

# **Social inequality and environmental-induced migration in Mesoamerica (Mexico and Central America): who is left behind?**

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**1 June 2021**

# Research Question

Why is environmental or climate-induced migration a **complex socioenvironmental phenomenon** that is still not discussed widely among the scientific community and is **increasing the socioenvironmental vulnerability** among poor urban dwellers and rural-indigenous people?

Which are **gender and cultural aspects** that let vulnerable groups behind, often exposed to a **survival dilemma**, while better trained and educated people risk the dangerous migration process from Mesoamerica to the US?

Which is the role of **Mexico as transit land** between Central America and US, itself heavily affected by hurricanes and drought, thus confronted with its **own socioenvironmental migration process**. But Mexico is also responsible to grant a safe transition process across the country and receiving (deporting) the expelled Central American migrants from the US?

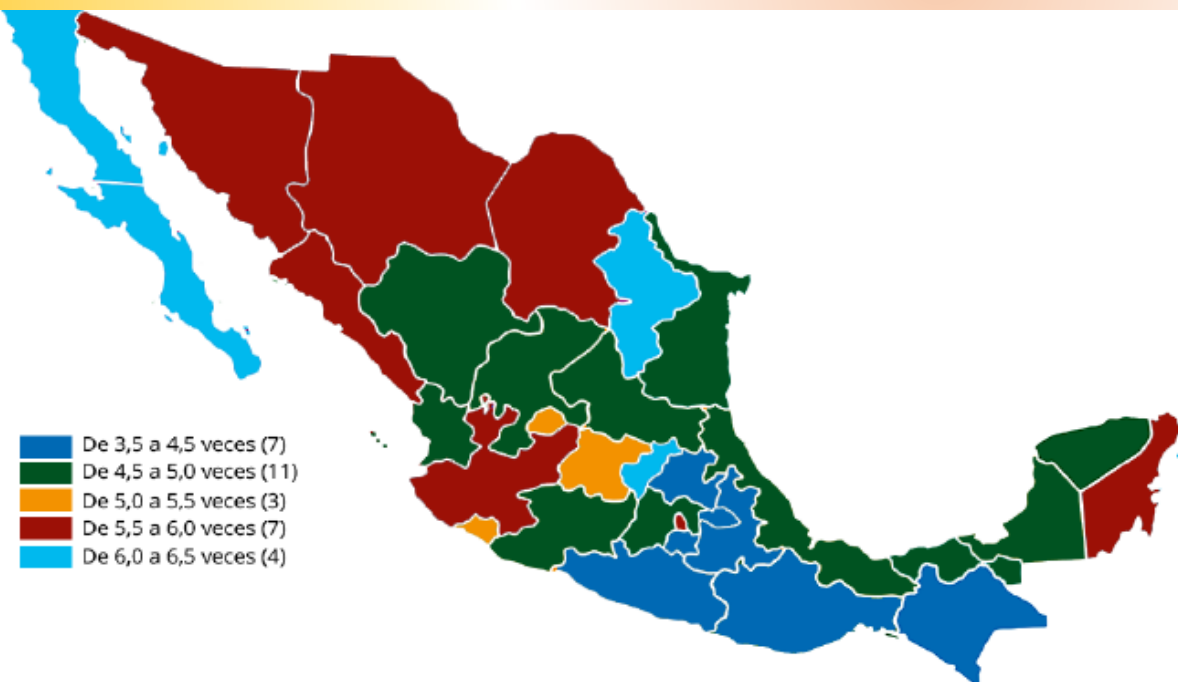
# Complexity of migration

- This presentation analyses empirically-searched **environmental migration in Mexico** with some data of the recent migrations from Central America, using quantitative and qualitative methods.
- Drought, floods, hurricanes, and loss of food security and livelihood together with the collapse of food export prices are producing an increasing rural insecurity, where the **organized crime** is further taken away the limited resources of poor peasant families.
- We found a **gender-bias** in environmental migration, where women, head of household **were left behind** and confronted with socioenvironmental vulnerability and survival problems.
- Mesoamerican people got limited governmental support after disasters, which has reduced their **coping strategies** and **obliged members of the family to migrate inside, to Mexico or to the US**, where militarized borders and the organized crime is an increasing risks for crossing the borders without legal documents.

