



The Migrant Experience: A Journey of Hope

A report summarizing data obtained from migrants and those helping migrants at the
US/Southern Border and in North Carolina

March 28, 2023

Dr. Keri E Revens¹, Lennin Caro¹, Daniel Alvarez¹, Sarai Ordonez¹, Dr. Carolina Benitez²,
Paola Garcia³, Anna Price³, Rusty Price³

¹Camino Research Institute

²Camino University

³Camino Worldwide

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Border Servant Corps in Las Cruces, New Mexico; a church in Juarez, MX which chose to remain anonymous, and individuals from organizations in El Paso for their hospitality throughout our trip, for answering our questions, and for sharing deidentified data with us. We would also like to thank all participants who were willing to be interviewed or complete an intake form. We hope this report helps share your experiences.

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Methods	5
Findings	6
Implications	15
Conclusion	17
References	18

The Migrant Experience: A Journey of Hope

Executive Summary

Since 2021, there have been almost 4 million migrant encounters at the US Southern border (US Customs & Border Patrol, 2023); these numbers are expected to steadily increase once Title 42 is lifted in May 2023. A team from Camino traveled to the US/Mexico border to gain first-hand insight into the border crisis and better understand the migrant journey. This report presents findings from a mixed-methods, multi-site study conducted in partnership with organizations on both sides of the border. The Camino team interviewed migrants and members of migrant centers and churches in El Paso, Texas (TX); Las Cruces, New Mexico (NM); and Juarez, Mexico, using questions developed by Camino Research Institute (CRI). Questions were asked about motivations and challenges during migration, modes of transportation, plans after migration, and demographics. CRI conducted interviews in February-March 2023 with migrants who recently arrived in North Carolina (NC), using the same questions. Interviews were conducted using a rapid-appraisal approach. During the border trip, Camino partnered with Border Servant Corp, a hospitality center in Las Cruces, NM, and a migrant shelter in Juarez, Mexico, obtaining de-identified data from migrants waiting to cross the border or head to their final destination in the US. Data includes demographics, destination city and state, and parole information when applicable; data was analyzed by CRI.

The Future is Latino! Data from (n=4,185) migrants in Mexico and (n=10,415) in NM show most are young adults and children. The shelter in Mexico saw an 85% increase from Nov 2022 to Feb 2023 in children under 5. Five migrant families and (n=15) staff were interviewed during the border trip, and 150 migrants participated in informal conversations. 18 migrants were interviewed in NC. Migrants traveled to great lengths—physically, financially, and emotionally to get to the US, taking multiple modes of transportation and spending thousands of dollars, with the average cost at \$5,000 per person. Some fly to Mexico or another country, others travel in caravans, cross the Rio Bravo by raft, or travel on foot through the Darién gap, a dangerous jungle in Panama. Migrants risked their lives to come to the US and many experienced unspeakable trauma. Participants perceived Mexico to be the worst part of the journey, attributed to the way they were treated by law enforcement, coyotes¹, and the cartel.

Data from NM shows 99% of migrants were granted entry into the US by homeland security, meaning they did not enter illegally. Migrants cross the border seeking asylum, surrender themselves to border control, and are processed and released into the US with a parole date. Likewise, 100% of migrants in NC who crossed the border surrendered themselves to border patrol. Migrants moved to the US for better opportunities or to flee violence. All migrants want to contribute to US society, desiring to further their education or continue their careers. Most use their life savings to get to the US, leaving them with little to nothing upon arrival. Consequently, many migrants need economic support. Although 100% of participants were employed in their home country, many in professional careers, they are awaiting work permits in the US. Several mentioned a need for medical care, and while they rarely mentioned behavioral healthcare, we anticipate they will need access to treatment for trauma and related mental health disorders. Although the journey to the US was filled with trials for many, it was also filled with triumph, hope, and resilience.

¹ Coyote is a slang term for people who are paid to help migrants get to the US/Mexico border.

Introduction

The number of migrants attempting to cross into the US from the southern border each month is at the highest levels seen since 2000 (Gramlich, 2023). Although migration rates dropped to a low point in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, migration attempts have been steadily increasing since 2021 (Gramlich, 2023). In December 2022, 302,046 migrants attempted to cross the US Southern border (US Customs and Border Protection, 2023). At the beginning of the pandemic (May 2020), over 90% of migrants were immediately expelled to their last country of transit under Title 42 in an attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, in November 2022, only 32% of migrants were expelled under Title 42 and 68% were apprehended under Title 8 while awaiting immigration court proceedings.

