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**LGBTQ FORCED MIGRANTS' LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION IN
MEXICO CITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM MEXICO'S
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS,
AND MEXICAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

Rolando Diaz Vasquez
Master of Arts in Migration Studies
University of San Francisco

April 2021

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MEXICO CITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM MEXICO'S
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS,
AND MEXICAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER IN MIGRATION STUDIES

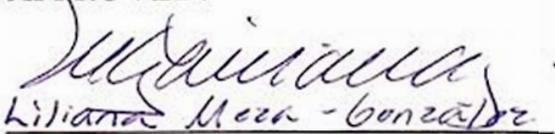
Rolando Diaz

April 2021

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree.

APPROVED:


Lilitiana Mora-Gonzalez

Advisor

Apr 15 - 2021

Date



Academic Director

April 21, 2021

Date

Dean of Arts and Sciences

Date

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Preface

When I first began to ponder a research question, I wanted the overall theme to focus on integration through an international migration context. Integration is an exciting topic that would often produce fruitful discussion in my classes both at the University of San Francisco and Universidad Iberoamericana. Through our diverse backgrounds, classmates discussed their own personal migration stories, particularly how integration played a major role as a result of the culture, politics, and policies of their host-country. This led me to reflect how migrants back home in the United States integrate. What are the cultural, political, and policy factors that influence a migrants' integration in the US? Generally, the US integration experience is not as contentious as it is in other parts of the world with more homogenous societies, such as in Western Europe or East Asia. However, regardless of where we set our sights on within that discourse, factors like race, ethnicity, language, and education levels are the main drivers that guide our understandings about integration. It is the degrees to which those factors are present in migrant's profiles that determine the outcome of their integration in host-countries. While we can consider sex (men vs. women) within that context, sexual orientation and gender identity goes largely overlooked. Despite gender identity and sexual orientation being very central to an individual, and very visible for some, I found it surprising that these two elements were not considered as significant in integration discourse both in the classroom and in academia. This influenced my desire to bring awareness to how LGBTQ people and identity are included in efforts to integrate.

When I consider my own positionality surrounding this research, my sexual orientation and gender identity certainly played a larger role than anything else. I reflect back to those discussions on integration in the classroom, where we envision the ideal integration model. Do

we prefer the “melting pot”? Is the “salad bowl” more practical? As an American, I’m inclined to consider integration through the traditional “melting pot” view—united we stand. As a Mexican American, I question that melting-pot idea and consider the “salad bowl” approach instead—a retention of culture and language. As a cis-gender gay male, I am wondering if that melting pot and salad bowl are decorated with glitter. Like glitter, it sticks and is nearly impossible to completely wipe off. In integration discourse, we should consider the reality that sexual orientation and gender identity follow LGBTQ people around everywhere and it cannot be “wiped off”. Sexual orientation and gender identity perhaps play a major role in LGBTQ migrants’ integration.

During this research, several government agencies, international organizations and community organizations offered their perspectives, solutions, and visions for a more equitable migration and integration system in Mexico. I came into this research thinking that these actors would perhaps provide a scripted presentation based on their preconceived notions of migration and gender. Instead, I found that they are all deeply invested in migration and share a common mission towards advancing labor integration. Nobody expressed disapproval for LGBTQ identity, nobody expressed homophobic or problematic views—this was a very heartening experience. Overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the interest in wanting to make LGBTQ migrants’ lives easier speaks to the commitment and goodwill in stakeholders’ work towards migration and labor integration.

The positive experiences in this research indicate that Mexico, at least in key areas of government and civil society, are past a culture of tolerance and have moved into inclusion. LGBTQ people are witnessing an increasingly accepting world that recognizes their gender identity and sexual orientation. Tolerance has certainly been on the rise on every continent of the

world in the last 10 years, but as Sister Lidia Mara de Souza said as part of this research, “Tolerance doesn’t mean ‘I respect that’, it means ‘It’s okay until *that* reaches *me*’”. Tolerance is fragile and as many of us have witnessed in recent years, tolerance can easily regress. On the surface, it is not enough to simply recognize and acknowledge LGBTQ people. It is imperative that LGBTQ people are included in action-oriented solutions, especially when it comes to migration policies and labor integration efforts. I hope that through this research, readers can glean an understanding about Mexico’s efforts towards labor market integration for a community that is continuously overlooked. In that spirit, I hope that we can advance much-needed discussion on integration and how it impacts LGBTQ migrants.

Abstract

Mexico holds a unique position as a country of immigration, emigration, refuge, transit, and return migration. In recent decades, researchers have built awareness on the country's received migrants' diverse characteristics by posing questions and tackling the challenges that certain migrants face. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) forced migrants have become increasingly visible since the exodus of asylum-seekers from Central America. Many of these LGBTQ migrants flee state and non-state actors that present life-threatening conditions for the LGBTQ community. Though Mexico as a whole is going through its own evolution on LGBTQ and migrants' rights, its capital city has emerged as an attractive possibility for an inclusive future in which LGBTQ forced migrants can flourish under the city's progressive political culture and LGBTQ counterparts. While Mexican society as whole faces its own reckoning with gender diversity and identity, Mexico's capital is seen as the LGBTQ Mecca of Latin America, offering a suitable glimpse into how LGBTQ migrants integrate into the local labor market.

This paper aims to highlight the promotion of labor market integration of LGBTQ forced migrants in Mexico City through the lens of local and federal government agencies, international organizations, and local civil society groups. Through semi-structured interviews with the aforementioned actors, this paper aims to shed light on the extent to which LGBTQ forced migrants are included in recent concerted efforts to advance labor market integration for Mexico City's forced migrant community.

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Introduction

“The rest of Mexico is not like Mexico City”. As Mexico’s increasingly visible diverse migration continues to capture the attention of academics, researchers, international organizations, and civil society, migration into the capital city is eclipsed by migrant epicenters in the country’s northern and southern border regions. The overwhelming sight of migrants at Mexico’s northern and southern border positions Mexico mainly in migrant-sending and transit lens, but in actuality, many migrant populations wager on actually remaining in the country. In the case of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) forced migrants, many face contradicting expressions from the Mexican government over their place in Mexican society as they settle into their new environments, often from places with repressive and homophobic attitudes that drive them to find inclusivity elsewhere. While many associate LGBTQ migrants in North America with that of LGBTQ immigrants or asylum-seekers *in* the United States *from* Mexico and Central America, this paper introduces the idea of examining LGBTQ migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers *in* Mexico in order to further recognize and understand Mexico’s position as a country of refuge. Migration research is vast, and one study alone cannot capture the entire migration landscape that is Mexico through the context of refuge, therefore, this paper seeks to understand how LGBTQ migrants are regarded through one element of migration: labor market integration. In line with that context, it is imperative to accept Mexico as a country of reception, with its own institutions and frameworks that function outside of the American context.

Western researchers have historically studied Mexico as a migrant-sending state under the context of American immigration policies. These studies have focused on Mexican immigrant youth, women, workers, and more. The deficit in this research is understanding

Mexico for its own long history of being a migrant-receiving country ever since the country's revolution came to an end in 1924. Since then, Eastern European Jewish people escaping persecution, Spanish Republicans fleeing the Franco regime, and Chilean refugees who fled the Pinochet regime have called Mexico their new home. In the current moment, Mexico is far more than a migrant-sending state, encompassing a system of immigration, emigration, refuges, transit, and return migration. These realities compound Mexican migration policy, creating a “tug-o-war” between public bodies and civil society in order to meet the needs of particular migrant communities. Mexico's migration is evidently diverse, but in spite of that fact, general discussion in popular media and even within academia largely centers around migrants, especially immigrants, in the United States. Most literature on LGBTQ migrants, or queer migrants, is chiefly Euro and American centric in terms of inquiring the experiences of migrants within a Euro or American centric context. At the same time, the topic of integration and assimilation is also largely Euro and American centric, leaving out the ways such themes can be studied not only in Mexico, but in other regions of the world with high volumes of migration.

While several themes exist within the topic of migration in Mexico, this paper will primarily focus on how providers and government agencies promote LGBTQ migrants' integration into Mexico City's labor market. This investigation serves as a viewfinder into the emerging migrant population in Mexico, as well as accounts for an underrepresented and vulnerable group of migrants who often have intersecting identities that create a multiplex relationship between their identities, the Mexican state, and a society that is polarized on the topic of LGBTQ rights. This paper seeks to focus on intersecting identities in Mexico as it relates to being part of the LGBTQ and migrant community, with the aspiration that the themes involved in this research will amplify an understanding of Mexican migration policies, LGBTQ

rights, and migration patterns into Mexico. These three themes are important in order to quell the disproportionate focus on American research contexts and focus on a more dynamic, global context that enables future research to identify and further investigate Mexico's increasingly diverse migration flows. Recent developments from Central America and Venezuela, two regions of Latin America that have experienced an exodus of LGBTQ migrants heading to Mexico, serves as an opportunity to test Mexico City's capabilities in integrating these new migrants, while at the same time enabling a comprehension of the diversification of Mexico's migration landscape.

Literature Review

This literature review will touch upon several themes that intersect with the overall research topic. This review starts with a brief overview of gender and gender identity in the Mexican context before pivoting towards a particular focus on queer theory, which is the theoretical framework. This review also touches on underlying themes relevant to the research topic, including queer migration studies, labor market integration in Mexico, and the Mexican immigration legal framework. These key areas are critical towards understanding the theoretical and practical context of this research. While some sections have greater relevancy than others, they nonetheless carry considerable purpose to the topic. This review illustrates a deficit on the topics of Mexico as a migrant-receiving state and Mexico as an LGBTQ destination; thus, raising the need for further research that focuses on LGBTQ forced migrants who seek refuge in Mexico.

Gender and sexuality

Gender has been the subject of many studies for over three decades. Researchers have engaged with women, men, teenagers, families, and more in order to inquire how experiences become gendered in different areas of real life, from politics, education, labor, and science. When it comes to gender, it is important that certain understandings are established. Society and academia have different ways of approaching sex, gender, and gender identity due to the interchangeability of the terminology. Whereas sex refers to the physical and biological differences between male and female, Foucault (1980) describes gender as a “fluid variable” that is subject to shift. Diamond (2002) defines gender and gender identity as the area in which an individual identifies as either masculine or feminine. Masculine and feminine traits are commonly associated with the sex of an individual due to social constructions that influence an

assignment of gender to individuals at the time of birth. Individuals who conform to their assigned gender adhere to performances that have socially constructed masculine and feminine traits associated with their sex. The distinction between sex and gender is an important one to make in order to understand that gender and sex, though commonly used interchangeably, are in actuality very different. Essentially, one's sex does not always, nor does it have to, correspond to a gender trait or role, but certain gender traits can find itself in either sex. Some individuals see themselves as not being either male or female, thus identifying as non-binary gender (Bouman & Acelus, 2017).

An important aspect of gender identity for the purpose of this research are individuals who are transgender. Transgender is defined by Bouman & Acelus (2017) as:

"...anyone whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from the assigned gender at birth based on the sexual characteristics."

To expand, a transgender man would be someone who was assigned female at birth based on sexual characteristics and identifies as a man. A transgender woman would be someone who was assigned a male gender at birth based on sexual characteristics and identifies as a woman (Bouman & Acelus, 2017). This is why it is important to separate sex from gender so that people who identify as transgender are better understood.

An additional layer that requires mentioning is sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is different from gender identity because it refers to an individual's sexual attraction to a particular sex. There are four categories associated with sexual orientation. According to Little and McGivern (2014), these categories are:

“..heterosexuality, the attraction of individuals of the opposite sex; homosexuality, the attraction to individuals of one’s own sex; bisexuality, the attraction to individuals of either sex; or asexuality, no attraction to either sex.”

Given that gender and sex are used so interchangeably, coupled with the reality that heteronormativity is the social norm, it can be confusing to dissect the nuance and differences in the fluidity of gender, identity, and sexual orientation. It should be acknowledged that for the purposes of this research, the previously mentioned descriptions of gender, sex, and sexual orientation are rudimentary and not illustrative of other advancements made in the understandings of gender and sexual orientation that can be found in the abundance of literature. However, for the purposes of this research, the covered areas serve to illustrate the context.

Within Mexican government institutions, civil society and academia, the topics of gender, sex, and sexual orientation are approached with interchangeability. The previously mentioned topics of gender, sex, and sexual orientation come from American, Canadian, and French perspectives are also approached with interchangeability, but Mexican approaches differ in the sense that, comparatively, Mexico’s inclination towards studying gender is less. Such context is necessary in order to draw connections between Mexico’s relationship with the study of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation, relative to how LGBTQ migrants are perceived and understood. Due to an underlying deficit in Mexican gender studies, this review will focus on government-produced definitions of gender and sexuality, however some brief context as to why there is a deficit will be explained.