# Territorial inequality

Región/País	Crecimiento poblacional	Elasticidad empleo-producto	Umbral de empleo
América Latina y el Caribe	1,2	0,48	2,5
América del Sur	1,3	0,53	2,4
Centroamérica y México	1,4	0,57	2,5
El Caribe	0,9	0,33	2,7

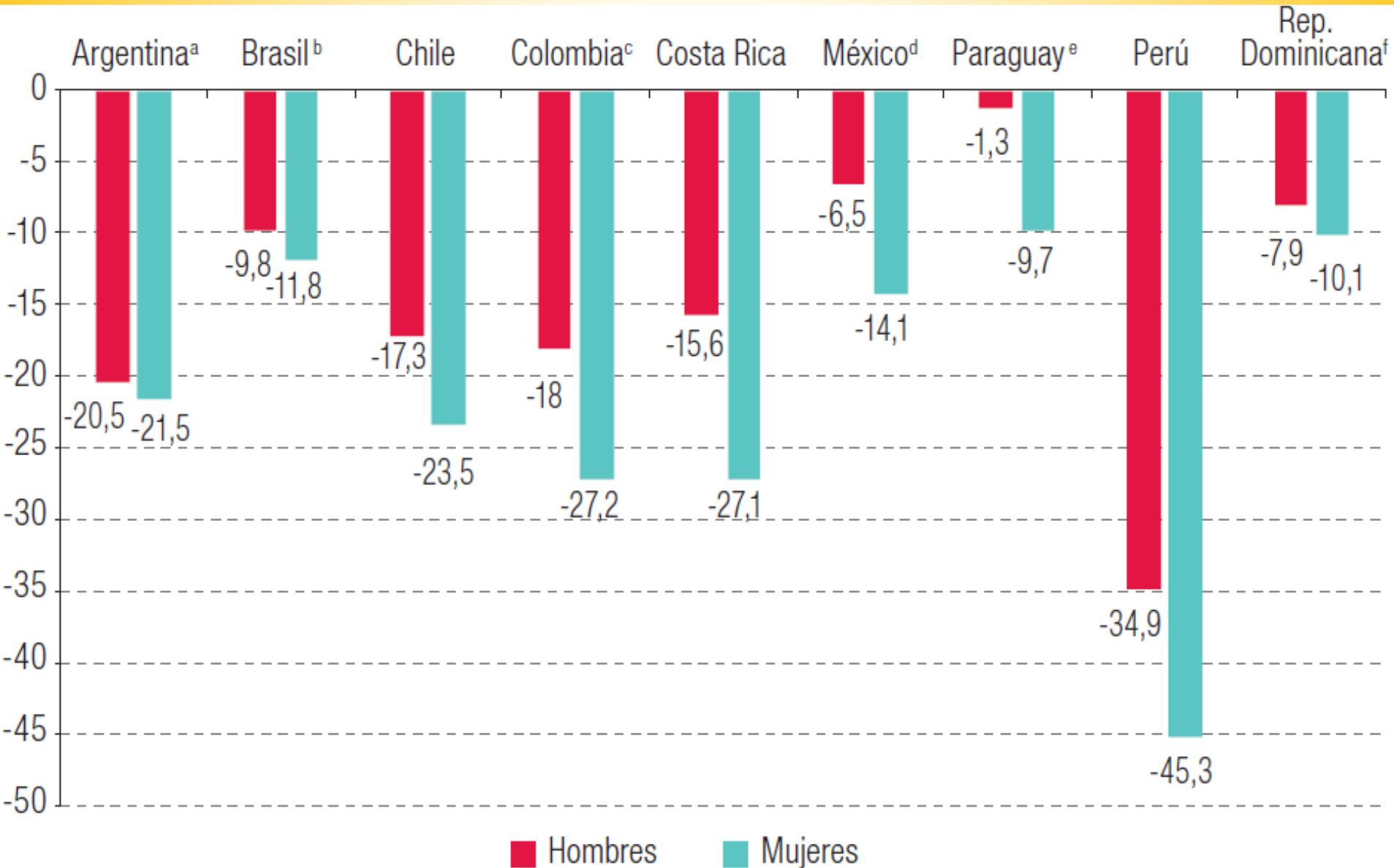
Sources: BM, OIT, CEPAL 2019: 38



**Income differences in rural-urban areas limits the growth, increase poverty, reduce capacity of development and increase regional inequality.**