The demographic profile of migrants has also shifted, with significantly more migrants coming from Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela in 2022 compared to 2020. Colombian migrants increased by 386,000%, Cubans by 214,000%, Nicaraguans by 40,000%, and Peruvians by 8,500% (Gramlich, 2023). This new wave of migrants primarily consists of single adults (70%), rather than families (24%) or unaccompanied minors (6%) (Gramlich, 2023). The majority of migrants attempting to enter the US are admitted entry (TRAC immigration, 2022). Shifts in migration trends are likely due to the implementation of a humanitarian parole process for Haitian, Nicaraguan, Cuban, and Venezuelan immigrants implemented by the Biden Administration in November 2022.

A team from Camino traveled to the US border to gain first-hand perspectives on the border crisis. Throughout the trip, they collected data on experiences of migrants and organizations assisting migrants to better prepare for an influx of migrants to the US and potentially NC. The Camino team included: Rusty and Anna, Price, Camino's CEO/Founders; Dr. Carolina Benitez, Director of Camino University/Director of Behavioral Health Services, and Paola Garcia, Public Relations Manager. The trip dates were January 29- February 2, 2023, and the destinations were El Paso TX, La Cruces, NM, and Juarez, Mexico. This report summarizes Camino staff accounts, migrant stories from interviews at the border and in NC, and intake data from a hospitality center in NM and a shelter in Juarez. Findings are presented in the sequence of a migrant's journey to the US; pre-migration, pre-border crossing, crossing the border, post-border crossing, and settling in NC.

Methods

A rapid appraisal process was utilized in order to provide timely results on the current border migrant crisis to help inform and guide policy. Rapid appraisals employ data collection methods and analysis in a short time frame to generate preliminary data and results that can be used to guide existing policy decisions and directions in future research (Beebe, 1995; Harris, Jerome, and Fawcett, 1997).

This report presents results from a multi-sited, mixed methods rapid appraisal study analyzed by a team of four researchers. Quantitative datasets were provided by Border Servant Corps, a migrant center in NM, and a migrant shelter in Juarez, Mexico. The datasets contained records and demographic information of migrants that stayed in these centers. Descriptive statistical analysis on these datasets was done by a research team member with expertise in data analysis using SPSS Version 26.

In addition to quantitative data, qualitative data were collected from Latino migrants at the US-Mexico border as well as recently arrived (2022-2023) Latino migrants living in NC. Interview questions for recent migrants were initially drafted in English by a team of four researchers; three of the researchers were bilingual in English and Spanish and translated the questions into Spanish. The research team then equipped Camino staff traveling to the US-Mexico border with recording equipment to conduct semi-structured interviews with the questions created by the research team. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted in-person and over the phone with 18 recent Latino migrants currently living in NC by a member of the research team. Migrants were recruited using snowball sampling in which initial participants were recruited by community leaders connected to the Latino immigrant population. Participants also identified and provided contact information to other newly arrived migrants.

Findings

Demographics

Intake data was collected from (n=4,185) migrants in Juarez, Mexico from November 2022- February 2023. Most are between 20-32 years old and the number of children aged 5 and younger has been steadily increasing. 80% (n=406) are from Venezuela, 8% from Guatemala, 7% from Honduras, and 3% from Colombia.