Gender has been at the center of great interest by academic institutions around the world, especially in the United States. According to Data USA, over 14,000 degrees related to cultural and gender studies were awarded in 2017 by public and private universities across the country

(Data USA, 2020). Many American institutions have evolved to endorse areas of study on gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation from the community college level to the higher education, post-graduate level. Mexico, however, has struggled to achieve equal interest in the topic.

Research indicates a general lack of interest in teaching or administering topics on gender and sexuality in Mexico. Due to perceptions that such areas of study are not scientific enough to merit government funding and university oversight (Mendoza, et.al., 2009), there is a severe rift between the federal government's education priorities and the need for advancing gender studies in Mexico. Even though the Mexican feminist movement's initial demand was a right to education (Torres Falcon, 2019), the Mexican education system still lags behind in endorsing these areas of study. Mendoza (2009) references the Universidad Iberoamericana in Puebla, Mexico as the only exception to private university's interest in the topic. While academic institutions continue to work through challenges in understanding gender and sexuality across Mexico, key areas of civil society have taken up the interest in the subject, thanks in large part due to the Mexican feminist movement. In the Mexican legal framework section of this review, more details can be found on civil society's role in influencing inclusive policies for both women and LGBTQ people across Mexico and especially in its capital.

When it comes to gender and sexuality, the definitions in Mexico are quite similar. The Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación, also known as CONAPRED (National Council to Prevent Discrimination), a government agency established by the 2003 Ley Federal para Prevenir y Erradicar la Discriminación (2003 Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination), provides several guiding definitions to terminology, defining the terms gender,

transgender, and other terms. CONAPRED defines gender in a broad sense that includes several influencing factors, defining gender as:

“...attributes that socially, historically, culturally, economically, politically, geographically, among others, have been assigned to men and women. It...refers to the characteristics that, socially and culturally, have been identified as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’...” (CONAPRED, 2016).

Certain terminology that is used to reference the transgender community in Mexico is generally unpopular or regarded as offensive in current United States public discourse, but is nonetheless used by Mexican government agencies, international organizations, and civil society. Many of these definitions are influenced by a need to be inclusive of variants within the umbrella term “Trans”, such as the terms transsexual and transvestite, which both have abbreviations in the Mexican version of “LGBTQ”, which is “LGBTTTI”.

Transgender is defined by CONAPRED as:

“...people [who] feel and conceive themselves as belonging to the opposite gender that was socially and culturally assigned to their birth sex, and who generally only choose hormonal reassignment—without reaching the surgical intervention of the internal and external sexual pelvic organs—to adapt their physical appearance and corporality to their psychic, spiritual and social reality” (CONAPRED, 2016).

Transsexual in this regard is defined by CONAPRED as people who:

“...feel and conceive themselves as belonging to the opposite gender and sex to which they are socially and culturally assigned based on their sex at birth, and that may opt for medical intervention—hormonal, surgical, or both in order to adapt their physical appearance and corporality...” (CONAPRED, 2016).

Transvestite is defined by CONAPRED as:

“...people who like to present a temporary or lasting appearance opposite to the gender that is socially assigned to their birth sex, through the use of clothing, attitudes, and behaviors” (CONAPRED, 2016).

Sexual orientation is also described by CONAPRED, with particular emphasis on gay, lesbian, and bisexual, stating that:

Gay: *“Man who is erotically attracted to another man”*

Lesbian: *“Woman who is erotically and emotionally attracted to women”*

Bisexual: *“Capacity of a person to feel an affective erotic attraction by people of a gender different from yours and of the same gender...”* (CONAPRED, 2016).

While it may seem redundant to explain this terminology, it is important to understand the unique reality that Mexico’s federal government recognizes these nuances, which translates into advancing public discourse on the topic of LGBTQ rights. At the same time, these seemingly progressive approach by the Mexican government would not be possible without the organizing of civil society.

It should be noted that the above definitions are in accordance with a federal mandate, established by the 2003 law. Mexico City has its own agency, the Consejo Para Prevenir y Eliminar La Discriminación de la Ciudad de México, known as COPRED (Council to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination), which was established in 2011 as a decentralized area under the Secretaría de Desarrollo Social del Distrito Federal (Secretariat of Social Development in Mexico City). Nonetheless, the understanding of terms is similar between the CONAPRED and COPRED with little to no differences in how the terms are understood.

Heteronormativity and queer theory

The principal theoretical framework that has been used to investigate gender inequality and gendered experiences are primarily seen through feminist lenses. Feminist theory has contributed to understandings of gender inequality for centuries and it has continued to evolve over the decades. Despite the evolution, many LGBTQ theorists argue that feminist schools of thought have not been able to properly account for LGBTQ experiences.

The “Big Three” schools of feminist thought, which include liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism, and radical feminism (Maynard, 1995) have long been used to inquire gender

inequality around the world. Though there are different degrees to feminism that attribute oppression to only gender, class, race; or a mixture of these factors; a common element in the system of domination is patriarchy. Patriarchy has been viewed as the dominant factor that contributes to gender inequality, but it must be acknowledged that patriarchy does not act alone. Though it is a dominant force that maintains the male-dominated status-quo, such a system of domination is not absent without the exclusive complicity of heteronormative norms that solidify patriarchy's imposition of gender inequality.

Heteronormativity has long been the strict basis for the components that make up our daily lives, from political, economic, and social arenas, heterosexuality as the norm has had major implications for how systems, including institutions, are established and operate. One of the initial conceptualizations of heteronormativity was referred to as "*compulsory heterosexuality*" by Rich (1980), who describes the term as not limited to perpetuation by heterosexual individuals, but also as a powerful system that even feminist scholarship tends to preserve. Consequently, feminist theory renders queer experiences as abhorrent, invisible, and excluded from what is generally thought of as inclusive theory (Rich, 1980). Warner (1990) examines heteronormativity by pointing to how feminist theories could benefit from "gay politics" as a starting point in order to challenge "pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity of modern societies". Warner (1990) further criticizes heteronormative systems by highlighting how these system's most inclusive acknowledgements of queer movements are still damaging, due to the fundamental reality that heteronormativity has an inherent inability to conceptualize itself as anything but the norm, therefore "actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world" is the only robust way of challenging heteronormative systems both in and out of the academy (Warner, 1990).

Heteronormativity permeates daily systems that individuals, consciously and subconsciously navigate. Berlant and Warner (1998) define heteronormativity as:

“...the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as sexuality—but also privileged.”

It is important to distinguish heteronormativity from heterosexuality here, as Berlant and Warner reference. They state that heteronormativity and heterosexuality are different in the sense that there is no heteronormative version of homosexuality because heteronormativity has already rendered homosexuality as visible, opposite, and not foundational to society, therefore, no such thing as “*homonormativity*” can even exist because one system, heteronormativity already dominates over any conceivable alternative (Berlant & Warner, 1998). Sullivan (2003) cites Butler and Witting, stating “complex matrix of discourses [and] institutions” become normalized within a culture, thus establishing it as the dominating “truth effect” which fuels and further empowers the heteronormative structures that exist as we know them today (Sullivan, 2003). Indeed, heteronormativity is a pervasive system and it is difficult to conceptualize an alternative one, even within systems that are inclusive and responsive to queer movements.

Heteronormativity is not a structure that will collapse anytime soon, but Warner (1990) states, the introduction of queer politics, especially into feminist theory and other critical studies, is nonetheless something that they could immensely benefit from. Academics and social scientists, from Butler (1990), Berlant (1998), Rich (1980), and Warner (1990) have all pointed to heteronormative systems as one of the principal reasons why an alternative approach is necessary. It is here where queer theory enables a better understanding of how heteronormativity, often overlooked or upheld by traditional feminist lenses, can unveil other forms of oppression.

Queer theory builds upon feminist lenses that view gender inequality through a heteronormative point of view. Though initially sparked as late as the 1990s, Queer studies continues to advance, with new findings and on how gender inequality affects LGBTQ people. Queer theory was first coined by Teresa de Lauretis who organized the first of its kind, queer theory conference, at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1990, thus initiating the institutionalization of queer studies. Subsequently, de Lauretis introduced her original work “*Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*” (1991), in which she explores the criticism of then-commonly referred “Gay and Lesbian Studies” and introduces an alternative, *Queer Studies*, that explores the non-heteronormative spectrum that goes beyond the exploration of “Gay and Lesbian” identity in research and captures a more inclusive scholarship that not only advances understandings of queerness around the world, but directly challenges systems that maintain the heteronormative status-quo. Queer theory embodies an “inclusive scholarship” that identifies key areas which make an individual “queer” as it relates to how heterosexuality has been institutionally and socially constructed as the basis for what is “normal” and queerness as not normal. This is evident in De Lauretis’s (1991) description of queer theory as a particular approach that allows for the “de-heterosexualizing” of academia and research in order to further comprehend queerness and queer experiences in research.

Butler (1999), De Lauretis (1991), Berlant (1998), and Sedgwick (1990) have advanced queer studies and contributed to understandings of “queerness” in research. Since the 1990s, queer studies have been integrated into several disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, education, and political sciences. Social scientists who use queer theory have captured how heteronormativity permeates these disciplines. By highlighting the “disciplining” of sexuality,

queer theory can be seen as a necessary framework that not only diversifies, but amplifies LGBTQ perspectives, thought, and consciousness.

The term “queer” has typically been regarded as a derogatory term to reference LGBTQ people, but since its inception in academia by de Lauretis, the term has become a word that challenges homophobia, xenophobia, racism, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. Early scholars who contributed to queer theory have addressed intersecting elements that contribute to oppression. Butler (1990) raises similar points on a compulsory gender order that Rich (1980) alludes to in regard to heteronormativity. Following in post-structural theory, Butler (1990) states that gender and sex are two distinct subject matters, in which traditional feminist theorists lacked the inclusion beyond what Butler calls a “heterosexual matrix” that keeps the sexual order “protected” from criticism (Butler, 1990, p. 150). This heterosexual matrix excludes the process of an individual’s gendered experience that is influenced by manifestations involving culture, behavior, and performances rooted in heteronormativity and supplemented by oppressive elements. Sedgwick (1990) advances the idea of understanding gender outside of a spectrum, suggesting that the clash between homosexuality and heterosexuality is oversimplified and requires a complete overhaul in our understandings of LGBTQ issues.

Queer theory comes from multiple contexts, having challenged several pre-existing systems of oppression that were inquired through lenses that overlooked underlying oppressive issues. This does not mean that feminist theories are invalid, nor are feminist lenses inappropriate for this particular research, but queer theory has been able to expand feminist lenses’ conceptualizations of privilege and inequality that are generally overlooked. For the purpose of this research, queer theory enables an understanding that goes beyond that of focusing on

heterosexual migrants and is inclusive of LGBTQ migrants whose needs and particularities are generally marginalized by academics, immigration policies, and government actors.

Queer migration studies

Queer migration studies emerged relatively recently as an inquiry into phenomena that cannot be understood through traditional academic lenses. Queer migration studies tend to be heavily focused on LGBTQ migrant communities in the United States. This review will cover how queer migration materialized, as it has a relevance for studies on LGBTQ individuals who navigate life within an international migration context. Though Latin America is not as regarded as the US in the field of queer migration studies, the following review sheds light on why queer migration studies can benefit from expanding its purview into Latin America.

Queer migration studies emerged out of a rapid transformation in the late 20th century. The AIDS pandemic, along with the effects of globalization, as well as developments in feminist studies are all attributed to advancing gender and sexuality understandings in research (Manalansan, 2006). At the same time, the United States had specific provisions in its immigration laws that specifically targeted members of the LGBTQ community, such as the prohibition of entry for gays and lesbian migrants. This prohibition existed in the US through much of the 20th century until the approval of The Immigration Act of 1990 (Chavez, 2013). According to Chavez (2013) and Luibéid (2008), the justification for keeping LGBTQ migrants out of the country was due to the that irrational fear the LGBTQ population posed a public health risk, particularly that they would spread HIV/AIDS as it ravaged communities, which included the immigrant and LGBTQ community across the country. Other countries, like Canada, also had similar immigration laws that barred entry for LGBTQ migrants', while at the same time

associating such migrants with prostitutes, pimps, and pertaining to an immoral purpose up until 1977 (LaViolette, 2003).

The 1980s represented turmoil for the LGBTQ migrant community. Despite many of the challenges that LGBTQ people faced, initial migration research as well as gender research scholars still did not point their focus on LGBTQ migrants to study these issues. It wasn't until the mid-1990s that researchers took an interest in studying the intersections between international migration and LGBTQ identity. It should be acknowledged that while migration research has, for a long time now, tried to understand gendered experiences relative to international migration, these studies remained within the heteronormative norms and expectations regarding women, girls, the gendered labor force, gender roles, families, and more (Korten, 2019).

