹ While many employers throughout the country need labor, matching refugees to these open positions remains a challenge.^{m122} Currently, the UNHCR is leading Mexico's efforts to improve relations and information sharing between the public and private sectors. The refugee organization has developed relationships with private companies over the last few years, mostly to raise awareness and counter commonly-held misconceptions about refugees. This informal outreach specifically aims to inform businesses that refugees have the legal right to work and are guaranteed access to employment.¹²³ Anecdotally, parts of the private sector have since begun advertising jobs to refugees.¹²⁴

Since 2016, the UNHCR has also headed a relocation initiative in Mexico to better match refugees with available jobs.¹²⁵ The program helps refugees in southern Mexico resettle in metropolitan

^k USD figured based on exchange rates from April 8, 2019.

¹ See numbers from earlier in report.

^m Mexican officials' estimate that there are 100,000 open jobs.

areas that have more employment opportunities and a greater capacity to absorb workers. The program's first initiative launched in Saltillo, Coahuila, in collaboration with the local migrant shelter, Casa del Migrante. The program recently expanded to Guadalajara, Jalisco, in collaboration with the FM4 Paso Libre migrant shelter.¹²⁶ The UNHCR keeps track of program participants and their integration into Mexican society by sending social workers on home visits.¹²⁷

Overall, the program has been a success. In 2017, a reported 92 percent of the 224 refugees enrolled in the Saltillo relocation program were working in full-time jobs, and saw their average weekly wages increase from around MX\$900 (US\$47.46) to MX\$1500 (US\$79.11).¹²⁸ Similarly, 100 percent of school-age children in the program were enrolled in school, compared to only 18 percent of children prior to their participation in the program.¹²⁹ Yet the greatest indicator of the program's success is that 86 percent of participants have remained in their new location, with 10 percent migrating to other cities in Mexico, and only 4 percent moving onward to the United States.¹³⁰ⁿ The success of these programs may provide a model to be replicated on a larger scale.¹³¹

Even if refugees are able to find employment, however, they often struggle to access their legal right to financial services. This may include difficulties such as opening a bank account to deposit income or applying for credit cards. Part of this challenge stems from the fact that banks may still request the now defunct FM1 and FM2 visas that were previously used to establish residency, simply because they have not yet updated their systems.¹³² While another part of the challenge comes from many refugees' lack of knowledge regarding finances and financial institutions.¹³³ To address this issue, the FM4 Paso Libre shelter in Guadalajara, in collaboration with the UNHCR, teaches refugees how to budget, manage savings, and provides other financial information. Overall, refugees' limited access to financial systems makes them more vulnerable to theft, because they must deal exclusively with cash, and can complicate their ability to apply for credit lines.

Education. The Mexican Constitution guarantees that all individuals within the country, regardless of migratory status, be able to access both public and private education services.¹³⁴ The Law of Migration and the Law of Refugees reinforce these rights, and the latter also ensures that Mexican schools recognize coursework and credentials completed in another country.¹³⁵ In October 2018, President Enrique Peña Nieto also mentioned these rights while announcing the migratory proposal "Plan Estás en Tu Casa," although specific details about educational integration were not included in the announcement.¹³⁶

In practice, refugees face a number of obstacles when they attempt to access Mexico's education system. The first step for refugee families is validating previous coursework in order to enroll their children into the appropriate grade. This step can be marked by burdensome administrative processes. For example, in Tapachula, Chiapas, refugee parents have reported difficulties validating their children's foreign education credentials.¹³⁷ As a result, some families have had to travel five hours to the Ministry of Education in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the Chiapas state capital, for an official to override the administrative restrictions.¹³⁸ For families facing economic hardship, or those with both parents working full time, traveling between cities to resolve administrative issues may not be feasible.

ⁿ Those who do leave the program usually cite dissatisfaction with the industrial work, highlighting their familiarity and background in agriculture. Some also have social ties in other areas.

In response, civil society groups, such as Sin Fronteras, have organized campaigns to help refugees navigate the school enrollment process and reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies. The UNHCR has provided support to parents looking to enroll their children in school in Chiapas, and COMAR's Mexico City office partners with local community organizations to provide support.¹³⁹ On the administrative side, in 2015, the Institute for Women in Migration (*El Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración*, IMUMI) successfully lobbied the Mexican Department of Education to eliminate the requirement that foreign education documents be notarized.¹⁴⁰

Despite this change in the law, schools still frequently reject foreign documents and have been slow to adjust to the new mandate.¹⁴¹ In particular, schools may request “constancias de origen” for adult refugees seeking to continue their education. Only consular officials can provide these documents, and consulates for Honduras and El Salvador at times have limited capacity given the numbers of Hondurans and Salvadorans seeking assistance in Mexico.¹⁴² To overcome this challenge, FM4 works with Mexico's National Education Institute for Adults (*Instituto Nacional de la Educación para los Adultos*, INEA) to have schools recognize diplomas from other countries.¹⁴³

Once refugee children are enrolled in classes, they may face obstacles integrating into the classroom. The local, state, and federal Mexican school systems have been slow in developing strategies to actively orient and integrate students of varying cultural backgrounds, languages, socioeconomic status, and education levels. Part of the problem lies in the fact that there is little consensus on which level of government should be responsible for improving refugee children's educational opportunities. National teacher education and professional development programs do not incorporate sensitization to particular student populations, including refugees, into their training.¹⁴⁴ As a result, children in these populations may go unnoticed, and any particular academic or socioemotional needs may go unaddressed. In turn, these children sometimes face discrimination for their noticeably different accents.¹⁴⁵ Discrimination from their peers can lead to both socioemotional and academic difficulties.¹⁴⁶

Healthcare. As previously mentioned, Mexican law guarantees access to healthcare for all people within the country, but refugees frequently struggle to access health services. Despite increasing numbers of refugees in Mexico, the Mexican government has not stepped up its commitment and capacity to confront this population's healthcare needs. Of particular importance and concern is the high incidence of psychological trauma among refugees. Poor mental health conditions may stem from a host of different issues, including but not limited to experiences in refugees' home countries, violent or traumatic events along the migration route, and the stress of adjusting to a new country and community, particularly where they may feel unwelcome, unsupported, and disconnected.

The effects of this violence and stress are widespread, ranging from physical ailments to mental trauma. From 2015 to 2016, Doctors Without Borders treated 1,817 refugees and migrants across Mexico for mental health issues. Ninety-two percent had “lived through a violent event in their country of origin or during the route that threatens their mental health and wellbeing,” and nearly 50 percent cited physical violence as the reason they sought mental attention.¹⁴⁷ An additional one-third of the treated population had symptoms associated with depression, and nearly 12 percent

showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹⁴⁸

These psychological conditions, even when detected, are not always appropriately addressed with counseling, medication, or other forms of care. Beyond the intake interview, COMAR does not have any mechanisms to detect refugees' physical or mental health trauma. Although the Law of Refugees guarantees special protections to vulnerable populations, including victims of sexual and gender-based violence, there is no national system or program related to facilitating these protections.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, the persistent perception that these are "private matters" weakens these refugees' ability to communicate, justify, and secure the support that they may require, such as counseling, medical attention, or relocation and protective services.¹⁵⁰ To date, there have not been any systematic federal efforts to sensitize officials and the public to refugees' legal rights and particular needs.

Without proper treatment, trauma and similar psychological conditions can hamper refugees' ability to integrate into Mexican society. In general, individuals affected with these psychiatric conditions often struggle to find and keep a stable job, pursue and succeed in educational opportunities, and develop social ties and networks of support in local communities.¹⁵¹ The challenge is magnified in the area of sexual health, largely due to discrimination and a lack of understanding of the needs of specific groups, such as sexual assault victims and LGBTI refugees.

Discrimination and Ignorance

Discrimination, misconceptions, and ignorance about refugees is common among Mexican government officials and citizens, and this complicates efforts to protect and integrate refugees. Discrimination based on ethnicity or gender identity is common in Mexico. Refugees experience social exclusion, especially due to their belonging to a particular social group, and may be retraumatized by some of the same factors that led them to flee their countries of origin. For refugees who have faced discrimination, violence or abuse, and others who are particularly vulnerable, the state guarantees institutional assistance and protection. Yet this promise is vague and difficult to fulfill. Instead, there are anecdotes of poor procedural implementation and cases of discrimination and abuse by officials, who are seldom held accountable.¹⁵²

Vulnerable and minority populations, such as members of the LGBTI community, face even greater barriers for integrating into Mexican society. Like Central America, Mexico has a strongly heteronormative culture. Stigma toward individuals with alternative sexual orientations or gender identities prevails in many parts of the country, particularly in religious communities. The LGBTI population faces discrimination in various contexts, including from employers, landlords, and fellow refugees, who may hold the same social biases that the refugees confronted in their home communities. As a result, they struggle to break into the social networks that other refugees develop to find work, navigate public systems, and integrate socially into their communities.¹⁵³

Furthermore, refugees' own misunderstandings and lack of knowledge sometimes prevent them from defending their rights or pursuing access to social services in Mexico. Refugees' unfamiliarity with Mexico's legal protections under the Constitution, Law of Migration, and Law of Refugees means that many do not know their legally mandated social rights or guaranteed government support. However, even if refugees were better informed, widespread fear and mistrust

of Mexico's legal and justice systems may impede them from pursuing or advocating for their rights. Additionally, normalization of violent and traumatic events both in countries of origin and within Mexico may make refugees unaware or unable to express what they survived, and any special needs they may have for care, support, or protection.