Source: Encuesta Ocupación-Empleó 2018 en México  
CEPAL 2019: 56

# Cambios en ocupación/sexo abril-junio 2019-2020 (Cepal 2021: 232)

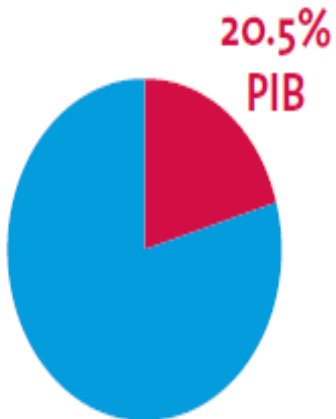
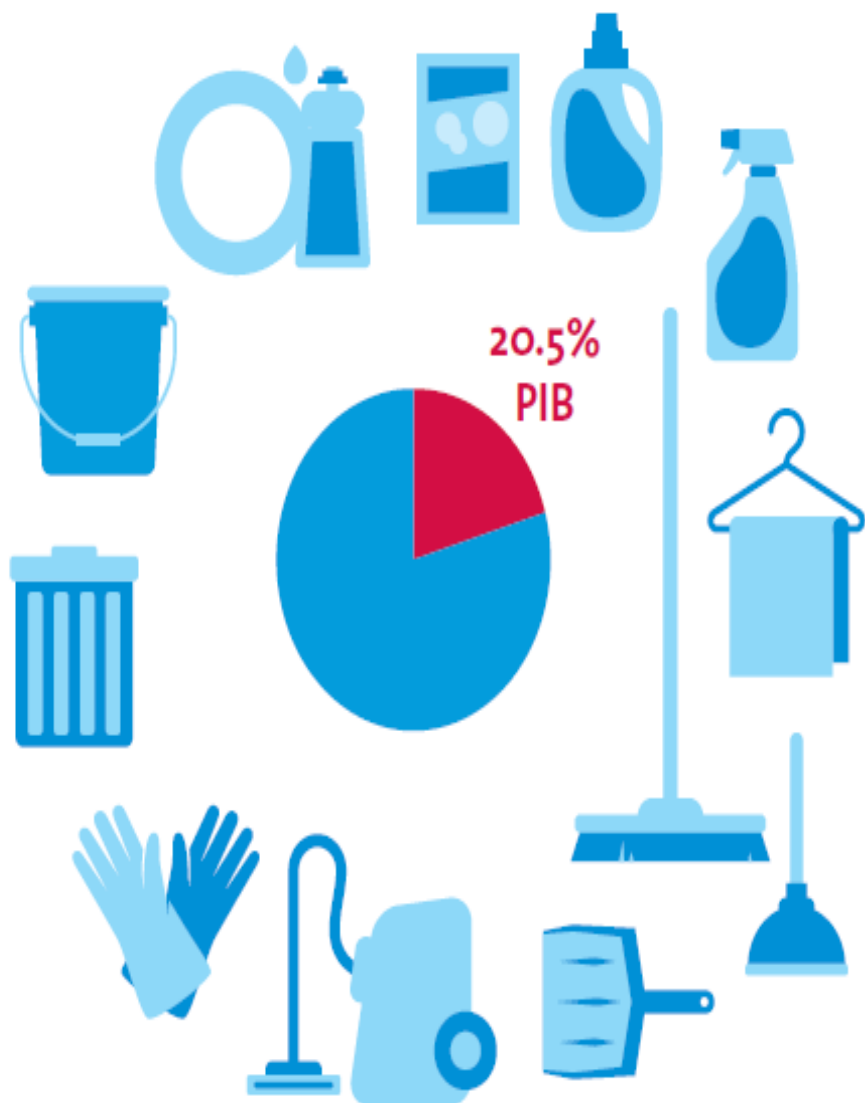




# Extreme poverty in Mesoamerica



# Value of unpaid domestic work



20.5% PIB



15.5%



5%

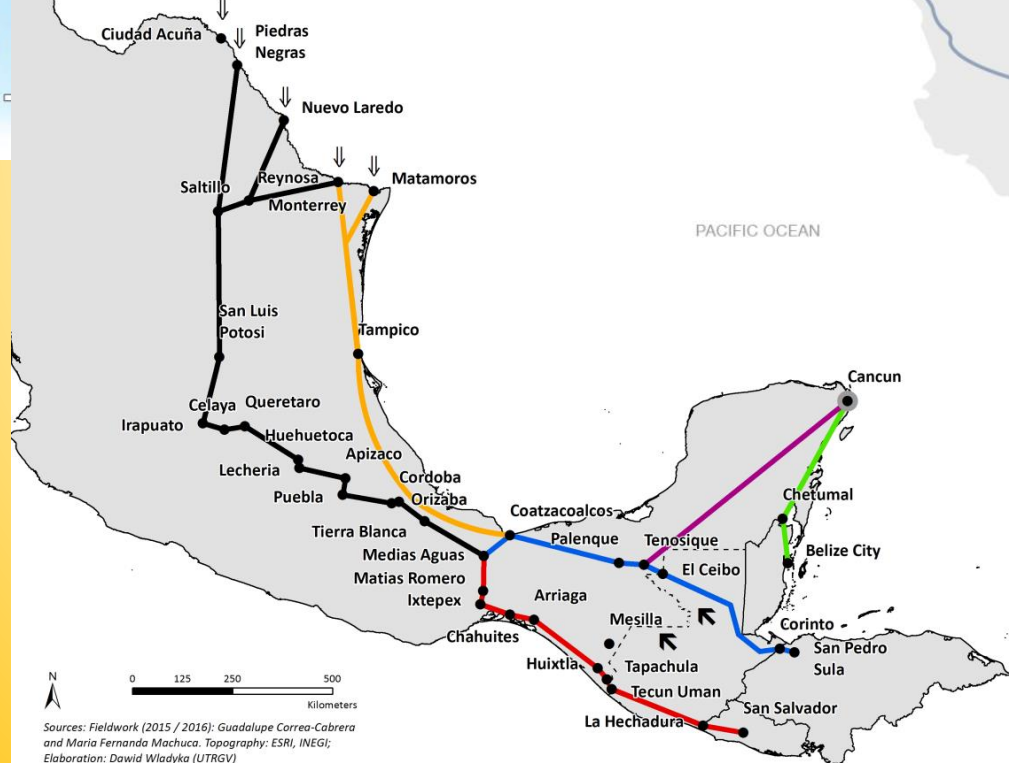
# Gender and range of salaries in Mexico