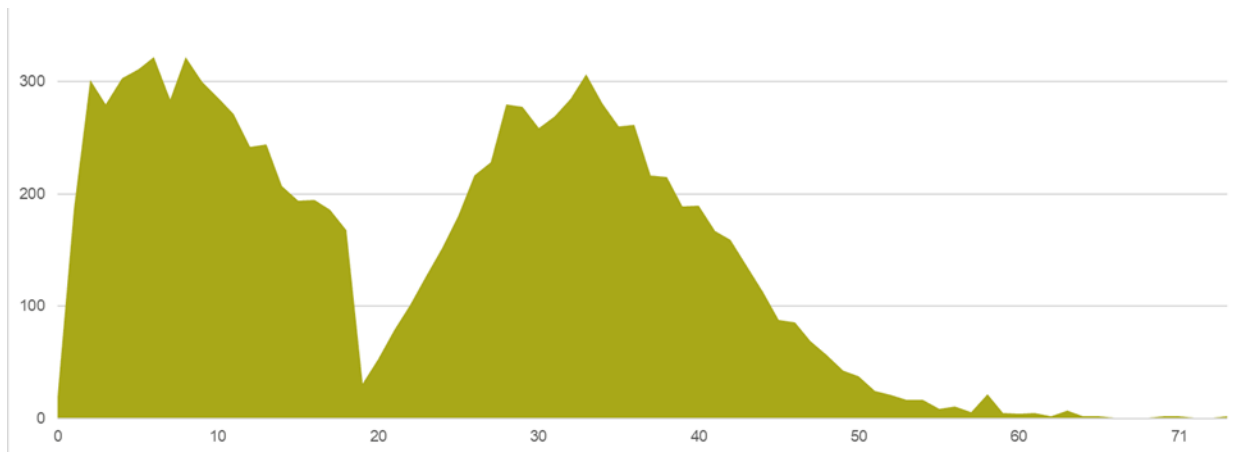
Intake data was collected from (n=10,415) in Las Cruces, NM from October 2022- February 2023. Demographic data can be seen in Table 1. Like the trends seen in Mexico, the majority of migrants are children and young adults (Figure 1). This data suggests the US may start to see an increase in the number of children migrating to the US, a change from recent patterns where the growth of the Latino population has been attributed to births, rather than immigration (Krogstad and Noe-Bustamante, 2021).

Table 1: Demographic data of Migrants in Las Cruces, NM (n=10,145)

Data from Oct 1, 2022 to Feb 15, 2023

Demographics		
Gender (n=5,711)	People	Percent
Male	2423	42.4%
Female	3288	57.6%
Age Group (n=10,205)	People	Percent
<= 5	1403	13.7%
6-18	3221	31.6%
19-34	3128	30.7%
35-64	2442	23.9%
65+	11	0.1%

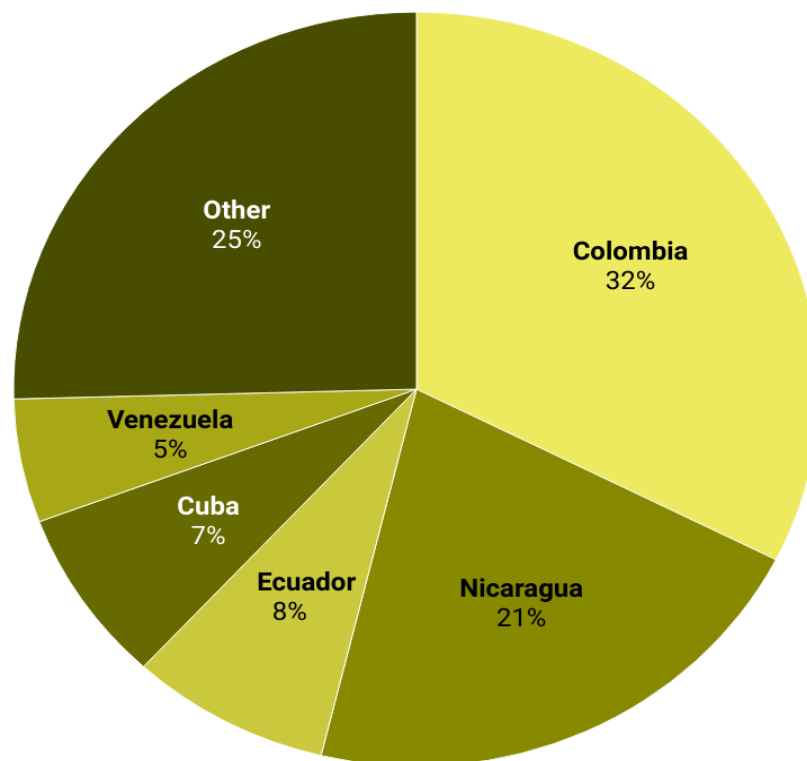
Figure 1: Migration trends by age in Las Cruces, NM (n=10,000)



Although BSC assists migrants from all over the world, 95% are from Latin American Countries: 32% from Colombia, 21% from Nicaragua, 8% from Ecuador, 7% from Cuba, and 5% from Venezuela (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Countries of Origin of Migrants in Las Cruces, NM (n=10,205)

■ Colombia (32%)
 ■ Nicaragua (21%)
 ■ Ecuador (8%)
■ Cuba (7%)
 ■ Venezuela (5%)
 ■ Other (25%)



18 immigrants were interviewed in NC; 50% are male and 50% female. The top countries included Colombia (27%), Cuba (22%), and Venezuela (17%). Demographic information can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Data of Migrants in NC (n=18)

