

**Contemporary African Migrations to Mexico,
As Seen from its Northern Border****Migraciones africanas contemporáneas a México,
vistas desde su frontera norte**

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to shed light on the migratory phenomenon of people of African origin arriving in Mexico, en route to the United States or Canada. For this, government statistical data was analyzed, along with information obtained through in-depth interviews with people of African origin in Tijuana, Baja California. The study identified a predominantly male migration pattern and a significant dispersion in places of origin, with West Africa being the most common. Political persecution and violence emerged as the principal causes of migration, as well as extensive migratory routes that include entry into the Americas primarily through Ecuador and Brazil. The increasing travel times suggest what has been termed migratory «entrapment», which in many cases leads to changes of the initial migration plans, including family reunification in Mexico as one of the strategies employed by the migrant population to cope with the consequences of this entrapment.

Keywords: 1. migration, 2. identity, 3. family, 4. Africa, 5. Mexico.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo pretende vislumbrar el fenómeno migratorio de personas originarias de África que arriban a México con destino a Estados Unidos o Canadá. Para ello, se analizó información estadística gubernamental y también datos obtenidos mediante entrevistas a profundidad con personas originarias de África en Tijuana, Baja California. Se identificaron una migración mayoritariamente masculina y una importante dispersión de los lugares de origen con predominancia del África Occidental, apareciendo la persecución política y la violencia como las principales causas de migración, así como extensos itinerarios migratorios que incluyen el ingreso a continente americano principalmente por Ecuador y Brasil. Los crecientes tiempos de desplazamiento permiten hablar de lo que se ha llamado *atrapamiento* migratorio, que conlleva en muchos casos la transformación de los proyectos migratorios iniciales, incluyendo la reunificación familiar en México como una de las estrategias empleadas por la población migrante para encarar las consecuencias de dicho atrapamiento.

Palabras clave: 1. migración, 2. identidad, 3. familia, 4. África, 5. México.

Received: June 12, 2024

Accepted: October 21, 2024

Available online: January 15, 2026

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INTRODUCTION

After having served for decades as the setting for predominantly Mexican migration (Durand, 2016), Mexico's territory has progressively transformed into a space of circulation for diverse migratory flows. Although the most substantial shift in scale has been driven by migrants from Central America, who frequently travel in caravans (Salazar, 2019; Odgers-Ortiz, 2020; Pérez Bravo, 2022), new migration profiles have emerged over the past decade. These include migrants from Haiti, the Venezuelan exodus, and migration originating in Asia and Africa. While these so-called extra-continental flows remain numerically limited, their presence is highly significant, as it reveals the depth of ongoing transformations in global migration dynamics (Castles, 2010).

Another major transformation concerns the lengthening of migrants' periods of stay in Mexico among those who enter through the southern border with the intention of reaching the United States. This process is largely the result of border externalization and has led scholars to conceptualize these movements through notions such as "segmented itineraries" (Collyer, 2010; Collyer et al., 2012), "turbulent trajectories," "stepwise migration," or "truncated migrations" (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012; Wyss & Borrelli, 2014; Basok et al., 2015; Missbach, 2015; Lønning, 2020). Miranda (2023) frames this situation as a condition of waiting, while Gil Evraert (2021) examines the subjective experience of those who remain for extended periods along the southern border as "inhabiting the meanwhile." Hess (2012), for her part, conceptualizes these sites of prolonged transit as "precarious transit zones," describing them as spaces in which migrants become trapped within mobility. In a similar vein, Odgers-Ortiz (2024) employs the concept of *strandedness* to describe situations in which individuals are forced to stop in an unchosen location and compelled to remain there for an indeterminate period while still en route to their intended destination.

As will be discussed below, individuals originating from the African continent who are currently in Mexico experience this condition of strandedness. In particular, fieldwork conducted since 2019 in the Baja California border region has documented an increase in the number of migrants from Africa who remain in this situation. Although a growing body of scholarship has examined migration from Africa to Latin America (Cruz Cinta, 2020; Ray & Leyva, 2020; Mercadal, 2021; Roa, 2021; Navarro Alvarado, 2022; Miranda, 2023; Serra Mingot, 2023; Odgers-Ortiz, 2024; Odgers-Ortiz et al., 2023; Odgers-Ortiz & Olivas, 2024), both quantitative and qualitative data remain limited. Accordingly, this article seeks to characterize contemporary population flows originating in Africa that reach the Mexico–United States border, drawing on available statistical sources and field-based evidence.

The article begins by outlining the methodology employed and presenting the available statistical sources, along with a discussion of their scope and limitations. This is followed by an analysis of the fieldwork material, with a focus on reconstructing selected migration routes and strategies. The article concludes with reflections on the trends likely to emerge in the near future.

METHODOLOGY

If the literature on migration from Africa through various parts of Latin America en route to the United States remains limited, statistical sources capturing this phenomenon are even scarcer. Consequently, the present study employs a mixed-methods approach (Proudfoot, 2023) to complement field observations and interviews with other available data sources.

The starting point of this study is 2019 in the city of Tijuana, Baja California, when one of the authors conducted fieldwork in shelters and community centers for migrants as part of the project *Tracing Mobility and Care Trajectories: Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Experiences at the US–Mexico Border* (Csordas & Odgers-Ortiz, 2019). During this work, the increasingly frequent presence of individuals from Africa was observed. As a result, some members of the project began volunteering as instructors in Spanish classes offered free of charge by a local community center. Initially held in person, these classes shifted to an online format with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This transition allowed students living farther from the community center to participate and increased the diversity of attendees: whereas the classes had originally been attended predominantly by Haitian migrants, this period saw a notable rise in African students.

The Spanish classes offered an ideal setting for fostering open dialogue, allowing students to share both their goals and aspirations as well as the concrete challenges they faced. As part of a community center offering diverse activities, the Spanish instructors were able to assist migrants in addressing some of these challenges. Support included providing essential information, connecting students with the legal clinic, accompanying them to medical facilities offering free care, and translating official documents from immigration authorities, among other forms of assistance.

By the end of 2023, detailed knowledge had been gained regarding the experiences of slightly more than twenty families, including their arrival routes, reasons for migrating, and the challenges they faced during both their journey and their stay in Mexico. In addition to information gathered through this engagement, eight formal in-depth interviews were conducted, in which participants provided detailed accounts of their motivations for leaving their countries of origin, the routes they followed, the strategies they prioritized, the challenges they faced at the time of the interview, and their future plans. This information was further complemented by extensive electronic correspondence, including emails, WhatsApp messages, and exchanges via Facebook. Over the course of 2021, 2022, and 2023, some interviewees completed family reunification processes, several migrated to the United States, and one settled in Canada. In some cases, ongoing communication through WhatsApp and Facebook provided close insight into this new stage of their lives.

The information obtained through these channels is rich but not necessarily representative of the broader population of African migrants arriving in Mexico. To complement it, existing statistical data from available sources were also analyzed, including the national population and housing censuses, figures provided by the Migration Policy Unit⁴ based on the activities of the

⁴ Unofficial translation of Unidad de Política Migratoria.

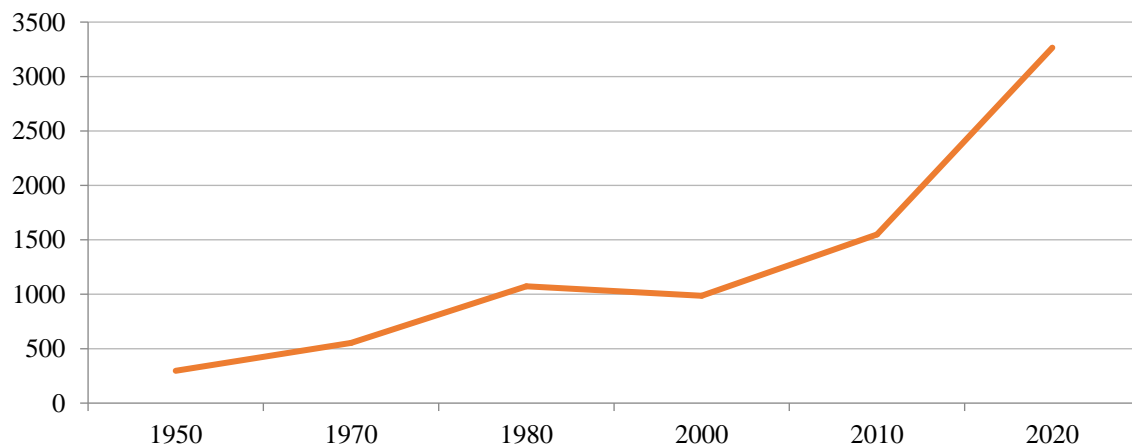
National Institute of Migration,⁵ and data related to the operations of the National Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR).

Thus, drawing on a review of the specialized literature and an analysis of both field data and available statistical information, this article provides an overview of African migration toward Mexico's northern border. For reasons of space, the focus is placed on migrant profiles and trajectories, while analyses of integration processes, the challenges encountered during these extended journeys, and the strategies employed to address them are reserved for future publications.

African migration to Mexico in numbers

The national population and housing censuses conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography⁶ indicate that the presence of individuals originating from Africa in Mexico is longstanding, though numerically limited, as shown in Graph 1. A gradual increase is observable throughout the second half of the twentieth century, becoming particularly pronounced from 2010 onward.