PERSONAL POR GÉNERO Y RANGO SALARIAL





# Mesoamerican Migration Routes



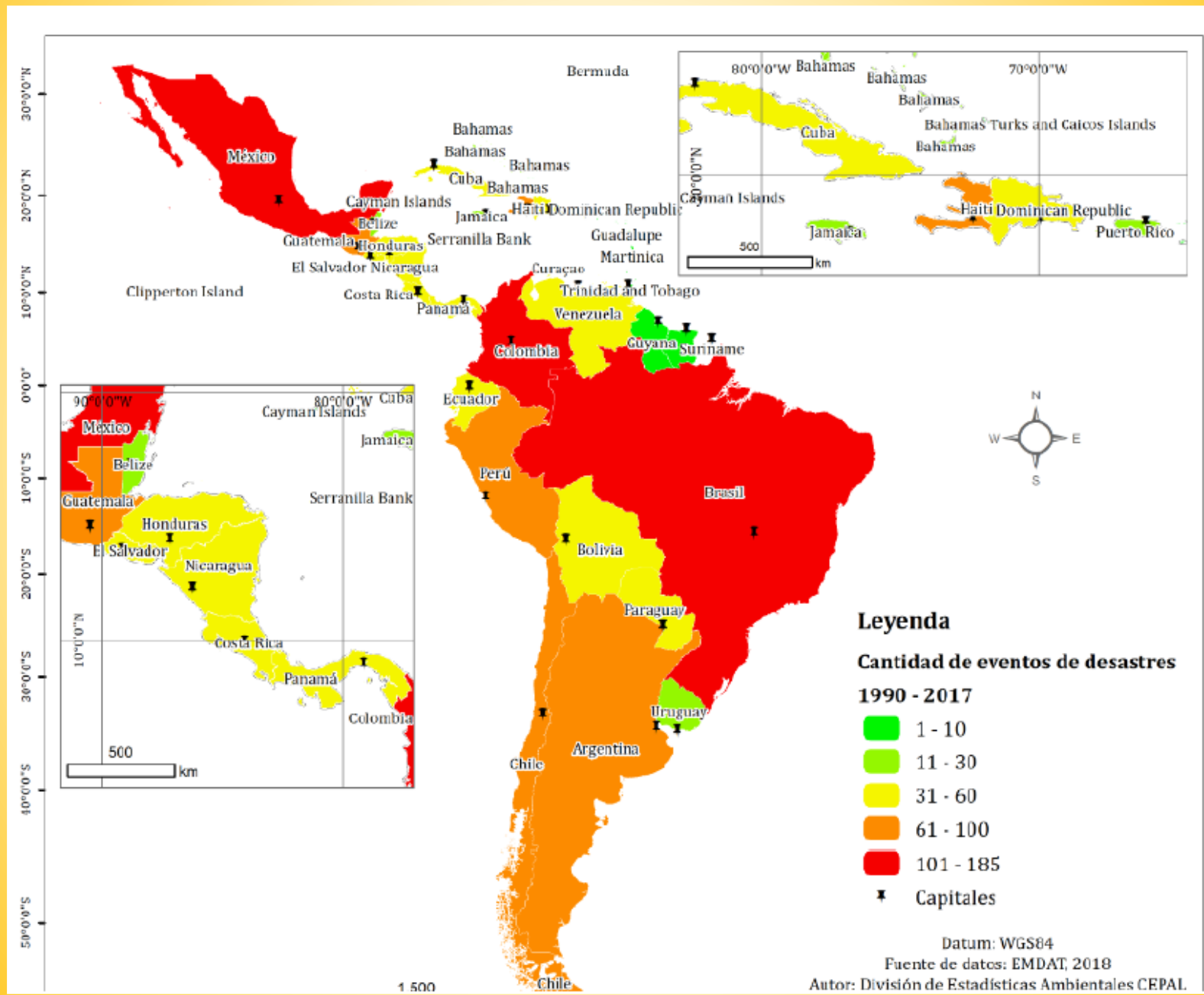
Sources: Fieldwork (2015 / 2016); Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera and Maria Fernanda Machuca. Topography: ESRI, INEGI; Elaboration: Dawid Władysław (UTRGV)