Demographics		
Country of Origin	People	Percent
Colombia	5	27%
Cuba	4	22%
Venezuela	3	17%
Nicaragua	2	11%
El Salvador	1	6%
Ecuador	1	6%
Chile	1	6%
Haiti	1	6%
Gender	People	Percent
Male	9	50%
Female	9	50%

Pre-migration

Motivations for leaving. Migrants interviewed at the border and in NC were asked about their reasons for moving to the US. Many people were the first in their families to make it out of their country. Most migrants choose to come to the US because they are seeking better opportunities for their families, including family members they migrate with and those who remain in their home country. Many migrants seek opportunities in the US so they can support their families back home, sending money and other items as needed. Although 72% of migrants held professional careers in their country of origin, many still did not make sufficient money to support their families. Some migrants interviewed at the border talked about food insecurity and going to bed hungry. One Venezuelan participant said, ***"In Venezuela and other places, we went to sleep without food. If we eat breakfast, we won't be able to eat lunch. If we eat lunch, we won't be able to eat dinner. So it is something very hard."*** Another participant discussed feeling like they had no choice but to leave their country and that people in the US do not understand they did not want to leave:

"There are many people who tell us 'Go away! Go back to your country.' And it makes me feel bad. I say to him [my husband] 'If only he knew that we didn't want to leave our country, we would not want to leave our country. We wouldn't want to. But we have to. We have to do it so that our family can at least have something to eat or count on or have hope day by day. At least my family is

counting at this moment on me to pass, to be able to help them financially. I don't mean buying them a house, buying them a car, no. But to have the money for them to eat."

Some participants talked about fleeing violence and extortion. A male Ecuadorian participant stated, **"We had a small business selling home appliances, but it wasn't anything big, just something personal, small. They started sending us letters with threats saying that we had to pay a monthly bribe. We started giving it to them. And then one time they sent a message saying that if you don't leave from here, we are going to do something to you."**

Others were fleeing religious or political persecution. A Cuban male participant recounted his experience in Cuba, **"In Cuba, the freedom of expression does not exist, and that is a negative point because they will keep an eye on you for thinking differently. In terms of work, there were problems because sanitary conditions were really bad, there were no resources for work. We had to work with what we didn't have. We had to use what was already used...sometimes we were forced to do things that were not right/ethical."**

Reasons for migration align with data collected by CRI in the 2022 Mecklenburg County Latino Strength and Needs Assessment (n=458) where most participants report better opportunities and improved quality of life for their family as a reason for moving (Revens, et al., 2022). Data from NC shows there are two distinct ways participants migrated to the US. A subset of participants (n=5) either previously had or were able to apply for visas to fly into the US but the majority of participants (n=13) migrated to the US through the Mexican border.

Pre-border crossing

The Journey to Mexico. The journey from the country of origin to Mexico is often full of physical and emotional challenges, loss of family members, financial loss, and abuse and extortion. Participants use multiple modes of transportation to get to the border, like trucks, cars and foot travel. They also use rafts or boats to cross rivers, and sometimes fly within Latin America (Haiti to Mexico; Colombia to Mexico). Participants traveled in groups, which varied in size; some traveled in a group as large as 40 while others traveled with just a family of 3. A female participant from Nicaragua recounts her experience crossing a river, **"They crossed us over the river in an inflatable raft that fit 12 people....Thank God they put life jacket on us because I told him I didn't know how to swim, I'm not getting on that, so he put the life jackets on us and told us 'No, don't be scared, just make sure to look below you because sometimes there are branches in the river and it can poke a hole' because it was an inflatable raft."**

Unfortunately, multiple migrants interviewed at the border discussed witnessing people or family members being hurt or killed on their journey to the US. One family lost their baby while trying to cross the Rio Bravo, and others recounted a situation where a man saw his wife and child get hit by a car and then tragically committed suicide. Others experienced severe hunger, feared for their lives or the lives of their family members, or were abused by coyotes or law enforcement officers. Needless to say, by the time they arrive in the US, many migrants have experienced unspeakable trauma.

The cost to travel to the border is relatively high. Participants estimated to have paid around \$5,000 per person to arrive at the border, and they explained that while that may not sound like much in the US, it is a lot in Latin America. Migrants pay various amounts of money throughout the journey to coyotes, law enforcement, and other people who offer to help them

along the way. Most migrants take multiple forms of transportation, all of which cost money, passing through many other countries to get from their country of origin to the US border. Some participants sold their homes to get the money and a few participants mentioned having to work during their travels to raise more money to continue the journey. A male Venezuelan participant discusses his journey, explaining how much it cost to get to the border from Venezuela.