Graph 1. Individuals Born in Africa Residing in Mexico, 1950–2020



Note: The graph does not include data from the 1960 and 1990 censuses, as no information was found.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the general population and housing censuses (INEGI, 1950, 1970, 1980, 2000, 2010, 2020).

This increase has also been observed in the field, with a marked acceleration in flows beginning around 2019. Although sources generally identify the second decade of this century as a turning point in African migration, the 2020 census figures likely underrepresent the phenomenon, recording only 3 265 individuals born in Africa residing in Mexico who had emigrated between March 2015 and March 2020. Several factors may explain this underrepresentation, including

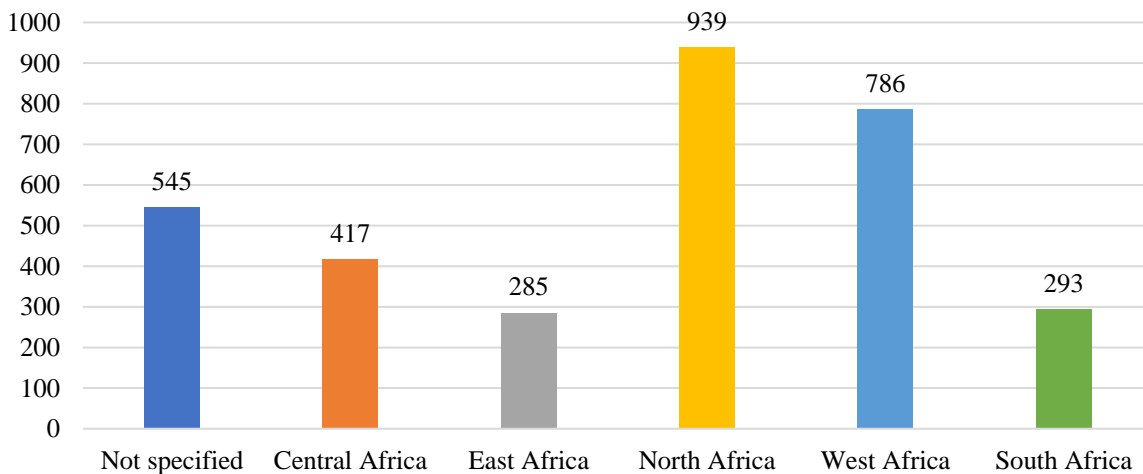
⁵ Unofficial translation of Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM).

⁶ Unofficial translation of Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI).

migrants' fear of being identified and the circumstances of the 2020 census, which was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nonetheless, the information provided by the census allows for an initial approximation of the origins of flows from Africa and is particularly useful for identifying regions of origin within the continent. Using the regional classification proposed by the United Nations, North Africa and West Africa emerge as the predominant source regions for individuals of African origin in Mexico, as shown in Graph 2. The data also indicate that this is a predominantly male flow, with approximately 67% of migrants being men (United Nations, n.d.).

Graph 2. Region of Origin of African Individuals in Mexico, 2020



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the General Population and Housing Census⁷ (INEGI, 2020).

Statistical Bulletins of the Migration Policy Unit

Another important source of information is the annual statistical bulletins published by the Migration Policy, Registration, and Identity of Persons Unit (unofficial translation of Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas [UPMRIP]),⁸ which provide tables derived from data generated by the INM on entries, documentation and residence status, irregular migrants, migrant protection programs, and the return of Mexican nationals from the United States and Canada. For this study, particular attention was given to data on residence cards—both temporary and permanent—as well as Humanitarian Visitor Permits issued by the INM to individuals holding citizenship from African countries, alongside records of African migrants presented to immigration authorities between 2016 and 2023.

⁷ Unofficial translation of Censo General de Población y Vivienda.

⁸ In its monthly bulletin, it presents statistics “derived from administrative records on international mobility and migration generated by the Government of Mexico, disaggregated by sex, age, and nationality” (UPMRIP, n.d.).

Regarding Temporary Resident Cards (TRCs), their increase over the period under analysis is noteworthy. Although the proportion of TRCs granted to individuals of African nationality remained below 1%, it is significant that the overall number of cards issued grew in parallel with those issued to African migrants. In 2016, a total of 52 281 TRCs were issued, of which only 397 were granted to migrants from Africa (0.76%). By 2022, the total number had increased to 60 129 cards, and similarly, the number of TRC allocated to migrants of African origin had also increased (447, corresponding to 0.74% of the total), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Temporary Resident Cards issued in Mexico, 2016–2023

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
<i>Total</i>	52 281	59 388	56 453	43 521	35 229	46 835	60 129	61 600	415 436
Africa	397	441	375	360	300	359	447	610	3289
%	0.76	0.74	0.66	0.83	0.85	0.77	0.74	0.99	0.79

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Unidad de Política Migratoria (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

The three main African nationalities granted TRCs between 2016 and 2018 were Nigeria, Egypt, and South Africa. In 2019, the leading nationalities shifted to Egypt, South Africa, and Morocco. In 2020, this trend was interrupted, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the number of TRCs issued declined rather than increased; however, growth gradually resumed over the following two years. Of the 359 TRCs issued to African migrants in 2021, 78 were granted to South Africans, 55 to Nigerians, and 52 to Moroccans. In both 2022 and 2023, these three nationalities continued to predominate.

Another valuable source of information is the issuance of Permanent Resident Cards (PRCs). Although PRCs granted to individuals from Africa represent only a small percentage of the total, the available data reveal an important shift: while PRCs issued between 2016 and 2023 were primarily granted under the family ties category, in 2021 humanitarian reasons increased by almost double compared to the previous year, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Permanent Resident Cards Granted in Mexico to Individuals of African Nationality, by Reason, 2016–2023

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Family	212	219	192	181	232	281	349	325	1 991
Work	91	41	29	54	43	66	48	50	422
Rentier	3	1	0	2	7	6	9	6	34
Humanitarian	18	12	22	28	56	100	36	24	296
Other	39	31	26	21	37	33	43	53	283
<i>Annual total</i>	363	304	269	286	375	486	485	458	3 026

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Unidad de Política Migratoria (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

As will be discussed later in the section on reasons for migration, the search for refuge is particularly significant among the African population. Accordingly, as shown in Table 3, the low number of PRCs issued on the basis of refugee status during the study period is noteworthy.

Table 3. Permanent Resident Cards, by Refugee Status

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Total	1 702	2 406	4 018	5 626	16 845	19 474	20 464	15 743	86 278
Africa	16	7	17	22	44	93	31	23	253

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Unidad de Política Migratoria (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

In contrast, regarding Humanitarian Visitor Permits, Table 4 shows a clear upward trend in permits issued to African migrants between 2016 and 2022, increasing from just 21 in 2016 to 3 269 in 2022.

Table 4. Humanitarian Visitor Permits Issued in Mexico, 2016–2023

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Total	3 971	9 642	17 722	40 966	25 414	87 674	131 075	126 771	443 235
Africa	21	72	61	105	114	1 618	3 269	2 844	8 104

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Unidad de Política Migratoria (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

The UPMRIP bulletins provide data disaggregated by the federal states in which the permits were issued. Since this study focuses on border regions, the data for Mexico's northern and southern border states are highlighted. Table 5 shows the increasing trend in the issuance of Humanitarian Visitor Permits in the state of Chiapas until 2022, reflecting Mexican policy in this area, while issuance in other states is nearly nonexistent, except for the year 2021. As will be discussed in the qualitative section, this situation contributes to the migratory entrapment of individuals originating from Africa.

Table 5. Humanitarian Visitor Permits Issued in Mexico's Border States, 2016–2023

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Baja California	1	21	4	17	4	5	8	7	67
Campeche	0	0	0	0	0	116	1	0	117
Chiapas	0	8	5	35	74	185	3 064	2 029	5 400
Quintana Roo	0	0	0	0	0	121	6	1	128
Other border states	1	0	1	2	5	4	8	55	76

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Unidad de Política Migratoria (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

Finally, as shown in Table 6, the records confirm that this flow was predominantly male during the period analyzed, with a substantial gap between men and women, although the difference narrowed between 2022 and 2023.

Table 6. Humanitarian Visitor Permits, by Sex

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	<i>Total</i>
Men	18	65	48	80	97	1 215	2 347	1 982	5 852
Women	3	7	13	25	17	403	922	862	2 252
Masculinity index	600	928.57	369.23	320	570.59	301.49	254.56	229.93	259.86

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Unidad de Política Migratoria (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

Statistics on African-Origin Populations from the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR)

Another relevant source of information is that published by the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (unofficial translation of Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados [COMAR]),⁹ which reports on applications submitted by women, men, girls, boys, and adolescents, both accompanied and unaccompanied by an adult, as well as on the decisions issued. However, these publications disaggregate data only for the ten nationalities with the highest number of applications. Since no African country ranks among these top ten, the published information did not provide useful data for the purposes of this study.

For this reason, an information request was submitted through the National Institute for Transparency, Access to Information, and Personal Data Protection¹⁰, requiring COMAR to provide specific data on the number of individuals from the African continent who applied for refugee status in Mexico, including their nationality, year of application, and the outcome or current stage of their case for the period 2016–2023 (COMAR, 2024). The information obtained through this request proved highly valuable because refugee applications, although only an approximate indicator of the arrival of African populations in Mexico, provide important insights into changes in migration flows.