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# Reasons for migration in Mesoamerica

- Corrupt, inefficient **governments** with poor **health system**
- Informal labour force temporary, affecting **more women & economic desperation**
- **Domestic violence**, organized crime, weak judicial system
- **Highest crime rate** globally: homicide & femicide
- Mexico's National Guard reinforced both borders
- **12 hurricanes** struck Mesoamerica in 2020: eviscerated subsistence farms, killed livestock, and devastated large-scale agricultural production. **Drought** on the Pacific coast, due to La Niña killed livestock, reduced subsistence, flooded agricultural production & **produced hunger**.
- **Poverty rate** after 1 year of COVID-disaster increased 15-20%
- **April 2021**: most migrants are Mexican individuals; families and small children from CA.
- Trump's administration froze assistance; Biden will give **4 bio** to reinforce **civil society** and structural problems of **corruption in CA**

# Disasters in Latin America: 1990-2017

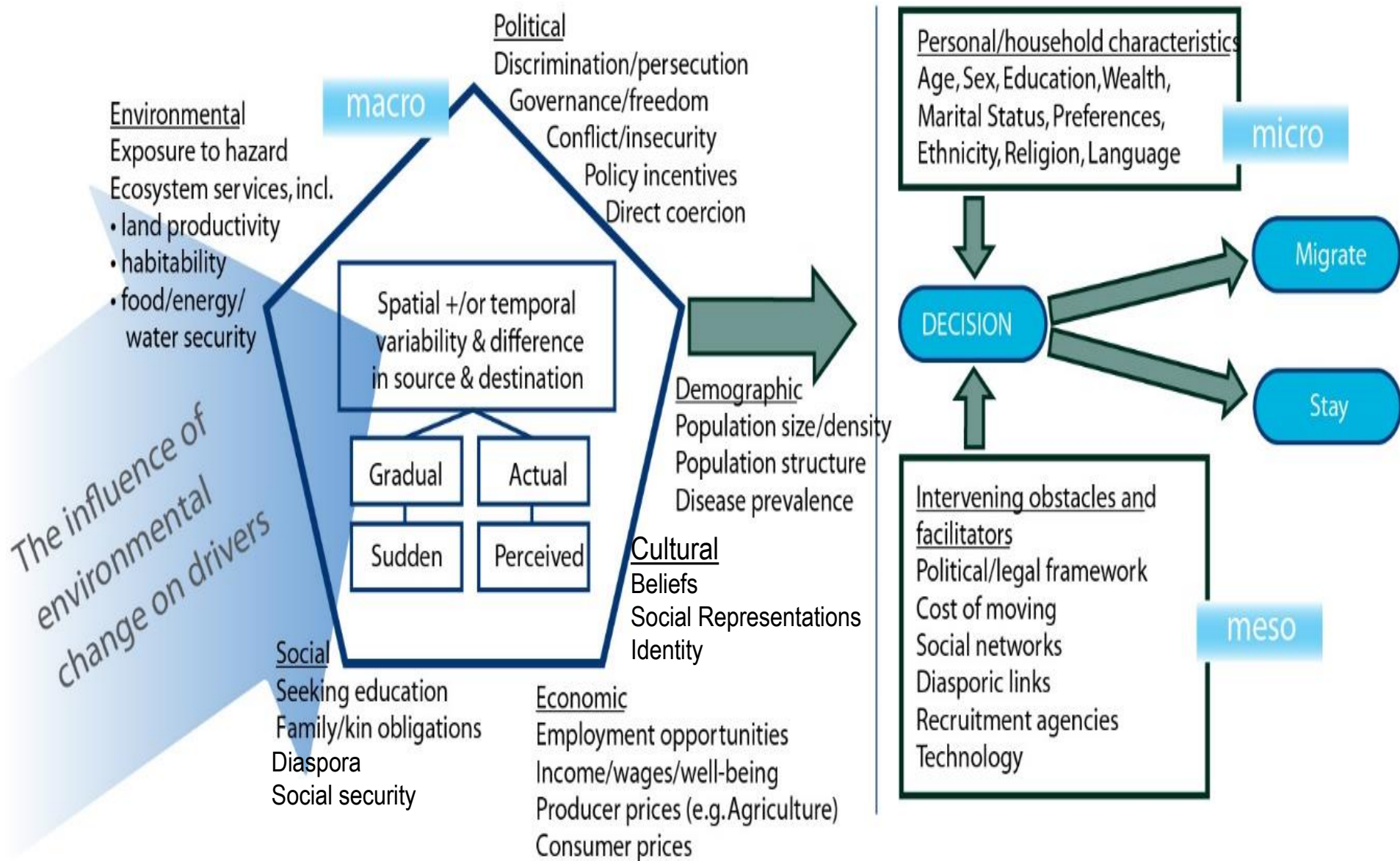


# Definition of environmental-induced migration (EIM)

- There are controversial theories on environmental-induced migration is a complex phenomenon, not totally included in the traditional understanding of IOM (MC/INF/288 2007: 2): “Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, for compelling reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad”.