Chapter 6: Policy Responses

From 2013 to 2018, COMAR reported that 13,363 individuals from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela were recognized with refugee status and complementary protection. This small but growing refugee community is dispersed throughout Mexico, particularly in the country's southern and northern border states, and in large cities such as Guadalajara and Mexico City. While refugees are guaranteed legal rights to education, employment, healthcare, and institutional support in Mexico, they face significant challenges in accessing these rights.

To address these challenges, Mexico's federal government should assume its legal responsibility to better protect and support refugees throughout the country. However, local and state governments, as well as private actors, can also play a supportive role in refugees' transition and integration into society, helping them to become healthy, stable, and productive community members. By designing policies and revamping services for refugees, the Mexican government would not only fulfill its legal commitments, but also foster long-term cultural and economic benefits.

1. Expand COMAR's Operational Capacity and Address Staffing Concerns

Increase COMAR's budget. Over the past six years, COMAR's fiscal appropriations have not kept pace with the number of refugee applications. From 2013 to 2018, the number of refugee applicants increased over 2,000 percent, while the budget increased by only 95 percent. As a result, the agency has been unable to meet the deadlines required by law, such as the 45 business day turnaround on application decisions. If COMAR is to fulfill its mandate, it must begin to receive a budget that is commensurate with its workload.

- COMAR should receive a budget of MX\$119.2 million (US\$6.3 million), which is 472 percent more than it currently receives. The following methodology was used as a starting point to reach this number: In 2016, COMAR had a budget of MX\$22.3 million (US\$1.17 million) and successfully processed applications for 8,784 people, closing out the year with only four pending cases. This means that COMAR spent an average of MX\$2,537 (US\$134.54) per applicant. The agency is projecting 47,000 people will apply in 2019. With 2016's success as a benchmark, and accounting for the MX\$20 million (US\$1.06 million) provided by UNHCR and the MX\$20.8 million (US\$1.1 million) already appropriated by the government, COMAR should receive an additional MX\$78.4 million (US\$4.15 million) for its protection operations in 2019.
- In 2020, to help establish the Monterrey office mentioned below, COMAR should receive a one-time appropriation increase to cover the start-up costs for establishing the office.

Improve Fiscal Transparency. COMAR should publish more transparent budget data. With the current nebulous budget data, it is difficult to determine whether or not COMAR spends money effectively. This concern will only increase if the refugee agency receives a larger budget.

- COMAR should publish budgetary data that provides greater specificity to the listed expenses. For example, the expense that says “Contracting of other services” should provide subsections or line items outlining the contracted services.
- COMAR should allocate money for service activities every year, rather than doing so sporadically. Items such as “Printing and promotion of informative material” will recur every year, and the budget should reflect that.
- To ensure that money is being allocated appropriately, COMAR should undergo a financial audit conducted by an independent third-party company. This would serve as an impartial supplement to the reviews performed by the *Auditoría Superior de la Federación*, Mexico’s governmental organization dedicated to internal audits.

Increase COMAR’s geographic scope. In addition to investing in new technology and staff, COMAR should expand its geographic scope. As previously discussed, individuals are not always aware of their right to seek refugee status when they enter the country and others may not decide to submit an application until they are in the northern part of the country. However, once refugee status seekers reach these northern states, there are no COMAR offices. This limits refugee status seekers’ ability to access the full range of refugee services available to them further south.

- **Northern Office.** An initial expansion should include a delegation in the city of Monterrey, Nuevo León. This city leads Mexico’s northern region in refugee applications submitted through INM, accounting for 45 percent of all refugee status applications from this region in 2018.¹⁵⁴ It should start out as a smaller office, similar to the delegation in Tenosique, Tabasco.
- **Port of Entry Outreach Team.** The COMAR delegation in Chiapas should send an outreach team to the point of entry in Ciudad Hidalgo. Ciudad Hidalgo is the main crossing point on the international border with Guatemala. Sending a small team of employees to this border crossing area could help the agency to make contact with more refugees as they cross into Mexico. This team would be charged with informing migrants of their right to seek refugee status and providing them with information on the COMAR office in Tapachula.

Improve assistance services. Chapter IV of the Law of Refugees charges the government with facilitating refugees’ integration into the country. COMAR assistance officers hold this responsibility and perform key functions to ensure that refugees have the tools they need to integrate into Mexican society, including facilitating access to healthcare and housing, providing information on their rights, and helping to report crimes.¹⁵⁵ However, given the high numbers of refugee status applications, COMAR has had to prioritize adjudicating applications over providing refugee assistance. As of October 31, 2018, only 4 of the 48 COMAR employees were assigned to the assistance field.¹⁵⁶ To ensure that refugees are given the opportunity to become self-sufficient members of Mexican society, COMAR should improve its assistance actions.

- In addition to the director and upper-management positions, each COMAR office should be staffed with assistance officers and a department supervisor (*jefe de departamento de asistencia*).
- While application processing should remain the agency’s priority, COMAR should make efforts to dedicate resources to the area of assistance. Allocating funds for these services

should be seen as making an investment in Mexico's future.

- Priority should be given to the Chiapas office, where 60 percent of applications are currently being received, and where access to civil society support is more limited than in Mexico City.
- COMAR should take advantage of UNHCR's expertise in the area of refugee integration and coordinate to fill any gaps in its services.

Improve employee training and better facilitate self-care. COMAR lacks sufficient support for its employees. This report's researchers interviewed three COMAR officers with a combined eight years of experience. Their employment spanned from 2013 to 2017 and included both protection and assistance work in the Chiapas and Mexico City offices. Each COMAR officer emphasized that support from COMAR was inadequate. Initial training sessions were limited and often focused solely on legal issues, leaving new hires alone to navigate the actual practice of protection and assistance work. This includes learning how to cope with secondary trauma and managing self-care. Access to prescribed vacation time was also restricted. Despite having earned paid time-off, the former employees complained of having to negotiate to take vacations. In the cases when time-off requests were approved, employees had to work extra hours before and after their vacation in order to make up the work. This resulted in high levels of employee burnout and turnover.

- COMAR should develop a rigorous orientation and training schedule that incorporates all aspects of the job and not just law. This should include elements of case management, interview skills, and trauma-informed care.
- Training should be an ongoing process that helps address both the agency and the staff's needs. COMAR should arrange monthly trainings and seek input from employees as to the trainings' content and purpose. These could range from human trafficking seminars to Excel workshops.
- The agency should honor vacation requests when sufficient time has been accrued. This would result in a more productive and engaged staff and strengthen employee retention.
- Other self-care initiatives, such as stress-relieving activities and mental health workshops, should be implemented to help employees cope with secondary trauma.

Decrease administrative burden on refugee status applicants. Refugee status applicants have limited freedom of movement during the application process and must wait for a decision in the state where they applied. Given current backlogs, applicants may wait up to one year to receive a determination. Meanwhile, most refugee status applicants are waiting in Mexico's southern border states, which is the most economically depressed region in Mexico. Additionally, current application procedures require that applicants physically sign in at their designated COMAR office once a week during typical working hours. Wait times to check-in are often a few hours, which places a burden on applicants who are seeking steady employment or are already working.

- COMAR should provide applicants more freedom of movement during the adjudication of their cases by allowing them to easily transfer their cases between states. In states that do not have a COMAR office, applicants should be able to check in at INM offices.
- COMAR should allow employed applicants to check-in outside of typical working hours, which could be accomplished by extending office hours on a particular day of the week. This would help to ensure that individuals are not having to risk their jobs in order to fulfill

the reporting requirement.

- COMAR should make the check-in requirement less frequent. Allowing applicants to check-in once every two weeks, as opposed to weekly, would help to reduce the administrative burden placed on refugee status seekers while still providing COMAR with the assurance that applications have not been abandoned.

2. Expand and Improve Integration and Support Services

Recognized refugees continue to face obstacles in accessing their rights, social services, and other forms of support. To improve refugee integration requires concerted efforts across federal, state, and local governments to increase access to health and education services and employment initiatives. Part of the improvements will need to come from increasing budgetary and administrative capacity, and the other part will need to come through additional initiatives for specific refugee populations, including sexual and ethnic minorities, school children, victims of sexual violence, and those suffering from mental health conditions. In addition, there should be accountability and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that refugees can access legally mandated services and forms of support.

Create Identifiable Integration Metrics. Currently, there are no official metrics for evaluating refugee integration in Mexico. To improve support for refugees, COMAR, the Office of Human Rights, Population, and Migration in SEGOB, and the UNHCR should work together to develop metrics for measuring refugees' integration into Mexican society. This information would allow for more targeted programs and would help prevent inefficient resource allocation. There are international examples that these organizations could look toward. For example, Central European governments, in collaboration with the UNHCR, developed a tool to holistically evaluate all legal, socio-economic, cultural, and educational aspects of refugees' lives. This evaluation aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of various refugee integration policies. The assessment tool will become operational in the next 18 months.

- COMAR and the Office of Human Rights, Population, and Migration within SEGOB should work with the UNHCR to develop a tool to evaluate refugee integration into Mexican society.
- Project collaborators should develop indicators for measuring refugee integration across different areas, such as employment, education, and housing. These indicators would allow authorities to determine the areas in need of attention and improvement.
- In developing the tool, the project collaborators should seek input from local and state governments and civil society actors—such as migrant shelters and religious groups—to tailor indicators to local conditions.
- The data collection can be modeled on the UNHCR's current home visits in Saltillo and Guadalajara, which evaluate the effectiveness of the refugee resettlement programs through personal interviews.