According to COMAR, between 2016 and 2023, 10 517 individuals from Africa applied for refugee status in Mexico. This figure is nearly seven times higher than the number of African-born individuals recorded in the census, although it is naturally likely to underestimate the total number of arrivals during this period, since only a portion of those who reach Mexico apply for refugee

⁹ The COMAR “is a permanent intersecretarial body (under the Secretaría de Gobernación, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, and Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social), established by Presidential Decree on July 22, 1980, with the purpose of providing assistance to the refugee population in Mexico” (Cámara de Diputados, n.d., para. 1).

¹⁰ Unofficial translation of Instituto Nacional de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos Personales.

status. Another important insight from this source concerns the applicants’ regions of origin: while Central and West Africa are particularly prominent, all regions of the continent are represented in these flows, encompassing a total of 47 different nationalities.

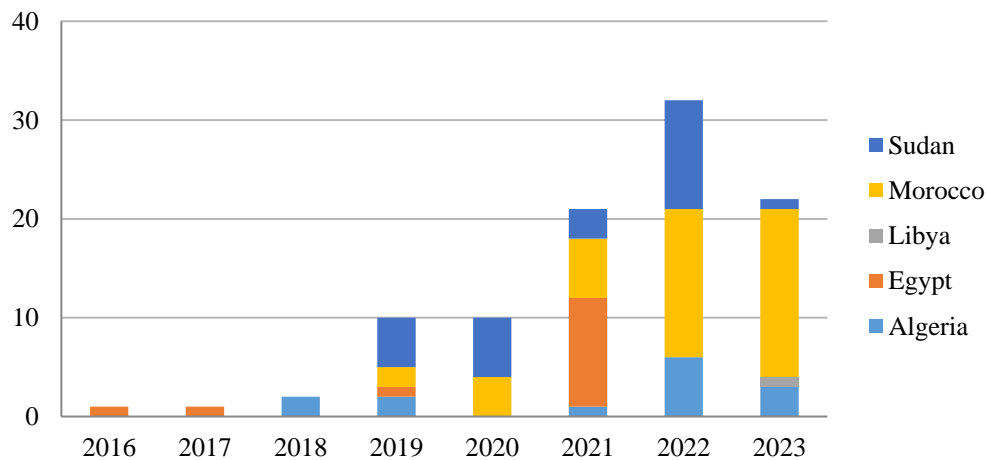
The Northern Region comprises Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia. As shown in Table 7, although migrants from this region represent a minority, they exhibit a growing trend in refugee applications, with numbers tripling from 2020, when 10 applications were recorded, to 2022, with 32. A decline was observed in 2023, when only 22 applications were submitted. Over this period, the last three years are particularly marked by the presence of migrants from Sudan, Morocco, and Algeria, as illustrated in Graph 3.

Table 7. Refugee Applicants in Mexico Originating from the Northern Region of Africa, 2016–2023

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total per country
Algeria			2	2		1	6	3	14
Egypt	1	1		1		11			14
Libya								1	1
Morocco				2	4	6	15	17	44
Sudan				5	6	3	11	1	26
Tunisia									0
<i>Total per year</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>99</i>

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from COMAR (2024).

Graph 3. Refugee Applicants Originating from the Northern Region



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR.

As detailed in Table 8, the Eastern Region comprises Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, with Eritrea, Somalia, and Uganda showing the

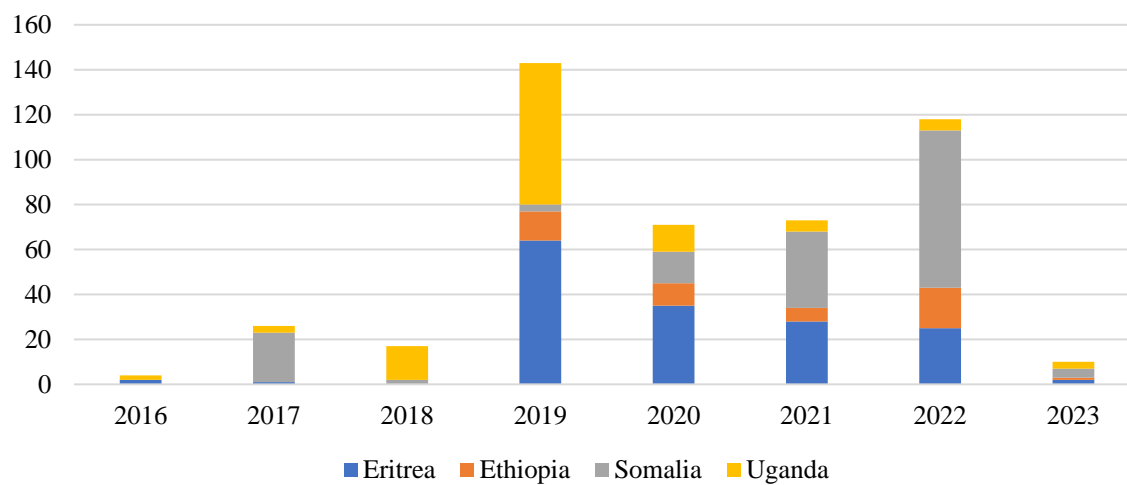
greatest presence throughout the period analyzed. In this region, as illustrated in Graph 4, abrupt changes are observed, with peaks in 2019 (145 individuals) and 2022 (130). In addition to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, these fluctuations likely reflect departures driven by specific circumstances rather than the establishment of migratory networks (Gurak & Caces, 1992) that would allow for continuity in flows.

Table 8. Refugee Applicants in Mexico Originating from the Eastern Region of Africa, 2016–2023

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	<i>Total per country</i>
Burundi				1	1	1		1	4
Djibouti			1	1			1		3
Eritrea	2	1		64	35	28	25	2	157
Ethiopia				13	10	6	18	1	48
Kenya					1	1	4		6
Madagascar								1	1
Mauritius								1	1
Mozambique							4	1	5
Rwanda						4	1		5
Somalia		22	2	3	14	34	70	4	149
Tanzania			1					3	4
Uganda	2	3	15	63	12	5	5	3	108
Zambia							1	1	2
Zimbabwe						2	1		3
<i>Total per year</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>145</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>496</i>

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

Graph 4. Refugee Applicants in Mexico from the Eastern Region of Africa, 2016–2023 (Nationalities with Highest Prevalence)



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

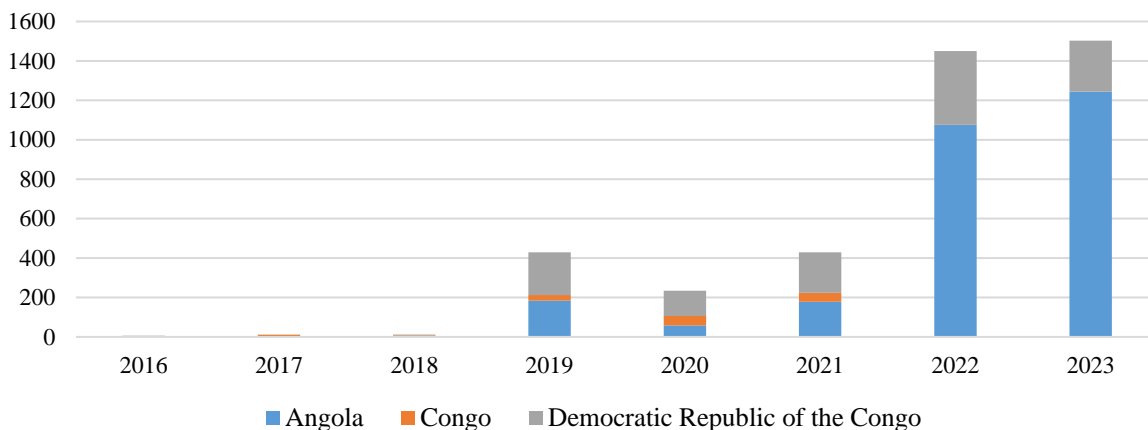
Table 9 shows the contribution of the Central Region, which includes Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sao Tome and Principe. This region is the most represented in the counts, with 5 179 individuals recorded between 2016 and 2023. It is also characterized by the prominence of three countries: Angola, with 2 741 cases; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with 1 193; and Cameroon, with 1 055 while the remaining countries in the region are almost absent. As illustrated in Graph 5, the steady increase in cases from Angola is particularly striking, accompanied by a smaller but notable rise for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and more variable trends for Cameroon, which peaks in 2019.