- EIM does not take into account gender, age, ethnic and cultural aspects in its definition of EIM, which increase the risks during the migration process. Often **criminal rings** are promoting EIM with cost between 5 to 9000 dollars.



# Complex decisión-making processes



# Impacts of EIM in Mesoamerica

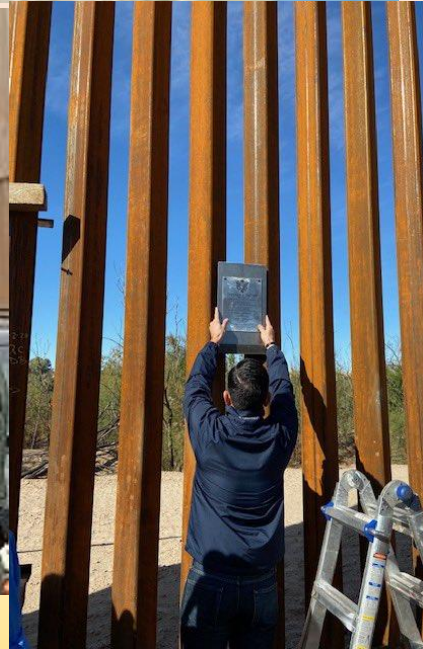
- **Falsely promised border openness, disasters & socioenvironmental crises** increased migration in Mesoamerica
- From January to March 2021: **4,500 children** were detained at US border
- US expelled **EIM-migrants to Mexico**, flying them hundreds of kilometers away to a different border town (under Title 42).
- Thousands of unaccompanied migrant children are filling up **detention facilities, lacking families in Mexico** and getting traumatized.
- Of the 1,165 people the personal in Filter Hotel has processed since the beginning of May, nearly **39 percent were minors**, most of them under the age of 12.
- The demand for shelter in Mexican is at **breaking point in Mexico**, overloaded with children, lack of health services (no-COVID prevention), schools & HR-attention.
- Mexico is **increasing raids on smuggling groups** and send migrants **massively back to CA**, according to the existing running shelters.
- Environmental conditions **are worsening in Mesoamerica** the **survival** conditions of poor urban dwellers, peasants and women, forcing new **EIM migration waves** to the US, due to **lack of coping strategies & adaptation**, which are further limiting the recovery and quality of life.