Increasing cooperation between federal, state, and municipal governments. Authorities across different levels of Mexico's government may not always regularly communicate with one another regarding refugee issues. By increasing cooperation among various levels of government, particularly with regards to refugee integration programs, authorities can identify best practices

and prevent repeating similar mistakes.

- The Office of Human Rights, Population, and Migration within SEGOB should create a platform for national dialogue on refugee integration that includes representation from all levels of the Mexican government, civil society organizations, and the private sector. The platform may need to start small, such as with a national public forum, and grow over time. Officials in charge of migration issues for their state or municipality could attend and report back findings to be implemented in their area of responsibility. This platform would allow participating parties to align objectives, measures, and information to create more coherent integration policies.
- SEGOB should provide funding to the respective State Commissions for Human Rights (*Comisiones Estatales de los Derechos Humanos*, CEDH) for states with sizable refugee populations in order to publish studies that highlight how refugees impact labor, health services, housing, education, and other parts of society in their geographic area. These studies can help provide information regarding how refugee populations contribute to cities and identify where further support may be necessary.

Employment

Some refugees arrive in Mexico with little or no formal education or job training. As a result, it may be difficult to find well paying, formal employment to support themselves and their families. In conjunction with current relocation and integration programs—such as the UNHCR’s initiatives in Saltillo and Guadalajara—there are a series of steps that government officials and non-government organizations could take to connect refugees with labor markets and job training opportunities. The following recommendations aim to improve job training programs and market information for refugees.

Expanding job training programs, with an emphasis on vocational training. Vocational training programs provide refugees with an entry point into the labor market. In November 2018, the Scalabrini International Migration Network inaugurated vocational training centers for migrants and refugee seekers in Guadalajara and Mexico City. In light of this effort:

- The Ministry of Labor, in consultation with civil society organizations, should evaluate the two recent training programs and develop plans for expanding vocational training to other migrant shelters. Programs should collect and report data on outcomes, which would be used in refining and updating future refugee-focused programs.
- The Ministry of Labor, in consultation with civil society organizations, should also form partnerships with private sector representatives, to explore opportunities for apprenticeship programs and job placements.
- Civil society organizations and inter-governmental organizations, such as the UNHCR, should coordinate with the Ministry of Labor to identify LGBTI-friendly workplaces for refugees. This should also include input from LGBTI advocacy and research groups. These actors should also develop sensitization training curriculum to help make Mexican workplaces more welcoming for all employees regardless of their background or sexual orientation / gender identity.

Strengthen job market information. Over the past few years, state governments and non-governmental organizations have worked together to improve refugees' job prospects. For example, in November 2018, the government of Baja California advertised more than 20,000 vacancies to migrants at the Ciudad Deportiva temporary shelter through a Job Fair in Tijuana. State authorities offered bus transport from the shelter to the venue. While it is too soon to know the job fair's long-term impact, it is likely that some migrants found employment and were persuaded to seek permanent status in Mexico. Other state governments should follow suit and take additional steps to improve employment information for refugees.

- Civil society organizations and the Office of Human Rights, Population, and Migration in SEGOB should collaborate with the private sector to conduct analyses that identify key industries, sectors, and geographic areas with labor market absorption potential. This might include sparsely populated, economically productive northern states that border the United States, such as Nuevo León, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Sonora.
- State and local authorities should draw on the best practices from the Tijuana Job Fair to create mechanisms for disseminating job market information to refugees. A comprehensive approach might include web portals, social media pages, phone applications, and local job fairs with subsidized or free transportation.

Education

Mexican law grants refugees the right to receive an education, but refugees often face challenges in accessing education services. Integration into schools, outdated systems for school administrators, and difficulties recognizing previous coursework all need to be improved or remedied for refugees attempting to integrate into Mexican society and access employment opportunities.

Provide administrative actors at the local level with more tools to alleviate bureaucratic barriers for refugees. The Ministry of Education should take the lead on addressing refugee integration challenges in Mexican schools. The Ministry could do this by granting administrators and faculty at the local level more information, training, and autonomy to help facilitate an understanding of refugees' legal rights and assist in refugee integration.

- The Ministry of Education should disseminate standardized information to ensure local school administrators and directors in cities with high concentration of refugees like Mexico City and Guadalajara are aware of refugee rights and administrative procedures. This may include issuing a mandatory training workshop for school administrators, faculty, and staff to ensure comprehensive understanding of refugee's legal rights and Mexico's overall refugee context.
- Ensure school administrators uphold and enforce the revalidation process of previous academic studies, credentials, and degrees from their country of origin in a reasonable time period after a refugee has submitted a request for revalidation. In order to ease this process, the Ministry of Education should grant local school administrators the authority to override restrictions at the local school level instead of the Ministry of Education offices.

Facilitate classroom integration. Refugees face challenges assimilating into schools and classrooms due to a range of barriers. The Ministry of Education should take specific steps to help primary, secondary, and high school administrators to ensure that refugee children receive adequate resources and support. Some of these steps would also benefit deported Mexican children who grew up in the United States and face similar integration challenges in Mexican schools.

- The Ministry of Education should coordinate with COMAR and the UNHCR to create an orientation program for refugee children to ease their transition into Mexican culture and society. The program should include a cultural introduction to Mexico, familiarize them with academic curriculum, and facilitate a family orientation for parents of refugee children.
- The Ministry of Education should require that teachers who have direct contact with refugee populations undergo professional development workshops in order to understand the socio-political environment for refugees in Mexico. This would help them be better prepared to address refugees' diversity and any challenges that emerge inside the classroom.
- The Ministry of Education should incorporate cross-culture studies into the academic curriculum to increase awareness and understanding of diverse cultures amongst teachers and students. This would help to combat discrimination against refugees in schools. These studies should include a focus on displacement and migration histories that are specific to Latin America and accurately challenge biases about refugees.
- The Ministry of Education and COMAR should provide benchmark exams on critical subject areas such as mathematics, reading, and writing in order to more efficiently evaluate and identify refugee students' education levels to help them better succeed in the classroom. Refugee students should also have the opportunity to receive remedial education and tutoring to advance their confidence and ability to academically flourish.

Healthcare

Refugees often face conditions in their countries of origin and in their transit to and through Mexico that take a significant toll on their physical and mental health. Despite the Mexican Constitution and Law of Migration outlining refugees' right to receive healthcare, the population often faces challenges in accessing these services due to insufficient programs to meet their specific needs. The Ministry of Health and state-level actors under the National Health System should increase their financial resources and better allocate personnel to ensure that refugees live healthy lives in Mexico.

Address administrative inefficiencies. A lack of accountability mechanisms, intergovernmental cooperation, and insufficient information regarding refugees' legal rights and challenges impede the population's access to targeted healthcare services. The Ministry of Health, in coordination with state-level healthcare administrators across Mexico, can help alleviate these challenges.

- The Ministry of Health should disseminate information on refugees' rights to improve awareness among healthcare providers. In addition, the Ministry of Health should offer workshops to train state healthcare professionals that work closely with refugee and migrant populations. This training would aim to reduce discrimination and highlight these

populations' specific needs.

- The Ministry of Health at the state-level should conduct semi-annual audits of public healthcare facilities to ensure the healthcare providers and facilities are up to date and operating in accordance with Mexican law to allow fair and equal access to healthcare services for all populations, including refugees.

Address mental health. Refugees' psychological conditions, even when detected, are not always appropriately addressed through counseling, medication, or other forms of care. Diversifying the types of healthcare services available in the Seguro Popular to refugees, especially for mental health, would be a significant step in improving their access to healthcare. The Ministry of Health and healthcare providers at the state-level should prioritize strengthening mental health screening and support for refugees. In order to ensure that these unaddressed issues do not have consequences on refugees' integration, the Ministry of Health should strengthen mental health services.

- The Ministry of Health should coordinate with COMAR to provide initial case detection strategies such as counseling and psychological consultations on an ongoing basis during and post-processing for refugees. This initial screening could take place at COMAR and INM offices in order to detect mental health conditions, document patients' trauma histories, and collect any relevant details to integrate into specialized care for affected individuals.
- The Ministry of Health should also provide health screenings and care at COMAR and INM offices for victims of sexual and gender-based violence, especially women and LGBTI individuals. These groups could also receive safety strategies, such as tips for contacting support hotlines, safety information, and emergency services numbers in Mexico.
- The Ministry of Health should increase staffing of specialized healthcare professionals, especially psychologists, to provide psychiatric and behavioral medicine services in areas with large refugee populations.

3. Reduce Discrimination Through Research, Sensitization, and Engagement

Systematically study public perception and information on refugees. Mexican citizens and authorities are often unaware of refugees' rights, why they might seek international protection, and the challenges that they face while integrating into Mexican society. Part of the challenge is that there has been little research completed on the topic and the research that exists may not always be recent. For example, the UNHCR published the most recent in-depth report on the topic in 2012.¹⁵⁷ More recent studies of Mexican public opinion do not distinguish refugees from the general migrant population.¹⁵⁸

- In coordination with the UNHCR and Mexican civil society groups, COMAR and the Office of Human Rights, Population, and Migration in SEGOB should conduct a systematic study of public opinion toward refugees. It should include questions that tease out Mexican's understanding of refugees' specific challenges, both among officials and the general public.
- This information should be published and distributed via email and/or printed materials to inform the Office of Human Rights, Population, and Migration, INM, COMAR, and

other public or private actors. It should be used to guide information and sensitization campaigns to combat xenophobia and discriminatory acts against refugees.

