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Employment Assessment for youth on the move in Mexico City

2025

Executive Summary

This assessment arises from the need for up-to-date and systematized information on the conditions of access to formal employment for young people on the move (migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons) in Mexico City. Although this group faces multiple barriers to socioeconomic integration, there are only few studies that specifically document their experiences, perceptions, and strategies in relation to the labor market.

The objective of this document is not only to identify obstacles, but also to highlight opportunities, good practices, and recommendations that can guide public policies, social programs, and business strategies toward more effective and sustainable labor inclusion.

The information contained in this assessment is intended for decision-makers in the public sector, civil society organizations, international agencies, and companies interested in strengthening their hiring and inclusion practices. It also seeks to serve as technical input for designing projects, generating partnerships, and promoting more inclusive work environments that recognize the potential and trajectories of young people on the move.

The aim is to analyze the main barriers, perceptions, and strategies that young people recognize as determinants for their labor integration in Mexico City. In addition, it incorporates a market-system perspective, considering the perceptions of the private sector and civil society organizations. A participatory approach was used, with qualitative and quantitative data collection, complemented by a secondary data review.

The analysis summarizes the contextual factors that influence the labor integration of young people on the move. In particular, it highlights institutional barriers such as legal and documentation limitations, administrative costs, and access to regularization procedures; structural barriers such as informality, underutilization of talent, and revalidation of studies; and social barriers such as discrimination, stigma, and cultural differences that limit labor integration.

This assessment offers recommendations to strengthen the labor integration processes of young people in Mexico City. The main recommendations for government institutions, civil society organizations, and companies include:

- Expand labor inclusion programs for population on the move.
- Provide documentation to people on the move so they can access formal employment.
- Strengthen case management strategies by providing personalized guidance on administrative procedures, selection processes, and soft skills training.
- Move towards a transformation of organizational culture that recognizes migrant trajectories as part of the country's available human capital.
- Review recruitment, training, leadership, and talent management processes, incorporating inclusive and intercultural approaches that facilitate the labor integration of young people on the move.

Background

Formal and informal work for young people

In 2019, Mexico City was in an environment characterized by high informality, with more than 50% of the employed population working in informal conditions, with a higher incidence among young people, women, and people with low levels of education.¹

The most recent data from the National Occupation and Employment Survey (ENOE) show a minimal decrease in the informality rate, which now stands at 44.7% nationally, indicating that the problem persists with similar characteristics.² The focus on youth indicates that the population aged 18 to 29 faces greater difficulties in accessing formal employment, with a high concentration in low-paying occupations (informal trade, manual labor, occasional subsistence activities), mainly with incomes of up to the minimum wage, and an unemployment rate that can reach 10.4% among those with a secondary education or lower literacy levels.³

Informality is exacerbated in sectors such as commerce, personal services (beauty salons, aesthetics, and physical appearance-focused services), and construction, where jobs without contracts, access to social security, and low wages predominate. In particular, the service sector is one of the most affected by informality, with the rate of informal employment in this sector exceeding 53%.⁴

In Mexico City, labor informality among young people (aged 15 to 29) exceeds 69%, which shows that even in contexts with higher average incomes, structural barriers persist that limit access to decent and sustainable jobs.⁵

The migration context in Mexico

Youth migration represents a demographic and economic dynamic of growing relevance. Migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean tend to be younger than the local population and actively participate in the labor market. In host countries, the labor integration of young migrants can boost sectors with labor shortages, increase productivity, and broaden the tax base, which is especially relevant in contexts of population aging and demographic transition.⁶

In Mexico, the humanitarian crisis associated with mixed migratory movements and internal displacement exposes increasing numbers of people to various protection risks. Although there are no exact figures on the number of people affected in the country, the magnitude of human mobility in the region, and in Mexico, can be appreciated through multiple estimates that account for the needs of the population.⁷

Migration continues to bring people of various nationalities and profiles to Mexican territory, some with the intention of remaining in Mexico and others with the purpose of transiting through the country. Experiences of mobility are not homogeneous, the groups most vulnerable to these risks include cisgender and transgender

¹ National Observatory (2019).