Table 9. Refuge Applicants in Mexico Originating from the Central Region of Africa, 2016–2023

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total per country
Angola			2	184	58	178	1 075	1 244	2 741
Cameroon	23	105	18	512	50	81	194	72	1 055
Chad						9		4	13
Congo	1	11	6	28	48	46	1		141
Gabon				1					1
Equatorial Guinea					2	3	7	14	26
Central African Republic		1				4	2		7
Democratic Republic of the Congo	5	1	4	217	128	205	374	259	1 193
Sao Tome and Principe						2			2
<i>Total per year</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>942</i>	<i>286</i>	<i>528</i>	<i>1 653</i>	<i>1 593</i>	<i>5 179</i>

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

Graph 5. Refuge Applicants in Mexico from the Central Region of Africa, 2016–2023 (Nationalities with Highest Prevalence)



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

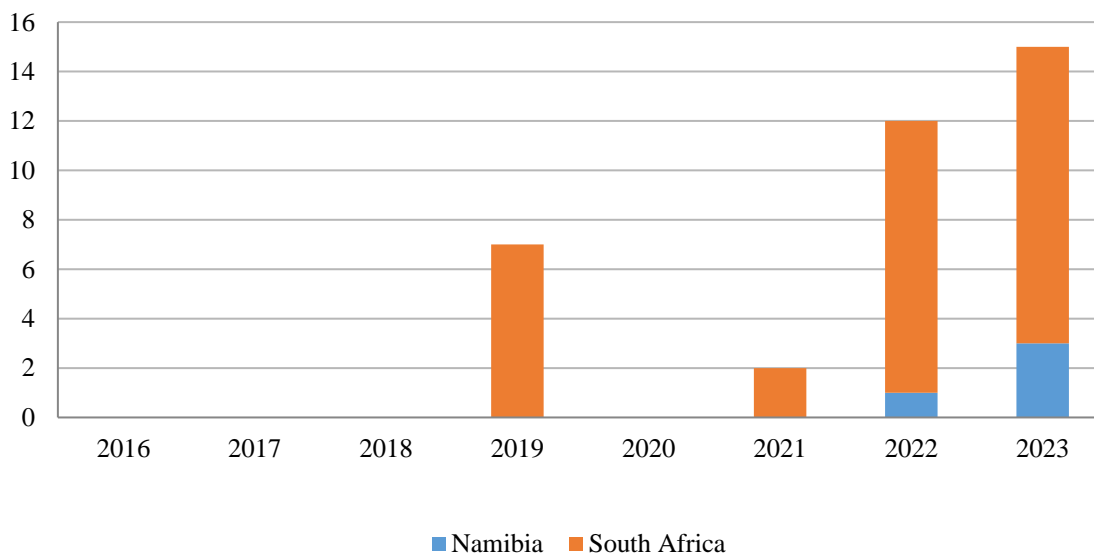
The Southern Region, comprising Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa, is the least represented in this source, as shown in Table 10. Graph 6 illustrates that South Africa accounts for the highest number of recorded applications, although in 2022 and 2023 applicants from Namibia were also recorded, with one and three individuals, respectively.

Table 10. Refugee applicants in Mexico Originating from the Southern Region of Africa, 2016–2023

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	<i>Total per country</i>
Namibia							1	3	4
South Africa				7		2	11	12	32
<i>Total per year</i>				7		2	12	15	36

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

Graph 6. Refugee Applicants in Mexico from the Southern Region of Africa, 2016–2023 (Nationalities with Highest Prevalence)



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

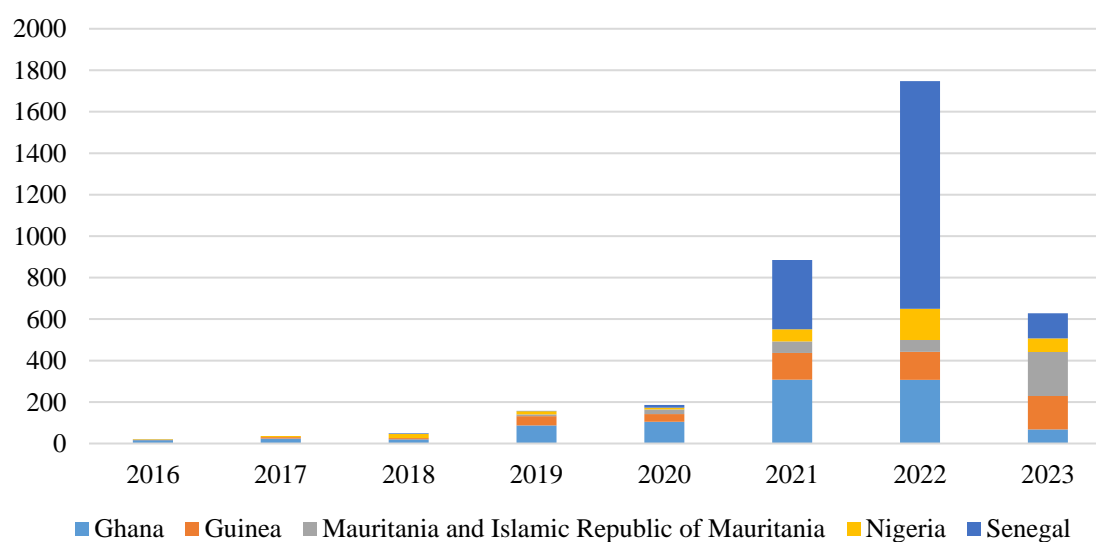
The Western Region of Africa includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. As shown in Table 11, Senegal stands out with 1 571 cases, including a significant surge in 2022, when 1 098 applicants were recorded. Ghana ranks second, with increases observed between 2019 and 2022, followed by Guinea, which shows consistent growth, and Mauritania, which experienced a notable spike in 2023. Although Graph 7 illustrates that Burkina Faso and Togo were not the top-ranking countries in this region, they were highly visible in our fieldwork.

Table 11. Refuge Applicants in Mexico Originating from the Western Region of Africa, 2016–2023

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total per country
Benin	2		1	8	6	11	18	4	50
Burkina Faso			7	10	15	96	58	29	215
Cabo Verde						2	3		5
Cote d'Ivoire				6	15	36	22	8	87
Gambia		1	1	3	1	5	28	8	47
Ghana	16	24	20	87	105	308	307	68	935
Guinea	1	7	6	45	37	129	135	161	521
Guinea-Bissau		2		1		3	18	19	43
Liberia	1			1	2	1	2	3	10
Mali			1	3	7	53	73	14	151
Mauritania and Islamic Republic of Mauritania				8	22	55	57	212	354
Niger					1	1	4	8	14
Nigeria	3	5	20	16	9	59	151	66	329
Senegal	1		3	1	13	334	1 098	121	1 571
Sierra Leone	5	1	1	12	7	96	62	4	188
Togo	6		1	8	18	75	63	16	187
<i>Total per year</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>209</i>	<i>258</i>	<i>1 264</i>	<i>2 099</i>	<i>741</i>	<i>4 707</i>

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

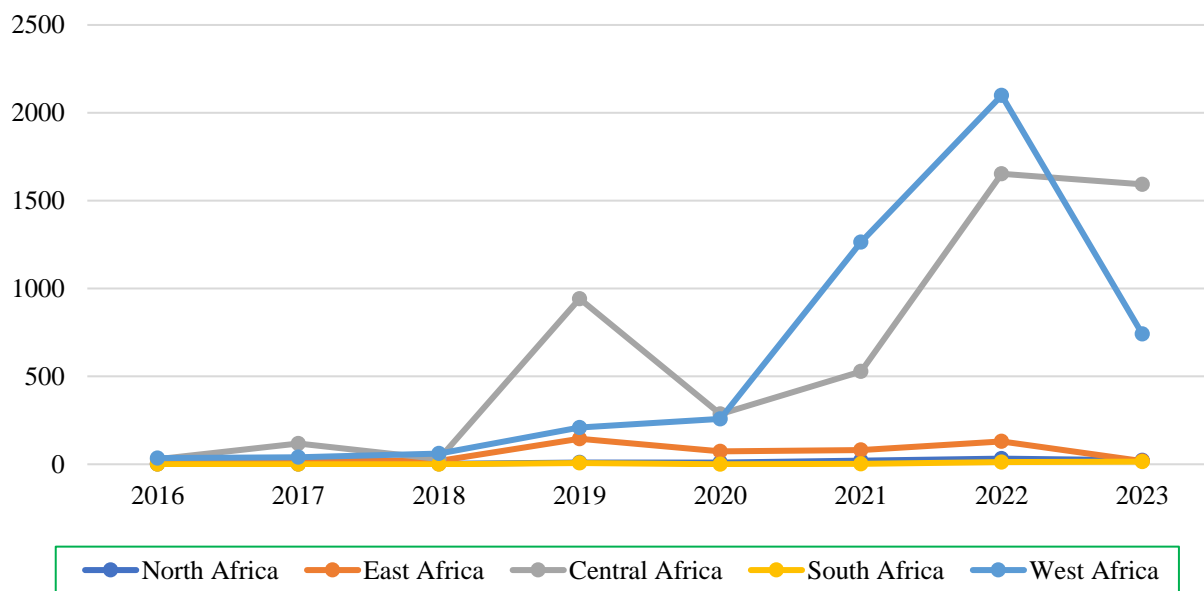
Graph 7. Refuge Applicants in Mexico from the Western Region of Africa, 2016–2023 (Nationalities with Highest Prevalence)



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

As noted earlier, during the study period, the Central and Western regions were the most represented, with notable peaks in 2019 and 2022. Although the Western region predominated between 2021 and 2022, its representation declined in 2023, with the Central region becoming the most prominent, as illustrated in Graph 8.