- SEGOB should also examine knowledge gaps among INM and COMAR officials that may be contributing to inefficient or inadequate services for refugees, which could be then addressed through targeted trainings.

Raise public awareness and sensitization about refugees. Refugees often face misperceptions and stereotypes, including about their races, nationalities, languages spoken, gender identities, social groups, or the conditions within their home countries. As a result, refugees may face consistent discrimination within Mexico that inhibits their ability to integrate into Mexican society.

- The Ministry of Culture (*Secretaría de Cultura*) should collaborate with cultural institutions to produce informational exhibits on Central America and the treatment of refugees in Mexico. The Ministry of Culture should prioritize cities with COMAR delegations—for example, the Museum of Memory and Tolerance in Mexico City—and other areas with refugee resettlement and integration programs (such as Guadalajara and Saltillo). Ideally these exhibitions would be implemented around the same time in various regions of Mexico.
- To complement these efforts, the Ministry of Culture, in partnership with private foundations or other donors, could provide grants for a series of public art exhibits—for example, at the entrances to Chapultepec Park in Mexico City—enabling the public to reflect on and interact with images of refugees in their home countries and/or in Mexico.
- The Ministry of Culture should complement these strategies with a social media campaign, inviting the public to share stories about their experiences with refugees or how they have engaged with the public exhibits.

Engage the public to respond with reflection, activism, and service. An influx of factual and sensory information about refugees may be overwhelming to individuals or lead to confusion about how to become involved. There are low-cost ways that the government or civil society groups could invite the public to reflect on what they have learned or to engage in activism or service to the refugee community, spreading a culture of acceptance, welcoming, and accompaniment.

- Local cultural institutions, civil society groups, or media publications could launch a photo or essay contest aimed at refugees, Mexican citizens, or both that would focus on refugees' stories, whether negative or hopeful. Ideally, the winning entries could be published nationally through a media outlet or as a part of public exhibit.
- The Ministry of Education could develop and incorporate refugee awareness content, such as personal stories and case studies, in multicultural curriculum in public schools. This curriculum could be complemented with school field trips or volunteer days that allow students to engage with refugees and refugee services where possible, or with exhibits or information on refugees. Following these kinds of experiences, students should be invited to reflect through writing or group discussion.

Appendix I:

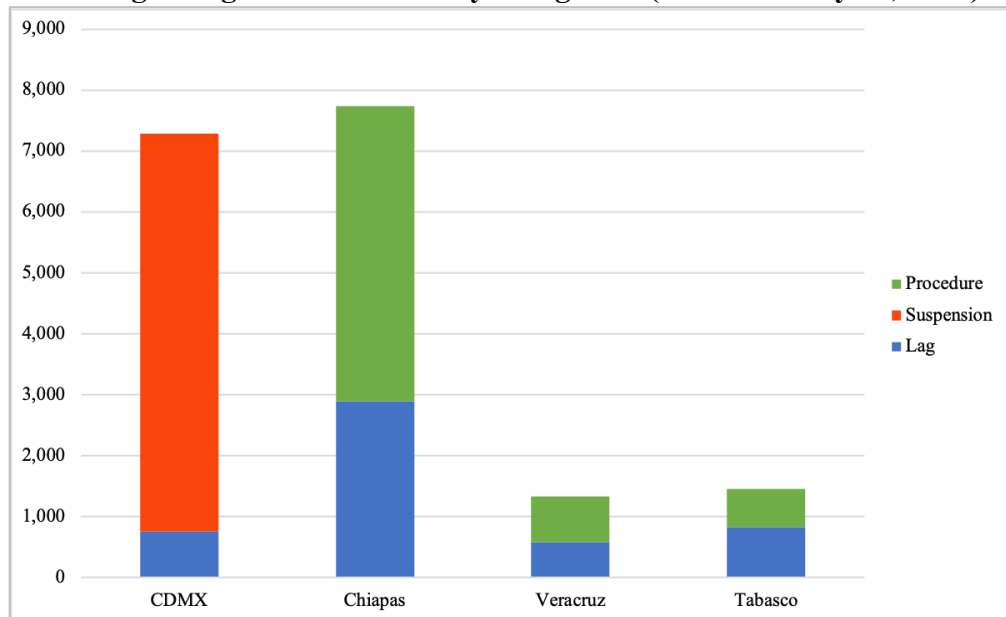
Figure 21
Refugee Status Application Process



Source: Resource of SEGOB, COMAR, UNHCR, National Commission on Human Rights; Accessed via Casa Monarca on April 13, 2019

Appendix II:

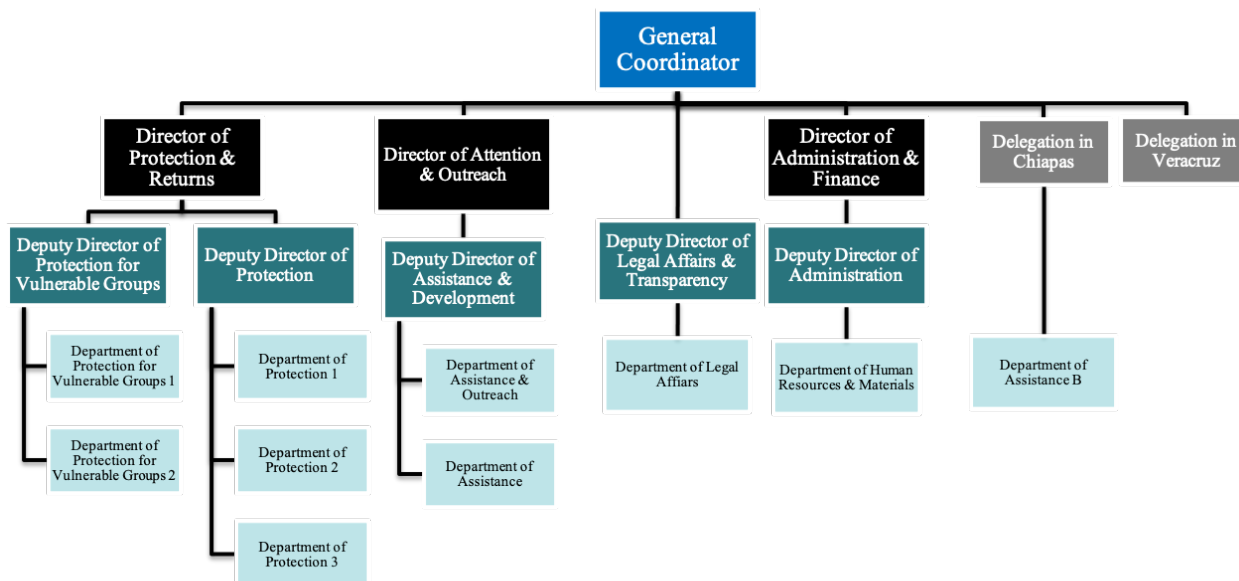
Figure 22
Pending Refugee Status Cases by Delegation (As of January 31, 2019)



Source: COMAR Data

Appendix III:

Figure 23
COMAR Organizational Chart (July 2017)¹⁵⁹



Source: COMAR

Appendix IV:

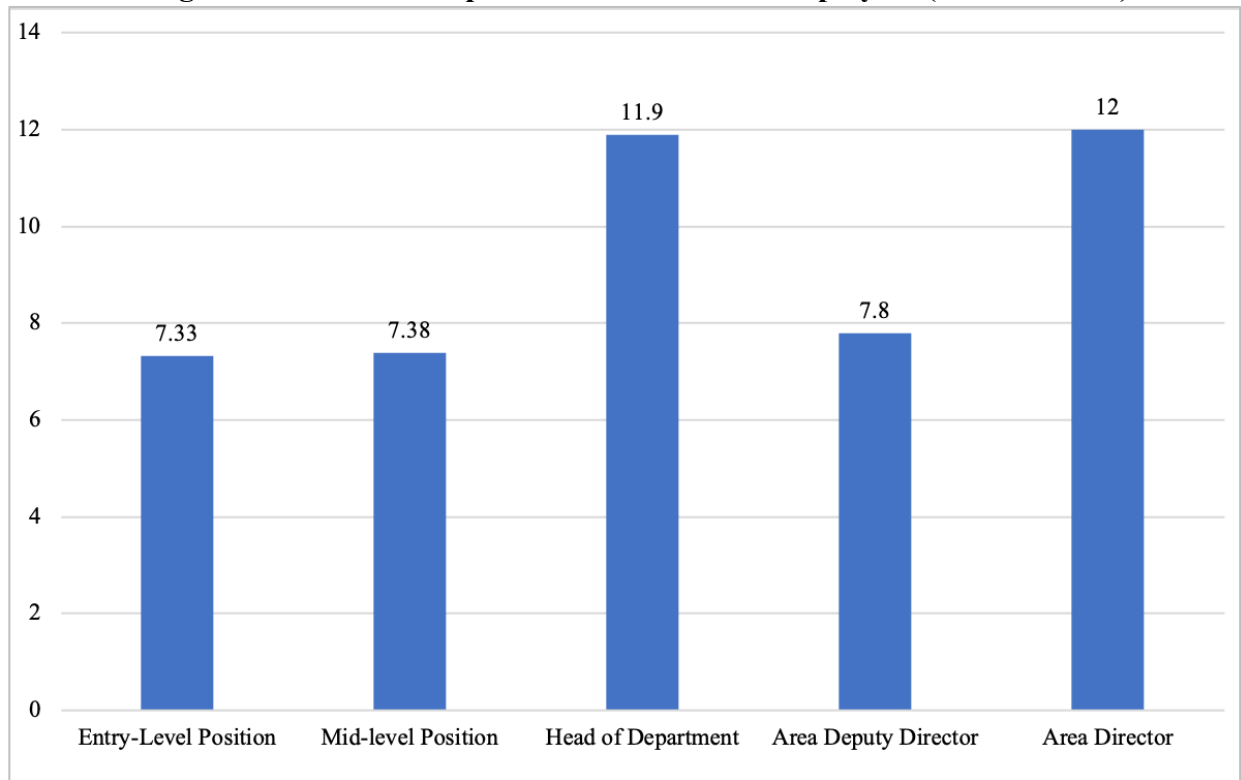
Figure 24
Number of UNHCR-COMAR Agreement Positions by COMAR Office (October 2016)¹⁶⁰