² National Institute of Statistics and Geography (2025).

³ National Institute of Statistics and Geography (2025).

⁴ International Organization for Migration (2025).

⁵ United Nations Development Program and United Nations Population Fund (2025)

⁶ Van der Welf (2024)

⁷ National Protection Working Group (2023)

women (especially those between the ages of 18 and 39), children and adolescents, people without legal status, people with disabilities, young people, and older adults.⁸

Young migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people face obstacles to accessing formal employment. A needs assessment by the International Rescue Committee showed that 72% of population on the move cited lack of financial resources as one of the main obstacles to meeting their basic needs. Additionally, 54% mentioned lack of documentation as a major barrier to employment opportunities.⁹

Protection Monitoring data show that 43% of those surveyed cited lack of employment or low wages as a cause of displacement. In addition, 77% mentioned not having obtained any legal documentation in Mexico.¹⁰

In this context of high informality, legal barriers, and limited inclusion of young people in the workforce, there is a need to generate an assessment of the challenges and opportunities for labor integration of young people on the move in Mexico City. This assessment seeks to provide guidance to institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and even young people themselves in developing the necessary pathways and changes to promote their inclusion and strengthen their agency in personal and collective development.

Objective

To identify and analyze the factors that influence the labor integration of young people in the context of mobility in Mexico City based on the voices of the young population, employers, and social organizations, in order to generate practical recommendations that guide inclusion programs and promote more inclusive business practices for this population.

Methodology

This assessment was developed using a mixed methodological approach, combining various quantitative and qualitative techniques with the aim of obtaining a comprehensive view of the conditions of labor integration of young people in a context of mobility in Mexico City. Although the results are not statistically representative of the labor market in Mexico City, they offer a valuable exploratory overview that combines information from people on the move linked to organizations with those who remain outside the institutional reach. For more information on the methodology, see Annex 1: Methodological Design.

Data collection was carried out from **June 13 to July 10, 2025**, using individual level surveys, focus groups, interviews with private sector actors, and a review of success stories.

⁸ National Protection Working Group (2024)

⁹ International Rescue Committee (2025)

¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees et al. (2025)

50 surveys of people on the move between the ages of 18 and 35. Main nationalities: Venezuelan, Cuban, and Honduran

5 interviews with companies in the agricultural, commercial, real estate, and technology sectors, including one national business chamber.

3 focus groups with representatives from civil society organizations and the private sector.

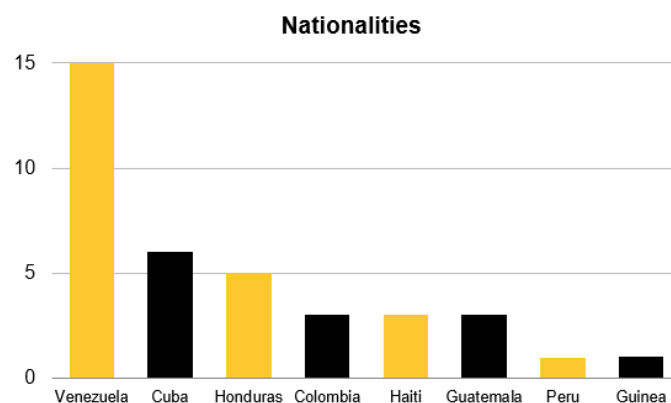
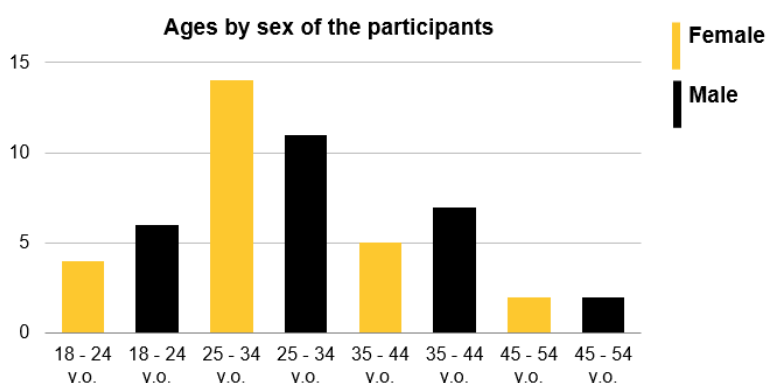
4 documented success stories.