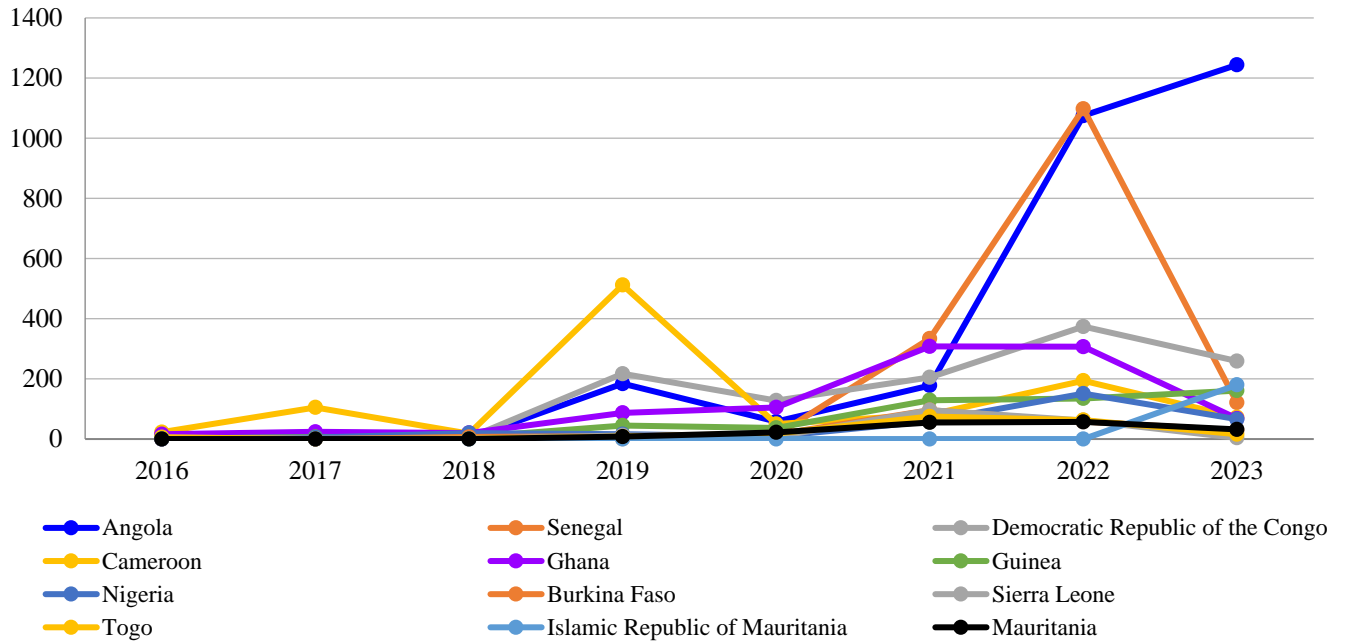
Graph 8. Refugee Applicants in Mexico Originating from the Five Regions of Africa, 2016–2023



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

As shown in Graph 9, there is considerable variability in the numbers, which may reflect mobility driven by specific events rather than the establishment of stable migratory routes and networks, particularly for nationalities that exhibit a sharp peak in a given year without notable growth in subsequent years, such as Cameroon in 2019 or Senegal in 2022. In contrast, other cases show sustained growth, as observed for Ghana and Angola. Monitoring the behavior of these flows in the coming years and comparing statistical data with fieldwork observations will be important. Similarly, Mauritania stands out due to its exponential increase in 2023. While the available information is insufficient to determine whether this represents an isolated peak driven by a specific event or the beginning of a flow that will stabilize over time, it could potentially lead to the formation of more enduring migratory networks (Gurak & Caces, 1992).

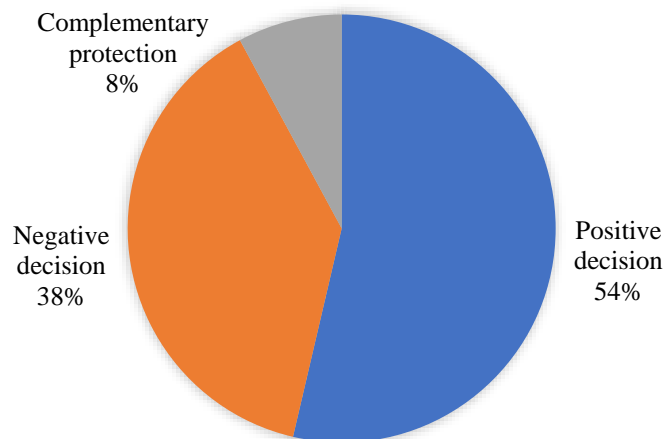
Graph 9. Refuge Applicants Originating from the 12 Main African Countries, 2016–2023



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

Moreover, the information obtained from COMAR records allows us to identify the outcomes of decisions issued on refugee applications. As shown in Graph 10, among the cases that have been effectively resolved, the percentage of positive decisions is relatively high (53.7%). However, this proportion should be interpreted with caution, since, as shown in Table 12, resolved cases represent only a small fraction of the total applications received. The vast majority of cases (9 997, equivalent to 95%) remain pending resolution.

Graph 10. Decisions on Refugee Applications in Mexico, 2016–2023



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

*Table 12. Decisions on Refugee Applications
in Mexico, 2016–2023*

Number of cases	Resolution
279	Positive decision
200	Negative decision
41	Complementary protection
9 997	Pending

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

As will be discussed later, this situation may be partly explained by the requirement to remain in the locality where the refugee application was submitted, typically the border city of Tapachula, Chiapas, until a decision is issued. The extreme precarity in which applicants must endure this waiting period, combined with prolonged response times, leads many to abandon their applications and attempt to continue their journey irregularly, moving toward the northern border and/or the United States (Torre Cantalapiedra et al., 2021). As noted in the introduction and explored in the following section, the condition of waiting, or migratory entrapment, constitutes a defining feature of the migration experience of individuals originating from Africa.

Finally, it is worth noting that data on the deportation of African nationals residing irregularly in Mexico show a significant change beginning in 2017. As Table 13 shows, 470 deportations were recorded in 2016, with individuals from Mali representing the largest group. In contrast, from 2017 onward, deportations did not exceed 10 cases per year, with a slight increase in 2023 to 36 cases, notably involving individuals from Egypt.

*Table 13. African-Origin Individuals Returned
by Mexican Immigration Authorities, 2016–2023*

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Benin	10	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	12
Burundi	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Cote d'Ivoire	57	1	1	3	-	1	-	1	64
Djibouti	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Egypt	-	1	1	1	-	1	4	22	30
Gabon	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Gambia	93	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	94
Equatorial Guinea	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2
Lesotho	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Mali	185	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	186
Morocco	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	4	6

(continues)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
<i>(continuation)</i>									
Niger	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Nigeria	44	2	1	3	1	3	1	6	61
South Africa	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Togo	77	-	5	1	1	-	-	1	85
Tunisia	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>470</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>550</i>

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data requested from COMAR (2024).

As evidenced, despite their limitations, the existing data from this statistical source provide a valuable foundation for an initial analysis of contemporary migration flows from Africa. They can undoubtedly serve as the basis for future, more detailed research.

MIGRATORY TRAJECTORIES: SOME FACES OF AFRICAN MIGRATION IN MEXICO

To complement statistical information and gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of individuals of African origin arriving in Mexico, this section presents qualitative data collected as part of the project Tracing Mobility and Care Trajectories: Migrants and Asylum Seekers' Experiences on the U.S.-Mexico Border (Csordas & Odgers-Ortiz, 2019), conducted in the city of Tijuana, located at the western end of Mexico's northern border. Participation in the Spanish classes mentioned earlier was crucial for establishing communication with the African population. Unlike migrants from other nationalities, who can often be reached through established migrant shelters in the city, African migrants rarely use these facilities. Fearing discrimination and facing challenges associated with living closely with people whose language they do not know, they often choose to rent accommodations independently, even if this entails living in overcrowded and precarious conditions.

The individuals with whom prolonged communication was established originate from Cameroon, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Conakry, and Togo. The information gathered focuses on their daily activities and concerns, the difficulties they encounter at work or in their neighborhoods due to language barriers, and the emotions they experience as they strive to adapt to a new environment while coping with the absence of their loved ones.

Through in-depth interviews with some of these individuals, it was possible to gain more detailed insights into the characteristics of their places of origin and the reasons for their departure, reconstruct their migratory trajectories, and identify both their life projects and the experiences arising from their condition of entrapment in the city of Tijuana. While the trajectories and experiences of the interviewees are not necessarily representative of the entire African migrant population in Mexico, they provide valuable insight into specific routes, motivations, and

strategies for coping with entrapment. The following section presents four cases in detail, concluding with reflections on their differences and points of convergence.

Trajectory A: Ismael, from Burkina Faso to Tijuana

Ismael was born in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, in the early 1990s. Because his parents are originally from Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire does not grant citizenship to children born on its territory, Ismael was born a foreign national. Nevertheless, like his sisters, he attended the local primary school, and during adolescence, his talent for football allowed him to join a local professional team, which led him to leave school.

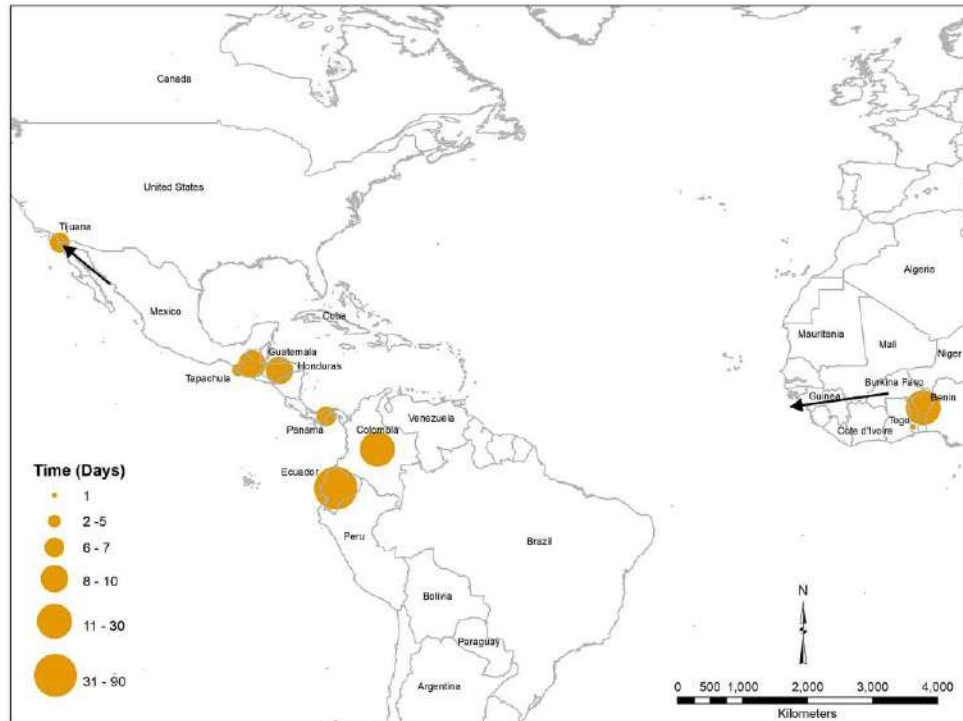
Ismael's parents had arrived in Abidjan in the 1960s, fleeing violence and seeking better employment opportunities, with no intention of returning. However, like many other Burkinabé, they were forced to go back due to the violence unleashed by Cote d'Ivoire's second civil war following the post-electoral conflicts of 2010, which intensified xenophobic sentiments in the country (Flan, 2021). Consequently, just before turning 18, Ismael arrived in his country of nationality, a country he had never known.

Again, thanks to his skills as a footballer, he joined a professional club, but in 2018 he suffered a serious injury to his left knee. The doctor determined that surgery was necessary, but Ismael had no health coverage and could not afford the costs at a private hospital. This situation prompted his decision to emigrate in search of a country where he could work and access public healthcare to treat his knee and return to playing football or, alternatively, work and save enough to pay for the surgery privately. Accordingly, in 2018, Ismael set out on his journey accompanied by other young Burkinabé.

He first arrived in Cotonou, Benin, where he stayed for 20 days while obtaining the necessary information and documents to continue his journey legally by air to Ecuador. Ismael had never imagined traveling to Ecuador, which he could barely locate on a map, but he chose this route after learning that entry was possible without a visa. Indeed, between 2008 and 2010, Ecuador's universal visa exemption policy made it one of the most accessible countries in the world (Freier & Hollaway, 2018). However, as Álvarez Velasco (2020a) notes, in later years, various strategies were implemented to place migrants in situations of irregularity.

As shown in Map 1, Ismael arrived in Ecuador in the summer of 2018, but unable to find favorable conditions to settle, he decided, together with a group of young Africans, to continue his journey toward the United States. His main concern was his knee, as he was unsure whether his injury would allow him to endure the long journey, including crossing the Darien Gap jungle, which proved to be the most arduous segment, taking the group more than five weeks. Ismael recalls applying an ointment he had brought from Burkina Faso to reduce the inflammation while continuously reciting passages from the Qur'an in his mind, praying to make it through. Comparatively, his passage through the rest of Central America was brief and relatively straightforward.

Map 1. Ismael's Trajectory from Burkina Faso to Tijuana, with Locations Marked by Duration of Stay



Source: Prepared by the authors based on information provided by Ismael (personal communications, 2019–2024).

Upon arriving in Tapachula, on Mexico's southern border, he spent only five days at the Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI.¹¹ Unlike other migrants, his humanitarian visa was approved within just one week, and once received, he traveled to Tijuana, where he stayed at a Catholic shelter. There, he obtained information about the process for applying for asylum in the United States, as well as for obtaining refugee status and permanent residency in Mexico. As of October 2024, Ismael held refugee status and permanent residency in Mexico, had stable employment, and was in the process of family reunification to bring his younger sisters to Tijuana, although he has not yet undergone surgery for his knee.

Trajectory B: Cédric, from Cameroon to North Carolina

Cédric, born in Cameroon, lived with his family in Douala. He explains that, although not an activist, he sympathized with a political association critical of the ruling party,¹² and in 2019 he participated in a demonstration that was violently suppressed. The following day, a government-led persecution

¹¹ Immigrant detention center managed by the INM.

¹² In Cameroon, an armed conflict known as the “Anglophone Crisis” or the “Ambazonia War” is ongoing in the northern and western regions of the country. In this conflict, the Cameroonian armed forces confront separatist rebel groups from Anglophone communities, which seek the creation of a state called “Ambazonia” (Matfess, 2018).

targeted anyone perceived as an opponent, prompting Cédric to leave the country urgently. Coming from a middle-class family, he was able to cover the costs of flying to Ecuador. Although his ultimate goal was to reach the United States, his itinerary via Quito, similar to Ismael's, was motivated by the possibility of entering the Americas legally.

Cédric stayed in Quito for seven days, during which he gathered information about the route and costs for continuing his journey northward. According to his testimony, the dangers of crossing the Darien Gap cannot be avoided even with resources, and the journey was long, exhausting, and extremely perilous. His account highlights both the risks involved and the extreme precarity of the camps where travelers must remain for several days, whether to recover strength or to treat injuries and illnesses. He also explained that having financial resources was necessary to pay for exit from each of the camps.¹³ When he finally entered Central America, he had to spend two weeks in a hospital in Costa Rica due to his poor health. From that point on, the journey proceeded more quickly, thanks to continued financial support from his family. After brief stays in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala, he arrived in Tapachula, where he approached the migration authorities to request a safe-conduct pass to reach the northern border.

Cédric recounted that, due to his lack of knowledge of Mexican migration policy and his limited understanding of Spanish, he was unaware that his case was being processed as a request for refugee status in Mexico when he was held at the Siglo XXI Migratory Station. He was therefore greatly surprised when, six months later, he received his permanent resident card along with the resolution granting him refugee status as a stateless person.¹⁴ Upon receiving it in January 2020, he traveled to the border as quickly as he could.

For Cédric, as for many other migrants attempting to seek asylum in the United States, the pandemic represented a severe setback (Bojorquez et al., 2021; Del Monte Madrigal & Bautista León, 2021; Castro Neira, 2024). Not only did he have to postpone his journey to the U.S., the border remained closed for nearly a year, but even his survival in Tijuana became difficult. Shelters were closed, preventing residents from leaving to work; jobs were scarce due to the suspension of in-person activities; and fear of contagion limited movement within the city. Cédric had to earn a living while also sending remittances to his wife and children remaining in Cameroon.

In addition to the border closure, which suspended the processing of asylum applications, Cédric understood that the implementation of Title 42 meant that if he attempted to cross the border clandestinely to request refuge from U.S. territory, he would be immediately returned to Mexico.

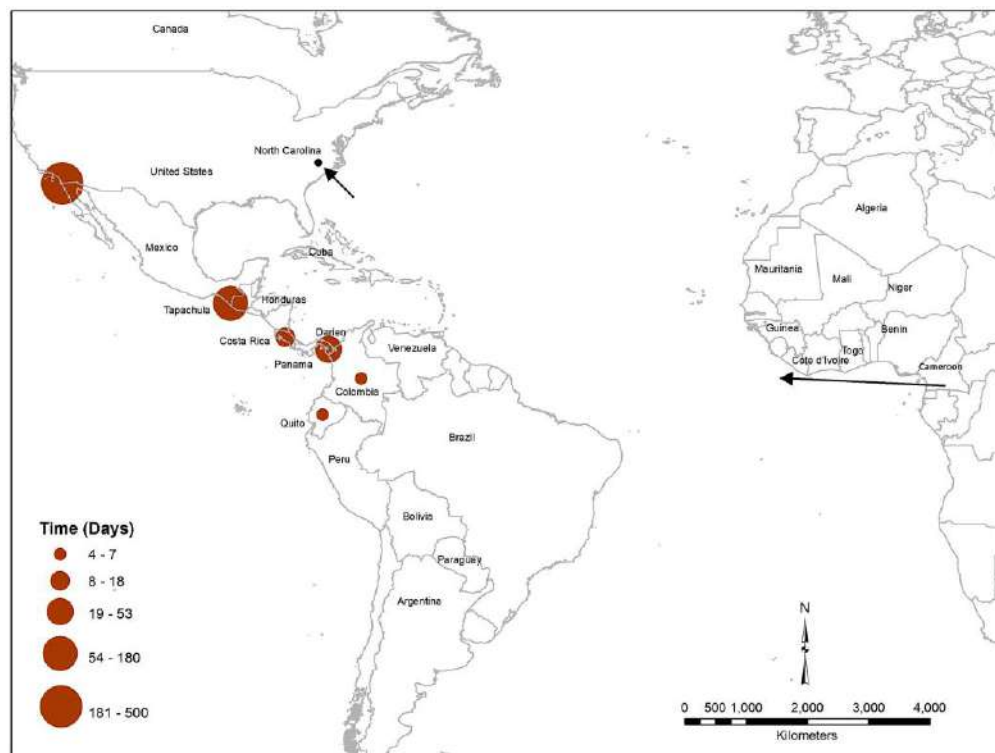
¹³ For information on crossing the Darien Gap, the migrant camps where individuals are held, and the associated costs for continuing the journey, see Alonso Sandoval (2024).

¹⁴ The reason why, during this period, refugee status under the designation of statelessness was granted to African citizens presenting their national passports remains unclear. Fieldwork identified this situation among individuals from Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Guinea. Serra-Mingot examined this phenomenon in detail, noting that “there are no clear reasons why some individuals received humanitarian visitor permits or statelessness cards” (Serra-Mingot, 2023, p. 11).

Furthermore, as a young and healthy man, he did not qualify for any potential exceptions on humanitarian grounds, which were granted under the principle of humanitarian parole.¹⁵

It was during this critical stage that Cédric learned, through a Cameroonian friend in a similar situation, that his permanent resident status granted him the right to family reunification. As shown in Map 2, he decided to postpone his journey to the United States in order to prioritize relocating his family to Mexico. After just over three months of administrative procedures, his wife and children obtained extensions of their refugee status and were able to travel legally to Mexico. Once the family was reunited, they resumed their journey following the border reopening, ultimately reaching North Carolina, where they are currently awaiting a resolution to their asylum application.

Map 2. Trajectory of Cédric, from Cameroon to North Carolina, with Locations Marked by Duration of Stay



Source: Prepared by the authors based on information provided by Cédric (personal communications, 2021–2023).

¹⁵ “During the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the nearly two-year closure of the land border, the activation of Title 42 [...]—which used public health as a pretext to suspend the right to asylum—resulted in individuals crossing the border clandestinely in search of international protection being immediately expelled, without the possibility of initiating an asylum claim. During this period, some individuals were able to begin the asylum process after entering through the humanitarian parole procedure. This is a discretionary mechanism that allows certain foreigners legal and temporary entry on a case-by-case basis, for urgent humanitarian reasons or for a significant public benefit” (Odgers-Ortiz et al., 2024, p. 3).

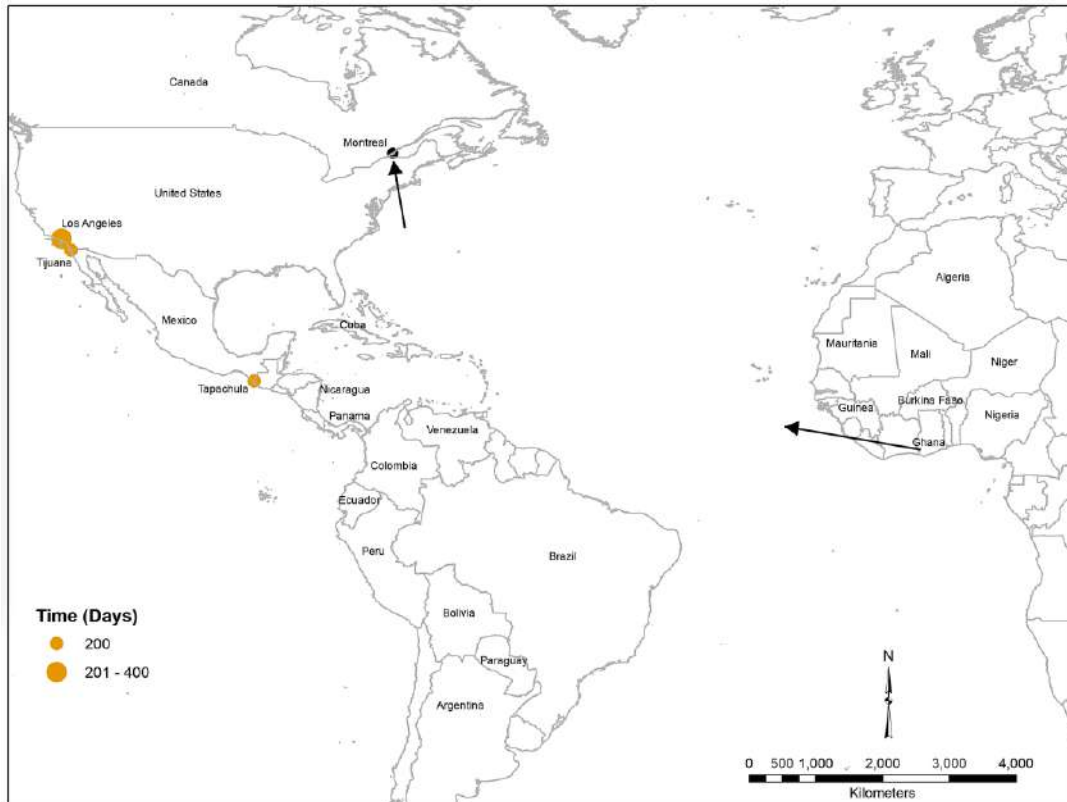
Trajectory C: Issa, from Ghana to Montreal

Despite being only 18 years old, Issa was completing his second journey to the United States at the time of the interview. The first time, at age 16, he had managed to enter the U.S. clandestinely along with other adult family members and worked there for nearly a year, and he would have continued if he and his family had not been deported. Shortly thereafter, he attempted to cross again while still a minor, reasoning that if intercepted by immigration authorities in the U.S. or in any of the transit countries, he would face a more favorable situation due to his age.

However, although the journey from Ghana to Tijuana, passing through Ecuador, Colombia, the Darien Gap, and Central America, was not longer than expected, the waiting time he faced in Tapachula and later in Tijuana meant that he reached adulthood while still in Mexican territory, as shown in Map 3. Once he became an adult, Issa received permanent residency along with recognition of his refugee status in Mexico, and due to the border closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, he had to endure a prolonged waiting period that caused him considerable anxiety.

Having just turned 18, he was eager to envision his future. At times he said he wanted to validate his studies to enter university in Mexico, and at other times he wanted to cross clandestinely and join the U.S. Marines. On another occasion, he decided he wanted to get married and asked his relatives in Ghana to find a fiancée for him, anticipating that he might be able to bring her legally if he married by proxy, though he changed his mind before following through with the plan. Ultimately, thanks to the support of a civil society organization, he was able to submit his asylum application and cross the border, settling in Los Angeles, California, where he held a job for just over a year before emigrating to Canada, where he married a young Canadian woman of Ghanaian origin.

Map 3. Issa's Trajectory, from Ghana to Montreal, with Locations Marked by Duration of Stay



Source: Prepared by the authors based on information provided by Issa (personal communications, 2011–2023).

Trajectory D: Addisa, from Togo to Maryland

As the child of a middle-class family, Addisa had the opportunity to attend university, where he studied sociology. Although he did not complete his studies, he obtained a comfortable job that allowed him to support his wife and four children without luxury but without deprivation. Addisa recounts that from a young age he was outraged by the lack of democracy in his country, which had been governed for decades by the same family, responsible for numerous acts of corruption (see Gutteridge, 2023). For this reason, despite the risks involved, he actively participated in an opposition group.

In 2017, when Addisa was 47 years old, the group he belonged to organized numerous demonstrations demanding that the provisions of the 1992 constitution be respected and attempting to prevent the re-election of the sitting president. The protests were violently repressed, and since Addisa was one of the main opposition leaders in his locality, it became evident that his life was in danger, prompting him to leave the country immediately.

After a brief stay in another African country, he was able to obtain a visa to travel to Brazil.¹⁶ Addisa considered his stay in the South American country temporary and hoped to return to Togo once the political situation calmed. However, a year and a half later, favorable conditions for his return had still not materialized, and his situation in Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro's government became difficult. Therefore, at the end of 2018, he decided to travel to the United States along with a group of colleagues, originally from Haiti and other African countries.

Thanks to his savings, the journey to Colombia was quick. However, upon reaching the entrance to the Darien, they had to pause to gather resources and reorganize. Addisa recounts that, despite being warned about the dangers of crossing the Darien, he never imagined it would be such a dramatic, dangerous, and disheartening experience. He explains that although the route is relatively short if viewed on a map, the conditions are so adverse that it is impossible to cross quickly. For him and the group he was traveling with, the passage took just over three weeks, despite having resources and being healthy and in good physical condition.

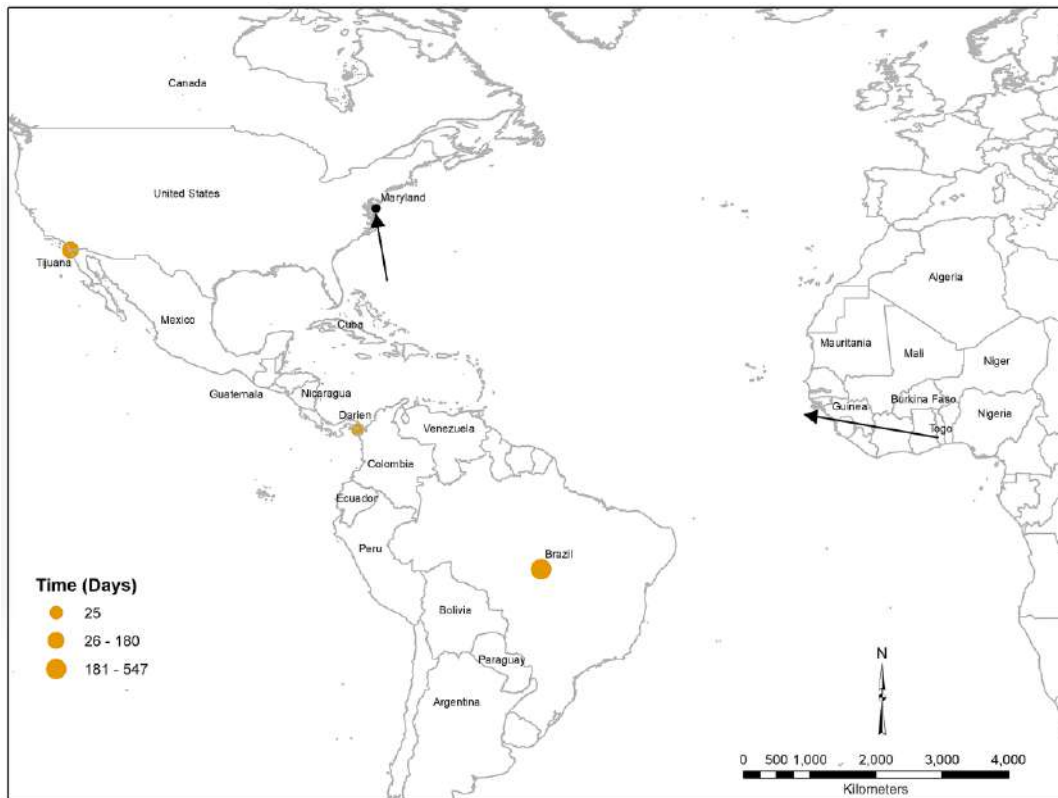
The rest of the journey through Central America was comparatively easier, allowing them to reach Tapachula quickly. Addisa notes that while in the immigration station, his anxiety constantly grew as he observed that, unlike people of Central American origin who were released a few days after arrival, African migrants remained confined with no clear prospect of being let out. This situation, combined with treatment that Addisa considers overtly racist and discriminatory, made him fear that the Mexican government might keep them imprisoned indefinitely. Ultimately, Addisa understood that the only way he could leave was by applying for asylum in Mexico, so he began his proceedings with COMAR.

Once he obtained refugee status and the corresponding permanent resident card, Addisa traveled to Tijuana, hoping to cross the border into the United States, a journey depicted in Map 4. However, upon arrival, although the border had reopened,¹⁷ Title 42 was still in effect, making it clear that crossing would not be quick or easy. As a result, Addisa found a job in a factory that provided him with health insurance and sufficient resources to continue sending remittances to his family.

¹⁶ According to Yates and Bolter (2021), Brazil is attractive for African migration for several reasons, including having diplomatic representation in more African countries than any other country in the Americas. Additionally, there is the possibility of applying for asylum upon arrival, and the historical connection established during the colonial period plays a role, reflected in a significant percentage of Afro-descendant people in Brazil. Another colonial link that facilitates migration is the use of Portuguese both in Brazil and in some African countries (Angola and Cabo Verde, among others). However, Brazil's visa policies for African citizens have been variable throughout history, with notable recent fluctuations during Jair Bolsonaro's presidency and later with the return of President Lula da Silva.

¹⁷ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the border closure from March 2020 to October 2021 restricted crossings, limiting them to those considered essential. However, Title 42, which mandated the expedited expulsion of individuals detained for entering U.S. territory without documentation, remained in effect until May 2023.

Map 4. Addisa's Journey from Togo to Maryland, with Locations Marked by Duration of Stay



Source: Prepared by the authors based on information provided by Addisa (personal communications, 2021–2023).

As with Cédric, it was during this stage of the journey that Addisa discovered that his refugee status allowed him to request family reunification. Although Addisa had left Togo hoping to return, three years had passed, the situation had not improved, and he missed his wife and children. Therefore, he proposed that they change their plans and reunite in Mexico. After six months of bureaucratic procedures, the family was able to come together in Tijuana, and once reunited, they crossed the border to apply for asylum, currently residing in Maryland while awaiting a decision on their case.

CONCLUSIONS

This article is based on a review of existing migration statistics, complemented by fieldwork data, to provide an approximation of the reality of contemporary African migration crossing Mexican territory en route to the north. As a relatively new phenomenon, one contribution of this study is the presentation of available statistical sources along with an assessment of their scope and limitations. Additionally, the trajectories and strategies of African migrants and asylum seekers were reconstructed and analyzed based on extensive, in-depth fieldwork. Together, these contributions offer insights and avenues for continued research in the coming years.

The review of quantitative information, although fragmentary and likely underreported, confirms a progressive increase in migration from Africa, as well as its predominantly male character. This finding reinforces previous studies (Cruz Cinta, 2020; Ray & Leyva, 2020; Mercadal, 2021; Roa, 2021; Navarro Alvarado, 2022; Miranda, 2023; Serra Mingot, 2023; Odgers-Ortiz et al., 2023; Odgers-Ortiz, 2024; Odgers-Ortiz & Olivas, 2024) that utilize other sources and cover different time periods. Similarly, COMAR data provide a more precise understanding of migrants' places of origin, showing that they are dispersed across all regions of the African continent. Greater representation is observed from the Central and West regions, with Angola, Senegal, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso being the most represented countries.

The variability in flows from countries such as Ghana and Senegal suggests at least two avenues for future research. First, a more detailed analysis of the economic and political circumstances in the countries of origin is required to better understand the root causes of migration. Second, longitudinal analyses, both qualitative and quantitative, are needed to determine whether these movements represent the early formation of migratory networks, which would imply continuity and stabilization in migration numbers and the eventual development of a new migratory system (Gurak & Caces, 1992), or whether they are temporary responses to particular circumstances.

In the same vein, the high number of cases from Mauritania in 2023 highlights the importance of analyzing the development of this flow in the coming years to determine whether it represents a temporary surge followed by a decline in 2024, or, on the contrary, the beginning of a period of sustained growth. Only data produced during 2024 and subsequent years will allow this question to be answered. In contrast, the sustained increase in migration from places such as Ghana or Angola could be related to the formation of migratory networks and the stabilization of a long-term flow.

Ultimately, the analysis of migration flows originating from Africa allows for the identification of diverse patterns. Considering only the 12 countries with the highest number of applications during the period, it is possible to distinguish: *a*) countries of origin for movements that appear to respond to specific, temporary events (Cameroon, Senegal, and, to a lesser extent, Ghana); *b*) countries of origin showing a steadily increasing trend (Angola and, to a lesser extent, the Congo); and *c*) countries with emerging flows (Mauritania).

On the other hand, although the qualitative data cannot be considered representative of the entire African population arriving in Mexico, they provide a deeper understanding of their experiences. In particular, it is confirmed that this migration is intended to be in transit toward the United States or Canada, but in practice, migrants often remain for months or even years in Mexican territory due to the impossibility of continuing their journey. Likewise, even when direct violence is not the cause in all cases, violent contexts and political instability are a recurring and constant factor in the testimonies of African migrants. In this way, the present research contributes to reinforcing the concept of migratory entrapment processes as part of a global trend (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012; Hess, 2012; Wyss & Borrelli, 2014; Basok et al., 2015; Missbach, 2015; Lønning, 2020; Odgers-Ortiz, 2024).

Thinking of the African population in Mexico in terms of entrapment allows for a reframing of issues related to integration, such as discrimination arising from limited proficiency in the language of the destination or transit location. This shift in perspective from transit to entrapment is crucial for designing appropriate public policies. The present research demonstrates that the condition of entrapment, combined with limited Spanish proficiency, places the African population in Mexico in a highly vulnerable situation. Notably, there is a widespread perception among this population of discriminatory treatment by the authorities of the National Institute of Migration. The longer the entrapment persists, the more likely it is that violations against them will accumulate, particularly because limited knowledge of Mexican migration law may lead them to face lengthy administrative processes they do not fully understand, generating conditions of anxiety and uncertainty.

Moreover, the empirical data collected reinforce findings from previous studies regarding migration routes, with arrivals by air into Brazil or Ecuador (Echeverri, 2016; Álvarez Velasco, 2020b; Miranda & Silva Hernández, 2022), followed by overland journeys in which the Darien Gap represents the most dangerous segment, even for those with some financial resources. Beyond these data, the present investigation highlights the transformation of family migration strategies as a result of reunification processes at Mexico's northern border.

It is evident that the condition of entrapment, combined with the possibility of initiating family reunification in Mexico for individuals who have obtained refugee status, has facilitated the development of a new migratory strategy. In this strategy, the father or, in exceptional cases, the mother undertakes the long, costly, and dangerous journey to Mexico in order to subsequently process family reunification from this territory. Family reunification is not necessarily accompanied by plans to settle in Mexico; rather, it is conceived as a stage for continuing migration toward the United States. This approach reduces the period during which the family remains separated and improves the chances of obtaining asylum in the United States, as these applications are submitted by family groups that include minors.

The settlement of these migrants, together with their families, in Mexico can, in some cases, constitute a new life project, particularly for those who have secured stable employment and developed friendships in their new environment during the long waiting period required for reunification procedures. However, in other cases, as previously noted, family reunification represents merely another stage in the long journey toward seeking asylum in the United States or Canada.

As information about the feasibility of legal reunification in Mexico spreads, it is likely that this procedure will soon become the initial project for many of these migrants. This would imply, among other aspects, that the stays of African migrants in Mexico will become longer. Ultimately, both statistical and qualitative data allow us to conclude that African migration will continue in the coming years, that this population is in a state of entrapment rather than in transit, and that it is therefore urgent to develop strategies, policies, and mechanisms that facilitate their integration, particularly by addressing the discrimination that persists across various governmental spheres.

Translation: Erika Morales.

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