Main Job Function	Mexico City	Chiapas	Veracruz	Tabasco	Overall
Assistance	2	2	1	2	7
Protection	1	5	2	4	12
Legal	2	1	1	1	5
Administration	1	-	-	-	1
Psychologic	1	1	1	1	4
Total Jobs	7	9	5	8	29

Source: SEGOB, UNHCR Data

Appendix V:

Figure 25
Average Years of Work Experience for COMAR Employees (October 2018)¹⁶¹



Source: COMAR Data

Appendix VI:

COMAR Budget Information and Methodology¹⁶²

The reported data differentiates between “approved costs,” which are generally determined at the beginning of a fiscal year, and “modified” or “exercised costs,” which represent the amount of money actually spent on a particular program by the end of the year. This report uses the “modified costs” to determine COMAR’s spending on different categories.^o Overall, COMAR’s budgetary descriptions did not include specific expenses.

Each budget entry was assigned to one of six spending categories.

Personnel: This category includes payments directly to COMAR employees. This includes base salaries, year-end bonuses, and vacation/holiday premiums pay.

^o These modified costs were often significantly different from the originally approved budget.

Government Programs: This category includes COMAR’s payments to other Mexican government institutions and programs. These payments were primarily related to social security, retirement, medical insurance, separation insurance, and other payments required by the federal government.

Administrative: This category includes typical maintenance costs, including water, phone, and electricity.

Transportation: This category includes COMAR employees’ flights for their job. It also includes “Services for the movement of people,” which likely involves moving refugee status applicants or employees by bus or car from one place to another.

Services Provided: This category includes services for refugees and refugee status seekers. It includes “Services related to translations” and “Expenses related to cultural or sporting activities, and of extraordinary assistance.”

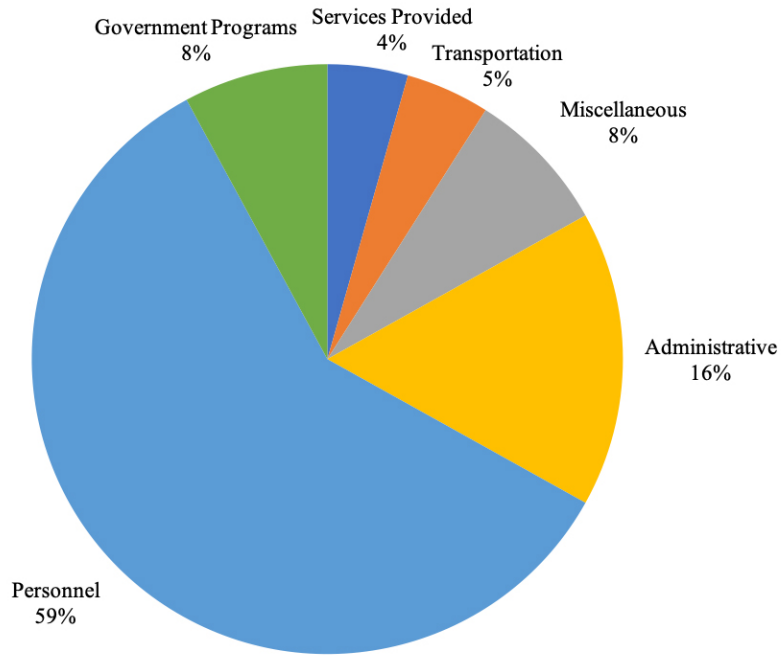
Miscellaneous: This category includes items that did not clearly fit in any of the other categories, often because they were ambiguous and non-descriptive. For example: “Contracting of other services.”

**Figure 26
COMAR Budget (2012-2018)**

Budget Category	Range in Percentage of Budget (%)	Average Percentage of Budget (%)
Personnel	32.7 to 59.0	43.1
Government Programs	7.9 to 21.7	11.9
Administrative	5.6 to 25.9	12.7
Miscellaneous	4.6 to 32.3	13.3
Transportation	4.2 to 12.1	7.8
Services Provided	1.6 to 35.0	11.2