Characteristics of participants

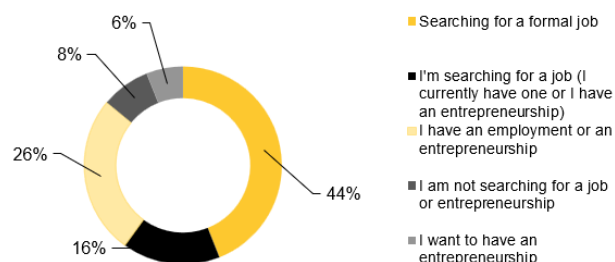
Surveys

Sampling strategy: 50 people who have received IRC services were surveyed. These individuals were selected at random from among those who were available. It is important to note that this group does not represent all young people on the move included in the service database. However, their testimonies offer valuable insight into their individual experiences.

Demographic profile of respondents



Employment



Documentation in Mexico

Migrant or does not mention a regular status	24 persons
Asylum seeker	16 persons
Refugee	16 persons

Success stories

Testimonials of success stories in job placement were collected from individuals who have successfully integrated into the local labor market through various mechanisms. These include support processes provided by social organizations, participation in job banks, and experiences of autonomous integration. These stories highlight effective routes to job placement and good practices that can be replicated or strengthened in future placement strategies.

Focus groups

Through an open call on social media, complemented by direct invitations via telephone calls to companies previously identified in social responsibility groups and sectoral awareness roundtables, those interested in participating in the diagnostic process were contacted. Despite sending out more than 30 invitations to companies and private organizations, participation was limited, highlighting the challenges that exist in the process of engaging with the private sector. However, eleven representatives of different companies did participate in individual interviews and focus groups, providing qualitative information about their perceptions, needs, and challenges in terms of employment and economic development.

Findings

Young people on the move face a combination of structural, institutional, and social barriers that condition their entry and permanence in work environments in Mexico City.

Structural barriers

- **Informality:** The labor market in sectors such as commerce, personal services, and hospitality, where much of the job opportunities for this population are concentrated, has high levels of informality. This translates into jobs without contracts, without social security, or with low wages. Two of the people interviewed from companies mentioned that informality is the easiest way for people on the move to enter the labor market, although both interviews mention that it is not the appropriate route for their development.
- **Underutilization of talent:** There are cases of people with postgraduate studies and professional experience who, due to the lack of agile mechanisms for revalidation or recognition of studies, can only access operational positions or informal jobs.

60% of the young people surveyed mention having had one or more technical or job-related training courses in their lives. Additionally, 42% mention that documentation and revalidation are significant barriers to finding employment. Meanwhile, four of the five companies interviewed affirm that skills, knowledge, experience, and/or basic education are important for entering the labor market in operational positions.

"I don't have years of experience, but I have these hard skills, I have this certification, this diploma, this specific knowledge that can endorse these years of experience." – Male, human resources representative

- **Revalidation of studies:** The costs and requirements, such as school documentation from countries of origin, represent a barrier for people who have studied but cannot afford the costs or access the necessary documentation for certification.



I worked irregularly for two years. I was fired without severance pay and was always paid the minimum wage. That's why I decided to seek self-employment, to avoid such exploitation."

- Woman, Colombian, 35 years old

Institutional barriers

- **Formal hiring:** Participating companies mentioned that documentation is a barrier to hiring people on the move. While 42% of respondents mentioned that the chances of formal hiring are low or very low, 40% do not have a clear idea, and 18% mention that the chances of hiring are high.
- **Legal limitations on hiring:** The limitation of up to 10% of the workforce being foreign represents a particularly significant challenge for small companies that have already hired foreign nationals and cannot offer more jobs. With regard to the young people interviewed, only 25% of those under 35 are currently employed, while 38% of those over that age are.
- **Procedures and documentation:** Obtaining work permits, bank accounts, IMSS registration, and compliance with SAT requirements often delay hiring, even when the employer is interested.
- **Administrative costs:** The investment required to participate in selection processes, such as transportation, paperwork, documentation, photographs, and materials, represents an obstacle for those who do not have the necessary resources to cover each process, especially for women caregivers with family responsibilities.