Due to the underlying heteronormative presumptions in previous migration research, there is a deficit in the understanding of LGBTQ migrants in migration studies, which raises a necessity for comprehending this community. Manalansan (2006) describes these historical discourses as the privileging and promotion of heteronormative ideas, practices, and institutions by progressive feminists. Luibhéid (2004) argues that previous migration research studies' absence of LGBTQ people has marginalized LGBTQ migrants' stories, experiences, and narratives. In Luibhéid's (2004) view, many migration scholars have concluded sexuality as being a private matter, with much of their scholarship, including that which attempts to answer questions related to oppression, such as Marxist economic theory, has largely ignored sexuality and gender. Only when sexuality is premised on the idea of traditional and heteronormative gender roles, Luibhéid, states, do theories like Marxist economic theories attempt to answer questions related to sexuality and gender (Luibhéid, 2004).

In the realm of queer migration studies, there have been strides towards understanding LGBTQ people's experiences in international migration, much of it being ethnographic and qualitative studies into queer diasporas. Cantu's (2009) ethnographic, binational approach studied Mexican immigrant men in the United States as well as Mexican men who have sexual relationships with other men in Guadalajara, Mexico. Cantu's (2004) research informs key aspects of sexual identity in Latin America relative to the United States, finding that Western men's "coming out" is generally viewed as liberating, Mexican and Latin American men navigate a social order where gender performance, not sexual relationships, has a greater involvement in the determination of one's oppression as a gay Latin American male. Manalansan (2003) also takes an ethnographic approach in his study of Filipino gay men who live in New York City. Manalansan's (2003) findings suggest that Filipino gay men's experiences are not monolithic, but rather versatile and scripted based on competition with their LGBTQ counterparts. These scripts are heavily influenced factors relating to race, class, gender, sexual orientation and immigration status.

It is not just the heteronormative history of migration research that inspired queer migration to come into fruition, it is also global state-sanctioned policies that deliberately target LGBTQ people that raises the urgency for studying international migration and LGBTQ issues. Whether it's keeping LGBTQ people out of the country, or gross inaction during the AIDS pandemic (Chavez, 2013), there has been a historic necessity in studying policy that directly affects the lives of LGBTQ migrants. As previously mentioned, heteronormativity plays a pervasive role in the world. State institutions are no exception to the reaches of heteronormativity, which can present itself in both overt and covert ways, but always to the detriment of LGBTQ people. Luibhéid (2008) states that heteronormativity in migration systems

and policies manifest anti-immigrant sentiments that express ethnocentrism by virtue of heteronormativity's own instability. In taking Luibhéd's idea, heteronormativity's role in migration can be understood through the political implications of migration policies. For example, migration policy often mirrors and reinforces stereotypical, heteronormative perceptions that migrants who are eager to move into a host community bring in much-needed family values. The stereotype of migrants with large families is evidently heteronormative. At the same time, these heteronormative policies consider LGBTQ migrants as undesirable, morally bankrupt, and carriers of sexually transmitted diseases who have no place in that host-community because they bring in no family values (Luibéid, 2008). This is especially noticeable in immigration laws such as those in the US and Canada that explicitly banned entry for LGBTQ migrants, much less recognized their family reunification rights (LaViolette, 2004). As a result of this convoluted relationship between LGBTQ migrants, LGBTQ rights, and immigration laws, queer migration scholars have inquired the topic through understanding the multi-layered process that LGBTQ migrants navigate when moving to a different country. As mentioned earlier, queer migration scholars of the early 2000s have focused on LGBTQ diasporas in the US, such as Mexican and Filipino LGBTQ community members. Since then, other studies, such as those in Canada, have investigated the effects of border controls, bureaucracy, and integration on the LGBTQ migrant community. These studies have highlighted how research and social justice interact within queer migration research, largely through post-colonial, feminist, or intersectional frameworks that contribute to queer migration research and social work research. Murray (2014), Fobear (2015), Lee and Brotman (2013), and Kahn (2016) remind us that LGBTQ migrants in Canada all come from diverse backgrounds, with different stories, and location-specific nuances that Canadian institutions, like the Immigration and Refugee Board (Canada's

immigration tribunal responsible for refugee and immigrant decisions), fail to comprehend by privileging heteronormative assumptions and skepticism of LGBTQ migrant claims and experiences. These heteronormative assumptions do not just stop at the IRB, Fobear (2015) argues, they affect daily life of an LGBT migrant who in addition to jumping over the IRB obstacles, have to navigate complex society that is multicultural on the surface, but presents challenges stemming from racism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia in the integration process.

While this review has focused mostly on queer migration research coming from American and Canadian authors, queer migration research is increasingly globalizing with subjects relating to LGBTQ migrants from the Asia-Pacific region, Latin America, the African continent and the Middle East. However, a common denominator in a lot of the queer migration research is that it largely focuses on those migrants who have made a traditional migrant-receiving state their home. There has been little focus on LGBTQ migrants in emerging destinations, such as Mexico. Mexico's migration phenomenon continues to evolve and will only further change into the future. It is this reality that serves as the basis for why Mexico should be included in future studies of migrants, including those who are LGBTQ. As the legal framework will explain, Mexico offers a dual opportunity for LGBTQ and migrant's rights; which queer migration research can influence and bring further attention to.

Labor market integration

Much of the literature on migrants' labor market integration focuses on migrants in high-income and traditional migrant-receiving states, such as the US and the EU. In Mexico, the existing literature on labor market integration focuses primarily on inter-regional migration and return migration, particularly immigrants who return to Mexico from the US. Very little

literature exists on international forced migrants' labor market integration in Mexico, much less relating to LGBTQ forced migrants. In other fields of study, researchers have investigated labor market integration among non-migrant groups pertaining to the LGBTQ community, though this research is also mainly focused on those living in high income countries, for instance transgender migrant women who live in the US. In order to understand Mexico as a destination country relative to labor market integration, this section includes two subareas, the first focusing on the existing labor market integration for migrants that heavily puts focus on return migration; the second subarea focuses on labor market integration specific to LGBTQ forced migrants.

Migrants' experiences in labor markets are exceptionally diverse, making it difficult to portray their stories as representative of an entire collective due to individual, underlying factors that range from mental and physical disparities, which can affect migrant's human capital in different ways (Brell; Dustman; Preston, 2020). While the diversity in migrants' experiences add an additional layer of complexity when identifying the ways migrants navigate labor markets through a racialized or gendered lens, it is largely agreed that general barriers prevent migrants from integrating into labor markets. Hooper, Desiderio, and Salant (2017) state that migrants face challenges ranging from psychological trauma, to language barriers, lack of recognition for qualifications, and limited professional networks in the areas they migrate to. While Hooper, Desiderio, and Salant (2017) focus on these factors within a largely European context, they can really be applied to just about any migration context in the world. Labor market integration is also a critical process for a migrant, as it is a major determinant for the migrant's success. "The early and successful labor market integration of newcomers...is essential to their integration more broadly. It allows for economic self-sufficiency, prevents social exclusion and marginalization, and facilitates cultural and social integration by providing migrants with early

access to mainstream networks and services” (Desiderio, 2016). While there is no literature specific to LGBTQ migrants’ integration in Mexico, this review will substitute that with the topic of returnee migrant integration as a way to highlight how the needs for integration. This also draws connections to the government response of such integration needs.

Return migrant integration is a much-studied area of migration in Mexico. Though return migration has always happened concurrently with migration into the US, recent developments have prompted responses from both federal and local governments, as well as civil society, to rise to the challenge of addressing and managing high volumes of return migration.

Since the Great Recession, the Mexican government has pivoted a lot of resources and attention to its returnee migrant population. Returnee migrants are defined as “people born in Mexico who had lived in the US at some point but were back in their country of origin with or without an intention to migrate again” (Hazán, 2014). Since 2005, the population of Mexicans who left the US increased, while the number of Mexicans who migrated into the US also declined, leaving a continuous pattern of zero net migration. While most Mexicans who left to the US tend to be from Mexico’s southwest region, the top Mexican regions that have received returnees are in the northern border region with the exception of Mexico City. Baja California, Tamaulipas, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, and Mexico City receive the highest volume of returnees (Schmidtke, R; Chuayffet, R, 2018). Consequently, this prompts a major challenge for these areas to both reintegrate the returnees and integrate the returnee’s children who have limited ties to Mexico.

Several academic studies have qualitatively explored returnee migrants’ reintegration in different parts of Mexico. Though in different context ranging from labor, education, and healthcare, studies have looked into return migrants’ reintegration in Estado de México (Alfaro,

R; Hernández, A; Salas, V, 2019) (Alfaro, R & Hernández, A, 2020), Mexico City (Sánchez, 2013), Veracruz (Télles-Anguiano, M; Cruz-Piñero, R; Burey-Garbey, R, 2013), and Yucatán (Lizama, 2017). These qualitative inquiries explore a growing phenomenon of returnee migrants who find themselves navigating a different landscape with a different social, labor, and transnational context that was pervasive back “home” in the US. Navigating Mexican bureaucracy, obtaining public benefits and documents, and attaining recognition of US education credentials are just a few of the social and labor challenges faced by returnee migrants and their children across Mexico. Specifically, on labor integration, many studies tend to be quantitative that explore variations in social and labor integration outcomes, particularly in human capital.

Many government and civil society efforts have been made to bring more attention to returnee migrants’ integration needs. For instance, the Calderón administration made concerted efforts to facilitate the regularization of return migrants and precedence to their social and labor integration. In 2007, the Calderón administration introduced a federal program, *Programa de Repatriación Humana*, with an objective to facilitate return migrants’ integration. This program was replaced by *Somos Mexicanos* in 2013 under the Peña Nieto administration. Within the *Somos Mexicanos* program, the program *Repatriados Trabajando* was established by Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social as a sub-program that aimed to assist return migrants in finding employment. Unfortunately, these reintegration efforts have been noticeably lacking in operative efficacy in large part due to low budgets. According to an analysis by Suárez and Cardenas (2020), the federal effort *Somos Mexicanos* spent \$43 Mexican pesos per return migrant—that is a little over \$2 US dollars. Schmidtke, R & Chuayffet, R (2018) note that several critics of *Somos Mexicanos* call into question whether there is an impact at all from these programs. As a result, Civil society in Mexico has taken on the role of reintegrating returnee migrants, with

organizations like *Deportados Unidos en la Lucha (DUEL)*, *Dreamers Moms*, *New Comienzos*, *Poch@ House*, and *Unified US Deported Veterans*. These organizations play critical role in social, labor, and cultural reintegration of returnees, which include deportees, into Mexican society.

As evidenced by the available literature, studies on labor integration in the Mexican context focus heavily on return migration. In the last decade, government investment and civil society's attention to the returnee migrant population has been of increased priority over other forms of migration into the country. Whether it be refuge, transit, or immigration, the most conspicuous literature on migration in Mexico is on return migration. Further research is needed to understand labor integration within a refuge context, which could then inform further aspects about LGBTQ migration.

Labor market integration in Latin America is generally understudied and LGBTQ forced migrants add another layer of detail that further complicates the migration context that the region experiences. As a result, it should be no surprise that the literature, including both qualitative and quantitative studies just don't account for this group. This is not to say that LGBTQ people are not studied at all when it comes to labor markets. While there is no particular focus on LGBTQ forced migrants' labor market integration in any recent or historic literature, there have been significant research studies conducted in other areas pertaining to LGBTQ people, mainly those who are non-migrants, but are transgender (Drydakis, 2017; Leppel, 2016; da Silva, 2020). Though it is encouraging to see the emergence of studies of certain LGBTQ people in labor markets, the absence of literature, makes the phenomenon all the more necessary to investigate.

While there is little literature, areas of academia and civil society do seem interested in investigating labor market integration for LGBTQ migrants. Although not specific to migrants,

the International Labor Organization (ILO), states that “no data means no action” in regard to LGBTQ studies related to labor markets, and that as sexual orientation and gender identity are evolving contexts, data collection should too, especially in countries with LGBTQ inclusive legal frameworks (ILO, 2019). Queer migration scholars have also been calling for LGBTQ labor data.

Within the realm of queer migration studies and queer theory, there is an acknowledgement that individuals in the LGBTQ community face heavily gendered challenges. More than that, however, leading scholars like Luibheid (2004) have called for investigations into LGBTQ people’s experiences in labor forces 15 years before the ILO did. Luibéd (2004) states further research and investigation is needed to understand how LGBTQ people and LGBTQ migrants in particular, have their experiences shaped in labor markets and whether their sexual orientation and gender identities can be quantitatively and qualitatively measured. Though sexuality may not be as considered as gender, race, ethnicity, or class in the generation of production, Luibheid (2004) says that studies do confirm LGBTQ people are susceptible to employment discrimination, poverty, and wage discrimination; therefore, future research needs to be able to answer whether an LGBTQ person’s migration status can fit into that conversation.