"[From Venezuela] to get to the jungle in Panama, which is how you get into Central America...it costs around \$1000...To go from Panama up to Mexico, it costs around another \$1000 on the cheap - sometimes sleeping in the streets, not staying in hotels. It costs \$2000 to get into Mexico. Now, to travel through Mexico it costs another \$1000, more or less, with luck that you don't get taken off a bus and sent back...For people living here (in the US) it is not much, but for a person living in Latin America, in Venezuela we are talking about someone's life savings, selling their beloved house, selling their car, selling property, selling whatever thing they can to get the money. Or, what often happens, they lend you money in order to fund the journey".

Due to economic struggles, many migrants chose to go through the jungle because they can travel on foot, which is not an easy journey, especially for those with health conditions. Migrants interviewed at the border described the jungle as difficult and petulant. One participant said it was ***"horrible and takes your energy and hope"***.

Mexico. Participant accounts from the border trip and interviews in NC show Mexico is commonly perceived to be the hardest part of the journey, even for those who crossed through a jungle on foot. Mexico was challenging for several reasons. Some participants mentioned they had to wait in Mexico for an extended period of time, sometimes up to three months, before finally crossing. Some participants feared for their safety, as they often had to be in the company of coyotes and other strangers. Others mentioned they were fearful of the cartels and Mexican authorities. A female Colombian participant stated, ***"When I was in the coyote's house, in Mexicali, we were 11 people staying in a very small space. I was with my two daughters. It was summer and it was very hot...I was very thirsty and they didn't give us anything there, not even water for my girls...my boyfriend didn't (sleep) because there were men with weapons and we heard that men have done lots of things to other women...I was worried about that"***

Another [Venezuelan] participant recalled feeling unsafe due to the cartels and the police. ***"Also, you have to be careful with the cartels because in Mexico everything is controlled by the cartels. Aside from that, the police are after you, migration is after you, and they take your money, if you get caught by a cartel they think you have family here [in the US] and they can kidnap you to extort your family so that your family can send money to them. So, you have to be very careful with the cartels, that's why I said Mexico was the most difficult part."***

Other participants recalled difficulty in traversing mountainous terrain and river crossings. A female Cuban participant said, ***"The most difficult part was when we left the airport in Mexicali, that was the most difficult, all the way up to the border. There weren't any difficulties, but we did expose ourselves to dangers. There were dangers. Thank God nothing bad happened but there were serious dangers...For example, we had to get on a truck with people we didn't know and they left us in a place we didn't know that was all mountains. We had to cross...a small canal, at least 4 meters approximately, very low but very cold. It was pitch black, we couldn't see anything, not even our own hands. I was fearful for my children. That was the hardest part."***

Refuge in Mexico. Although some migrants experienced hardships in Mexico, some found refuge and hope in a church in Juarez, Mexico. The church, which chose to remain anonymous in this report, provides a shelter for migrants to stay while they wait to cross the US/Mexico border. The pastor explained that migrants are hard workers who just need some help on their journey. He discussed how migrants arrive in Juarez feeling disoriented, uninformed, and some even receive threats or have money stolen from them by the police.

The pastor explained that the church where he preaches is now full of people, mostly Venezuelans, who are seeking shelter. They provide them with food, resources, and a warm place to sleep. The average length of stay is 21 days, but some people have been there for 6 months or longer. Most migrants are in Juarez because they crossed the border and got sent back to Mexico. Many of them had their documentation taken by police or border patrol and are attempting to reapply for their passports and get another appointment with border patrol. They stay in Juarez while they wait. The pastor explained that resources are currently scarce/limited and they rely on volunteers who work without getting paid; the only payment they receive is help paying for gas. Volunteers are working in the shelter every day from 9am-6pm.

Crossing the border

When migrants cross the border, most are not doing so illegally, rather they are surrendering themselves to border control officers and requesting asylum in the US. For example, after crossing the border undetected, a Nicaraguan participant said their group sought to get caught by border control agents: ***“We walked for hours and we couldn’t find them anywhere. So, we stayed put because it was getting dark and we ran out of water...the whole group stayed put and then the agents came and took us in their vehicles.”*** Once in the custody of border control, migrants are processed and released back into the US with a parole date, under the humanitarian process for Haiti, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela. Data from BSC shows 99% of migrants have been granted permission by Homeland Security to remain in the country (Table 1).