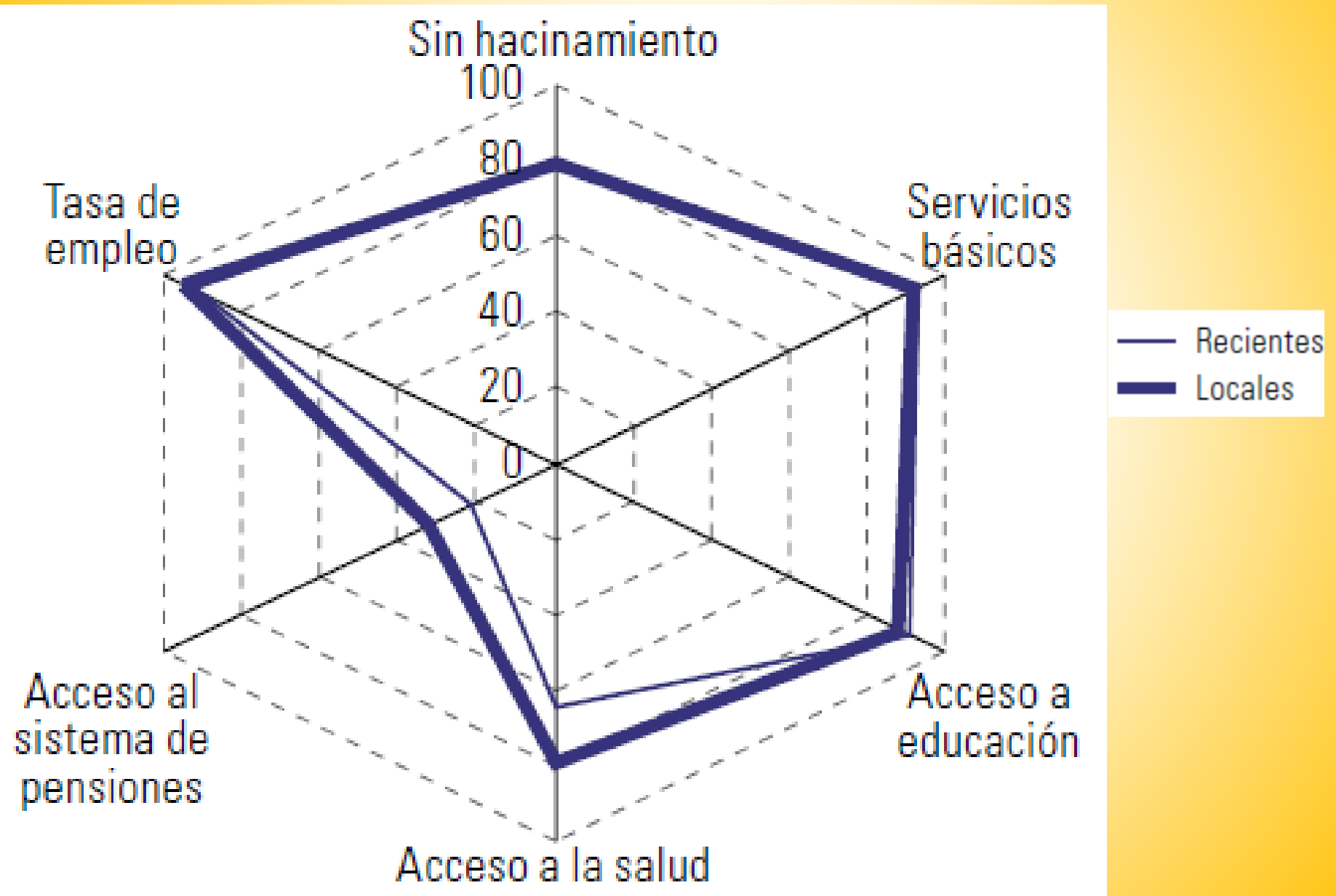


# Militarized border between Mexico-Central America-US





# Migrants from CA in Mexico (Cepal 2019: 214)



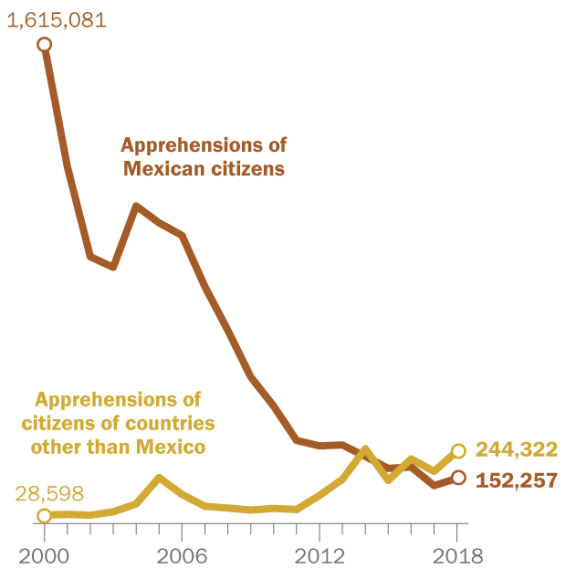
# Security threats

- 2019: 150,000 Central Americans ask at **US border for asylum**.
- UNHCR 2021: **470,000 asylum-seekers; 97,000 located in Mexico**; Honduras-El Salvador 318,000; Nicaragua 102,000 internally displaced.
- Mexico was forced to put **15,000 national guards** in the northern border; **6,000** in the south to control the immigration from CA.
- Mexico supported **El Salvador and Guatemala** with development programs to reduce migration.
- Mexico **reduced 70% illegal migration** to US until 2020, but COVID and disasters **increased Mexican migration**
- US: Terror, humiliation, isolation, fear to strip dignity & human rights against asylum-seekers trying to avoid entering into the US. Presence of **migrants as a threat**; using “securitizing” language to claim that migration **represents a crisis** (Republican).
- **MS-13 and the Barrio** (Maras) were originally formed in the United States by children of Mexican immigrants and Central American war refugees. They organize now the illegal **human trafficking, violence, drug and other crimes**.