The ongoing scholarly conversations and investigations on LGBTQ forced migrants’ integration in general tend to look at short-term phenomena surrounding this community, such as challenges in acquiring mental and physical health services. Most of these studies are primarily in Canadian, American, and European contexts (Messih, 2017; Murray, 2011; Chavez, 2011; Karimi, 2018; Fox, Griffin, Pachankis, 2020) due to the fact that these regions are traditionally migrant-receiving areas with legal frameworks that favor LGBTQ rights. But, these regions of the world do not own a monopoly on legal frameworks for LGBTQ rights or migration

governance. Several instruments are in place in Latin America with aspirational goals towards a migration governance system with proper integration practices.

Mexican Immigration Law and Legal Framework

While many regard Mexico as a traditionally migrant-sending country, it is actually a country of emigration, immigration, refuge, transit and return migration, all the while its legal frameworks function under a heavy securitization of its borders. Given that most migration research focuses on traditionally migrant-receiving states like the United States, Canada, and Western European countries, it is important to conceive international migration outside of that usual praxis. For the purpose of this research, Mexico will need to be particularly envisioned as a destination country. Mexico has historically received migrants from Spain, Central America, the Caribbean, South America and Africa. Recent developments around the world, but particularly those in Central America, have created conditions that have caused migrants to move into Mexico, further advancing immigration politics and discourse across the country. As Mexico reckons with its unique position, its legal framework, operating under the Cartagena Declaration and federal laws are the center of investigation and inquiry. This review of Mexico's legal framework and regulations will contextualize the city-specific regulations that Mexico City adopted in response. By understanding the legal instruments and its contents, the research is in a better place to understand the actors interviewed for this research.

The Mexican constitution establishes the main framework for which nationality and citizenship is obtained. Through both *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* systems, Article 30 of Mexico's constitution establishes the general requirements for naturalization (Article 30, Mexican Constitution). While the basis for nationality and citizenship is straightforward, immigration laws that have been amended in the later quarter of the 20th century added a layer of complexity

to Mexico's immigration policies. The constitution itself has generally not accounted for migration flows as we know them today, which has necessitated legislation as a response throughout history. The 1857 and 1917 constitutions made little to no references to refugees and asylum-seekers, having only accounted for political persecutions and extradition mechanisms. It was the 1936 *Ley General de Población* that made the first reference to political exiles and was the eventual framework that guided Mexico's response to the Spanish civil war and the flow of refugees that entered the country in 1939 (Davila Valdes, 2002).

The principal law that governed Mexico's immigration policies was the *1974 Ley General de Población* (1974 General Law of Population), which sparked the end of a liberal immigration regime that survived in Mexico as a result of low immigration numbers up until the revolution (Gonzalez-Murphy & Koslowski, 2011). According to Gonzalez-Murphy and Koslowski (2011), the main objective of the 1974 law was to "promote an immigrant population that demonstrates good mental and physical health, economic solvency, poses no threat to Mexican labor, and shows a desire to assimilate". It effectively criminalized the crossing of borders, with strict, but vague criminal penalties for foreigners who entered or remained in Mexico without the proper authorization. These provisions were mainly targeted at migrants from Central America and as a result of its vagueness, the laws were exploited for corruption during the 1979-1992 civil war in El Salvador, which led to over 120,000 Salvadorans immigrants in Mexico during its peak (Gammage, 2007). At the time, the 1974 law established no legal mechanism for refugees/asylum-seekers. Mexico essentially had no international obligation to refugees, vying instead for its own internal processes and legislation for managing the migration phenomenon.

For nearly 25 years, the 1974 law was the law of the land, but some amendments and decrees were issued in order to manage Mexico's evolving migration system. In 1993, the Instituto

Nacional de Migración (INM) (National Institute for Migration) was created as a “deconcentrated technical organ, dependent on the Secretariat of the Interior” (Decree of Law, 1993). Its mission is to “strengthen the protection of human rights and the security of national and foreign migrants...to provide migration services efficiently, honestly and safely, strengthening development and national security” (INM, 2017). Since its inception, the INM has managed migration flows and developed special efforts, such as Programa Paisano, a visitor’s program that facilitates transit for Mexican citizens who visit from abroad (INM 2017).

It was in 2008 that the Mexican Congress approved a major amendment, which decriminalized a section of the law that established up to a 10-year prison sentence for entering Mexico illegally. Soon after, however, certain events during President Calderón’s presidential term led to an even more innovative law that went beyond what many in President Calderon’s administration deemed an obsolete 1974 law.

Latin America witnessed waves of forced migration throughout the latter half of the 20th century that sparked international cooperation, a period that would later continue to be the basis for many Latin American country’s legal frameworks, especially for Mexico. The existing 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol did not adequately address forced migrants who fled countries like Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala during the 1960s-1980s. Therefore, Latin America needed its own international instrument to propose an “asylum regime” that could function regionally in response to intersecting waves of violence that resulted in an exodus of refugees (Fischel de Andrade, 2019). The Cartagena Declaration was a milestone moment over its broadening of the definition of “refugee” to include those fleeing “generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order” while at the same time establishing

the principle of non-refoulement (Esthimer, 2016). These norms were created in the spirit of solidarity among countries with shared histories of humanitarian crises, which was strengthened with the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action, signed by 20 Latin American countries.

The *Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America* reaffirmed members' commitment to a solidarity asylum regime. The Mexico Plan of Action enabled a "renewed and strategic operational framework that defined the main challenges on the protection of refugees and other persons in need of international protection" (Viroli, 2010). In addition, the Mexico Plan of Action included language that specifically addressed integration and the role that UNHCR and civil society have in "implementing, monitoring, and improving integration projects" such as the "Solidarity Cities" Program that sought to facilitate local integration in key areas with high migration flows (Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen International Protection of Refugees in Latin America, 2004). To date, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration serves as the international legal framework and norm that guides Mexico's approach towards refugee admissions. However, the securitization of the country has made it so that the Declaration's guiding principles are difficult to follow.

With the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Mexican Refugee Commission (COMAR) drafted a policy proposal that was later approved by Mexico's congress and signed by President Calderón that incorporated "good practices" for refugees and asylum seekers. Among its provisions included access to certain health services, including insurance, education, and the revalidation of studies (UNHCR, 2011). The 2010 law built upon the 1987 Cartagena Declaration and the 2004 Plan of Action, to advance protections for asylum-seekers as the security situation in the southern border and Central America got more

volatile. The 2010 law allowed for Mexico to grant protection to people who did not meet the criteria as refugees, but whom still faced threats to their life if they were to return to their country of origin. To date, complementary protection is provided to individuals at the border by COMAR, however, one key informant for this research, who is a Mexican immigration attorney stated that COMAR often cites complementary protection for individuals who are part of the LGBTQ community as a basis for allowing them entry into the country, however it is disputed whether or not access to health and education benefits is allowed due to the generally practice that all individuals are required to have a *Clave Única de Registro de Población* (CURP), or Unique Population Registry Code (Mexico's version of a US Social Security number) in order to obtain public benefits. Many migrants who enter Mexico through complementary protection have not been provided with a CURP up until 2019. In addition, this key informant states that complementary protection must be renewed annually, which incurs fees and bureaucratic obstacles for those who live in Mexico under this particular status.

A country of migration, Mexico initiated several strategies and reforms from 2010-2011 to keep pace with increasingly diverse international migration flows, both regular and irregular. Today, we see that Mexico is a country of immigration, emigration, returnee migration, transit, and refuge. The Calderón administration recognized that Mexico faced many challenges at the turn of the decade, sparked by these realities in addition to advancements in technology, communication, human capital, as well as an increasingly disturbing pattern of violence against migrants (Morales Vega, 2012). At the same time, Mexico was bearing witness to a painful debate in the US, where anti-immigrant political movements grew in popularity in the aftermath of the 2008 election. Eventually, several US states embraced anti-immigrant sentiments by adopting anti-immigrant policies, such as Arizona's Senate Bill 1070. On the other side, several

states and cities strengthened their sanctuary policies, fueling debate and discourse. Despite the internal debate on immigration law in the US, the Mexican government responded through its own laws and policy changes.

President Felipe Calderon made the bold proposal to reform the existing 1974 law in 2010, which the Mexican Senate took up and approved in 2011 in what became the 2011 Ley de Migración (2011 Migration Law) (Garcia, 2018). The Migration Policy Institute characterizes the 2011 law as “ambitious” with goals that “respects the human rights of migrants; facilitates the movement of people...meets the country’s labor needs; guarantees equal rights for Mexican natives and foreigners residing in the country; promotes family unity and socio-cultural integration...” (Migration Policy Institute, 2011). Garcia (2018) argues that while this law did address an immediate need, it only continued Mexico’s pattern of legislating on impulse, instead of offering long-term solutions. The 2011 law, however, does capture major segments of migration management and governance that is unique, by formally affording rights to migrants that the 1974 law did not. For instance, Article 2 of the 2011 law establishes “unrestricted respect for the human rights of migrants, nationals, and foreigners, whatever their origin, nationality, gender, ethnicity, age and immigration status, with special care for vulnerable groups” (Tamagno, et al., 2018). Furthermore, the 2011 law allowed migrants to obtain medical and education access, regardless of irregular status, which no longer impeded access to these benefits as a result of the new law (Tamagno, et al., 2018). The law marked a major development for Mexico in its approach towards international migration flows and further demonstrates how Mexico continues to give formal government recognition of these diversity involved in these migration flows. To date, the 2011 Migration Law is the federal immigration legislation under which federal Mexican government agencies function.

As Mexico continues to develop its migration systems, several challenges have created inconsistencies in how the country's laws and international guiding principles are carried out. While Mexico is no stranger to sharp increases in migration flows from its southern border, the country has been grappling with a heavy securitization of both its borders and domestic policies in attempts to meet US expectations on migration flows and drug trafficking-related violence. The US-Mexico bilateral Merida Initiative further securitized the country's southern border, adding an additional layer of complexity and change in the humanitarian situation there (Seelke; Finklea, 2017). The federal government's response to violence has trickled into the migration system, putting it at odds with the 1984 Cartagena Declaration. As a result, a localized approach towards migration has emerged out of Mexico City, in particular, in the last decade. Following in the footsteps of American sanctuary cities like San Francisco and New York City, several city-wide laws have been implemented as a way to reaffirm Mexico City's commitment to migrants who move in.

The 2011 Ley de Interculturalidad Atención a Migrantes y Movilidad Humana en el Distrito Federal (Intercultural Law on Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility in the Federal District) is a law pertaining to Mexico City that was pushed to establish a local framework that created the Secretaría de Desarrollo Rural y Equidad entre las Comunidades (SEDEREC) (Secretariat for Rural Development and Equity among Communities). While this law was originally intended to develop and promote inclusion of indigenous and rural populations, the local Mexico City government considered migration as part of this law a matter for the federal government and not the local one; but thanks to the major efforts of civil society, the law included a migration mandate for SEDEREC (Marzorati & Marconi, 2018). This milestone local law pivoted Mexico

City's position as a global, diverse city with certain local obligations to its increasingly diverse migrant community.

As previously mentioned, immigration policy discourse in the US sharply increased after the election of former President Barack Obama. Prompting several reactions, such as the 2011 reforms, the polarization of the early 2010s did not stop. On the contrary, polarization only sharply increased. In the aftermath of the contentious 2016 US election, Mexico City Mayor Miguel Angel Mancera Espinosa declared Mexico City a "sanctuary city" in 2017. The policy was further affirmed by the city's unique constitution that was enacted that same year. Under the city's constitution, migrants, including those who are subject to international protection, are not criminalized. In addition, the local government's constitution specifically identifies migrants from different backgrounds as deserving of rights. "The Government of Mexico city and all local authorities...must promote, respect, protect, and guarantee the human rights of migrants, whether they are in transit or return to Mexico City, as well as those who would have inclined for refugee status, political asylum, or complimentary protection" (Mexico City Constitution, 2017). Mexico City's inclusive constitution is in large part a response to perceived animosity against Central American asylum-seekers, with xenophobic attitudes coming in from both Mexican and American political actors that then translated to voters. The Trump administration's approach to Central American asylum-seekers was also a factor in how Mexico City as a local government could respond to the increase in anti-immigrant sentiment.

Since this paper focuses on LGBTQ migrants, it is only appropriate that LGBTQ rights are examined. Mexico City's inclusive legal framework for migrants is consistent with its unique position on LGBTQ rights. Mexico City first legalized same-sex marriage in 2006, solidifying its position as the LGBTQ capital of Latin America with its annual Pride march and vibrant

LGBTQ district in the center of the city. The city's forward-thinking approach to LGBTQ rights often places it at odds with greater Mexican politics, which can be viewed as struggling to fully accept LGBTQ rights as a federally recognized value. Lopez (2017) argues that Mexico as a whole may be a case of being "the exception, not the rule" when it comes to moving LGBTQ rights forward. Mexico has a clear federal framework against discrimination, upheld by the Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación (Mexico's Supreme Court), but Lopez (2017) states that the Supreme Court's progressive positionality does not extend to all 32 Mexican states, which is evident by state laws that do not afford recognition of marriage rights for LGBTQ people, for instance. In terms of security, transgender people are not as safe as the legal framework may promote. In fact, 63 transgender people were killed in Mexico in 2019, the second highest figure in Latin America after Brazil (Statista, 2019). Hate crimes against LGBTQ people within inclusive legal frameworks can be committed just about anywhere, including in the West. Mexico City has long marked its position in history as leading Mexico's effort towards LGBTQ rights where anyone who is LGBTQ and a migrant can find a safe haven in.