Post-border Crossing

Although migrants experience significant hardships on their journey to the US, their journey is also full of triumph and hope. Migrants interviewed at the border discussed how migrants from all nationalities are resilient and refuse to give up. Many people traveled on foot for months and never gave up. Groups of migrants often arrive in the US together, having not known each other prior to the journey but unite in solidarity and commit to helping each other make it to their destination. Camino staff witnessed some of these stories firsthand during their trip to the Border.

Border Servant Corps: Las Cruces, NM. Those who qualify for asylum are picked up by buses and taken to federally funded hospitality centers like the one in Las Cruces, NM. A staff member working with BSC explained that they have been helping migrants for many years and have never experienced such a high number. At its peak, the center was receiving 100 people per hour. When they arrive at the hospitality center, migrants are welcomed to the US, and complete an intake form. Migrants are also given a COVID test and provided with information about where they are and what will happen next. Staff recount that many migrants arrive thinking they will be provided federal assistance, but asylum benefits are different from refugee benefits, so staff educate them on the process, along with educating them on human trafficking and other schemes. Staff also help migrants make contact with their connections in the US and

their families back home. The shelter does not provide food but works with other organizations like the Salvation Army to provide breakfast and dinner for guests and basic hygiene kits. BSC is a temporary stop on the migrant journey; most are in and out within 48 hours. Although they do not provide long-term shelter, migrants can be referred to a homeless shelter as needed. Data from BSC shows the top destination states reported by migrants include Florida, New York, Texas, California, and New Jersey (Table 4). Participants reporting NC as their destination increased by 325% in the last 4 months, with 18 families reporting they planned to move to Charlotte, NC. NC ranks 13th as a migrant destination from NM.

Table 4: Migrant Destinations: Las Cruces, NM (n=3,932)

Data collected at Border Servant Corps from Oct 1, 2022 to Feb 15, 2023

State	Household Groups	Percent
Florida	689	18%
New York	519	13%
Texas	473	12%
California	422	11%
New Jersey	325	8%

El Paso, TX: Migrants who do not have a contact person or means to get to their next destination often end up staying in El Paso. Some migrants look up (google) agencies that can help them and provide that name and address to border patrol as their final destination, even if they do not know anyone there. Groups of organizations and churches in El Paso were working together to provide food, clothing, and other supplies to migrants in need but those efforts were recently shut down by the City of El Paso. Volunteers explained that they perceive the city to think the migrants are a nuisance. Staff and volunteers with the organization in El Paso and Camino staff recounted that the El Paso police stand around waiting for migrants to do something wrong, however minor it is, like jaywalking, so that they can arrest them. Migrants talked about feeling contradicting messages in El Paso and one commented, “Am I welcome here or not?” Overall, it seems there is a lack of communication between nonprofits, churches, and government entities in El Paso, making it difficult for migrants to have their basic needs met and/or get to their next destination.

Settling in NC

Migrants who recently arrived in NC chose their location because they knew someone who lived there. Migrants who are released on parole must have someone who can “sponsor” them upon arrival, helping them purchase their plane or bus ticket, and providing them with a place to stay. 100% of migrants interviewed in NC were employed in their country of origin. Migrants across all datasets expressed a desire to work in the US but all of them are waiting for work permits that would allow them to work legally in the US. Consequently, many migrants are

working informal jobs like cleaning or restaurants. One migrant discussed this, ***"One lady needed me to work for her. And she asked me, because I heard her ask the Americans and they didn't want [the job]. And then she asked me if I wanted a job. Obviously! Obviously, I do want one! "Yes" I told her. "Clean my house". Doesn't matter. I only asked if I could bring my kids and she said yes so, I brought them."***

Many migrants (72%) held professional careers in their country of origin but 66% of these experienced a decrease in socioeconomic status or social class as it relates to employment. For example, two Cuban doctors are now working as busboys in a restaurant, a Colombian nurse is working as a telephone operator, a Colombian lawyer working as a school monitor, a Venezuelan doctor working in cleaning services and an El Salvadoran in the banking industry is working in construction. Table 5 shows participant professions before and after migrating to the US. These findings align with data collected in Mecklenburg County by CRI in 2022 where 48% of immigrants were estimated to experience a decrease in socioeconomic status related to their profession (Revens et al., 2022).

Table 5: Professions before and after migration (NC migrants)

GENDER	BIRTH YEAR	COUNTRY	WORK BEFORE	CURRENT WORK
F	2000	Cuba	Human Resources	Childcare
F	1975	Cuba	Teacher (secondary)	Day laborer/Church
M	1997	Cuba	Medical doctor	Restaurant busboy
M	1997	Cuba	Medical doctor	Restaurant busboy
M	1979	Chile	Warehouse Manager	Kitchen manager
F	1979	Colombia	Nurse	Telephone operator
F	1995	Venezuela	Medical doctor	Independent/ Housework
F	1985	Nicaragua	Homemaker	Independent/ Cleaning
M	1971	Colombia	Lawyer	School monitor
F	1982	Colombia	Call center operator	Informal childcare
F	1993	Venezuela	Medical doctor	Cleaning services
M	1990	Haiti	Human Resources	Seeking employment
M	1992	Ecuador	House Appliance Sales/Small Business	Factory worker
F	1977	Nicaragua	Factory Worker	Taqueria
M	1995	El Salvador	Bank/Finances	Cleaning /Construction
M	1996	Colombia	Small Business/Mensajero	T-shirt pressing factory
F	1994	Colombia	Independent seller	T-shirt pressing factory
M	1997	Venezuela	Transformer Factory	Auto Body repair shop

Implications

Feedback from organization staff in El Paso shows there is a need for more collaboration and communication between nonprofits, churches, and government agencies who are assisting migrants. Various agencies report working in silos and have limited resources, often causing them to be reactive rather than proactive in their response to the border crisis. The lack of cooperative planning can lead to the depletion of already constrained resources which limits the amount of assistance provided to migrants. Camino is currently participating on a Task Force developed by The Emergency Management System for the City of Charlotte to better prepare for an increase in immigrant arrivals to Charlotte. This group brings together nonprofits, churches, government agencies, and community leaders to develop and implement action plans that better prepare the city for migrants. This may be a model that other cities like El Paso should consider adopting if they are not already doing so.

Latino migrants go to great lengths to reach the US, enduring numerous obstacles on the journey, demonstrating flexibility, creativity, ingenuity, and intelligence. However, the one thing they do not have is opportunity—that is what brings them to the US. Many Latino migrants are educated, credentialed, and want to continue their careers in the US yet they are not permitted to work upon arriving. The lack of work permit documentation leaves migrants vulnerable to unstable employment, low income, and potential labor exploitation. While some participants held professional careers in their country of origin, they expressed little hope in continuing their careers in the US.

Most migrants spend a significant amount of money to arrive at the border, suggesting they are financially constrained upon arrival in the US. All migrants interviewed in NC said their number one need is employment. At the same time, the US is experiencing one of the greatest labor shortages in history. In 2021, 47 million workers quit their jobs (Ferguson, 2023). 60% of available jobs are currently unfilled in leisure and hospitality, professional and business services, and financial industries (Ferguson, 2023). **The labor shortage presents a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between employers with open positions and unemployed people who want to work, namely Latino migrants. But for this to happen, the process for obtaining a work permit and/or recertifying previous education or credentials needs to be expedited, allowing migrants to obtain work legally.**

Arriba, Camino's upward mobility program, is an example of a service that helps immigrants find work and become recertified. Arriba provides workforce development, education, and entrepreneurship programs designed specifically for Latino immigrants. Arriba works with individuals to overcome barriers that impede employment, including access, language, and literacy. In 2022, through an Employment Readiness Program that provides resume building, interview prep, and time management skills, 406 Latino immigrants were connected to employers and 150 of those not only obtained employment but retained it past 90 days. Arriba also helped Latino immigrants start 32 businesses.

Working low paying jobs can vastly impact migrants' access to housing, food, health services, education, and transportation. The recent drastic rise of price inflation further exacerbates this situation. While the Latino communities across NC are growing, participants indicated not knowing many people and being unfamiliar with available resources even after living in NC for several months. Small social networks can limit migrants' ability to find employment, seek low-cost health and legal services, and housing. Moreover, results outlined in

this report suggest migrants who have crossed the southern border have likely experienced stressful and/or traumatic experiences before, during and, potentially, after their journey. These experiences can negatively impact their mental health and migrants may need access to counseling or therapy services to support their adjustment to their new life in the US.

Camino is dedicated to equipping Latino immigrants to live healthy, hopeful, and productive lives. Camino Health Center provides several low-cost bilingual health services, like primary care, therapy, nutrition and fitness education, peer support services, and a food pantry. All services are primarily staffed with Spanish-speaking individuals and were designed with Latino immigrants in mind. Through The WearHouse, we are able to provide people with clothing, furniture, and other household items. Camino Church has welcomed and provided social support and basic necessities to approximately 150 families in 2023 alone. Once migrants arrive at Camino through any of our services, Camino's social navigators work hand-in-hand to connect immigrants to the services they need at Camino and through partner organizations for services we are unable to provide. Camino has been a beacon of hope for migrants arriving in NC for more than 20 years, and continues to provide health, hope, and opportunity to thousands of Latino families each year. Through our wrap-around services, we provide the person-centered, holistic care that every person deserves in a language they understand and at a price they can afford.

It is worth noting that migrants interviewed in NC were reached through community leaders, meaning they are already well connected to support systems. Interviewed migrants have sponsors who were able to provide housing, food, and other items. Migrants who are not yet connected to organizations, churches, or other support systems are likely to have different needs and may need assistance with housing, food, and other basic necessities.

Call to Action

To keep up with the growing demand of health and human services for migrants, there is a need to allocate more funding and resources towards these efforts. Elected officials can vote to allocate funding for these essential services, such as expanded healthcare services, increased employment opportunities, and housing programs. Government sponsored programs should be marketed in a culturally competent manner to gain community trust and awareness. This may mean providing services through trusted Latino networks including faith, friends, and familial networks. It may also be helpful to provide a welcoming packet to migrants upon arrival that summarizes available resources.

By highlighting the resilience, determination, and willingness of Latinos to contribute to US society, government officials, media outlets, and others in the public eye can influence the narrative of migrants. The use of empirical data to back up such narratives is imperative but currently lacking. Though this report provides some insight into the experiences of these robust communities, more data is needed. Investing in research allows government entities and communities to become better equipped to leverage strengths, overcome challenges, and develop effective solutions to meet the needs of migrant families in NC and across the US.



Conclusion

This data helps shed light on the situation at the US/Mexico border, as well as the experiences of migrants after arriving in the US and more specifically, in NC. Almost all of the migrants depicted in this report were permitted legal entry into the US, surrendering themselves to border patrol to seek asylum. These stories depict a journey of hope of people who were forced to flee their home country in search of better opportunities in the US. Investing in educational opportunities for migrating children to become bilingual will benefit both the community and the industries in which they will work in adulthood. All adult migrants have a desire to work and contribute to US society yet are unable to work when they arrive. Better pathways to legal employment and recertification of existing degrees and credentials could help boost the US economy and reduce the current labor shortage. Migrants may also need affordable, bilingual, culturally competent physical health, behavioral health, food, and housing support upon arrival. Camino helps provide all of these services, but the demand is expected to continue to outpace the availability of such services, thus more resources and funding should be allocated to directly supporting new migrant arrivals in NC. Latino migrants in all locations expressed a desire to tell their individual story. Thank you for reading this report and taking the first step to help ensure their perspectives are heard.



References

- Beebe, J. (1995). Basic Concepts and Techniques of Rapid Appraisal. *Human Organization*, 54(1), 42–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44126571>
- Ferguson, S. (2023, February 22). *Understanding America's labor shortage: The most impacted industries*. U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/understanding-americas-labor-shortage-the-most-impacted-industries>
- Gramlich, J. (2023, January 13). *Monthly encounters with migrants at u.s.-mexico border remain near record highs*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2023/01/13/monthly-encounters-with-migrants-at-u-s-mexico-border-remain-near-record-highs/>
- Harris, K., Jerome, N., & Fawcett, S.B. (1997). Rapid Assessment Procedures: A Review and Critique. *Human Organization*, 56, 375-378.
- Krogstad, J. M. & Noe-Bustamante, L. (2021). Facts about US Latinos for national Hispanic heritage month. Pew Research Center. Retrieved March 20, 2023 from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/09/key-facts-about-u-s-latinos-for-national-hispanic-heritage-month/>
- Revens, K.E., Caro, L., Ordonez, S., Walsh, A., Alvarez-Orlachio, D., Rodriguez, D. (2022). 2022 Latino Community Strengths and Needs Assessment: Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Camino Research Institute, Camino Community Development Corporation, Inc.
- T. R. A. C. Immigration (2022, August 9). *New Data Sheds Light on What Happens to People Found Inadmissible at U.S. Ports of Entry*. New data sheds light on what happens to people found inadmissible at U.S. ports of entry. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/692/>
- US Customs and Border Protection (2023, March 10). Nationwide Encounters. Retrieved March 20, 2023 from <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>.