# Apprehension in southwest US border: 2000-2018

## Non-Mexicans now outnumber Mexicans in southwest border apprehensions

Apprehensions at southwest border, by fiscal year and country of origin, 2000-2018



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

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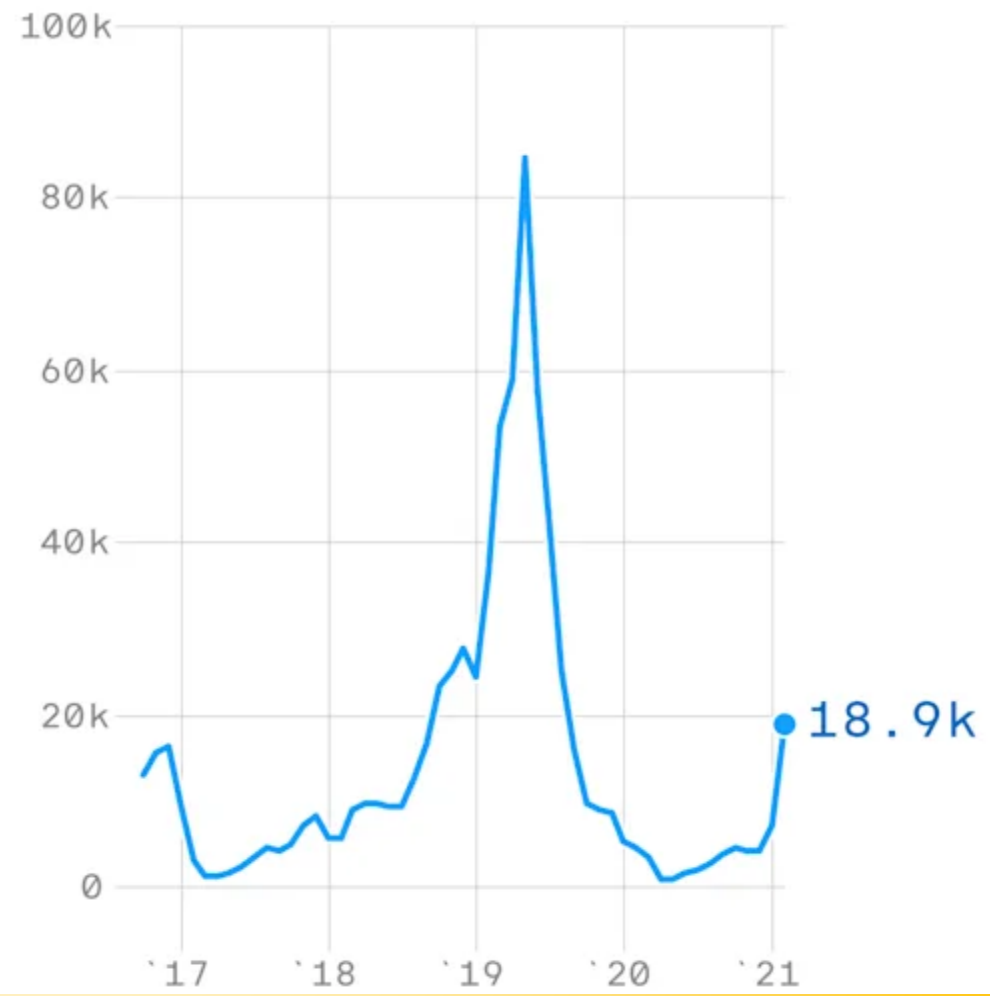
# U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions

Monthly; Oct. 2016 to Feb. 2021

## Unaccompanied minors



## Families







# **Migration: A national and human security challenge for North America, Mexico and Central America**

## **US Experience**

- Country of immigration from Europe & Global South (Mexico, Central America, Haiti, Venezuela, Europe, Asia and all over the world)
- Latino migration is understood as a national security threat?

## **Mexican Experience**

- Country of emigration to US & Canada and of transition from Central America and other countries
- Country of illegal transit from Central America, Haiti, Venezuela, Africa and the US expelled migrants is taken as a human security challenge, producing a humanitarian crisis
- Difficult task to control massive migration with militarized border, National Guard and lack of respect for human rights

## **Central American Experience**

- Countries of emigration and transmigration across Mexico to the US
- Poverty, disasters, violence and corrupt governments limits livelihood
- Criminal human trafficking ring abuse ignorant people and increase human suffering of poor people
- Unaccompanied children highly vulnerable, trying to reach family in US



# Return of Centro Americans



**Thank you for your attention**

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