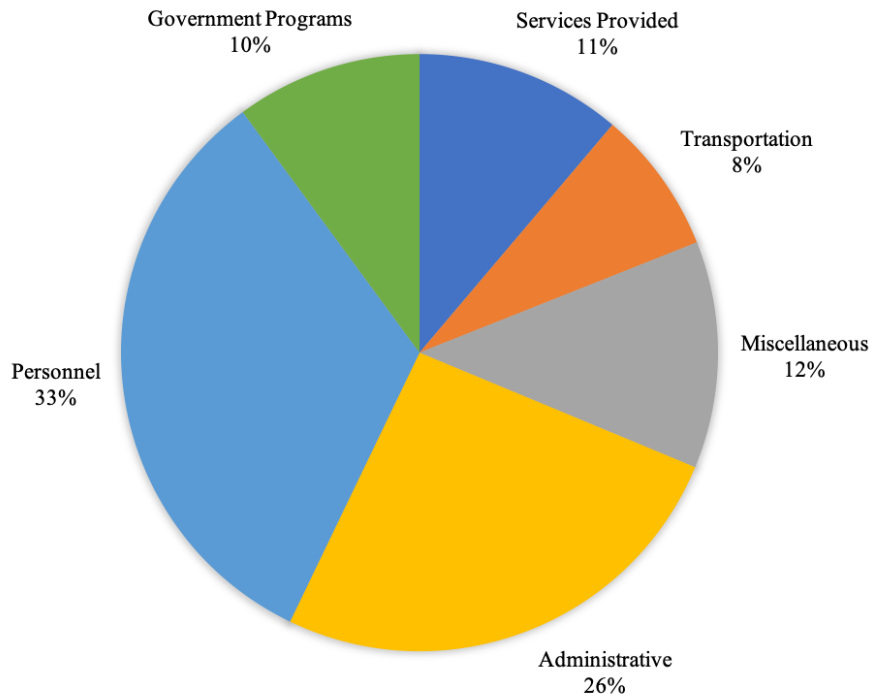
Source: COMAR Data

Figure 27
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2012



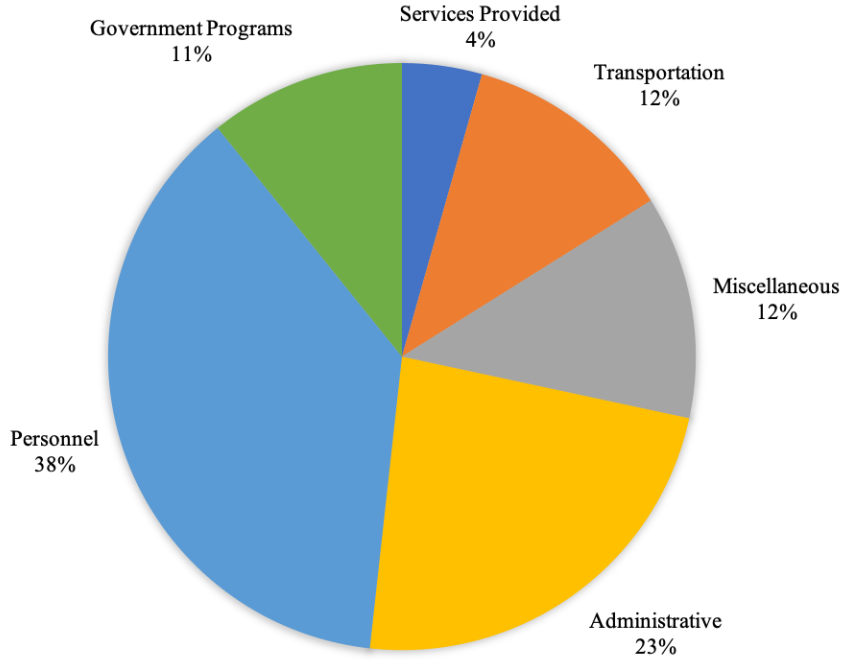
Source: COMAR Data

Figure 28
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2013



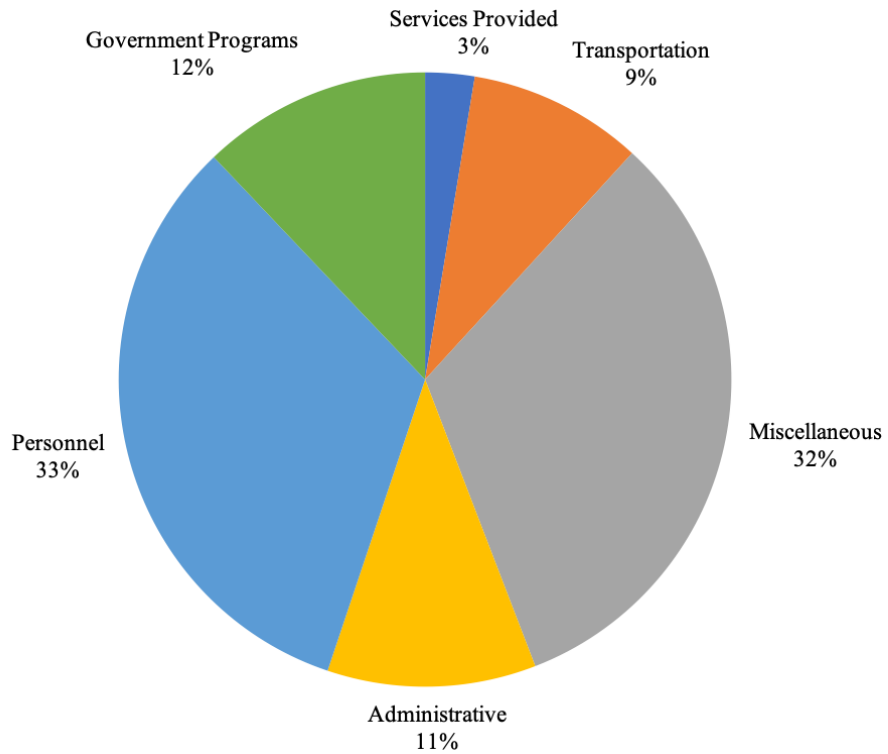
Source: COMAR Data

**Figure 29
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2014**



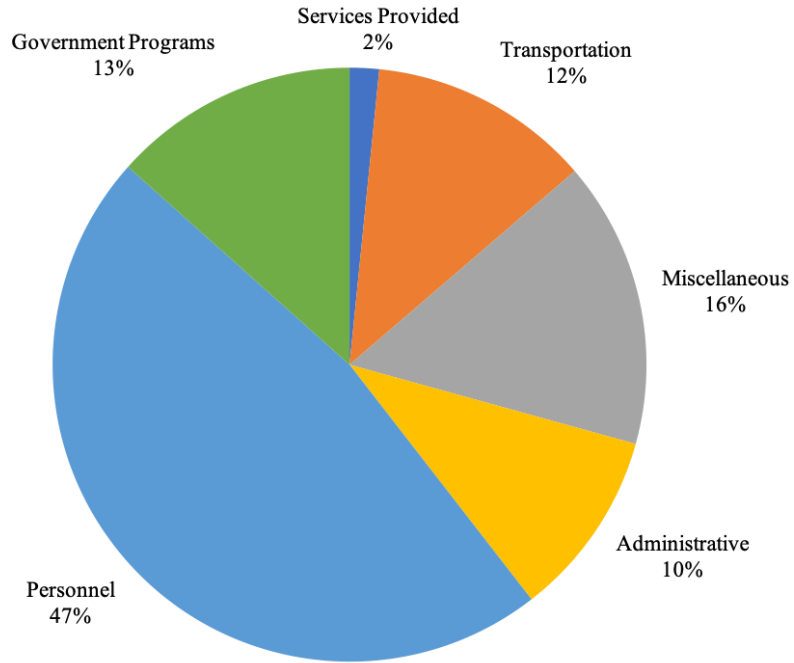
Source: COMAR Data

**Figure 30
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2015**



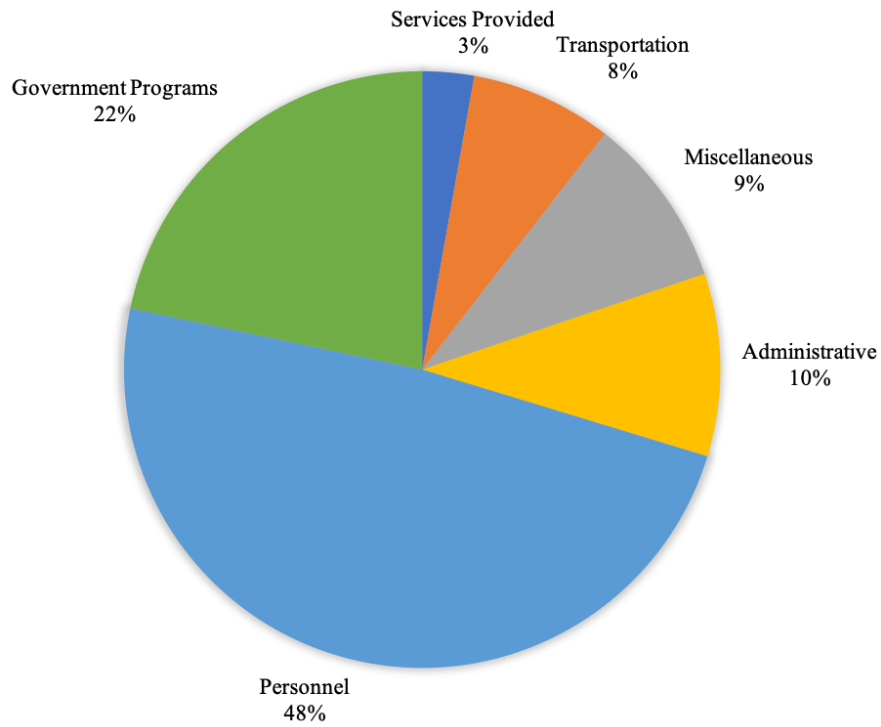
Source: COMAR Data

**Figure 31
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2016**



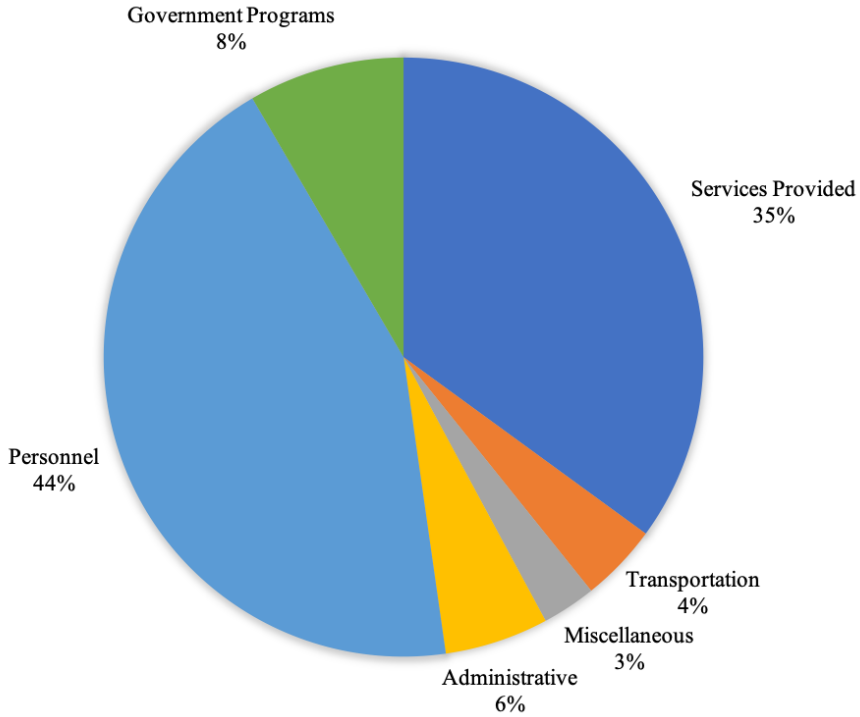
Source: COMAR Data

**Figure 32
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2017**



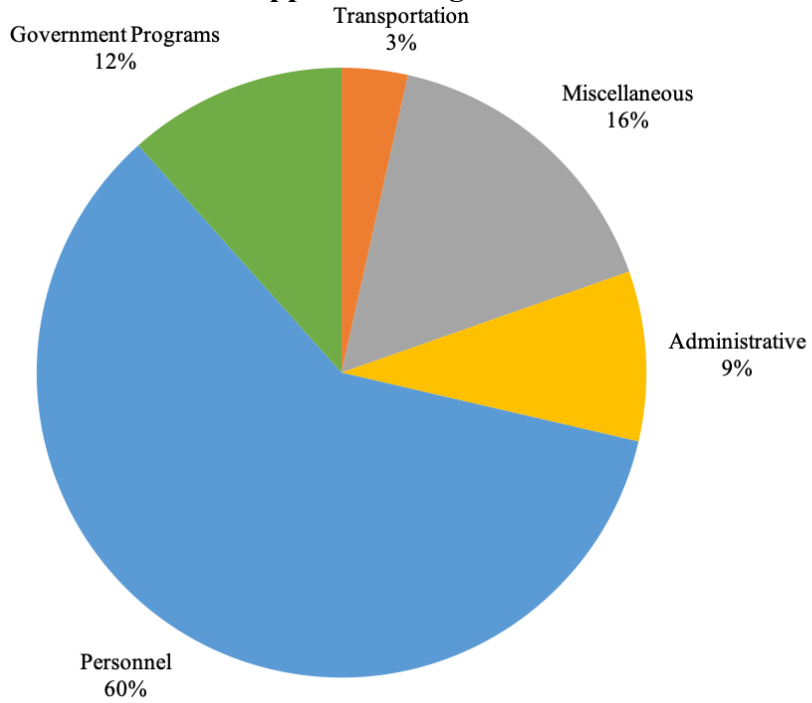
Source: COMAR Data

Figure 33
COMAR Budget Breakdown 2018



Source: COMAR Data

Figure 34
COMAR Approved Budget 2019



Source: COMAR Data

Appendix VII:

Figure 35
Laws Relating to Refugees

Type of right concerned <i>Relevant law and Article(s)</i>	Brief Description
Right to education <i>Constitution of Mexico, Article III</i>	Refugees are entitled to free public education provided by the government
Right to healthcare <i>Constitution of Mexico, Article IV</i>	Refugees are entitled to receive protection for their health from the government
Right to work <i>Constitution of Mexico, Article V</i>	Refugees have the right to engage in the profession, industrial or commercial pursuit, or occupation of their choice
Foreigners <i>Constitution of Mexico, Article 33</i>	Foreigners are not entitled to the guarantees granted by Chapter I, Title I, of the present Constitution
Non-refoulement <i>Law of Refugees, Article 28</i>	Complementary protection prevents a foreigner from being returned to a country where his or her life would be threatened or where they face extreme danger.
Non-refoulement <i>Law of Refugees, Article 29</i>	Applicants denied refugee status will automatically be considered for complementary protection.
Institutional Assistance <i>Law of Migration, Article 71</i>	SEGOB will create groups to protect migrants in Mexico. It will collaborate with state, municipal, civil society, and private groups in the operation of migrant protection groups.
Institutional Assistance <i>Law of Migration, Article 72</i>	Federal, state, and municipal government will assist legally established civil society groups.
Institutional Assistance <i>Law of Refugees, Articles 54-57</i>	The government will consider social and cultural contexts to bring greater assistance to refugees, such as for adolescents, the elderly, those with disabilities, etc.
Institutional Assistance <i>Implementing Framework for Law of Refugees, Articles 67-73</i>	COMAR will conduct personal interviews to determine individual needs and will create and execute an assistance and integration plan for each refugee.
Information and Confidentiality <i>Law of Migration, Articles 13, 69</i>	Migratory authorities must inform detained migrants of their rights and freedoms, including to apply for asylum, and information about how their applications will be processed.
Information and Confidentiality <i>Law of Migration, Article 14</i>	INM will provide translation services for non-Spanish speakers.
Information and Confidentiality <i>Law of Migration, Article 28</i>	The PGR will ensure that refugees' information remains confidential.

Legal Support and Due Process <i>Law of Migration, Article 70</i>	All migrants are entitled to legal representation, and INM should make it easier for civil society groups to offer legal representation to migrants.
Legal Support and Due Process <i>Law of Migration, Article 11</i>	Migrants have the right to administration of justice and to due process.
Legal Support and Due Process <i>Law of Migration, Article 113</i>	Migrants who are victims to crimes in Mexico are entitled to having their crimes investigated.
Legal Support and Due Process <i>Law of Migration, Articles 109, 119, 122</i>	Migrants have the right to legal counsel while in detention facilities and during deportation and assisted return.
Legal Support and Due Process <i>Law of Migration, Article 140</i>	INM officials who fail to provide migrants with knowledge of their rights, or who delay or impede the regularization process will be sanctioned.
Documentation and Regularization <i>Law of Migration, Article 9</i>	Officials of the Bureau of Vital Statistics cannot deny to issue documentation on the basis of migratory status.
Documentation and Regularization <i>Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section V</i>	Refugees are entitled to receive an identification document from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as documentation proving permanent residency.
Documentation and Regularization <i>Law of Refugees, Article 57</i>	Mexican authorities must assist refugees in obtaining documentation through the consular services of their country of origin.
Family Reunification <i>Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section VI</i>	Refugees may request family reunification.
Family Reunification <i>Implementing Framework for Law of Refugees, Article 95</i>	Family members who enter Mexico through the family reunification process are legally considered refugees and receive permanent residency.
Education <i>Law of Migration, Article 8</i>	Migrants have right to access public and private education, independent of migratory status.
Education <i>Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section III</i>	The Mexican government must recognize previous studies and degrees earned by refugees, both those received in Mexico and abroad.
Health Services <i>Law of Migration, Article 8</i>	Migrants have right to receive public and private medical care. The Ministry of Health must provide free services to migrants in emergency situations, including in cases of severe illness or injury.
Right to Work <i>Law of Refugees, Article 44, Section IV</i>	Refugees have the right to work and the freedom to participate in all legal activities without punishment.
Right to Work <i>Law of Migration, Article 54</i>	Permanent residents may work in Mexico in exchange for remuneration, subject to an offer of employment.

Sources: Mexican Constitution, Law of Refugees, Law of Migration

Endnotes

- ¹ Susanne Jones, “Guatemalan Migration in Times of Civil War and Post-War Challenges,” Migration Policy Institute, 2013.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Beatriz Manz, “Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua) Patterns of Human Rights Violations,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2008.
- ⁴ Peter J. Meyer, Rhonda Margesson, Clare Ribando Seelke, and Maureen Taft-Morales, “Unaccompanied Children from Central America: Foreign Policy Considerations,” Congressional Research Service, 2016.
- ⁵ “Total Monthly Family Unit & UAC Apprehensions by Sector (FY 2010 - FY 2018),” U.S. Customs and Border Protection, accessed on April 10, 2019; Stephanie Leutert and Sarah Spalding, “How Many Central Americans Are Traveling North?” *Lawfare*, March 14, 2019.
- ⁶ Ramón Márquez, La 72, personal interview, February 10, 2019.
- ⁷ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México 2013-2018,” COMAR, 2018.
- ⁸ “Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines,” World Bank, 2017, accessed on April 5, 2019.
- ⁹ “Latin America and the Caribbean: Tax revenues continue to rise despite low economic growth,” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, March 23, 2017.
- ¹⁰ “Poverty Ratio Headcount at National Poverty Lines,” World Bank, 2018, accessed on April 5, 2019.
- ¹¹ “Minimum Wage in Honduras,” Wage Indicator, 2018; “El Salvador Minimum Wage, 2018,” Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social, 2018; “Minimum Wages in Guatemala,” Wage Indicator, 2018.
- ¹² David Gagne, “InSight Crime’s 2016 Homicide Round-Up,” *InSight Crime*, 2017.
- ¹³ Rocio Cara Labrador and Danielle Renwick, “Central America’s Violent Northern Triangle,” Council on Foreign Relations, June 26, 2018.
- ¹⁴ Chris Dalby and Camilo Carranza, “InSight Crime’s 2018 Homicide Round-Up,” *InSight Crime*, 2019.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ “Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act,” Legal Information Institute, Cornell University.
- ¹⁷ “Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America,” International Crisis Group, April 6, 2017.
- ¹⁸ Stephen Dudley, “Northern Triangle is World’s Extortion Spot,” *InSight Crime*, 2015.
- ¹⁹ “Forced to Flee Central America’s Northern Triangle: A Neglected Humanitarian Crisis,” Doctors Without Borders, 2017.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² “Mafia of the Poor: Gang Violence and Extortion in Central America.”
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Jeffrey Hallock, “In Search of Safety, Growing Numbers of Women Flee Central America,” Migration Policy Institute, 2018.
- ²⁵ “Global Database on Violence against Women - El Salvador,” United Nations Women, 2016.
- ²⁶ “Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) & Migration Fact Sheet,” Kids in Need of Defense, 2017.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Saira Ramos, “Más de 51 Mil Mujeres Viven una Situación de Violencia en el País,” *Publinews*, November 22, 2017.
- ²⁹ “Neither Security Nor Justice,” Kids in Need of Defense, May 4, 2017.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ “Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and Migration Fact Sheet,” Kids in Need of Defense, Latin America Working Group and Women’s Refugee Commission, July 2018.
- ³² “Neither Security Nor Justice,” Kids in Need of Defense, May 4, 2017.
- ³³ “Forced to Flee Central America’s Northern Triangle: A Neglected Humanitarian Crisis,” Doctors Without Borders, 2017.
- ³⁴ “Sin Lugar Que Me Proteja,” Amnesty International, 2018.
- ³⁵ Carla LaGata, Carsten Balzer, and Lukas Berredo, “Informe anual del TMM 2016,” TransRespect, 2016.