"Unfortunately, it is not possible because in order to hire someone, we need that person to have the necessary documentation from both their country and here." - Male, human resources representative

Social barriers

- **Discrimination and stigma:** Xenophobia and prejudice based on nationality or place of origin limit labor integration. Of the people interviewed who mentioned being in search of employment, 20% mentioned that an important factor is discrimination based on nationality. On the other hand, three of the companies interviewed mentioned that all companies need to raise awareness to avoid these types of barriers.

- **Cultural differences:** Culture shock and different communication styles generate harassment or rejection in the workplace. Three of the companies interviewed mentioned that intercultural practices or processes are needed to ensure good communication and understanding among people who join the workforce.

***"I speak directly, as I did in my country, but here that has been misunderstood. I have been reprimanded for how I express myself."
- Woman, Colombian, 35 years old***



"What I would recommend to companies is that they better train their recruitment teams so that they have both the empathy and the knowledge to deal with people who are going through a migration process." - Woman, Venezuelan, 32 years old

In addition, there is a recognized interest in hiring people in the context of mobility, especially in operational areas where there is a shortage of personnel. Companies particularly value technical experience and a willingness to learn, although they also recognize that a lack of knowledge about the legal processes involved in youth mobility creates uncertainty. Since they are unfamiliar with the process that young people must go through to settle, revalidate documents, or open a bank account, they tend to favor Mexican nationals.

The private sector has also documented positive experiences in companies that have implemented labor inclusion policies. Some companies have developed welcoming practices, such as cultural integration activities, provision of uniforms and meals, and access to internal training platforms. These actions have contributed to creating collaborative environments.

Finally, during interviews with successful cases, it was mentioned that access to formal employment is feasible when community networks, institutional programs, and inclusive business policies are coordinated.

Recommendations

Recommendations for government institutions

- Expand labor inclusion programs for people on the move.
- Provide documentation to people in situations of mobility so they can access formal employment.
- Strengthen mechanisms for the revalidation of studies and certification of skills. Including knowledge acquired outside the formal system, such as previous work experience or community knowledge.
- Promote awareness and training campaigns on labor rights with an intercultural approach. Aimed at combating discrimination and promoting inclusive work environments, recognizing diversity as an added value.
- Create spaces for decision-making on labor policies for people on the move. Their inclusion would allow their experiences and proposals to be incorporated into the design of policies and models.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

- Strengthen case management strategies by providing personalized guidance on administrative procedures, selection processes, and soft skills training.
- Promote partnerships with micro-enterprises and local businesses, creating incentives for the formal hiring of young people in situations of mobility (badges and brand promotion campaigns).
- Strengthen collaboration strategies with the private sector for the inclusion of people on the move in their workplaces, through co-creation spaces, training, and the generation of integration models.
- Promote awareness-raising events in companies to recognize the professional value of people in a context of mobility.

Recommendations for the private sector

- Move towards a transformation of organizational culture that recognizes migrant trajectories as part of the country's available human capital.
- Review recruitment, training, leadership, and talent management processes, incorporating inclusive and intercultural approaches that facilitate the labor integration of young people, through spaces for good practices for inclusive recruitment.
- Adopt practices that promote diversity, such as welcome protocols, intercultural training, and flexible administrative processes for hiring.
- Strengthen coordination with organizations that work with vulnerable groups and can assist companies in designing inclusion strategies, talent channeling, and internal awareness-raising.

Conclusions

The experiences gathered show that labor integration for young people in the context of mobility is conditioned by various barriers. Structural barriers, such as the lack of recognition of studies; institutional barriers, such as the absence of valid documentation; and social barriers, such as discrimination and stigma, significantly affect young people on the move. However, the cases analyzed show that labor inclusion is possible when there is effective coordination between government, companies, social organizations, and community networks.

The labor inclusion of young people on the move represents an opportunity to enrich work environments through cultural diversity, contributing to the consolidation of more inclusive, resilient, and innovative organizational models.

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Appendix 1: Methodological design

Analysis Methods

This study used a mixed methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative) to analyze the conditions of access to formal employment for young people in the context of mobility, between the ages of 18 and 35, in Mexico City. The perspectives of people in the context of mobility, employers, and support organizations were considered.

Study design

The study adopted a mixed exploratory-descriptive design:

- Exploratory, to understand poorly documented phenomena regarding labor inclusion in urban contexts.
- Descriptive, to characterize the profiles, barriers, opportunities, and work experiences of the target population.
- Mixed, using surveys, interviews, focus groups, and case studies.
- Triangulation: the study's findings were strengthened through methodological triangulation, comparing results from different sources (mobile workers, companies, organizations) and techniques (surveys,

interviews, focus groups). This strategy made it possible to validate common patterns, identify contradictions, and enrich the interpretation from multiple perspectives.

Ethical considerations

- Confidentiality, informed consent, privacy notices, and data protection were guaranteed.
- The rights of free, voluntary, and safe participation of all participants were respected.
- Any form of revictimization or discrimination in the information gathering process was avoided.
- Anonymous use of information was guaranteed.

Limitations

The study has several methodological limitations that affect its statistical representativeness, although they do not compromise its exploratory value:

- Use of non-probabilistic sampling methods: this prevents representative statistical inferences from being made about the entire population in the context of mobility in search of employment in Mexico City.
- Selection bias: many respondents were already involved in support programs, which may have influenced their responses.
- Self-selection bias: only those who had access to the invitation and decided to collaborate participated, favoring profiles with greater connectivity and availability.
- Limited face-to-face surveys: although they broaden the diversity of profiles by including people in a context of mobility who are not linked to organizations, their number was lower (15 interviews), limiting the analysis.

Overall, although the results are not statistically representative of the labor market in Mexico City, they offer a valuable exploratory overview that combines information from people on the move linked to organizations with those who remain outside the institutional reach.

In summary

- Although it cannot be generalized, the study offers a valid characterization of the phenomenon.
- The methodology is appropriate given the difficulty of accessing the population in a context of mobility.
- The diversity of migratory situations can generate heterogeneous responses that are difficult to group uniformly.

Design of the quantitative component

The main source for the quantitative component of the study was a database of approximately 400 people, built within the framework of a previous job training program aimed at providing tools and support to people in a context of mobility in Mexico City. Two important limitations were identified for the design: 1. Applying simple random sampling was not feasible due to outdated or non-existent telephone contacts. 2. There was widespread fear of responding due to fraud or extortion.

Given these limitations, a combined non-probability sampling approach was chosen, specifically based on criteria and self-selection. First, the database was filtered to include only those individuals who met the defined criteria. Then, a general invitation was sent to this group, allowing each person to voluntarily decide whether or not to participate in the survey. This strategy meant that only those individuals with access to the means of contact (email, telephone) and willingness to participate responded.

As a complement, and in order to obtain a broader view, additional surveys were conducted randomly on public streets. These surveys were carried out in areas with a high presence of people in transit who met the same criteria as the participants in the database.

Design of the qualitative component

The qualitative component was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the job search process, identifying relevant points such as difficulties, timeframes, and job placement strategies from the perspective of various stakeholders. To this end, the following groups were used to collect information:

Company interviews: interviews were conducted with five employers from different economic sectors, intentionally selected for their experience in hiring people on the move or because of their interest in including them in the workforce. These interviews aimed to explore perceptions, identify the barriers employers face when hiring, and learn about good practices or initiatives promoted by companies to hire a greater number of people in a context of mobility.

Case study interviews: Five people on the move who successfully entered the labor market in Mexico City and who meet the defined criteria were interviewed. The objective was to analyze in depth the successful trajectories of these individuals' entry into the labor market in order to understand key elements such as individual strategies, overcoming barriers, and knowledge of support networks.

Focus groups: Two focus groups were held with seven members of organizations that provide support to people on the move to achieve labor inclusion, as well as private sector companies. The focus groups aimed to learn about their experience working with people on the move, good practices, and the identification of barriers they have encountered based on their expertise.



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