The Northern Triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) have been at the center of many incidences of violence amid political turmoil, crime, and foreign aggression. The legacies of these incidences still play out today in many ways, despite institutional commitments towards security, anti-corruption, and bilateral cooperation with the United States to fight drug and human trafficking. Similar to the events of the 1980s, Northern Triangle countries in the present moment have seen many of their citizens flee towards the north, vying to seek protection in the United States, with many settling for Mexico. For its LGBTQ citizens, many will select to remain with their Mexican neighbors, escaping the horrific conditions in their home-countries

that are caught between domestic policy failures and international criminal rings that make existing as an LGBTQ person all the more difficult.

Many high-profile murders of LGBTQ people come from Honduras, where gang violence, police violence, and hate crimes often intersect with one another. Such violence has claimed the lives of at least 215 LGBTQ people from 2009-2015, with hardly any of the perpetrators ever being arrested, let alone imprisoned (Tucker, 2016). Cattrachas, a Honduran-based lesbian collective organization, reports that LGBTQ people are all “killed differently” with transgender people being “targeted with fire arms, gay men murdered in their homes and workplaces, and lesbians shot in the street” and that there is “no state capacity or will to prevent violence against LGBT people” (Farthing, 2019). Such high profile murders have caught the attention the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), who publicly condemned the Honduran government for failing to follow its own laws in criminalizing discrimination and prosecuting subsequent murders, urging that Honduras go beyond its written policies and “adopt specific measures to effectively address the patterns of violence that exist against human rights defenders of LGBT persons” which are often perpetuated by the military and police forces (Organization of American States, 2016).

The situation is no better in neighboring El Salvador, where the government admits that LGBTQ people are more vulnerable to crimes, but does little to prevent it, subsequently resulting in mass LGBTQ migration towards the US. “LGBTI people, who, in addition to suffering from widespread discrimination, also face multiple forms of violence, including acts of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, excessive use of force...much of it committed by public security agents,” (HRW, 2021). Though El Salvador admits the situation is precarious for LGBTQ people, commitments by the Bukele administration and others in the past have gone

nowhere. Between January 2007-November 2017, over 1,200 El Salvadorans have sought asylum in the US due to sexual orientation or gender identity (HRW, 2021). For years now, local LGBTQ rights activists have mounted pressure on El Salvador to commit to holding perpetrators of hate crimes accountable. The pressure has led to the United Nations intervening, calling on Salvadorean authorities to investigate the sharp rise in LGBTQ hate crimes (Lopez, 2019). Honduras and El Salvador share a disturbing trend when it comes to crimes against LGBTQ people. Both countries have passed seemingly progressive legislation that is intended to address hate crimes, but neither country has convicted anyone under that legislation (HRW, 2020), giving way towards crimes against LGBTQ with impunity.

The resulting LGBTQ migration flows from Central America has tested Mexico's ability to afford refuge to this group. Though there is no official data from the Mexican government, initial reports of LGBTQ asylum seekers making claims in Mexico's southern border began around 2013-2014 when many transgender asylum-seekers began making asylum claims at the offices of COMAR in Tenosique, a border city in Mexico's Tabasco state (Kiernan; Flores; Lucero, 2017). At the same time, images of migrant caravans moving across the Guatemala-Mexico border were shared around the world. Among the caravans were LGBTQ asylum-seekers who deviated away from the caravan to form their own. The images resonated with some, while shocking others. Ultimately, the situation highlighted Mexico's limited immigration infrastructure as the country grappled with an increasingly securitized border and unprecedented mounting pressure coming from Washington, DC over immigration policy.

While the lack of data by the Mexican government makes it difficult to quantify the extent to which LGBTQ asylum seekers make claims with COMAR or INM, there is a general consensus that LGBTQ asylum seekers in Mexico do exist, and most of them come from Central

America. Whether they are in Mexico in irregular status or as refugees protected by Mexican immigration law, there are concerted efforts by the local Mexico City government to grant certain limited protections that mirror those of laws protecting undocumented immigrants in the United States, further positioning Mexico as having a migrant-receiving state.

Methodology

This thesis is based on fieldwork conducted in a virtual and remote setting with participants who were based in Mexico City over the course of Summer and Fall 2020. Due to the diverse and complex nature of the topic, the research design section of this chapter will contextualize and detail the elements that surrounded the fieldwork. The site selection will describe the uniqueness of Mexico City as the location of this study, with some brief context as to why the city provides the best geographical case study for LGBTQ migrants' labor market integration in Mexico. Research methods will be discussed by including the descriptions of participants, descriptions of the institutions they represent, and how the participants were recruited and ultimately selected for this research.

Research Design

The methodology used in this research represents a qualitative interview study as the most effective research method that captures a large scope of the Mexican integration regime as it affects members of the LGBTQ migrant community. The research design is composed of 17 in-depth semi-structured interviews of individuals representing 11 entities, including Mexican government agencies, international organizations, and civil society who are associated with the integration of migrants. These interviews amount to three unique perspectives on the matter of labor market integration and LGBTQ migrants/

This qualitative research study draws upon Bearman's idea that semi-structured interview data "does not represent what happened", but it is rather "a perspective about what happened" (Bearman, 2019, p. 4). Similarly, this research attempts to draw conclusions based on each perspective's experiences, understandings, and perceptions of labor market integration and the LGBTQ migrant community. This research study was approached with the acknowledgement

that labor market integration and the LGBTQ community is composed of many elements that are too vast to capture simply from one perspective; therefore, it is integral that multiple perspectives contribute in order to clearly illustrate what integration looks like in Mexico. Integrating any migrant community, but especially sexual minorities, comes with many underlying singularities that pose different types of challenges to government agencies, international organizations, and civil society. It is this reality for why gaining multiple perspectives on the matter is critical towards understanding the Mexican approach, identifying key issues and solutions, with the idea that such findings can inform future prospects for advancing the ultimate goal of providing a space for LGBTQ migrants to integrate successfully and dignifiedly into the labor market.

Site Selection

Initially, this research was aiming to capture the same three perspectives using a multi-city approach by incorporating perspectives from Tapachula, Chiapas and Tijuana, Baja California in addition to Mexico City. At the time, LGBTQ migrants were ascending upon these two border regions in caravans, with the goal of seeking asylum in the United States as they fled violence in Central American countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—also known as the Northern Triangle (Baker, 2019). The initial inquiry was to investigate civil society groups working with LGBTQ asylum-seekers in these two regions, however migrants living in a rapidly evolving mobility context, as most are in border towns, are distinct from those who reside in Mexico City. Migrants in Tijuana and Tapachula generally stay there temporarily, while awaiting certain immigration processes; therefore, understanding labor market integration in those particular cities would require a heavily localized perspective that was difficult to contact due to a rapidly changing migration system that local authorities and civil society groups adapted to amid the COVID-19 pandemic. While LGBTQ migrants in the capital are just as likely to be

staying temporarily in the city as their Tijuana and Tapachula counterparts, there is a structured integration regime in Mexico City that border regions continue to struggle with and is not as accessible for this research.

Mexico City has long been the diversity and LGBTQ rights capital of Latin America, generating great interest by LGBTQ organizations to further advance rights and inclusive local legal frameworks in the city. Since the 1960s, Mexico City has been the epicenter of social justice networks that actively fought for equality, largely inspired by the 1960's civil rights movement in the United States (Herrick & Stuart, 2004; Lopez, 2017). This work continues into the 21st century with notable victories, the 2006 legalization of same-sex marriage in Mexico City. With such legal victories, the city actively advances ways to implement inclusive local policies that directly speak to the particular employment, health, and education needs of the LGBTQ community.

Mexico faces challenges of its own when it comes to its LGBTQ population. For instance, a 2020 report found a surge in anti-LGBTQ violence across the country. At least 117 LGBTQ people—half of them transgender women—were murdered in Mexico, which represents a 1/3 increase compared to the previous year (Lopez, 2020; Letra Ese, 2020). At the same time, the Northern Triangle faces a humanitarian catastrophe on LGBTQ rights. In Honduras, for instance, several LGBTQ rights activists have been the targets of particularly gruesome murders, in which both gangs and police forces are implicated in. Indrya Mendoza, Director of the Honduran-based Cattrachas organization claims there is “no state capacity or will to prevent violence against LGBTQ people” as the country of 9.5 million people grapples with an average of 30 recorded LGBTQ murders each year (Farthing, 2019). Such incidence of violence has heightened the urgency among the Central American LGBTQ community as they grapple with

not only state and gang violence, but also with low and undignified employment prospects, harassment, abandonment, and more.

Due to unsafe conditions in Northern Triangle countries, as well as in Mexico's border regions, LGBTQ migrants have instead opted in to move to the capital, which has further diversified the already growing migrant population in the city. The city's inclusive culture and sanctuary policies intersect as a haven for LGBTQ migrants (Ward, 2019). As a result of Mexico City's inclusive positionality and recognition for LGBTQ and migrant's rights, it is thus the most efficient location to investigate how labor market integration is functioning for the LGBTQ migrant community.

Participants

Interviewees in this research were selected through a purposive sample on the basis of the following criteria for each set of participants.

Participants directly associated with the government of Mexico in either federal, state and city or local capacities:

- (1) Individuals greater than 18 years old.
- (2) Individuals affiliated with the Mexican government in either federal, state, and city capacities with direct involvement in migration policymaking, implementation of integration policies, and/or advancing LGBTQ rights as it relates to migration.

Participants associated with international organizations, civil society, and/or providers:

- (1) Individuals greater than 18 years old.
- (2) Individuals currently working directly with migrants within the parameters of an established non-profit, non-government agency that is either self-supported or funded largely without the support of the Mexican government.

The establishment of these criteria drew upon recommendations from preliminary research that identified which key actors are involved in the implementation of labor market integration policies and programs that could speak directly to the needs of the LGBTQ migrant community. A total of 17 individuals representing 11 institutions and organizations participated in interviews that lasted between 25 – 60 minutes, depending on the extent of involvement in which the institution or organization had in labor market integration policies. Of the 11 institutions that are represented in this research, six pertained to the Mexican government, two from international organizations, and three from civil society.

Each participant was aware of the research study's specifications and were read the consent form in Spanish, consistent with the protocol's guidelines. Before the participants were able to officially start the interview, they were all given an opportunity to ask questions in regard to the consent form and protocol. All participants were recruited through personal and professional networks, with the exception of two who were recruited through the snowball method. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions on travel, all interviews were conducted remotely via videoconference using the Zoom and WhatsApp platforms in order to guarantee the health and wellbeing of participants for this research. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, in accordance with the participant's native language.

Validity and credibility

While it cannot be guaranteed that all information provided by participants in the interviews are accurate and precise, all participants pertain to institutions, organizations, and civil society groups that hold its staff to exceptional high standards. Participants representing Mexican government agencies are formally representing the government of Mexico, its perspective, practices, and understandings of a complicated issue, which is acknowledged with

reverence. Participants representing international organizations and civil society are representing very particular organizations that are held in high regard and respect by governments, institutions, and academia around the world. Because participants represent valuable, and revered organizations, the information they provided can be concluded to be reliable and absent of other intentions other than to assist in a research study.

All participants were given the option of whether they wanted to remain anonymous for this research study. Only one individual asked to remain anonymous, however permission was obtained to keep the name of the organization they represented in the research.

Strengths and limitations

Several strengths and limitations exist for this particular research study. Much of the existing literature and research on LGBTQ migrants exist within the framework of traditional migrant-receiving, Western countries relative to how LGBTQ diaspora adapts to challenges ranging from socioeconomic obstacles to cultural adaptations. In other research studies and literature, there is a particular reclaiming of queer oral history that generally goes unspoken in certain migrant communities. However, such literature remains strictly within the context of Western countries and their politics, with little focus on emerging migrant destinations like Mexico. While this may be perceived as a weakness, this is actually a strength as it has kept the inquiry flexible and nonbinding towards any pre-existing frameworks that are specific to the case of Mexico.

A second strength includes the diverse and active presence of a multitude of Mexican government agencies and international organizations who all expressed interest in this research. Their willingness to participate in this research speaks to a growing positive sentiment among stakeholders involved in integrating migrants. In addition, all Mexican agencies and international

organizations in this research expressed interest in furthering their own understandings about the needs and complexities of the LGBTQ community, which is a very promising sign for future prospects involving inclusive and equitable integration policies. None of the participants expressed skeptical, or homophobic sentiment towards the topic, which is another promising sign that participants were actively engaged with the topic.

Data analysis

The data analysis in this ethnographic, qualitative research project is approached through grounded theory. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory assists researchers to understand “how social circumstances could account for the interactions, behaviors, and experiences of the people being studied” (Marjan, 2017). According to Marjan (2017), there are two main approaches to grounded theory: The Classic/Glaserian grounded theory approach and the Straussian grounded theory approach. This research project takes the classic/Glaserian approach due to certain areas of the research process that are more consistent with the classic approach. In the classic/Glaserian approach, data that is collected and coded is prioritized over the research question. The “research question” is actually an area of interest. Existing concepts in the literature that are deemed relevant to the inquiry are explored, but not necessarily included as deductive (Marjan, 2017). It is this reason that the classic/Glaserian approach is relevant for the data analysis of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted, given that the promotion of labor market integration for LGBTQ forced migrants is a relatively new and emerging inquiry of study that only contributes to the theoretical framework and existing literature, as opposed to being tested.

List of Subjects Interviewed

Institution Name	Translation	Classification	Location
Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR)	Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance	Federal agency	Mexico City
Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM)	National Institute of Immigration	Federal agency	Mexico City
La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas	Immigration Policy, Registration, and Identity Unit	Federal agency (Unit within Secretaría de Gobernación)	Mexico City
Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS)	Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare	Federal agency	Mexico City
Servicio Nacional de Empleo	National Employment Service	Federal agency	Mexico City
Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (ACNUR)	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	International organization	Mexico City
Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM)	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	International organization	Mexico City
Secretaría de Inclusión y Bienestar Social de la Ciudad de México (SIBISO)	Secretariat of Inclusion and Social Welfare	City agency	Mexico City
Sin Fronteras	No Borders	Civil society	Mexico City
Scalabrinianas: Misión con Migrantes y Refugiados	Scalabrinians: Mission for Migrants and Refugees	Civil society	Mexico City
Casa de las Muñecas Tiresias A.C.	House of the Tiresian Dolls	Civil society	Mexico City

Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this study is to examine how LGBTQ forced migrants are integrating into Mexico City's labor market. Like many other migrant-receiving states, Mexico's attempts to welcome and integrate new arrivals is promoted by both government and non-government actors, such as international organizations and community organizations, known as *asociaciones civiles* (civil associations). Several themes were identified in the semi-structured interviews conducted with 17 individuals who represented 11 different entities, ranging from Mexican government agencies, international organizations, and community organizations. Seeing as how this research inquiry was understood to be new and emerging in the field of migration studies, open coding was conducted in order to flexibly identify and categorize common patterns references in participant's semi-structured interviews. Open coding is also in keeping the grounded theory approach by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the most suitable qualitative method for research on new and emerging fields of interest. The codes collected from this research include operational support/budgeting, LGBTQ migrant data and tracking, building awareness and sensitivity, as well as descriptions of labor integration programs. This section will detail each theme's relevance to the overall research question.

Operational Support and Budgets

The lack of adequate budget in stakeholder's capacities to address several challenges relating to migration management and labor integration was discussed in depth and identified as one the most consequential factors in the lack of labor integration efforts, among other issues, especially in migration management and governance. Government agencies, international organizations, and community organizations expressed similar concerns regarding budget constraints, including the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM), La Unidad de Política

Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas (UPM), Comisión de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR), the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Sin Fronteras.

The lack of funds allotted to Mexico's top migrant and refugee processing agencies, the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) and the Comisión de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR) is a factor in the relationship between the country's top migration agencies and international organizations.

"We consider ourselves the younger sibling of the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM). We are very connected, but our budget is very small. We received 70,000 people [in 2019] that 150 staff have to tend to... we have a very reduced budget from the federal government" -Octavio, COMAR.

Budget shortages have been a reoccurring pattern for COMAR in the last few years. The agency's quarrel with its finances has resulted in international organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to step in and assist. In an interview with UNHCR, the study found that with the exception of a modest budget increase in 2020, very little federal investment has gone into COMAR. Despite a budget increase in 2020, the demand in operational services is not keeping up with the supply of funds this particular agency receives annually. This pattern has been reoccurring since at least the last seven years.

"From 2014-2019, COMAR's budget has not changed at all, so part of the work that UNHCR does is to support COMAR with equipment, operational support, and amplifying their operative work, etc. Our objective has been to enhance COMAR's budget...their budget has been increased to nearly \$40 million pesos (\$1.9 million US dollars), which would double what they have now, but it is not sufficient as we see that 70,000 applications went through COMAR in 2019, and we project up to 100,000 through the end of 2020." -Florian, UNHCR.

Figures from Sin Fronteras, a community organization based in Mexico City, show that COMAR's budget hovered around \$1 million US dollars in the last three years. In 2019, COMAR's budget declined sharply to just over \$960,000 US dollars from \$1.2 million US dollars the year prior. Although COMAR's budget was increased to the tune of \$1.9 million US

dollars, UNHCR continues to play a major role in the agency's operations to make up for persisting staffing and equipment shortages. UNHCR stresses that inadequate budgets for COMAR impact the ways host communities respond to migrants' needs in border regions.

“When we talk about budgets, we need to address the difficulty in accessing education, health services, etc., especially in the southern border, so that it corresponds to the needs of the migrants and the host community, otherwise the quality of services decreases, and migrants start to get excluded. It cannot be budgets just for COMAR, but other areas of services that host communities need in order to do their jobs” – Florian, UNHCR

Community organizations like Sin Fronteras hold budgets partially responsible for the lack of integration programs tailored towards vulnerable groups of migrants, including the LGBTQ migrant community.

“We need programs with budgets for integration. Very weak budgets mean less successful integration...there used to be identification cards for migrants—it was simple. Now, they say that there is no budget to create the plastic to make those cards,” – Ana, Sin Fronteras

The lack of budget for government agencies has also limited the cooperation between international organizations and government agencies, leaving room only for pilot programs that test the potential for migrants' labor integration.

“[We start] pilot programs because the main issue is that budgets are being cut, which limits our work....” – Jessica, La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas

Due to budget constraints, many government agencies and international organization cooperation is limited to where the highest needs are perceived.

“...many sectors are not investing in the special attention to vulnerable migrants because they prioritize their budgets and operations on the Mexican returnee population...there is also competition among United Nations agencies to account for the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) migrants at the northern border” – Jessica, La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas

Where government agencies have been unable to offer attention, community organizations have had to pick up the voids left.

All three perspectives scrutinized a lack of budget and financial support for the operational shortfalls that affect migrants in different ways. Though this section illustrates a bureaucratic system, it also highlights how budget requisition issues faced by agencies may have consequences that severely impact migrants' immediate and long-term labor integration. The purpose of this research study is to identify how LGBTQ migrants are included in integration efforts; therefore, it is important to include where fundamental aspects of integration is failing and/or succeeding.

While labor integration can be viewed as a one of the first steps in migrants' journeys, it is the initial application process for asylum, refuge, or other relevant stay that is really the first step. Government agencies have struggled through the years to adequately meet the pressing demands of refuge/asylum petitions at the southern border, as evident by massive and disorderly migration flows into Mexico's southern border. Without proper appropriations, COMAR and INM have been unable to meet the needs of migrants who require going through the early steps of application processing, much less for longer-term integration. As a result, international organizations have stepped into roles, such as offering administrative and operational support in COMAR and INM offices across the country to provide some sort of order for petitions.

The lack of ability to meet demand could be explained by Mexico's unique geography. As a country of immigration, emigration, returnee migration, transit, and refuge, a competitive spirit to attend to the most pressing and immediate demands seems to be the way government agencies respond. As Ana from Sin Fronteras alluded to in the semi-structured interview,

returnee migration has been a challenge for the Mexican government, diminishing operational support and resources for other groups of migrants that may require special attention.

In addition to budget shortfalls for COMAR's operations, limitations on services can have an impact on other key areas that have a role in integration. As Florian from UNHCR noted, budget cuts can have a negative impact on other services, including healthcare and education over the likely scenario that health and education providers can resort to denying services to migrants in order to keep the quality of service high for native Mexicans. This is a major consequence of budget cuts that can translate into host community's inability to offer adequate services to migrants. Labor integration is impacted here, as well. COMAR's budget limitations have impacted the ability for the agency to offer identification cards for migrants. Decried by Sin Fronteras, budget constraints have recently resulted in identification cards not being printed because there isn't enough funding for the plastic that is required to make the cards, severely hindering the ways migrants can access certain services. The lack of an identification card, which is especially consequential for LGBTQ migrants, can obstruct efforts to integrate into the labor market.

There is an overwhelming need for increased budgets among government agencies in order to offer the proper services for migrants. While this finding may not be new, it is nonetheless a factor that hampers the ability of labor integration to be successful. The increase in COMAR's 2020 budget is a promising sign of federal action to address inequities in services provided to migrants, however those modest increases do not seem to meet the increasingly pressing demand that is to come from a sharp rise in migration flows from Central America. It can be concluded that without proper funds, integration efforts can be made even more difficult, further exacerbating the sentiment of bureaucratic competition for funding in order to meet the

unique needs of Mexico's migrant population. To emphasize Ana's perspective, "*Very weak budgets mean less successful integration*".

LGBTQ Migration Data/Tracking

This study revealed a pattern of challenges in identifying LGBTQ migrants due to institutional practices that do not account for that information, leaving it up to international organizations and community organizations to do so.

This study asked several stakeholders whether they have tracking systems in place that specifically identifies LGBTQ migrants.

"Civil associations have a greater role in that because institutions don't have clearly defined policies and visions on implementing those strategies..." – Héctor, Instituto Nacional de Migración

"We don't have data on how many LGBTQ migrants there are...the information we have systemized, for LGBTQ identity, is not tracked unless [their identity] forms part of their persecution, but other than that we do not collect data on it..." – Octavio, COMAR

"We don't generate the data, but we base our work on the data that others create. The INM and COMAR create registries, but they don't allow migrants to self-identify as Afro-descending, Indigenous, or LGBTQ, so it makes it incredibly difficult to generate information about LGBTQ populations" – Jessica, La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas

"The Instituto Nacional de Migración does not ask or track data on sexual orientation. If the migrant expresses it in their solicitation for asylum, then it is taken into consideration, but it is not conditional for any service" —Isidro, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Data tracking has been a challenge for government agencies, especially in wake of sharp increases in operational demand. This study was able to identify very limited data on LGBTQ migrants in the context of the asylum process; however, it was unable to ensure whether that data was integral.

“The INM was able to report seven people in the last two and a half years in migratory stations who pertained to the LGBTQ community.” –Jessica, La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas

It was recognized that such data does not fall in line with the reality that is on the ground, given that previous academic studies, reports from international organizations, and community organizations do not corroborate with INM’s figures.

“COMAR does not have data on sex or sexual identity. If you submit an information request, for instance, by sex or age, they take a long time to do it because unfortunately, COMAR has made changes in ways they register. Since the 2018 caravans, data has been incredibly difficult to obtain—it comes down to prioritizing attending people on the ground versus tracking data.” – Jessica, La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas

Identifying migrants’ sexual orientation and gender identity is not a challenge that is unique to only Mexico, but for most host-countries. Limits to how much information government-run population surveys can request from people has many legal implications, especially when it comes to sexual orientation. It is not a surprise that Mexico does not carry that information, as many countries like the US and Canada do not as well. Unless sexual orientation is explicitly part of an asylum-seeker’s petition, then it is not documented. However, the lack of data on LGBTQ migrants among Mexican government agencies makes it difficult to identify how exactly vulnerable populations are being provided for and whether integration efforts are successful. Without a proper instrument to measure the effectiveness, it cannot be concluded whether government agencies are responding properly, leaving research to rely on discussion, experiences, and other qualitative forms of inquiry.

The few data that does exist on LGBTQ migrants does not seem to be consistent with the reality. The available data provided by UPM indicates that only seven LGBTQ people went through migration stations in Mexico, which are centers that the federal government established

across the country in order to serve migrants in transit, or those seeking refuge. While that data represents migration outside of the capital, it illustrates how difficult and unreliable data on LGBTQ migrants can be to find. Community organizations know for a fact, based on the number of experiences in providing for LGBTQ migrants in the past, that the number of LGBTQ migrants who arrive to Mexico City is high. While this research could have solicited data from COMAR through an information request on LGBTQ migrants, there is a massive data backlog that prevents requests from being attended to. The backlog represents a challenge for COMAR, who finds itself between tending to the on the ground needs of migrants versus collecting data, a stark reality for the troubled agency.

This research was unable to identify LGBTQ migrants, which could have offered a more “quantifiable” insight into how many LGBTQ migrants there are, as well as how many are successfully integrating into the Mexico City’s labor market. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this research study was unable to interview LGBTQ migrants in a safe manner, though several identified interest in participating if conditions permitted.

Building Awareness and Sensitivity

This study found that building awareness and sensibility training within immigration and labor institutions has advanced ways for institutions to acknowledge the needs of vulnerable migrants. Though the topic of LGBTQ migrants is relatively new, migrants pertaining to certain categories such as women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly have been subjects of existing special attention protocols and practices by institutions and community organizations. This study found that government agencies, civil society, and international organizations agree on the need for sensitivity training and building awareness of LGBTQ migrants, however the

results of that work is disputed. The study also found that practices vary depending on the region of Mexico in which an institution is located. Mexico City has been found to be in a more favorable position to adopt inclusive practices, compared to other parts of the country.

“The rest of Mexico is not like Mexico City. In Mexico City, you can change your identification documents and make them congruent with your sexual identity. Our ample [federal] law about equality and anti-discrimination gives that impression [that one would be treated like in Mexico City], but we know that LGBTQ migrants will be treated differently in a state like Chiapas, or states in the northern border region”

– Jessica, La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas

LGBTQ migrants’ inconsistent treatment from officials by immigration institutions captured the attention of international organizations and community organizations. International organizations have recognized the favorable legal framework that exists in Mexico, with its many anti-discriminatory policies, but recognize that certain practices fall short of meeting policy expectations.

UNHCR notes that the existing legal framework in Mexico is favorable.

“...we need to work towards sensibility training in key institutions that are local, state, and federal” –Florian, UHNCR

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has implemented strategies towards building LGBTQ awareness among Mexican immigration institutions, including generating manuals and issuing recommendations for public official’s use in addressing sexual orientation. This guidance is consistent with the IOM’s mission towards orderly migration management, in which LGBTQ migration now forms part of.

“...we conduct trainings so that we can build understandings among public officials on sexual orientation. If a migrant identifies a certain way, we want to ensure that public officials can guarantee an adequate response and recognize that the migrant fits a vulnerable migrant profile,” –Andreomar, IOM

Building awareness among institutions has been a key endeavor for civil society groups, who report negative experiences with agencies like COMAR, but COMAR has expressed that their staff go through hours of sensibility training.

“We have posters on site, courses on anti-discrimination, and the personnel are trained to tend to the LGBTQ population. We have to take 40 hours of sensibility training every year, at a minimum. We are obligated to take courses about gender...” – Germán, COMAR

This study found that some community organization groups have had a different experience when dealing with government agencies like COMAR. Such negative experiences have driven community organizations groups to physically accompany migrants, especially LGBTQ migrants, in order to advocate on their behalf during appointments.

“I don’t think institutions are very prepared or aware of the difficulties involved in working with LGBTQ people...many [LGBTQ migrants] have reported immigration officers challenging their gender identities because their photos don’t match the perceived gender...our lawyers accompany migrants to COMAR and other institutions because [COMAR] staff question people’s gender identity...sometimes COMAR questions why we, as an organization, send lawyers, but we have to in order to ensure that LGBTQ migrants’ rights are being respected and protected during the process,” – Sister Lidia Mara de Souza, Scalabrinian Refugee Mission

In a follow up, the study approached COMAR about certain LGBTQ migrants’ negative experiences with COMAR.

“On behalf of COMAR, I think the number of officials involved in discrimination cases is minimal,” --Germán, COMAR

Labor institutions also form part of the discussion on LGBTQ matters within institutions. The Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, though separate from the immigration institutions, report that they continue to work for LGBTQ inclusion.

“We acknowledge that LGBTQ people, like any person who pertains to a vulnerable group, will be susceptible to prejudice. We are working to sensiblize areas, not exclusively to migrants, but to the entire LGBTQ community...” -Isidro, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social

Efforts to build awareness on LGBTQ issues, including adopting sensitive language, anti-discrimination practices, and acknowledging migration's role in LGBTQ migrants' identity is a process that several institutions have undertaken. A concern among some is that despite the recommendations by international organizations, Mexican immigration institutions are not committing enough attention to vulnerable groups who have been discussed in public policy discourse for years. LGBTQ migrants, who form part of a much recent discussion, are left out even more.

“There is a disinterest in visiblizing particular migrants, especially when it involves irregular migration. The only focus that is always present is children because the law requires that children be given special protections...the Mexican government has had international recommendations for over a decade, but there has not been much progress...they have not tended to disabled populations, for instance,” – Jessica, La Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas

Despite anti-discrimination policies, certain LGBTQ migrants report being harassed by police, even the capital police in a seemingly inclusive city.

“The topic of police is worrisome...many of our LGBTQ migrants have suffered beatings from police...there have been instances of police stealing LGBTQ migrants' money, phones, migration documents, telling them ‘I hope they deport you, hopefully, they'll detain you’...I get worried over the levels of aggression and violence,” – Sister Lidia Mara de Souza, Scalabrinian Mission for Refugees

Mexico's forward-thinking anti-discrimination policies offer a positive environment for vulnerable groups of people, especially for migrants who fall under the categories deemed vulnerable, however certain practices may not fall in line with what is policy. The existing federal framework captures many vulnerable migrants, such as women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly. Based on the semi-structured interviews, these groups of migrants have been the subject of attention for a longer period of time than LGBTQ migrants, therefore, this suggests that existing agencies and community organizations have an assignment of simply

adding LGBTQ migrants into their mission objectives. However, this can be challenging as LGBTQ migration needs to be visibilized and certain institutions need to become increasingly aware of the diversity involved in migrant populations coming into the country.

In Mexico City, a much more inclusive attitude exists where community organizations and local government agencies appear to be on the same page in terms of non-discrimination towards LGBTQ migrants. Mexico City is well-equipped to offer LGBTQ migrants the appropriate changes that are consistent with their gender identity, such as being able to change the sex identification on an identification card. There is a clear consensus, in the capital at least, that anti-discrimination is an established norm. The issue appears to be on the degree to which these anti-discrimination norms are preserved and carried out equitably across the board.

Visibilization and building awareness about the diversity within migration in Mexico is an increasingly popular strategy by community organizations and international organizations. It is important to acknowledge here that community organizations and international organizations tend to already have established norms and values that already respect LGBTQ migrants. The objective appears to be to the extent to which those norms and values trickle into government institutions. While the study has revealed that government institutions and agencies are receiving those efforts well, certain community organizations dispute how much of that effort is translating into action. Even in the inclusive capital, certain anti-discrimination policies fall short.

Community organizations have decried discriminatory treatment by government agencies, including those that do not deal with migration at all, such as the police. Local Mexico City police, who are legally bound through the city's sanctuary law to not act as immigration law enforcement have been criticized by community organizations for certain behaviors towards LGBTQ migrants. As was reported by Sister Lidia Mara de Souza, Mexico City police have

acted aggressively and at times violently against LGBTQ migrants, particularly against transgender migrant women. One may ask what these experiences have to do with labor integration, but it has everything to do with integration. The relationship between government bodies and migrants are not limited to COMAR or INM, but rather all government bodies that are bound to legally protect all people. The relationship between government institutions and LGBTQ migrants is already a fragile one. Negative experiences with the police is an important one to consider, given how alleged instances of documentation robbery at the hands of the police can significantly hinder the wellbeing of LGBTQ people in general, but can also place an LGBTQ migrant in an especially dangerous situation where they are left without job prospects, verifiable identity, and are placed in an exceptionally vulnerable position. These acts of violence severely limit their integration and above all, well-being in the city. This study did not capture the perspective of the Mexico City police, as they are not an immigration government body.

Building awareness of the diversity within migration can be viewed as a simple act, but it is a critically important strategy. With limited understanding of LGBTQ migrants, their needs, and particularities, it is difficult to understand how to provide for them. Mexico's legal framework, especially Mexico City's, are unique that other countries around the world lack. The advantage here is that building awareness is a matter of continuing to advance the positive framework, while building upon existing structures that provide for migrants. With the exception of certain areas of the government, like local law enforcement, the matter appears to be more about building upon existing structures, rather than starting from zero, or creating a completely new system that is inclusive of LGBTQ migrants.

Labor Integration Programs

The main topic of this research study has been labor integration. Though LGBTQ migrants in Mexico are subject to many factors, as has been contextualized in the previous themes, labor integration programs provide a certain “light” for migrants to reach their potential. The findings in this section will be split in two, first addressing the work of international organizations and institutions in labor integration, which occurs broadly across Mexico. The second section will cover findings from community organizations and their work in advancing labor integration for LGBTQ migrants, which occurs mainly in the capital.

Federal Labor Integration Programs

One particular pilot program launched in conjunction with several agencies, including COMAR, INM, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, Servicio Nacional de Empleo and UNHCR, referred to as *Reubicación, Vinculación, Laboral y Acompañamiento* has shown promise in advancing labor integration for all migrants.

“We started in Saltillo, Coahuila in 2016, where there were more employment offers than there were employees. We chose Saltillo based on the fact that it is the safest city, next to Merida. We started with 38 migrants in 2016, 114 in 2017, and 500 in 2018. 6 out of 10 families who participated in the program were lifted out of poverty in the first year of accompaniment...this would not have been able to happen in the southern border region....they have formal employment, pay income taxes, have access to IMSS,...the program has extended to other cities, like Guadalajara, Aguascalientes, Monterrey, and in 2020, we launched programs in Querétaro, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, and León”
–Florian, UHNCR

Another program that involves a multi-institutional approach is the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social’s federal strategy *Abriendo Espacios*, which has the objective of linking vulnerable populations, such as people with disabilities, the elderly, migrants, LGBTQ people, and victims of crime to participate in the labor market. In September 2019, the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social established the *Red Nacional de Vinculación Laboral*, a national

network specifically dedicated to promoting inclusive labor practices and policies that protect migrants' rights. This study reveals that institutions, both with and without roles in migration, have all actively participated in efforts to integrate migrants. However, these efforts have not been shown to be concentrated in Mexico City and have not been able to show whether LGBTQ migrants are direct beneficiaries of these programs.

Mexico City Programs

One of the most structured labor integration programs in Mexico City belongs to the Scalabrinian Refugee Mission in Mexico City, which manages a migrant services and shelter facility, Casa Mambré. This shelter has a specific area for LGBTQ people, one of the only few in the entire country.

“When LGBTQ migrants enter our shelter, we solicit general information in an interview, such as asking for their work experience, educational attainment, etc. Our personnel support them by matching their experience with available jobs in the private sector”
–Sister Lidia Mara De Souza, Scalabrinian Mission for Refugees in Mexico

Casa Mambré's thorough labor integration program orients migrants by preparing them for job interviews, providing résumé building assistance, and helping with other relevant documents. The results of this labor integration program are not as quantifiable as that of the multi-institutional integration program mentioned earlier, but several indicators show that Casa Mambré's relationships with the private sector has benefited job-seeking LGBTQ migrants' insertion into the labor market.

“Many LGBTQ migrants prefer to be formally employed and be established in Mexico City, though their interest is generally to be in Mexico City for 2-3 years before continuing their journey to the US, Canada or Spain in some cases.” –Sister Lidia Mara De Souza

Casa Mambré has identified some sectors of the labor market where LGBTQ migrants tend to gravitate towards. While one sector doesn't have a particular interest over another, there

is a common experience among LGBTQ migrants when it comes to earning income in the beauty industry, especially hair styling, as well as in customer service and sales.

Mexico City is also home to a unique migrant shelter that is specifically designed to assist LGBTQ migrants, particularly transgender migrants. Casa de las Muñecas Tiresias is a migrant shelter, started in 2019, that provides services, including accompaniment, health services, sex education, and more. Most services are tailored towards transgender women in need of support, sex workers, and individuals struggling with drug or alcohol addiction. LGBTQ migrants who arrive at this particular shelter come from Central America, Brazil, and Colombia. The struggle to find employment for these populations is a challenge for Casa de las Muñecas Tiresias, who reports that transwomen are subject to discrimination and prejudice in the labor market, leaving many to resort to less desirable, informal work. These experiences may hinder program's efficacy when integrating migrants into formal employment in the private sector.

“A lot of transgender migrant women immediately go into sex work so they can earn an income—it’s a cycle that repeats itself....sex work, styling/beauty, ‘travesti work’, domestic work are all more popular jobs, but we don’t advance from there...LGBTQ people and labor—we don’t have rights, it is difficult to find a job,” – Kenya Cuevas, Casa de la Muñecas Tiresias

The Secretaría de Inclusión y Bienestar Social de la Ciudad de México (SIBISO) is a local Mexico City government office with a migration office that provides specialized attention, referrals and migration information. Formerly known as SEDEREC, Secretaria de Desarrollo Rural y Equidad para las Comunidades, SIBISO launched the Office of Migration in 2008, upon the anticipation of a massive exodus of returnee migrants from the US following the late 2000s global financial crisis. Though no mass exodus ensued, the infrastructure remained in place and the attention moved to international migrants. SIBISO's program, *Programa Hospitalitaria y Movilidad Humana*, is credited with providing integration support for international migrants and

returnees. Like the federal efforts, it is unclear whether this particular program has direct benefits for migrants who are LGBTQ.

“Programa Hospitalitaria y Movilidad Humana facilitates integration of international migrants and returnee migrants in terms of health, education, and other components of intervention,” –Jorge, SIBISO

Among the specific provisions of this program include direct application assistance for migrants in obtaining the proper documents to formally integrate into Mexico City. SIBISO promotes competencies, which can include skillsets and courses that are taught for a fee in order to obtain a certification in that skillset. The competencies, coordinated by the Secretaría de Educación Pública, have a financial cost that SIBISO is able to offset by providing fee waivers that cover up to the tune of \$10,000 Mexican Pesos (\$480 US dollars). The competencies are thus recognized by the Secretaría de Educación Pública, and formally valid by employers.

“We try to match migrants based on their competencies...many get into customer service and call centers with T-Mobile and AT&T. We work closely with the private sector and keep a database of migrants who align with requirements asked by an actively hiring company. This way, we are able to reach out to migrants and link them into jobs. It takes a strong relationship with the private sector and the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social so that migrants can better access employment,” –Isidro, SIBISO

SIBISO was unable to identify whether LGBTQ migrants are beneficiaries of these programs.

Pilot programs across Mexico offer a promising sign of the future of labor integration across the country, however there is uncertainty as to whether LGBTQ migrants are benefitting from any of it, or if there is room for future collaboration with LGBTQ migrants as direct beneficiaries from these efforts. Pilot programs have shown that despite budget constraints as mentioned earlier, cooperation between international organizations and local and state institutions have helped advance integration. The private sector has also been a prudent actor in

these efforts in addition to labor institutions whose role with migrants and non-migrants alike, speaks to the inclusive mission that can be attributed to the country's legal framework.

In Mexico City, community organizations have been able to respond to labor integration needs for LGBTQ migrants with detailed, tailored programs that aid LGBTQ migrants to identify areas of the labor market in Mexico City that are favorable towards their skills and identity. It is possible that the pilot programs that international organizations and government agencies work on can benefit from the perspective from community organizations in tailoring their labor integration efforts to specifically benefit LGBTQ migrants. It is possible that LGBTQ migrants are already benefiting immensely from these pilot programs, but because of the lack of data, it is difficult to measure. In any case, whether LGBTQ migrants are or are not benefiting, advertising such integration programs and recruiting LGBTQ migrants into the labor integration programs may be a necessary strategy in order to transition LGBTQ migrants away from the typical labor sectors of sex work, domestic work, etc. and into formal employment.

Florian with UNHCR spoke to the importance of formal employment for migrants due to the major benefits. Formal employment in Mexico allows employees to access social security through Mexico's IMSS system, offers savings plans, access to credit, and places employees under certain labor protections. During the study, it was unclear whether government agencies, migration or labor ones alike, are involved in labor education efforts for migrants in general. Per Kenya Cuevas' experience with LGBTQ migrants at her shelter, labor education may be an important element to contribute in order to enhance labor integration.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to bring attention to how Mexican government agencies, international organizations, and community organizations form part of a migration

landscape that includes the emerging LGBTQ migrant population. One of the earliest interventions in migrants' settlement is integrating them into the host community's labor market. With the idea that doing so improves migrant's prospects for success, this study focused on the extent to which LGBTQ migrants form part of the efforts to advance labor integration for Mexico's growing migrant community. The study proved that all key stakeholders are aware that LGBTQ migrant populations exist and are part of a greater collective of vulnerable populations that require special attention. Though most stakeholders have not been able to quantify how many LGBTQ migrants there are in the capital or across the country, there is a general consensus that LGBTQ migrants' visibility is made possible mostly through civil society and academic studies. Civil society has largely taken on the role of building awareness for LGBTQ migrant needs, with the hope that government agencies, local and federal adopt policies and practices that are in line with inclusive and sensible approaches that respect LGBTQ migrant's rights.

Impressive advancements have been made in migrants' labor integration thanks in large part to the cohesive relationship between government agencies, international organizations, as well as the private sector that employs migrants. While this study did not include the perspective from the private sector, future research could benefit from including the private sector perspective in identifying their experiences, possible challenges, and any other relevant information related to migrant labor integration in Mexico. Though these actors play a major role in promoting migrants' socioeconomic wellbeing, there was little information on how these roles impact LGBTQ migrants specifically. While it is necessary to acknowledge that intervention into LGBTQ migrants' integration into the labor market is a relatively recent endeavor for these actors, the civil society perspective indicates the LGBTQ migrant population they serve have existed for at least five years now. LGBTQ migrants would benefit greatly by the existing

government-international organization relationship that is already in place. However, without proper tracking and visibilization, this study is unable to show that the recent partnerships between government agencies and international organizations have direct benefits for LGBTQ migrants' labor integration outside of the capital. The focus of the study was Mexico City on the basis that the capital city offers an inclusive framework with a number of active government agencies, international organizations, and civil society groups. The study revealed that Mexico City is not necessarily the only location that offers promising signals for migrant labor integration. As is demonstrated in the interview with UNHCR, the *Reubicación, Vinculación, Laboral y Acompañamiento* pilot program indicates other promising labor markets across Mexico, including the cities of Saltillo, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Puebla, and more. Despite being unable to confirm whether LGBTQ migrants benefit from this particular program, it should be acknowledged that the *Reubicación, Vinculación, Laboral y Acompañamiento* program, led through a cooperation between the UNHCR, several federal and local migration and labor agencies, in addition to the private sector have made a meaningful impact in the economic lives of migrants. In spite of the fact that such a program was a pilot program, it offers a clear model for ongoing and future cooperation through a multi-institutional undertaking that exhibit effective governance.

The study was also unable to show whether LGBTQ migrants benefit directly from Mexico City-based programs that actively promote migrants' labor integration, in large part due to local institutions' practice of not tracking data related to LGBTQ identity. For instance, SIBISO's *Programa Hospitalitaria y Movilidad Humana* offers critical financial support that greatly benefit migrants, but there is no indication that the program's benefits are being felt in the LGBTQ migrant community. Like SIBISO, the Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social and

Servicio Nacional de Empleo are equipped to assist job-seeking migrants but were unable to demonstrate whether that assistance includes attention to LGBTQ migrant jobseekers. Though practices and policies exist within these institutions to bear adequate services to all job seekers, those practices do not specify that they are meeting the particular needs of LGBTQ migrants. The practice of viewing everyone as “all job-seekers” is a “blind” approach that suggests all participants are met with equal treatment, though it may have an unintended ramification of overlooking LGBTQ migrant’s particular needs, especially for transgender migrant women who are more proximate to informal work alternatives.

Sensibility training was a key theme in the study, addressed by all stakeholders involved in the field of migration and labor integration. Government agencies like INM and COMAR have shown to adopt several sensibility recommendations made by UNHCR and IOM, but the extent to which those trainings translate down to agency staff and their treatment of LGBTQ migrants, cannot be concluded to be adequate. Civil society groups like Sin Fronteras and Casa Mambré challenged claims that agencies like INM and COMAR are trained enough to offer professional, inclusive services to LGBTQ migrants. In fact, Casa Mambré and Sin Fronteras reported that INM and COMAR are actually ill-equipped to provide services to LGBTQ migrants and are the reason why they send legal observers in the form of accompaniment services to secure LGBTQ migrants’ rights in the process. This research accepted the points of view of key informants who have worked with agencies like COMAR and INM, who corroborated the views of civil society when it comes to the treatment of LGBTQ migrants. According to key informants, LGBTQ individuals, along with other vulnerable persons such as Black migrants have experienced discriminatory practices and severe bureaucratic barriers in the regularization process. As with many immigration authorities around the world, acts of

discrimination by agents and staff is an evident phenomenon that cannot be said to not happen. Despite COMAR and INM claims to the contrary, it is clear that witnesses claim a different story, for which these government agencies bear responsibility to rectify.

Troubling signs of inadequate labor integration practices have been found, as demonstrated in the experiences that Kenya Cuevas spoke to. As a result, civil society has taken on the role of intervening directly with LGBTQ migrants on matters pertaining to labor, but also healthcare, sex education, regularization of their migration status, and offering emotional support. LGBTQ migrants at risk of being placed in positions to resort to sex work are reported to have inadequate sex education and awareness of healthcare access in the capital. Kenya Cuevas reported government agencies pay little to no investment into sex education, which is an area that civil society picks up in order to ensure LGBTQ migrants have the proper education on HIV prevention, for instance. Sin Fronteras offers LGBTQ migrants services related to HIV prevention and care, which also relies of specialized clinics in the capital that provide services to LGBTQ people, but not always migrants.

While the study was able to identify several programs that advance labor integration for migrants, respondents pertaining to government agencies and international organizations that focus on labor integration both at the federal and local level were unable to explain whether LGBTQ migrants in particular were benefiting from such programs. While it is true that civil society groups, like Sin Fronteras and Casa de las Muñecas Tiresias offer services for LGBTQ migrants, they have not indicated that they offer specific labor integration programs that go beyond accompaniment and legal/social services. The only civil society group identified in this study that does have a labor integration program designed for LGBTQ migrants is the Scalabrinian Mission's Casa Mambré house in Mexico City. Though Mexico City also provided

a promising context for this study, there was an inadequate amount of data to suggest that even in Mexico City, LGBTQ migrants were being successfully integrated into the city's labor market.

As previously stated in the literature review, Desiderio (2016) states “early and successful labor market integration of newcomers...is essential to their integration more broadly”, which includes acquisition of services related to healthcare, legal services, and education. Though the study proved that government agencies have recognized this approach in their facilitation of labor integration, they have not adequately demonstrated that LGBTQ migrants form part of that process. Queer theorists like Berlant and Warner (1998) have pointed to how institutions can pervasively cling on to structures of heteronormativity that privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality, subconsciously and consciously. It can be argued that Mexican government agencies, in their attempt to be inclusive of LGBTQ people (not migrants specifically), often fail to recognize the intersecting identity of LGBTQ migrants by privileging “migrant” as being fundamentally heterosexual. This can be seen through government agencies’ historic approach towards migrants within the heteronormative understanding of vulnerable populations as being only women, children, those with disability, and elderly migrants; excluding LGBTQ ones until relatively recently. Queer migration scholars have identified the intersections between LGBTQ migrants’ sexual orientation and gender identity, coupled with their migration status, however much of the scholarly work in queer migration that is quantifiable has been facilitated by government agencies successfully tracking data on LGBTQ migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees. There is greater access to data that can help inform queer migration scholars’ inquiries, whereas Mexico’s limited data on LGBTQ migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers is a major barrier towards quantifying LGBTQ migration research. The qualitative foundations of this study were on purpose, acknowledging that quantifiable

research would be difficult on a subject that is only just emerging across Mexico. The qualitative aspect was adequate enough to demonstrate that this subject is, as many interviewees also described, very new. Despite the topic emerging in the last five to six years, there is still evolution happening at all levels of intervention.

Conclusion

Mexico possesses a rich history of migration, with an immense diversity that is becoming progressively visible and better understood with time. Key stakeholders involved in facilitating migrants' journeys whether it be through their refuge, their transit, or return are becoming increasingly aware of the disparities that exist within the mosaic of movement that stretches hundreds of miles across the country. Several challenges continue to permeate Mexico's migration system, thus impacting the way government agencies and civil society cooperate, particularly towards a steady labor integration regime. Through the difficult circumstances, stakeholders have risen to the challenge and lifted many migrants out of the clutches of poverty, informal labor, and dependency. The pilot partnerships between government agencies and international organizations have enabled a successful labor integration across Mexico for many migrants. These partnerships come at an ever-so important time in the country's migration history. In Mexico City, local government agencies and community organizations have also undertaken the role of advancing labor integration for migrants.

In Mexico City's cosmopolitan spirit of inclusivity and through the core missions to aid all migrants regardless of background, stakeholders have generated practical ways that address disparities in labor integration. For LGBTQ migrants, there is simply no indication that acknowledging their particularities and gender identities translate into empirical outcomes for their long-term wellbeing through migrant labor integration efforts. LGBTQ migrants face a

stark reality in the city's labor market, in which informal work is close to inevitable, with many succumbing to the proximate options in sex work, or irregular domestic work, among other sectors where labor protections are, if not minimal, non-existent. Mexico City, where local government recognizes LGBTQ migrants' varying gender identities, but evidently overlooks the economic and labor imperatives of this group, demonstrate a severe inequity that requires further investigation and cooperation among government agencies and civil society. Fortunately, Mexico City's inclusive legal framework, innovation, and a motivated cooperative culture can drive more development towards a secure, equitable labor integration system that recognizes and openly embraces LGBTQ migrants.

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