-
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ “Evaluación De Actitudes Hacia Las Personas Lgbti Por Parte De Las Fuerzas Policiales El Salvador,” Centro De Investigación y Promoción Para América Central de Derechos Humanos (CIPAC), 2014.
- ⁴⁰ “Población LGBTI en México y Centroamérica,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017.
- ⁴¹ “Americas: Weakening Democracy and Rise in Populism Hinder Anti-corruption Efforts,” Transparency International, January 29, 2019.
- ⁴² “Corruption Perceptions Index 2016,” Transparency International, January 25, 2017.
- ⁴³ Alicia Bárcena Ibarra and Winnie Byanyima, “Latin America is the world's most unequal region. Here's how to fix it,” World Economic Forum Blog, January 17, 2016.
- ⁴⁴ Rocio Cara Labrador and Danielle Renwick, “Central America’s Violent Northern Triangle.”
- ⁴⁵ Freddy Cuevas, “Opposition blocks highways after Honduras presidential vote,” *Associated Press*, December 15, 2017.
- ⁴⁶ “Sixth Report of Activities of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG),” International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), 2013.
- ⁴⁷ Héctor Silva Ávalos, “The Infiltrators: Corruption in El Salvador’s Police,” *InSight Crime*, February 21, 2014.
- ⁴⁸ Kirk Semple, “‘There’s No Law’: Political Crisis Send’s Nicaraguans Fleeing,” *New York Times*, August 6, 2018.
- ⁴⁹ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México,” COMAR, 2018.
- ⁵⁰ “Number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela reaches 3 million,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, November 8, 2018.
- ⁵¹ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México,” COMAR, 2018.
- ⁵² “Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos,” Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, February 5, 1917, Art. 11, 33; “Ley de Migración,” Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, May 25, 2011, Art. 2.
- ⁵³ “Constitución Política de los Estados, Art. 1, 3, 33.
- ⁵⁴ “Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión. February 21, 2012, Art. 4.
- ⁵⁵ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión, January 27, 2011, Art. 13; “Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 4.
- ⁵⁶ “Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 19; “Jueces declaran inconstitucional el plazo de 30 días establecido en la ley para solicitar el acceso a la condición de refugiado,” Universidad Iberoamericana, March 20, 2019.
- ⁵⁷ “Ley de Migración,” Art. 69.
- ⁵⁸ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 18 & 22; “Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político.”
- ⁵⁹ Ibid, Art. 29; “Ley de Migración,” Art. 121.
- ⁶⁰ “Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 38.
- ⁶¹ Jorge Ríos, personal interview, Austin, September 28, 2018.
- ⁶² “Ley de Migración,” Art. 14, 23, 40, 109, 119; “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político.”
- ⁶³ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México,” COMAR, 2018.
- ⁶⁴ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 27.
- ⁶⁵ Transparency request, COMAR, January 2019.
- ⁶⁶ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México 2013-2018,” COMAR, 2018.
- ⁶⁷ Jorge Ríos, personal interview, Austin, September 28, 2018.
- ⁶⁸ “Preguntas frecuentes sobre la Clave Única de Registro de Población Temporal para Extranjeros,” Government of Mexico, July 12, 2018.
- ⁶⁹ “Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 67-73.
- ⁷⁰ Mark Manly, Twitter, March 6, 2019, <https://twitter.com/MarkManly/status/1103131895842320385>.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.

-
- ⁷² “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México 2013-2018,” COMAR, 2018; Andrés Ramírez Silva, Twitter, April 3, 2019, <https://twitter.com/AndresRSilva/status/1113407118487502849>.
- ⁷³ Transparency request, COMAR, April 2019.
- ⁷⁴ “Closed Doors: Mexico’s Failure to Protect Central American Refugee and Migrant Children,” Human Rights Watch, March 31, 2016, 48.
- ⁷⁵ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México,” COMAR, 2017.
- ⁷⁶ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México 2013-2018,” COMAR, 2018
- ⁷⁷ “Donde Está Comar,” Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados, accessed on December 9, 2018, <https://www.gob.mx/comar/articulos/donde-esta-comar?idiom=es>.
- ⁷⁸ Olympia Montserrat Valdivia Ramírez, personal interview, Austin, October 18, 2018.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Andrés Ramírez Silva, Twitter, April 3, 2019, <https://twitter.com/AndresRSilva/status/1113407118487502849>.
- ⁸¹ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México 2013-2018,” COMAR, 2018; Andrés Ramírez Silva, Twitter, April 3, 2019, <https://twitter.com/AndresRSilva/status/1113407118487502849>.
- ⁸² Transparency request, COMAR, October 2019.
- ⁸³ “Convenio Especifico: SEGOB-UNHCR,” Secretaría de Gobernación, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, October 1, 2016.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Andrés Ramírez Silva, personal interview, Austin, February 2019.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Transparency request, COMAR, October 2019.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México 2013-2018,” COMAR, 2018
- ⁹⁴ Transparency request, COMAR, February 2019.
- ⁹⁵ Andrés Ramírez Silva, personal interview, Austin, February 2019.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Transparency request, COMAR, October 2019.
- ⁹⁸ Transparency request, COMAR, February 2019.
- ⁹⁹ Transparency request, COMAR, October 2019.
- ¹⁰⁰ “Ley de Migración,” Art. 9; “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 44.
- ¹⁰¹ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 57 & 44.
- ¹⁰² “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 44, Section VI.
- ¹⁰³ “Reglamento de la Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 95.
- ¹⁰⁴ Helen Kerwin, “Mexican Asylum Law for U.S. Immigration Lawyers,” The University of Texas at Austin School of Law Immigration Clinic, 2017.
- ¹⁰⁵ “Ley de Migración,” Art. 55.
- ¹⁰⁶ “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,” UN General Assembly, July 28, 1951, Art. 24.
- ¹⁰⁷ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 44.
- ¹⁰⁸ “Ley de Migración,” Art. 8.
- ¹⁰⁹ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 44.
- ¹¹⁰ “Ley de Migración,” Art. 8.
- ¹¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹¹² “UNHCR in Mexico,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed on March 11, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/mexico.html>.
- ¹¹³ Eguiluz Itzel, “Seminario ACNUR-CIDE de metodologías de investigación sobre refugiados y solicitantes de asilo en México,” Mexico City, November 1, 2018.
- ¹¹⁴ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 14.

-
- ¹¹⁵ Sandra Álvarez, Sin Fronteras, personal interview, Mexico City, October 15, 2018.
- ¹¹⁶ Sandra Álvarez, Sin Fronteras, personal interview, Austin, February 19, 2019.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid.
- ¹²⁰ Ibid.
- ¹²¹ Florian Hoepfner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, personal interview, Austin, October 4, 2018.
- ¹²² Nick Miroff and Joshua Partlow, “Deal with Mexico paves way for asylum overhaul at U.S. border,” *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2018.
- ¹²³ Florian Hoepfner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, personal interview, Austin, February 19, 2019.
- ¹²⁴ Ibid.
- ¹²⁵ Florian Hoepfner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, personal interview, Austin, October 4, 2018.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid.
- ¹²⁷ Florian Hoepfner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, personal interview, Austin, February 19, 2019.
- ¹²⁸ Florian Hoepfner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, personal interview, Austin, October 4, 2018.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid.
- ¹³⁰ Florian Hoepfner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, personal interview, Austin, February 19, 2019.
- ¹³¹ Ibid.
- ¹³² Sandra Álvarez, Sin Fronteras, personal interview, Mexico City, October 15, 2018.
- ¹³³ Daniela Treviño, FM4 Paso Libre, personal interview, Austin, TX, April 9, 2019.
- ¹³⁴ “Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos,” Art. 3.
- ¹³⁵ “Ley de Migración,” Art. 8; “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 44.
- ¹³⁶ “El Presidente Enrique Peña Nieto anuncia el Plan “Estás en tu casa” en apoyo a los migrantes centroamericanos que se encuentran en México,” Secretaría de Gobernación de México, October 26, 2018.
- ¹³⁷ Former Assistance Officer, COMAR, personal interview, Austin, November 11, 2018.
- ¹³⁸ Ibid.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁰ Leticia Calderón Chelius, “Organized civil society in response to transit migration through Mexico,” Central America - North America Migration Dialogue, 2016.
- ¹⁴¹ Daniela Treviño, FM4 Paso Libre, personal interview, Austin, TX, April 9, 2019.
- ¹⁴² Ibid.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁴ Mónica Jacobo and Nuty Cárdenas, “Los retornados: ¿Cómo responder a la diversidad de migrantes mexicanos que regresan de Estados Unidos?” Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Programa Interdisciplinario en Estudios Migratorios, 2018.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁷ “Forced to Flee Central America's Northern Triangle: A Neglected Humanitarian Crisis,” Doctors Without Borders, 2017.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁹ “Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político,” Art. 20.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ¹⁵¹ Gregory Simon, “Social and economic burden of mood disorders,” *Biological Psychiatry*, Vol. 54, Issue 3, 2003, 208-215.
- ¹⁵² Andrés Díaz, José Knippen, Maureen Meyer, and Ximena Suárez, “Access to Justice for Migrants in Mexico: A Right That Exists Only on the Books,” Washington Office on Latin America, July 2017.

-
- ¹⁵³ Anna Cabot, Center on Gender and Refugee Studies, personal interview, Mexico City, October 29, 2018.
- ¹⁵⁴ “Boletín Estadístico de Solicitantes de Refugio en México,” COMAR, 2018
- ¹⁵⁵ Former assistance officer, COMAR, personal interview, Austin, November 11, 2018.
- ¹⁵⁶ Transparency request, COMAR, October 31, 2019.
- ¹⁵⁷ “Refugees in Mexico: Social Profiles and Social Integration,” UNHCR, 2012.
- ¹⁵⁸ Gerardo Maldonado, Rodrigo Morales Castillo, Guadalupe González González, David Crow, and Jorge Schiavon, “México: Las Américas y el Mundo 2004-2014,” CIDE, 2014.
- ¹⁵⁹ “General Coordination of the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance,” Secretaría de Gobernación de México, July 2017.
- ¹⁶⁰ “Convenio Especifico: SEGOB-UNHCR,” Secretaría de Gobernación, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, October 1, 2016.
- ¹⁶¹ Transparency request, COMAR, October 2018.
- ¹⁶² Transparency request, COMAR, January 2019.

ISBN: 978-1-951006-01-3



ROBERT STRAUSS CENTER

FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND LAW
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN