# From Mobility to Opportunity

## Applied Evidence for Designing a Pilot Model for the Labor and Social Reintegration of Migrant Youth in Mexico

**Final Research Report**

By Angélica López Cuevas for the International Youth Foundation

**June 2026**








ALCtia
Evidencia/Conexión/Acción

# Index

*Index* ..... *3*
*Executive Summary* ..... *7*
*Chapter 1. Context, Objective, and Scope of the Research* ..... *12*
1.1 Introduction: Migration, Return, and Workforce Development ..... 12
1.2 Objective and Scope of the Research ..... 14
1.3 Conceptual and Programmatic Approach ..... 16
*Chapter 2. Initial Diagnosis of Return Migration and Place-Based Targeting Criteria* ..... *18*
2.1 Recent Trends in Mexico–United States Return Migration ..... 18
2.2 Geography of Return: Sending States and Anchor Territories ..... 22
2.3 Analytical Triangle for Site Prioritization: Arrival, Origin, and Destination ..... 23
2.4 Preliminary Profile of the Returning Youth Population ..... 25
2.5 Implications for the Data-Collection Design ..... 27
2.6 Terminological Framework of the Study ..... 32
*Chapter 3. Methodological Design* ..... *34*
3.1 Methodological design ..... 34
3.2 Stages of the methodological process ..... 35
3.3 Characteristics of the data collection ..... 37
3.4 Data-collection instruments ..... 42
*Chapter 4. Returnees and Migrants in Mobility* ..... *45*
4.1 Sociodemographic characteristics ..... 45
4.2 Return and Mobility Trajectories ..... 49
4.3 Educational profile ..... 55
4.4 English proficiency and functional use ..... 56
4.5 Analytical reading of the profile ..... 58
*Chapter 5. Skills, Work Experience, and Employment Pathways* ..... *60*
5.1 Occupational Trajectories and Sectors of Experience ..... 60
5.2 Educational Capital, Level of Responsibility, and Proximity to Employment ..... 62
5.3 Certification of Competencies and Recognition of Prior Learning ..... 64

5.4 English and Digital Readiness as Differentiating Assets ..... 69
5.5 Transferable and Cross-Cutting Skills ..... 73
5.6 Deeper Analysis of Skills by Sector ..... 77
5.7 Implications for Training, Certification, and Placement Pathways ..... 101
*Chapter 6. Place-based analysis of labor demand and site recommendation for the pilot* ..... *103*
6.1 Place-based targeting criteria: from 11 data-collection sites to four states for labor-market analysis ..... 103
6.2 Methodological note on the job-vacancy analysis ..... 106
6.3 Regional analysis of job openings in the target states ..... 107
6.4 Evolution, structure, and transparency of demand ..... 110
6.5. Northern Border and Metropolitan Markets: Two Logics of Demand ..... 118
6.6 Wages and Feasibility of Labor-Market Entry ..... 123
6.7 From Demand to Differentiated Labor Pathways ..... 128
6.8 State Level Analysis ..... 130
6.9 Territorial comparison and implementation scenarios ..... 150
*Chapter 7. Barriers to Social and Labor-Market Reintegration* ..... *153*
7.1 Barriers to accessing training and education ..... 153
7.2 Stabilization barriers: psychosocial, family, and protection conditions ..... 155
7.3 Enabling barriers: documentation, housing, and local networks ..... 157
7.4 Systemic barriers: governance, follow-up, and institutional capacity ..... 159
7.5 Socioeconomic inclusion barriers ..... 159
7.6 Composite Marginalization Index (IMC) ..... 161
7.7 High-marginalization profiles identified in Tijuana ..... 167
7.8 Operating conditions that work in Tijuana ..... 168
7.9 IMC Ciudad Juárez: qualitative composition of the barriers ..... 169
7.10 Recommended operating platforms in Ciudad Juárez ..... 172
7.11 Quantitative construction of the index and comparative findings ..... 173
7.12 Detention and trauma as an amplifier of barriers ..... 178
7.13 Programmatic implications for the pilot's design ..... 179
*Chapter VIII. Place-based ecosystem, competency gaps, and partners for the pilot* ..... *181*
8.1 Stakeholder Ecosystem and Power Map (Power Mapping) ..... 181
8.2 The reintegration chain and its functional gaps ..... 184
8.3 Anchor actors by territory ..... 185

8.4. Validating the competency model and gap analysis ..... 186
8.5. Cross-cutting competency profile of the population ..... 187
8.6. English, certification, training barriers, and digital competence ..... 189
8.7. Psychosocial dimension, economic urgency, and informality ..... 192
8.8. Gap analysis: skills supply versus sector demand ..... 195
8.9. Gap by sector and city ..... 198
8.10 Place-based supply of certification and training ..... 201
8.11 The crossover: the technical side covered, the human side uncovered ..... 206
8.12 Tijuana: an ecosystem with a coordinating hub ..... 207
8.13 Ciudad Juárez: an ecosystem with strong place-based legitimacy and a need for coordination ..... 208
8.14 Strategic role of the pilot's partners ..... 209
8.15 Implications for the pilot's design ..... 211
*Chapter 9. Criteria for the Design of the Pilot Model ..... 212*
9.1 The model's thesis: leverage what exists and add the missing layer ..... 212
9.2 Premises for the design ..... 213
9.3 Priority target population ..... 216
9.4 Objective of the Pilot Model ..... 216
9.5 The model's architecture: a pipeline that connects people to existing assets ..... 217
9.6 The main lever: recognition of prior experience and feasible certification ..... 219
9.7 Components of the model ..... 220
9.8 Same architecture, different emphasis by city ..... 221
9.9 The new piece: the Ciudad Juárez coordinating hub ..... 222
9.10 Sector clusters of the pilot ..... 223
9.11 Operational architecture: four phases ..... 225
9.12 Pilot partners by phase ..... 226
9.13 Rollout pathway ..... 226
9.14 Preliminary cost and sensitivity to scale ..... 227
9.15 Results funnel and indicators ..... 228
9.16 Risks and mitigations ..... 230
9.17 Closing of the model ..... 231
*Chapter 10. Conclusions and Recommendations ..... 233*
10.1 Concise Answers to the Research Questions ..... 233

10.2 General Conclusions.....239
*References* .....*243*

# Executive Summary

**The evidence suggests that conditions are in place** to launch a workforce development pilot for young returnees and migrants in mobility in Mexico. The **central opportunity** is not to build a parallel service system, but to **connect existing local assets** - shelters, migrant support centers, training providers, certifying bodies, employers, and referral networks - into **one trust-based pathway for social and labor-market reintegration**.

This study provides the evidence to guide that decision: who the target population is, what experience and skills they bring, where labor demand exists, what barriers limit their reintegration, and how a pilot could operate by combining stabilization, documentation support, skills recognition, short-term training or certification, labor-market intermediation, and follow-up.

The research used a **mixed-methods design**. Its main components included 392 valid in-person, interviewer-assisted surveys with returnees and migrants in mobility across 11 sites; 36 in-depth interviews, including interviews with people in mobility and with local actors directly involved in migrant services; the construction of a Composite Marginalization Index; and a labor-demand analysis of priority sectors in Baja California, Chihuahua, Mexico City, and the State of Mexico.

The surveyed population does not fit a single profile. It includes returning Mexican nationals, foreign nationals in mobility, people in prolonged waiting or transit, and people with varying time horizons for remaining in Mexico. In the overall sample, 82% were born in Mexico and 18% abroad; 44% are between 30 and 35 years old; and 90% reported having lived in the United States. Among those who lived there, six in ten stayed for more than five years, and one in three for over a decade. At the time of data collection, 56% had been in Mexico for less than three months, confirming that many were still in an early phase of stabilization, documentation, income-seeking, and rebuilding their networks.

Educational attainment is predominantly low to medium: 57% of respondents fall into the low category and 39% into the medium category, often with unfinished trajectories. In addition, 63% report only a basic level of English. In terms of work experience, 35% report experience in sectors traditionally linked to labor migration - such as agriculture, construction, and cleaning - while 53% bring experience in sectors with stronger placement potential, such as hospitality, manufacturing, maintenance, health, and logistics. Only 3% reported experience in Global Digital Services. Notably, nearly one in three respondents has performed technical or mid-level responsibility roles, confirming that the population **is not limited to entry-level profiles.**

The population's **main asset** lies in its **transferable skills.** Respondents bring work experience, work habits, resilience, adaptability to demanding contexts, and practical skills acquired in Mexico, the United States, or along their migratory journey. They also report strengths in following rules and checklists, problem-solving, organization, punctuality, and teamwork. The labor-demand analysis confirms that opportunities for labor-market entry exist, especially when read through a place-based lens.

In the overall sample, the main **barriers** to social and labor-market reintegration are related to obtaining **identity documentation** (39.6%) and the **absence of certifications** to validate prior knowledge, skills, or experience (about 80%).

Drawing on the sectoral and territorial analysis, the study narrowed its recommendation to **Tijuana,** Baja California, and **Ciudad Juárez**, Chihuahua, as the two cities with the greatest potential to **host a pilot.** This recommendation rests on the convergence of four conditions: the presence of the target population, sufficient labor demand, the capacity of the local ecosystem, and the feasibility of building a pathway that connects training, certification, labor-market intermediation, and follow-up. The recommendation does not point to a single sector, but to differentiated, multi-sector pathways that leverage transferable skills while participants advance on documentation and certification.

The Composite Marginalization Index shows that **Ciudad Juárez faces greater cumulative vulnerability than Tijuana**. In Juárez, one in three people presents seven or more barriers, compared with one in eight in Tijuana. The sharpest differences appear in detention or trauma, scheduling and caregiving constraints, lack of functional English, and the absence of formal certification. Tijuana, for its part, shows a more pronounced documentation barrier. This evidence points to a common model with differentiated emphases: Tijuana can move more quickly toward certification and job placement, while Ciudad Juárez requires a more robust layer of stabilization, protection, flexible scheduling, psychosocial support, and youth-centered services.

In the Tijuana-Ciudad Juárez analysis, more than 65% of the population showed high functional proficiency in following rules and checklists, and functional communication. The clearest gaps appear in customer communication, leadership, functional English, and workplace digital skills. In practical terms, the population needs support to translate experience into credentials, strengthen cross-cutting skills, and connect with sectors where those capabilities are in demand.

The gap analysis between the population's skills supply and local labor demand confirms that the best initial fit is in Transportation and Logistics, Advanced Manufacturing, and

Health and Care, because these sectors call for skills in which the population already shows strengths.

The **barriers** to reintegration are **cumulative** and cannot be treated as isolated obstacles. The leading constraints on accessing training are scheduling and financial resources, followed by lack of documentation and caregiving responsibilities. Layered onto these are deeper barriers: trauma from detention or deportation, family separation, unstable housing, the absence of a local network, lack of certification, low functional English, educational gaps, the digital divide, and the urgent need to generate income. This accumulation makes clear that **psychosocial and emotional support** is not an add-on, but a condition **for sustaining pathways of training, certification, and employment.**

Social and labor-market reintegration should not be designed solely around the individual returnee. The evidence shows that mobility is more dispersed, less visible, and more complex than return understood in the traditional sense. For this reason, the pilot should **serve people in mobility** - not only returnees - and incorporate a **community-engagement** dimension. Bringing vulnerable local youth into selected activities can reduce stigma, strengthen support networks, and avoid segregated cohorts.

The local ecosystem offers important assets, but it is also under strain. The decline in international funding and the weakening of support for migrant-serving organizations have stretched a network that was already operating with limited capacity. In this context, trusted local partners - shelters, faith-based and community organizations, local private-sector actors, and certifying institutions - are indispensable because they provide access, legitimacy, and place-based knowledge.

Based on the evidence, if a pilot is designed, it should include a first layer of psychosocial and emotional support at arrival; a phase of documentation, stabilization, power skills, and profiling; a subsequent stage of recognition of prior experience, feasible certification, short-term training, or reskilling; and a phase of employer engagement, job placement, community engagement, and follow-up. These components should **not run in a rigidly sequential way:** they should advance in parallel with income-seeking and, wherever possible, with the person's labor-market entry.

The pilot should begin as a bounded implementation pilot designed to test assumptions, measure retention, document costs, and refine the model before scaling. The recommendation is to start with a small cohort - for example, 25 people per site - to validate the operational pathway, the support mechanisms, employer responsiveness, and the model's sustainability. Success should be measured on two levels: first, stabilization outcomes, including documentation, guidance, support, and connection to a local network;

and second, trajectory outcomes, including formal employment, bridge employment, certification, continued training, or a stable return.

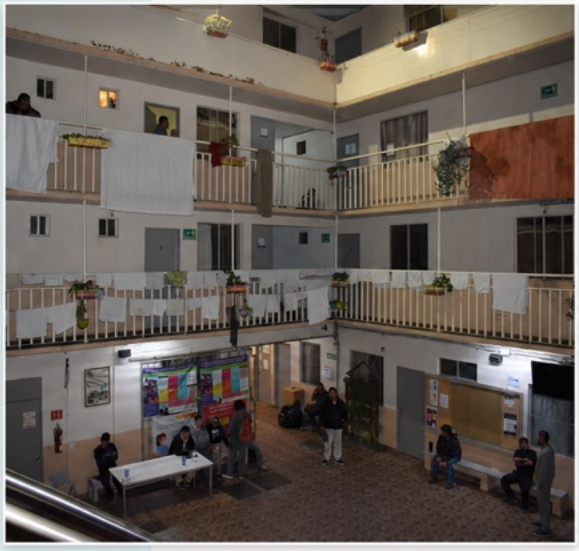
Finally, while the research produced many lessons across its initial premises and guiding questions, four stand out for their strategic relevance:

- **Return migration has become more complex**. Its recent transformation, tied to shifts in U.S. and Mexican immigration policy, has heightened vulnerability among people in return and mobility situations. Detention in the United States - four in ten respondents passed through a detention center - deepens the psychosocial consequences for those who experience it.

- **Lower visible flows do not mean the phenomenon has lost relevance**. Fewer irregular crossings have reduced apprehensions and formal return events; at the same time, the tightening of U.S. immigration policy has discouraged crossing attempts, some people are returning voluntarily, routes have become less linear and more dispersed, and direct transfers from the United States to southern Mexico have altered territorial patterns. Mobility is not disappearing: it is changing form, dispersing, and becoming less visible.

- **The available local response remains insufficient to sustain reintegration**. The support provided by the Mexican government works mainly as an initial point of arrival: it registers returnees and offers immediate assistance, but it lacks robust follow-up and a comprehensive workforce development strategy. Meanwhile, the capacity of local civil-society organizations has been weakened by declining international funding and difficulties in raising resources. These networks have infrastructure, place-based knowledge, and commitment, but not always the resources needed to sustain support, certification, placement, and follow-up.

- **Organized crime has become a relevant actor in the return-and-mobility ecosystem**. Returnees and migrants in mobility can be exposed to extortion, robbery, kidnapping, or recruitment, especially when they face economic urgency, lack documents, have no local networks, and have little clarity about safe pathways to employment. A verifiable pathway to formal work, certification, support, and community therefore carries value beyond employment: it can also function as a protection and risk-prevention strategy.




CENTRO SCALABRINI
"YO ANDABA DE EXTRANJERO
Y TU ME ACOGISTE

# Chapter 1. Context, Objective, and Scope of the Research

## 1.1 Introduction: Migration, Return, and Workforce Development

Migration is one of the defining social, economic, and territorial dynamics of the contemporary policy agenda. It is no longer only a border-management or humanitarian issue; it is also a workforce development, social protection, education, and economic inclusion challenge. In 2024, the United Nations estimated that 304 million international migrants were living worldwide, nearly twice the 154 million recorded in 1990. This scale underscores the need to understand migration as a multidimensional phenomenon with direct implications for public policy, labor markets, education systems, and development strategies.

In this context, **Mexico occupies a strategic and particularly complex position**. On the one hand, it shares an approximately 1,954-mile border with the United States—about 3,145 kilometers—according to the International Boundary and Water Commission, excluding maritime boundaries. Although it is not the longest international border in the world, it is indeed **one of the most dynamic, integrated, and politically significant borders in the world.** Its importance stems primarily from the intensity of crossings, the density of economic exchange, the presence of binational logistics corridors, and the constant interplay among migratory, commercial, labor, and security dynamics.

The significance of this border is also explained by the deep economic interdependence between the two countries. The United States is Mexico's leading trade partner, and Mexico has established itself as one of the leading trade partners of the United States. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative, bilateral goods trade between the two countries reached an estimated $872.8 billion in 2025. This economic relationship generates intense productive integration, but it also exposes the tension between two simultaneous processes: on the one hand, the growing need for labor, trade, and territorial coordination; and, on the other, the tightening of migration and border policies.

Mexico, moreover, cannot be understood solely as a country of migratory origin. In recent decades, and more intensely in recent years, Mexico has increasingly become a country of origin, transit, destination, return, and prolonged waiting for people whose mobility trajectories have been interrupted or redirected. This **multipositional condition** reflects both the historical migration of Mexicans to the United States and the increase in flows from Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and other regions. UNHCR reported that in recent years Mexico has remained among the leading recipient countries for new asylum

applications worldwide, confirming that its role in the regional migration system is no longer limited to transit toward the United States.

Return migration has also taken on new complexity. While the return of Mexicans from the United States has been a historical component of the bilateral relationship, the present moment is distinguished by the combination of more restrictive migration policies, greater legal uncertainty, the tightening of deportation processes, and the return of people with increasingly diverse life trajectories. The beginning of President Donald Trump's second administration once again placed migration enforcement at the center of the U.S. policy agenda. Reuters reported that, by April 2025, Mexico had received nearly 39,000 people deported from the United States since the beginning of that administration, and also documented that Mexico agreed to receive non-Mexican nationals deported from U.S. territory on humanitarian grounds. These elements show that migratory pressure on Mexico is not limited to the return of Mexican nationals, but also includes the reception, temporary stay, or eventual integration of non-Mexican nationals.

This point has also been noted by international media and human rights organizations. The Economist has described the recent period as a new phase of migration enforcement in the United States, marked by a sharp reduction in border encounters and by the strengthening of detention and deportation capacities. Likewise, recent reports cited by international media have indicated that Mexico has received third-country nationals deported from the United States, including Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, and other populations that do not necessarily have family networks, documentation, regularization status, or immediate prospects for integration in Mexican territory. This dynamic broadens the complexity of the phenomenon, as it turns return and deportation into **processes that can produce situations of immobility, prolonged waiting, and accumulated vulnerability.**

Return migration thus entails uprooting, the loss or weakening of support networks, the interruption of educational and occupational trajectories, documentation barriers, psychosocial effects, regularization needs, lack of institutional knowledge, and difficulties entering formal employment. In addition, many returning migrants or people in mobility possess skills, work experience, learning acquired in the United States, and transferable competencies that are not always recognized by local training, certification, or labor-market intermediation systems. This creates a paradox of real consequence for workforce development: accumulated human capital exists, but institutional, documentation, and place-based conditions can prevent that capital from translating into effective economic inclusion.

In the case of **young people in mobility,** these **barriers** can be **even more acute**. Young people are at decisive moments of transition toward upper-secondary or higher education, technical training, their first job, the certification of competencies, and the construction of life projects. When these transitions occur in contexts of mobility—whether through return, deportation, transit, or waiting—the risks of exclusion increase: school interruption, informal employment, underemployment, loss of networks, lack of reliable information, absence of documents, discrimination, and exposure to precarious or high-risk economies. For this reason, **youth migration** must be understood not only as a situation of **vulnerability**, but also as a **strategic agenda for productive inclusion, skills recognition, and capacity development.**

Against this backdrop, generating specific evidence on the characteristics, profiles, trajectories, competencies, and barriers faced by returning migrants or people in mobility is essential for designing relevant, feasible, and place-based interventions. To this end, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) commissioned applied research aimed at understanding the migration phenomenon in Mexico from a workforce development perspective, with particular attention to young people. The study seeks to provide evidence for the design of a pilot model to support the social and labor-market reintegration of returning migrants, identifying both their prior capabilities and experience and the institutional, place-based, and programmatic conditions needed to generate effective pathways for inclusion, training, certification, and connection to employment opportunities.

## 1.2 Objective and Scope of the Research

The central objective of the research was to **generate reliable evidence**, contextualized and actionable, to guide the possible design of a program supporting young people in mobility, with an emphasis on returning migrants to Mexico, from a workforce development perspective. The research sought to understand not only who young returnees or people in mobility are, but also what work experience they accumulate, which skills may be transferable to sectors with potential for labor-market insertion, which barriers limit their social and labor-market reintegration, and what institutional, place-based, and programmatic conditions would be necessary to design a relevant, feasible, and context-sensitive pilot.

The research was guided by five main questions:

1. Are there **support networks** from the Mexican government, social organizations, or other institutional stakeholders to facilitate the guidance, referral, training, or job placement of young people returning to Mexico?

2. How are the **skills, occupational trajectories, and sectors of work experience** of young people in mobility characterized—particularly those who have been returned from the United States to Mexico, whether Mexican nationals or of other nationalities?

3. To what extent do young returnees or people in mobility possess **transferable skills, experience, or capabilities** for sectors with employability potential, particularly the Global Digital Services sector and other strategic sectors identified during the research?

4. What **barriers**—documentation-related, institutional, educational, labor-related, psychosocial, place-based, or informational—do young people face when returning to or remaining in Mexico?

5. If a support program grounded in workforce development and aligned with IYF's vision were to be designed, what features should it have, where could it operate, which population should it prioritize, and which strategic partners would be needed to increase its chances of success?

The study was conducted over six months of work, from December 12, 2025 to June 12, 2026. During this period, it brought together activities of planning, desk review, methodological design, data collection, quantitative and qualitative analysis, validation of competency-model findings, identification of partners, and the formulation of recommendations for the pilot design.

The scope of the research makes it possible to build an **initial foundation** for designing a pilot program aimed at supporting the social and labor-market reintegration of returning migrant youth or young people in mobility. This foundation comprises three levels of analysis:

1) The **profile of the target population:** sociodemographic characteristics, migration trajectories, educational attainment, work experience, skills, expectations, and needs.

2) The **reintegration barriers**: obstacles that limit entry into education, training, certification, formal employment, institutional networks, or support services.

3) The **intervention ecosystem:** public, private, social, and educational stakeholders that could contribute to a support pathway, as well as locations with more favorable conditions for implementing a pilot.

In operational terms, the research's main contribution is **exploratory and applied in nature**: it makes it possible to recognize patterns, formulate programmatic hypotheses, identify intervention opportunities, and guide initial decisions about the design of a pilot model. In this sense, the findings should be read as strategic evidence for planning, not as definitive measurements of national prevalence.

The study's added value lies in **bringing together three dimensions that are frequently analyzed separately: human mobility, social reintegration, and workforce development.** This integration makes it possible to recognize that young returnees face not only immediate assistance needs but also challenges of productive inclusion, recognition of competencies, the rebuilding of educational and occupational trajectories, and connection to real opportunities for training and employment. For this reason, the study rests on a central premise: an effective intervention for migrant youth must combine support, guidance, skills development, certification, institutional coordination, and connection to economic sectors with labor demand.

## 1.3 Conceptual and Programmatic Approach

The study was framed as **applied research aimed at building a case for program design**. This means that the research was not limited to describing the migration phenomenon, but rather organized the evidence to assess the relevance, feasibility, and initial conditions of a possible intervention. This logic draws on elements of the case-study approach applied to public policy, insofar as it analyzes a contemporary phenomenon in close relationship with its territorial, institutional, and labor context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not fully separable (Yin, 2018). It is also linked to the tradition of case analysis in public policy, in which real-world problems are examined through contextual information, empirical data, and decision dilemmas in order to support analysis and decision-making processes.

In this sense, the research questions helped organize the evidence around five critical dimensions: the existence of support networks, the characterization of skills and occupational trajectories, the transferability of competencies to sectors with employability potential, the barriers to social and labor-market reintegration, and the place-based and institutional conditions for designing a pilot program.

This approach is also consistent with contemporary frameworks for youth workforce development. The International Youth Foundation has emphasized the importance of closing the gaps among education, training, and employment through evidence-based approaches linked to labor-market demand, the strengthening of training providers, and

engagement with employers and ecosystem stakeholders (International Youth Foundation, n.d.). Complementarily, the International Labour Organization (ILO) holds that youth employment interventions must begin with diagnostics that make it possible to identify barriers, access conditions, skills, sector-specific opportunities, and expected outcomes, so that programmatic design is connected to the real and measurable needs of young people and the labor market (International Labour Organization, 2023).

Under this logic, the study was framed as a **bridge between diagnosis and programmatic design**. Its purpose was not to produce an exhaustive or statistically representative characterization of the entire returnees and migrants in mobility in Mexico, but rather to **build an analytical foundation solid enough to inform the design of a pilot intervention.** For this reason, the scope of the research focused on identifying relevant patterns, occupational profiles, recurring barriers, existing institutional capacities, and opportunities for coordination with public, private, social, and educational stakeholders.



# Chapter 2. Initial Diagnosis of Return Migration and Place-Based Targeting Criteria

This chapter presents the initial diagnostic context that informed the study's methodological design and site-prioritization strategy. The analysis was updated between January and June 2026 to reflect the most recent available evidence on return migration, youth mobility, and territorial patterns of reintegration. Its purpose is to establish the baseline from which the research identified priority geographies, data-collection pathways, and the operational conditions needed to design a place-based pilot.

## 2.1 Recent Trends in Mexico–United States Return Migration

Between January and June 2026, the return of people from the United States to Mexico unfolded against a backdrop of irregular crossings at historic lows—the lowest in six decades—and the suspension of the right to asylum at the border. The volume of deportations of Mexican nationals was high, though below what had been anticipated, and shifted abruptly in mid-April: overland handovers in border cities were replaced by flights operated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to southern Mexico. In parallel, Mexico continued to receive third-country nationals—Cubans above all—under conditions of high vulnerability.

The U.S. immigration policy launched on January 20, 2025—which suspended asylum processing and declared an "invasion" at the southern border—produced two effects that by 2026 can already be considered structural: a sharp drop in irregular crossings and a sustained rise in return. According to public statements and reporting around the May 21, 2026 meeting between President Claudia Sheinbaum and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin, both governments agreed that irregular crossings have fallen by close to 90% so far in 2026. Border Patrol apprehensions went from roughly 250,000 per month in December 2023 to an average of about 8,000 per month between February 2025 and March 2026.

Data from the Migration Policy Unit of the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) confirm this reconfiguration. Between January and March 2026, 11,073 detention events involving people in an irregular situation were recorded, compared with more than 109,000 in the same period of 2025—a reduction of nearly 90%. By contrast, the share of "returned" individuals within those events jumped from 2.9% in the first quarter of 2025 to 29.4% in the first quarter of 2026, a rate ten times higher. In short, the Mexican migration system began

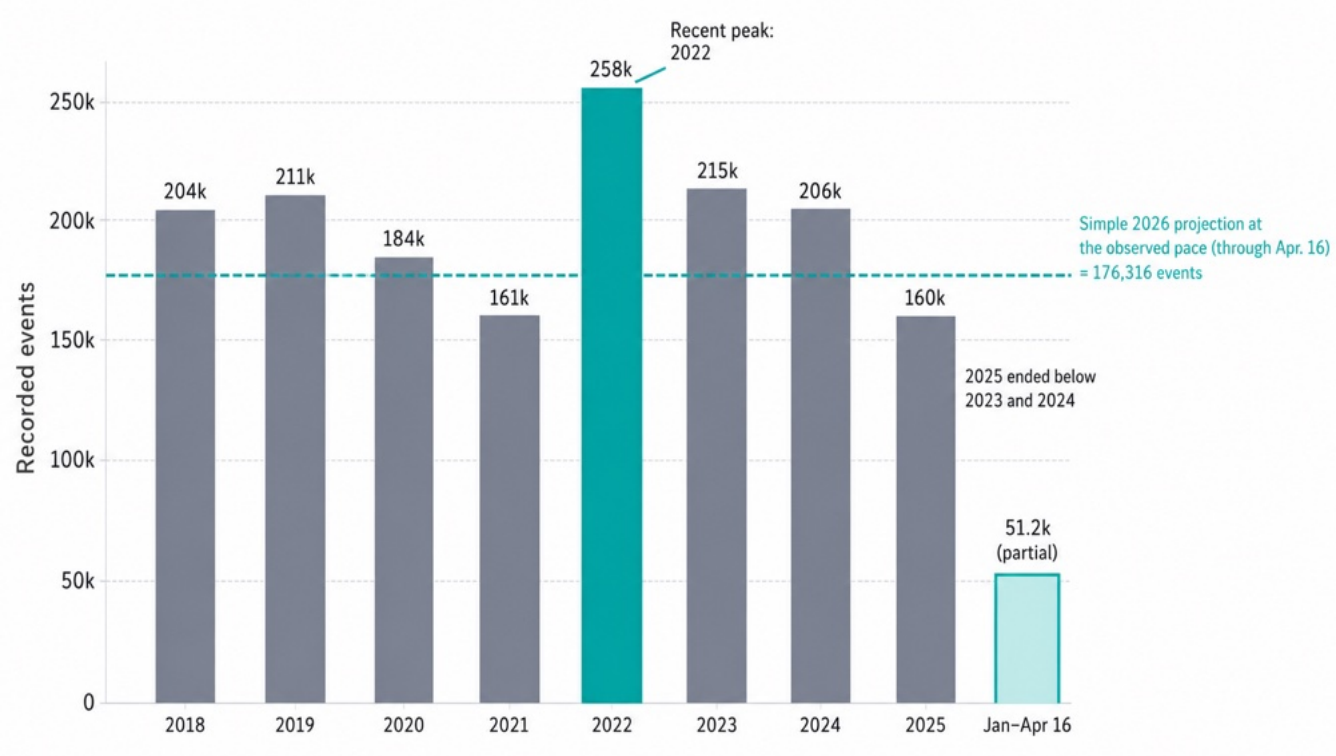
to shift from a predominant focus on northbound transit toward a more complex configuration shaped by return, deportation, prolonged waiting, and internal relocation.

Total-volume figures vary by source and period, but they converge on one key point: the pace of return is high, though lower than what the U.S. administration had promised and, in comparative terms, lower than in the final months of the Biden administration. **The underlying explanation is that there are virtually no new arrivals at the border to repatriate, so the bulk of return now comes from ICE arrests in the interior of the United States—many of them involving people with years or decades of residence.**

This apparent tension reflects a change in the composition of return rather than a simple increase or decrease in the phenomenon: fewer new arrivals at the border mean fewer immediate border returns, while interior enforcement and deportation flights have become more relevant to the current pattern.

A comparison of the Mexican and U.S. statistical series reveals a matching pattern. Both show a "post-pandemic peak" followed by a clear reversal. In the Mexican administrative data (fiscal year January–December), the series peaks in **2022, with approximately 258,000 events**, before declining steadily through 2023 and 2024 and registering a very pronounced drop in 2025, to approximately 160,000 events—a trend expected to hold into 2026.

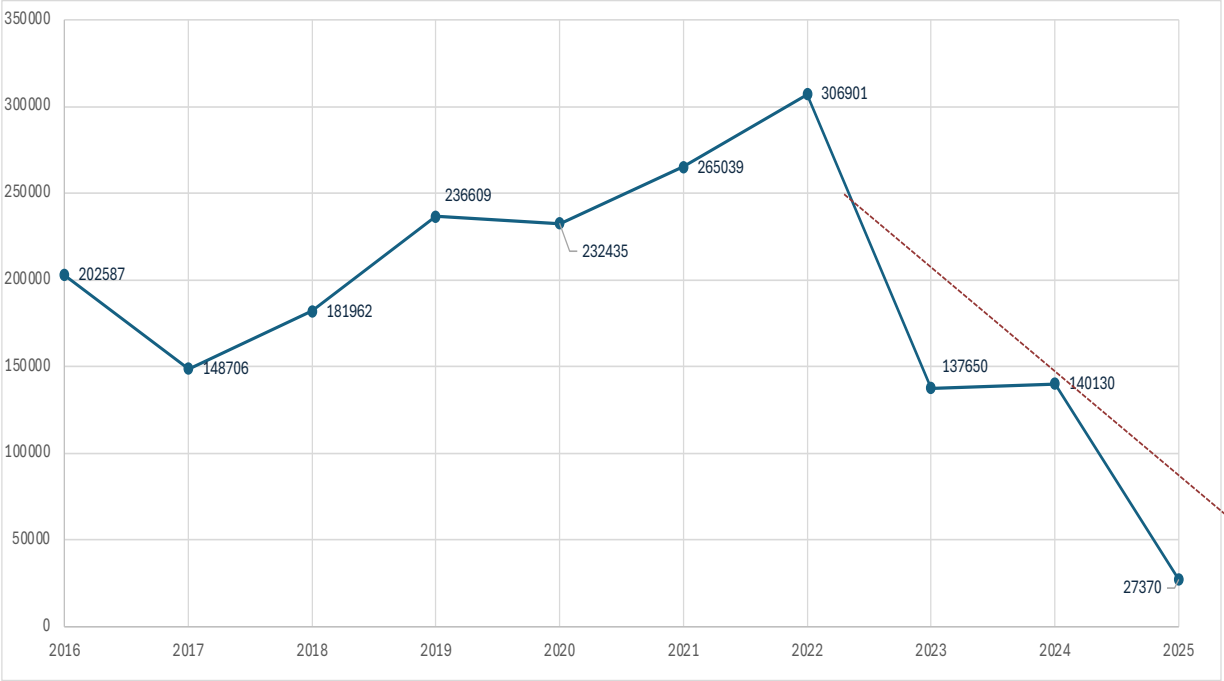
**Figure 1**. Total return events: Mexico series (2016–2026) by fiscal year.




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on data from the Migration Policy Unit–SEGOB and the National Migration Institute (Mexico). Fiscal year: January–December.

In the U.S. statistics (fiscal year October–September), the series also peaks in **fiscal year 2022, with around 307,000 events**, but from that point it registers a sharp break in fiscal years 2023 and 2024—on the order of 138,000 to 140,000—suggesting a significant change in the volume of returns and removals of Mexican nationals to Mexico.

**Figure 2.** Total return events: United States series by fiscal year.




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the Office of Homeland Security Statistics (United States). Fiscal year: October–September.

Although the calendars are not identical—Mexico measures from January to December and the United States from October to September—**the pattern matches in substance: a significant slowdown since 2023**. The 2025 figure should be read with caution given its preliminary nature; even so, it reinforces the underlying message: recorded return is contracting, and the convergence between the two sources suggests this is not a Mexican measurement "artifact," but a consistent trend observable from both sides of the border.

The most significant change of the half-year is logistical and geographic. Until mid-April 2026, deportations of Mexican nationals were carried out mostly overland, concentrated in a few border cities. During the first quarter, Matamoros absorbed more than a third of all overland handovers of Mexican nationals—nearly 14,000 people—followed by Ciudad Juárez and Nogales (around 6,000 and 5,000, respectively), Ciudad Acuña (more than 5,000), and Tijuana (more than 3,800).

Beginning on April 13, 2026, there was a **near-total halt to overland deportations** of Mexican nationals, **replaced by ICE flights to the south of the country,** primarily to Tapachula (Chiapas) and Villahermosa (Tabasco). Monitoring by Human Rights First counted 71 flights to Mexico in the first twenty days of May, compared with 68 in April and 25 in March; over the weekend of May 16 and 17 alone, 712 Mexican nationals were transported by air to Tapachula. The **rationale for the shift**, according to that monitoring, is to **make re-crossing more difficult**: by leaving people more than a thousand kilometers from the border line, the cost of a new crossing attempt rises.

This turn has direct consequences for northern cities. Shelters that were central for years now operate nearly empty—the Leona Vicario shelter in Ciudad Juárez reached barely 5% of its capacity—and the federal "México te Abraza" ("Mexico Embraces You") strategy continued taking down tents in places such as Nogales amid lower-than-expected volumes. The table below summarizes the main indicators of the shift.

Under an unwritten agreement with the United States, Mexico has received third-country nationals deported across the land border: between January 2025 and February 2026, an estimated figure of close to 16,000 non-Mexicans is reported. The largest group is Cuban nationals—whose government accepts very few return flights—followed by people from Venezuela, Guatemala, and Honduras, and even from countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe. This component concentrates the most vulnerable conditions of the phenomenon.

Forced transfer to the south is the first of these conditions. Mexican authorities systematically put these individuals on buses bound for Tapachula and Villahermosa; according to data from the National Migration Institute (INM), the government allocated some 13.5 million pesos (approximately US$0.8 million) to these transfers between January 2025 and March 2026.

Compounding this is a widespread situation of abandonment and risk. A Human Rights Watch report dated May 27, 2026 documented that many of these people are left without access to shelter, food, or medical care, sleeping in parks or outside hospitals and exposed to high levels of violence. The only shelter available in Villahermosa closed in April because of the insecurity of its surroundings. The Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) records waits of up to two years to resolve applications, and many people are unable even to obtain the humanitarian card that would allow them to work and access health care and education.

The Cuban population illustrates this entrapment in a particular way. Direct flights to Havana are scarce—generally one per month; the May 21 flight repatriated 76 people—so

Cubans deported to Mexico are left, in the words of civil-society organizations, in a “quasi-stateless limbo.”

In the border cities, the phenomenon is accompanied by a sharp reduction in—and lower visibility of—the migrant population: shelters have been replaced by rented rooms and apartments, and encampments have disappeared. An estimated 5,190 people remain in northern border cities—concentrated in Tijuana (~2,000), Ciudad Juárez (~1,250), and Mexicali (~800)—a figure that has been stable over the past year. Insecurity worsens the picture: kidnappings of migrants have been documented—15 people found in Ciudad Juárez on April 20—along with severe underreporting of crimes, as the Fundación para la Justicia (Foundation for Justice) counted 1,191 cases in 2025 against the 35 officially acknowledged. As a partial response, INM announced the installation of 28 shelters and “humanitarian access points” to operate from June to December 2026, though it has not been clarified whether stays in them will be voluntary or mandatory.

## 2.2 Geography of Return: Sending States and Anchor Territories

Based on Mexican statistics for the 2020–2025 period, the most consistent and weighty sending states are concentrated in the south of the country, characterized by high volume and low variance—that is, outflows that are structural and sustained in nature. This core is followed by a central–south–western corridor that also maintains significant levels.

The main implication of this pattern is that Mexico–U.S. return tends to “anchor” in historically sending territories. Consequently, reintegration and employment responses should prioritize these regional hubs and abandon the notion of a homogeneous return at the national scale. Treating the phenomenon as uniform would lead to poorly targeted intervention designs; recognizing its differentiated geography, by contrast, makes it possible to concentrate efforts where the critical mass and continuity of return make a pilot viable.

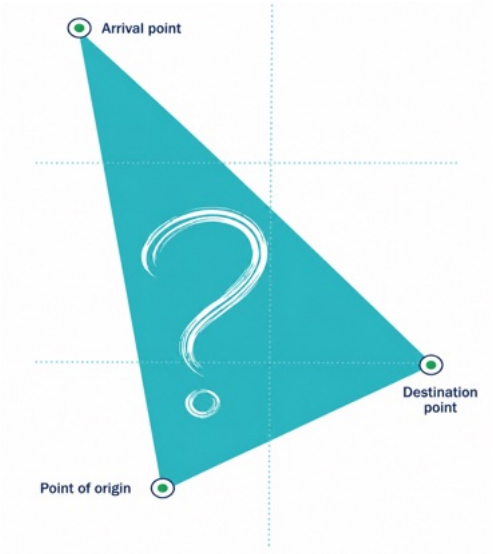
**Figure 3.** Migrant-sending states, 2020–2025, by volume and variance of return events.




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on data from the Migration Policy Unit–SEGOB and the National Migration Institute.

## 2.3 Analytical Triangle for Site Prioritization: Arrival, Origin, and Destination

**Figure 4.** Analytical triangle




To select the data-collection sites on technical grounds, we propose reading jointly the "triangle" formed by the points of arrival, origin, and destination. Each vertex offers a distinct reading. The main points of arrival indicate where it is most feasible to observe returns in the short term, for reasons of logistics and volume. The states of origin show where return tends to anchor and turn into place-based reintegration. And the destinations of young people aged 18 to 35 reveal where there is the highest probability of finding the target population actually reintegrating socially and into the labor market.

The intersection of these three layers makes it possible to prioritize territories with critical mass and continuity, maximizing the probability of identifying returning youth for the pilot and avoiding the investment of resources in places with high transit but low retention or low youth presence. This methodological note, executive in nature, directly informs Decision 02 on sites.

It is worth specifying the distinctive value of one of these inputs. The data on the destination of young people are not part of the public tabulations available in official statistics: this specific cut was obtained through direct outreach and access to unpublished information, through direct institutional outreach with the National Migration Institute (INM). This adds a strategic layer—youth destination—that is normally not observable through open sources and that is central to designing a pilot with a reintegration focus.

Reading the three layers translates into three rankings.

1. **Point of arrival:** the main points of arrival, by volume and relative weight, are: Tamaulipas (29.8%), Sonora (14.7%), Baja California (13.5%), Tabasco—by air—(11.4%), Coahuila (9.4%), Chihuahua (9.1%), Chiapas—by air—(8.7%), and Mexico City—AIFA (Felipe Ángeles International Airport) and Benito Juárez Airport—(3.5%).

2. **Point of origin:** the average ranking by volume places at the top Chiapas (9.74%), Guerrero (8.76%), Guanajuato (7.27%), Oaxaca (7.25%), Puebla (7.21%), and Veracruz (7.17%), followed by Michoacán (6.73%), State of Mexico (5.14%), Tamaulipas (3.99%), Sinaloa (3.86%), Jalisco (3.62%), and Chihuahua (3.11%).

3. **Point of destination:** Finally, as to where young people are headed—measured as a percentage of the total and by volume—the leaders are Chiapas (75%), Puebla (70.1%), Oaxaca (68.3%), Veracruz (67.2%), State of Mexico (65.5%), and Guerrero (65.3%), followed by Baja California (64.4%), Chihuahua (63.4%), Sinaloa (62.1%), Guanajuato (61.4%), and Jalisco (60.2%).

The convergence of these three rankings points to a core youth reintegration corridor in the south-central region of the country, where states of origin also appear as likely destinations for returning young people. The source note bears repeating: some of the statistics used come from non-public administrative tabulations, shared in aggregate form by an institutional source under conditions of confidentiality, without personal data or identifiers.

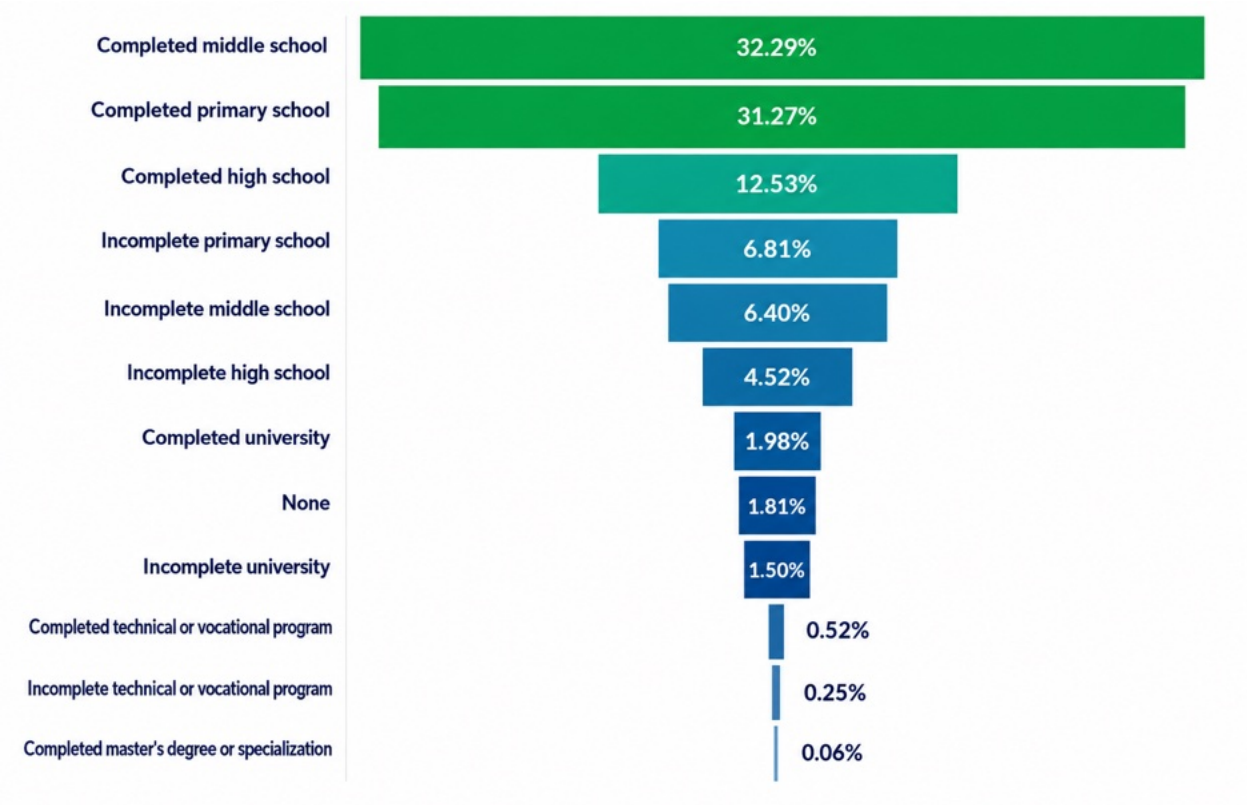
## 2.4 Preliminary Profile of the Returning Youth Population

Drawing on data obtained from public information sources (the Migration Policy Unit) and through institutional contacts, an initial profile of the returning population was developed.

### 2.4.1 Educational Profile of the Returning Youth Population

**64% of repatriation events correspond to young people aged 18 to 35**. Knowing their average educational attainment over the 2023–2025 period, prior to data collection, made it possible to calibrate the sampling design and the data-collection instruments.

**Figure 5.** Distribution of educational attainment among the returning youth population, 2023–2025.




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on non-public aggregated administrative tabulations, obtained through direct institutional outreach. The information corresponds to the returning youth population aged 18 to 35 and is not available in the public tabulations of official statistics, so it provides an additional analytical layer to guide the design of the data collection and the pilot.

The educational profile observed is concentrated in **completed lower secondary education (32.20%) and completed primary education (31.27%)**, with a third block in completed upper-secondary (high school) education (12.53%). These are followed, in smaller proportions, by incomplete primary education (6.81%), incomplete lower secondary education (6.46%), and incomplete upper-secondary education (4.62%).

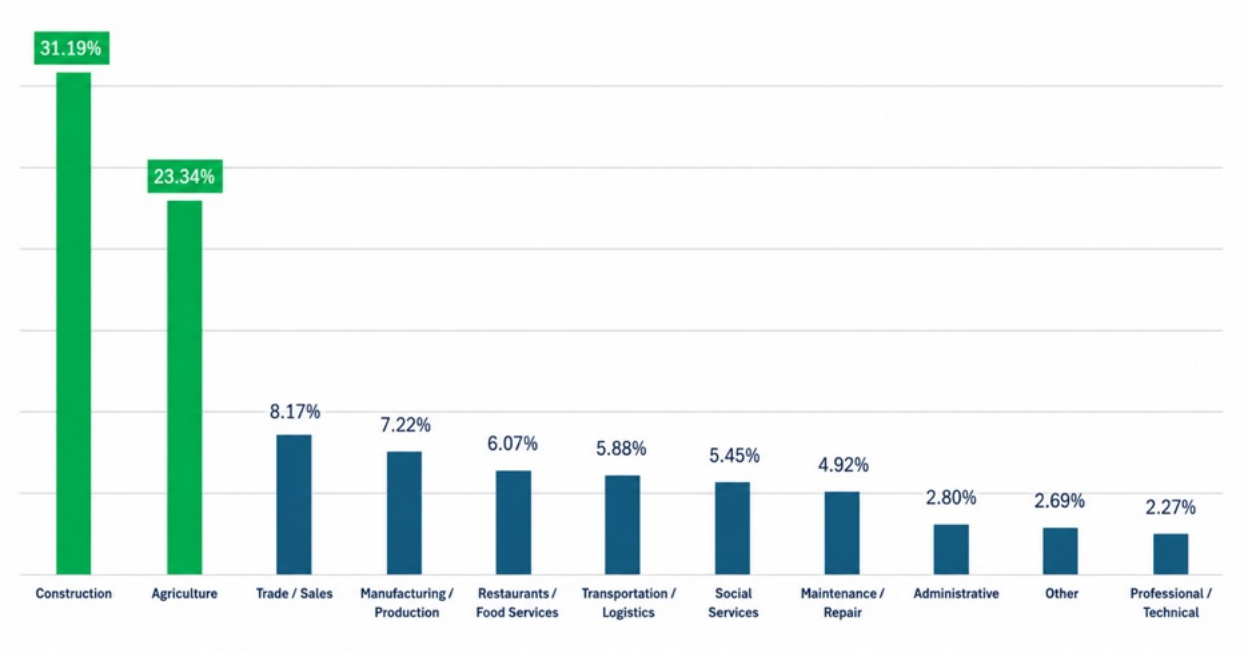
The share with university studies is small: 1.98% with a completed university degree and 1.50% with incomplete university studies. The remaining categories—none (1.81%), completed technical or vocational programs (0.52%) and incomplete ones (0.25%), and a completed master's or specialty (0.06%)—are marginal.

In operational terms, this profile indicates that the returning youth universe has an educational **base that is predominantly basic or intermediate**. For this reason, the data collection must accurately capture practical skills and prior work experience—including that acquired in the United States—functional digital competencies, English level, and access to devices and connectivity, along with the associated barriers. Above all, the design **must not assume that formal credentials are the main gateway to GDS (Global Digital Services)**, since doing so would exclude most of the target population.

### 2.4.2 Occupational Profile and Transferable Skills

The average occupational profile of returning young people in 2023–2025 was a key input prior to data collection, because it indicates that the "starting point" for most is not a formal track record in digital services, but rather **practical, hands-on, and field-based experience**.

**Figure 6.** Occupational distribution of the returning youth population, 2023–2025.




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on non-public aggregated administrative tabulations, obtained through direct institutional outreach. The information corresponds to the returning youth population aged 18 to 35 and is not available in the public tabulations of official statistics, so it provides an additional analytical layer to guide the design of the data collection and the pilot.

As shown in Figure 6, the distribution is markedly concentrated in Construction (31.19%) and the Agricultural sector (23.34%), followed at a considerable distance by Trade and Sales (8.17%), Manufacturing and Production (7.22%), Restaurants and Food (6.07%), Transportation and Logistics (5.88%), Personal Services (5.45%), Maintenance and Repair (4.92%), Administrative (2.80%), Other (2.69%), and Professionals or Technicians (2.27%).

This distribution led to a relevant decision in the design of the data-collection instruments, which must capture **transferable skills,** relevant both for GDS and for other sectors, rather than formal occupations.

## 2.5 Implications for the Data-Collection Design

During the kickoff meeting with the technical team of IYF (International Youth Foundation), four methodological decisions were adopted that structured the data-collection phase and established a common baseline of methodological, operational, and ethical understanding. These decisions functioned as initial design criteria, not as inflexible constraints. Given the mobile, contingent, and hard-to-locate nature of the target population, the strategy was conceived from the outset as an adaptive design, able to adjust to the real windows of access, to security conditions, and to the availability of institutional and community stakeholders on the ground.

i. **Target population and participation criteria**

The target population was defined through prioritized, non-exclusionary criteria: young people who had returned or were in mobility, preferably aged 18 to 35; those with a recent return, operationally defined as up to four years; those with prior work experience in Mexico or the United States; and those interested in employment, training, skills certification, or connection to job opportunities.

The non-exclusionary nature of these criteria means that they guided the prioritization of the data collection without closing off participation by people who did not meet all of the attributes. This decision responded to the complexity of the migration phenomenon and to the need not to exclude relevant trajectories that, even when they did not strictly fit the pilot's ideal profile, could provide valuable information for understanding reintegration barriers, capacities, and needs.

In parallel, exclusion criteria were established that were limited to situations that could compromise the safety of participants, the integrity of the field team, or the validity of informed consent. In this way, inclusion remained broad and flexible, while exclusion was

reserved to safeguard basic ethical principles: voluntary participation, understanding of the exercise, data protection, non-revictimization, and the safety of those involved.

### ii. Data-collection sites

As a starting point, it was agreed to conduct the data collection at a maximum of four sites nationwide. The initial selection of sites was based on technical criteria derived from the prior desk and administrative review: volume of return—where returnees arrive—, state of origin—where they are from—, state of destination of returning young people—where they are headed—, operational and security feasibility, and the presence of institutional stakeholders or civil-society organizations able to facilitate contact with the target population.

The final decision on the actual data-collection sites was made during operations, taking into account both the logic of the analytical triangle and the real conditions of field access. This approach made it possible to distinguish between priority territories and alternative or complementary ones.



- **Priority 1 states.** States were preselected where high reception of returnees converged with a high probability of youth reintegration. The states that met these criteria were Baja California, Chiapas, Chihuahua, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz.

- **Priority 2 states.** To cover contingencies of access, security, logistics, or permits, as well as to complement the sample or add sites if operational opportunities arose, alternative and complementary states were defined: Mexico City, Guerrero, and Michoacán.

**Figure 7.** States prioritized for data collection, based on the analytical triangle of arrival, origin, and youth destination.




**Technical criteria:** volume of return migration, place of origin, youth destination patterns, operational feasibility, and presence of local stakeholders.

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

The estimated pool of returning youth by state—presented in the study's cartographic material—constitutes an approximation of the observable potential population. This estimate was calculated from non-public aggregated administrative tabulations for the 2023–2025 period, without personal data or identifiers.

The values by state fall within orders of magnitude ranging from several thousand to more than thirty thousand potential young people, confirming the existence of critical mass in the prioritized states and reinforcing the relevance of using them as a starting point for the place-based design of the data collection.

**Figure 8.** Estimated pool of returning youth by state.




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on non-public aggregated administrative tabulations, obtained through direct institutional outreach. The information corresponds to the returning youth population aged 18 to 35 and is not available in the public tabulations of official statistics, so it provides an additional analytical layer to guide the design of the data collection and the pilot.

### iii. Logistics and institutional support

The logistics strategy contemplated institutional and community access through four types of spaces: shelters, offices serving the migrant population, airports, and local civil-society organizations. Operations relied on stakeholder mapping by site, formal institutional contact—under IYF's institutional identity—and a project introduction letter. In all, 220 potential contact nodes were identified, among public institutions, social organizations, service spaces, and relevant local stakeholders.

This mapping made it possible to build a flexible operational route for the data collection. Rather than relying on a single access channel, the strategy sought to diversify entry points to increase the probability of contact with the target population, reduce nonresponse risks, and adapt to the changing conditions of each territory.

### iv. Evidence, security and traceability of the data collection

The data collection faced a specific risk: among returnees and migrants in mobility, as well as in spaces such as migration offices, shelters, airports, and service organizations, it may not be feasible to record audio or video, take photographs, or administer full instruments. These restrictions may stem from fear or distrust on the part of participants, institutions' internal protocols, personal-data protection, security conditions, or risks associated with the territorial context.

The agreed guideline was not to record or photograph by default. Any audiovisual or photographic record could be made only under an opt-in scheme, with explicit, informed, and documented consent. To organize evidence capture according to context and instrument type, differentiated levels of traceability were established, indicating in each case which level was implemented and why.

- **Level A — Expanded evidence with explicit consent**. Recorded audio or photographs only when the participant grants explicit consent. In surveys or group activities, this level may include general photographs of the space or contextual evidence, avoiding faces, names, or other identifiable elements as far as possible.

- **Level B — Safe standard**. Structured notes, non-identifiable quotations, and a field log with an anonymous reference number, site, and date. It may include general photographs of the space, provided they do not allow participants to be identified.

- **Level C — Minimal record**. A record of themes, patterns, and aggregated findings, without verbatim quotations, sensitive data, or information that would allow individuals, institutions, or risk situations to be identified.

- **Alternative channel**. If in-person access is limited for reasons of security, permits, mobility, or participant availability, telephone or remote surveys may be used, under the same ethical protocol previously developed with IYF: informed consent, registration via an online form, an anonymous participant identifier, and safeguarding of information.

This scheme made it possible to balance two methodological needs: on the one hand, ensuring traceability and the quality of the evidence; and, on the other, protecting the safety, privacy, and dignity of participants. In migration contexts, where people experience situations of insecurity, uncertainty, or even shame, the absence of audiovisual evidence is an ethical and methodological decision aimed at reducing risks and fostering informed participation.

## 2.6 Terminological Framework of the Study

To ensure analytical precision, the study established a minimal terminological framework that makes it possible to distinguish between concepts that are often used interchangeably in everyday language but carry different methodological, statistical, and legal implications. This precision matters because the study combines Mexican and U.S. sources, administrative data, testimony from migrants, and evidence collected in the field.

First, a **migrant** is understood as a person who moves or has moved outside their usual place of residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for various reasons. For the purposes of this study, this definition is used broadly, with the aim of including trajectories of international mobility, return, transit, waiting, or temporary settlement.

**Return migration** refers to the process by which a migrant returns to their country of origin or usual place of residence after having migrated. From an international perspective, return may be temporary or permanent and may take different forms depending on the degree of voluntariness, institutional assistance, or coercion. For this reason, return should not be understood solely as a "definitive return," but as a phase of the migration cycle that may lead to reintegration, renewed mobility, prolonged transit, or temporary stay in another territory.

Within this general category, three relevant forms are distinguished. **Voluntary return** occurs when a person decides to return to the country of origin, the country of transit, or a third country, whether independently or with institutional support. **Assisted return** involves the existence of logistical, administrative, or reintegration support from an institution or organization. **Forced return** occurs when departure from the host country takes place through an administrative or judicial decision by a competent authority.

In the Mexican case, the concept of **return migrant** draws on the statistical definition used by INEGI (Mexico's national statistics agency), which refers to a person who returns to live in the state where they were born or where they had their usual residence, after having undertaken a migratory movement. This definition is useful for place-based analysis, because it makes it possible to distinguish between the place of arrival, the place of origin, and the place of reintegration.

In U.S. statistical terms, the term **repatriation** —repatriation, in the terminology of the Office of Homeland Security Statistics of the Department of Homeland Security— functions as an umbrella category that includes various forms of confirmed departure of non-citizens from

the United States. In particular, repatriations may include removals, returns and, depending on the series or dashboard used, expulsions.

**Removals** are mandatory, confirmed departures of inadmissible or removable persons, based on a formal order of removal. They typically entail administrative or legal consequences for re-entering the United States. **Returns**, by contrast, refer to confirmed departures that are not based on a formal order of removal and that generally do not carry the same administrative penalties. Finally, **expulsions** were used in certain periods and statistical dashboards to record departures carried out under specific authorities, such as those associated with Title 42 during the COVID-19 public-health emergency.

This distinction is central to the study because the common use of the term “deportation” does not always align with the legal and statistical categories used by the United States. Consequently, when the analysis draws on U.S. sources, it is advisable to use the official categories of removals, returns, expulsions, or repatriations, as appropriate. When referring to the social or narrative language of participants, “deportation” may be used as a common term, clarifying that it does not necessarily correspond to a single legal category.

Finally, the study incorporates the concept of **circular migration** to refer to temporary movements, generally associated with work, family, or subsistence reasons, that may recur over time and do not necessarily imply a definitive change of usual residence. This concept is relevant for analyzing the trajectories of people who have moved back and forth several times between Mexico and the United States, or who maintain open mobility projects even after a return event.



# Chapter 3. Methodological Design

## 3.1 Methodological design

The study used a **mixed-methods, semi-sequential, exploratory and applied design**. This approach was appropriate given the complexity of the migration phenomenon, the heterogeneity of the target population, and the absence of a single, up-to-date, accessible sampling frame that would support a conventional probability-based sampling strategy.

The methodological approach was designed to **build a programmatic case for a potential intervention**. In practical terms, the research sought to generate evidence to inform decisions about which problem to address, with which population, in which locations, through which support pathways, with which partners, and under which operating assumptions (Yin, 2018).

The research questions were designed to function as an analytical architecture for the case: they begin with the presence or absence of support networks; move toward characterizing profiles, skills, and sectors of experience; identify reintegration barriers; and culminate in criteria for designing a pilot.

The quantitative component made it possible to organize and classify information on sociodemographic characteristics, migration trajectories, educational attainment, work experience, sectors of activity, self-reported skills, support needs, and reintegration barriers. This component provided a systematic reading of the observed profiles and made it possible to identify clusters, recurring patterns, and relevant differences across groups.

The qualitative component made it possible to delve into dimensions that are difficult to capture through closed-ended questions: the subjective experience of return, the loss or rebuilding of support networks, job expectations, decisions to stay or move, institutional barriers, informal learning trajectories, adaptation strategies, and people's relationships with support actors. It also made it possible to incorporate the perspective of organizations, shelters, local stakeholders, and people who directly support the migrant population.

The **design** is defined as **semi-sequential** because the study's phases were organized in a linked but not rigid manner. That is, the preliminary findings of one phase fed into the decisions of the next, allowing methodological adjustments as fieldwork and analysis progressed. This logic was especially important in a study with a highly mobile population, where access conditions, contact points, and participant availability could change rapidly. Rather than imposing an inflexible methodological sequence, the design made it possible to

adapt instruments, data-collection routes, and analytical focuses without losing analytical consistency.

Methodological integration was realized primarily through two data-collection instruments. First, 417 structured assisted surveys were administered to systematically classify and characterize the target population. These surveys made it possible to gather comparable information across participants and to construct variables useful for analyzing profiles, employment trajectories, skills, and barriers. Of these, 94% (392) were usable for analysis and were therefore the surveys that were analyzed.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture narratives, experiences, motivations, obstacles, and opportunities that the survey could not capture at the same level of depth. Twenty-four interviews were conducted with people in mobility and 12 interviews with people involved in the management or operation of shelters or organizations that support migrants.

These instruments were complemented by participatory and passive field observation, desk review, secondary-data analysis, stakeholder mapping, and exploration of the institutional and labor-market ecosystem. These activities made it possible to contextualize the primary findings, cross-check the information gathered against external sources, and connect the identified profiles with potential support pathways, certification, training, or job placement.

## 3.2 Stages of the methodological process

The study was organized into five linked methodological stages:

1. Planning, documentation, and methodological design.
2. Primary data collection.
3. Systematization and analysis of the information.
4. Validation, feedback, and triangulation of findings.
5. Conceptual design of the pilot.

The first stage included a review of background information, the definition of research questions, instrument design, and the initial identification of sites and key stakeholders, as well as defining the analytical approach. The second stage involved data collection with returning migrants or people in mobility, as well as with institutional and community stakeholders involved in their care. The third stage focused on cleaning, systematizing, classifying, and analyzing the data. The fourth stage made it possible to cross-check preliminary findings with relevant stakeholders, strengthen the interpretation of results, and

adjust programmatic assumptions. Finally, the fifth stage was geared toward translating the evidence generated into design criteria for a potential pilot.

***Figure 9**. Diagram of the five stages of the methodological process*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

The rationale for the design rests on three central features of the study population. First, this is a **highly heterogeneous population**. Returning migrants or people in mobility may differ significantly in nationality, age, educational attainment, English-language proficiency, work experience, documentation status, family networks, conditions of return, length of stay in the United States, intention to remain in Mexico, and expectations of future mobility. This diversity is difficult to capture through a single instrument or a single source of information.

Second, the employment trajectories of this population tend to be fragmented and nonlinear. Many people have moved through informal, temporary, seasonal, or high-turnover jobs; others have developed practical skills in sectors such as services, construction, agriculture, manufacturing, logistics, retail, hospitality, care, or customer service, without necessarily holding formal credentials to back up those experiences. For this reason, the research could not limit itself to recording self-reported occupations, but had to identify **transferable competencies**, accumulated learning, and potential correspondences with sectors of opportunity.

Third, the study needed to recognize that labor-market reintegration does not depend solely on an individual's willingness to work or train. It is mediated by documentation barriers, a lack of information, discrimination, the absence of networks, educational gaps, family responsibilities, psychosocial effects, a lack of awareness of available programs, a lack of certifications, place-based restrictions, and differences in the responsiveness of local ecosystems. These barriers required a methodological design capable of capturing both objective conditions and lived experiences.

These elements make the mixed approach the most methodologically appropriate option. The survey made it possible to observe trends and classify profiles; the interviews made it possible to understand trajectories, motivations, and obstacles; and the stakeholder mapping made it possible to connect the findings with real possibilities for intervention. Taken together, the methodological design made it possible to move from characterizing the population to identifying programmatic pathways, maintaining a direct connection between evidence, analysis, and decision-making.

The research, therefore, did not limit itself to describing needs. It sought to identify capacities, gaps, and opportunities. This distinction is fundamental from a workforce development perspective, because it makes it possible to avoid a purely welfare-oriented reading of the returnees and migrants in mobility. Instead, it proposes recognizing young people in mobility as individuals with experiences, skills, and productive potential, but who require enabling conditions to turn that accumulated capital into sustainable pathways of education, certification, employment, and social inclusion.

## 3.3 Characteristics of the data collection

The data collection combined broad territorial coverage, a multichannel contact strategy, and a logic of source triangulation. This combination made it possible to approach the phenomenon of return migration from different empirical entry points: on the one hand, through the generation of quantitative information directly with returning migrants or people in mobility; and, on the other, through the qualitative recovery of experiences, barriers, and care pathways identified both by the population itself and by the institutional and community stakeholders that work with it.

The field strategy was designed taking into account the operational and methodological complexity of the phenomenon. Unlike other population groups that can be located through stable sampling frames, institutional registries, or previously defined contact points, the returnees and migrants in mobility exhibits high levels of mobility, geographic dispersion, variable temporality, and, in many cases, transit trajectories that do not necessarily end at a fixed point of residence or care. For this reason, the data collection required a flexible, adaptive, and place-based strategy capable of responding to real windows of access to the target population.

### 3.3.1 Territorial coverage and distribution of the sample

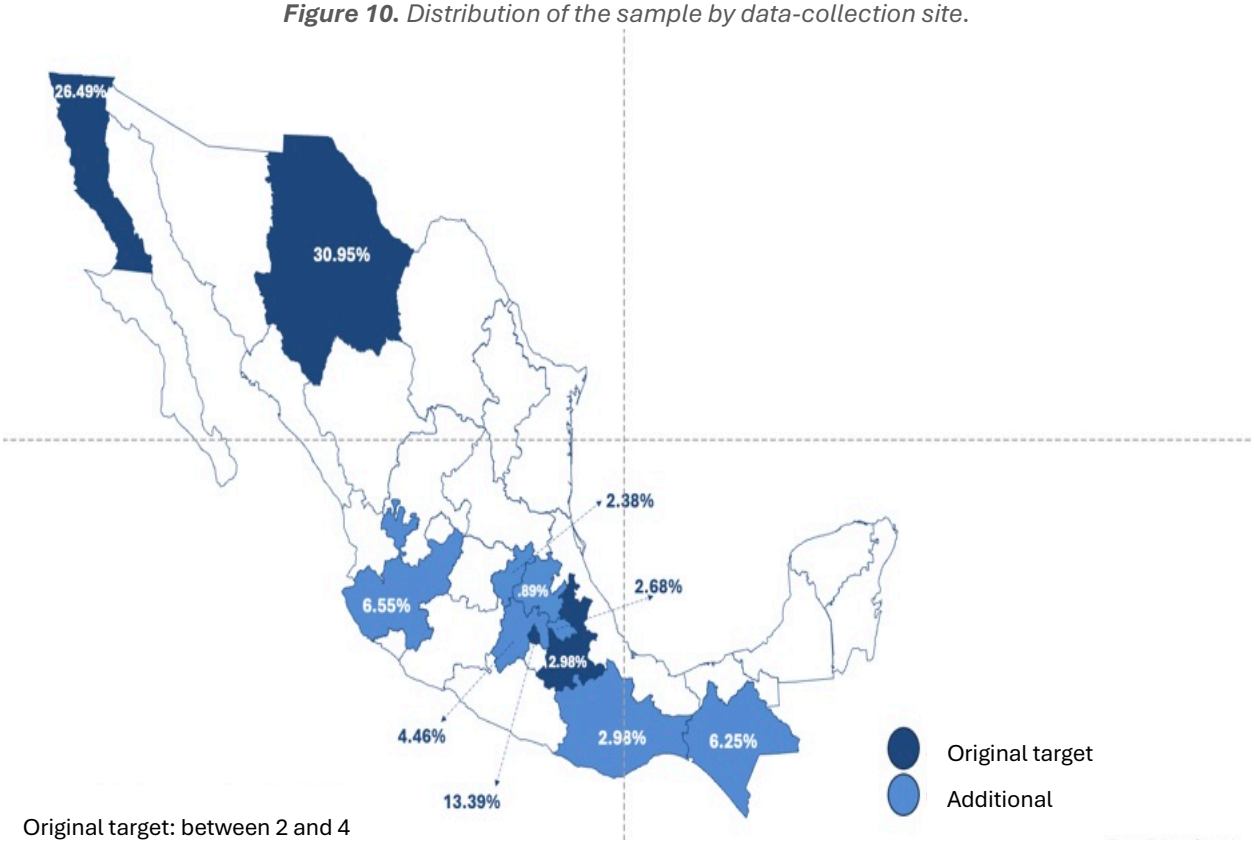
Starting from an initial projection of up to four sites, the fieldwork was able to expand to 11 data-collection sites. This expansion made it possible to increase the territorial diversity of the study and capture experiences associated with different contexts of return, transit, reception, and care. The participating states were Baja California, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Mexico City, the State of Mexico, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, and Tlaxcala.

The territorial expansion responded to the dynamics of the phenomenon itself and to the need to take advantage of effective opportunities for access to the target population. As explained in Chapter II, recruiting returning migrants required establishing both formal and informal partnerships and communication channels with agencies of the Mexican federal government, as well as with local civil-society organizations. These connections made it possible to identify moments and spaces for contact, particularly in relation to the arrival of flights of Mexican nationals with repatriation immigration status to Mexico City —mainly through Felipe Ángeles International Airport— and to Chiapas —by way of Tapachula International Airport—. At the other sites, data collection took place mainly in shelters, migrant care facilities, or support points that facilitated direct contact with the population.

Figure 10 shows the distribution of the sample by state. As can be seen, the distribution was not uniform, which is consistent with the type of phenomenon studied and with the methodological strategy adopted. Data collection was carried out between January and March 2026, a period in which the arrival of repatriated individuals did not follow any public, stable, or predictable schedule. In particular, repatriation flights from the United States can be arranged or modified with very little advance notice, which limits the ability to plan deployments, assign field teams on strictly proportional criteria, or guarantee equivalent quotas across sites. In addition, in shelters and care facilities, the presence of the target population varies from day to day depending on migration flows, transit conditions, personal decisions, available support networks, and local institutional capacities.

For these reasons, the study used a non-probabilistic convenience sample, appropriate for contexts in which there is no complete, up-to-date, accessible sampling frame for the target population, and in which the possibility of contact depends on changing operational conditions. This methodological decision does not seek to produce statistically representative estimates for the entire returnees and migrants in mobility in Mexico, but rather to generate relevant, contextualized, and analytically useful empirical evidence on profiles, trajectories, competencies, barriers, and needs for social and labor-market reintegration.

***Figure 10.*** *Distribution of the sample by data-collection site.*




Original target: between 2 and 4

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

Within this framework, the concentration of records at some sites does not constitute a weakness of the data collection, but rather an expected feature of an adaptive field strategy in the face of a mobile and hard-to-reach population. Two nodes alone accounted for close to six out of every ten records —approximately 31% and 26%, respectively— while the remaining sites contributed smaller shares. This distribution reflects, on the one hand, real differences in access opportunities during the data-collection period and, on the other, the operational capacity of certain points to facilitate contact with returnees at specific moments.

From an analytical standpoint, this concentration should be interpreted as part of the operational geography of the data collection and not as intentional overrepresentation. The nodes with the largest number of cases functioned as critical recruitment points due to their institutional, logistical, or territorial relevance during the observed period. At the same time, the inclusion of sites with fewer records made it possible to broaden the contextual variability of the study, incorporate experiences from different migration routes, and enrich the qualitative and comparative reading of the findings.

Consequently, the results should be read through an exploratory and applied lens, aimed at identifying patterns, profiles, and barriers relevant to the design of a pilot support model for the returnees and migrants in mobility. The uneven territorial distribution of the sample is addressed through a prudent interpretation of the data, avoiding mechanical extrapolations by site and favoring the analysis of general trends, recurring findings, and relevant contextual differences. Likewise, triangulation with interviews, desk review, and consultation with local stakeholders makes it possible to strengthen the interpretive validity of the results and to offset, in analytical terms, the limitations inherent in a data collection carried out with a highly mobile population with restricted access.

### 3.3.2 Multichannel contact strategy

To reach a dispersed, mobile, and hard-to-access population, a multichannel contact strategy was used, supported by three complementary channels:

- The first channel consisted of sending emails to shelters and civil-society organizations that provide care to people in mobility. The team worked with a directory of 181 organizations, of which approximately 15% responded. This response rate reflects the operational limitations, institutional overload, and heterogeneity of capacities within the migrant care network, as well as the need to complement formal channels with more direct and relational contact strategies.

- The second channel consisted of existing professional networks and trusted referrals available to the consulting team, which helped open doors in locations where formal institutional channels were insufficient. This channel was important for building trust, identifying local counterparts, and activating connections with stakeholders who are directly familiar with the place-based dynamics of care.

- The third channel consisted of project-introduction meetings with key stakeholders, aimed at explaining the study's objectives, clarifying how the information would be used, addressing ethical concerns, and enabling access to the target population. This strategy was particularly important in border cities such as Tijuana, Baja California, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, where openness to the topic and the presence of specialized organizations facilitated more substantive conversations about potential support pathways.

This strategy made it possible to reduce dependence on a single contact mechanism and increased the study's capacity to adapt to different institutional contexts. It also confirmed that access to the returnees and migrants in mobility does not depend solely on the formal

existence of services, but on relationships of trust, operational availability, security conditions, and the real intermediation capacity of local stakeholders.

### 3.3.3 Source triangulation

The methodological design relied on the triangulation of sources of evidence, which made it possible to weigh magnitudes against meanings and enrich the interpretation of the data. Triangulation was especially important given the complexity of the migration phenomenon and the exploratory-applied nature of the research. By combining direct observation, surveys, interviews, and desk review, the study was able to approach both general patterns and situated experiences.

The first source consisted of **11 field visits**, which provided direct observation of the care settings, the operating conditions of shelters and institutional spaces, as well as the place-based dynamics that affect participant recruitment.

The second source was the quantitative component. During data collection, 417 interviewer-assisted structured surveys were administered. After the process of review, cleaning, and completeness validation, a valid analytical sample of **392 complete surveys** was assembled. Of these, 336 corresponded to young people aged 18 to 35, which makes them the target analytical subsample for analyses focused on returning or in-mobility migrant youth. The result was above the committed range of 250 to 350 surveys, which strengthens the descriptive robustness of the quantitative component. Throughout the document, figures are reported on a general analytical sample of N = 392 or on a youth analytical subsample of N = 336, depending on the question considered.

The third source was the qualitative component. **24 in-depth semi-structured interviews** were conducted with migrants and people involved in migration issues, within the committed range of 15 to 25 interviews. These interviews underpin the qualitative analysis of trajectories, barriers, expectations, and reintegration conditions. Additionally, **12 interviews** were conducted with managers or staff of shelters and civil-society organizations supporting migrant populations, to inform the Composite Marginalization Index and the analysis of the care ecosystem. In total, **the study included 36 semi-structured interviews.**

This combination of sources made it possible to strengthen the interpretive validity of the analysis. The surveys provided structure and comparability; the interviews made it possible to delve into meanings, trajectories, and barriers; and the field visits provided operational and territorial context. From an evaluation and programmatic-design perspective, this

triangulation made it possible to move from describing profiles to identifying concrete implications for the design of support pathways, training, certification, and job placement.

## 3.4 Data-collection instruments

The data-collection instruments were built on the basis of **international taxonomies** of occupations, skills, competencies, and tasks, in order to ensure greater comparability and programmatic usefulness of the information. This decision was important because the target population has heterogeneous employment trajectories, often developed in informal, temporary, cross-border, or non-certified contexts. Consequently, the study required instruments capable of **translating diverse experiences into a common language of workforce analysis.**

The architecture of the instruments integrated four main reference frameworks. First, the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), of the International Labour Organization, was used as a reference for organizing occupations according to tasks, duties, and skill levels. Second, the European Union's ESCO classification, helped guide the identification of skills, competencies, and occupations through a taxonomy useful for matching profiles to training and employment opportunities. Third, the competency models of the United States Department of Labor provided a reference for identifying foundational, cross-cutting, and industry competencies associated with employability. Finally, O*NET made it possible to consider tasks, activities, knowledge, skills, and occupational requirements tied to the U.S. labor market.

This common architecture makes it possible to translate heterogeneous trajectories into a standardized language that is comparable across sites. From a workforce development perspective, the use of these taxonomies facilitates three analytical operations: classifying prior occupations, identifying transferable skills, and exploring correspondences among work experience, training needs, and potential pathways for labor-market insertion. Both the questionnaire and the differentiated interview guides can be consulted in the documents attached to the report.

### 3.4.1 Structured survey

The structured survey was designed as an interviewer-assisted instrument to characterize respondents' sociodemographic profiles, migration trajectories, work experience, skills, support needs, reintegration barriers, and interest in training, skills certification, job placement, or other employment pathways.

Although the questionnaire had an estimated duration of approximately twenty minutes, in the field the actual duration ranged from 20 to 95 minutes. This variation arose because, in several cases, administering the instrument opened up spaces for listening and narrative support. Given the vulnerability of many participants, some surveys turned into broader conversations about experiences of return, family separation, uncertainty, immediate needs, and job expectations.

All surveys were conducted in person with interviewer assistance. This format made it possible to reduce comprehension barriers, clarify questions, support people with different levels of education or digital literacy, and improve the quality of the information gathered. It also made it possible to observe contextual nuances that would have been difficult to capture through a self-administered survey.

### 3.4.2 Semi-structured interview guide

The semi-structured interviews had an estimated duration of between 25 and 60 minutes. Their purpose was to delve into dimensions that the survey could not capture at the same level of detail: migration trajectories, work experiences, non-certified learning, documentation barriers, family ties, support networks, expectations of staying or moving, emotional health, relationships with institutions, and conditions for a possible entry into employment or training.

The migrants interviewed were given an incentive of 500.00 Mexican pesos, approximately US$22. The incentive was provided as compensation for participants' time and did not affect their right to decline participation, skip questions, or withdraw at any point.

The interview guide shares the same international taxonomic basis used in the survey — ISCO, ESCO, USDOL competency models, and O*NET— in order to ensure analytical comparability. However, unlike the survey, the interview made it possible to explore how people narrate, interpret, and translate their own work experiences and skills. This distinction was key to identifying transferable competencies that do not always appear as formal occupations, but that may be relevant for training, certification, or job placement pathways.

### 3.4.3 Production of charts and analytical visualizations

The charts and visualizations included in this document were produced through a reproducible workflow for data processing, analysis, and visualization, using mainly R and Python for the quantitative component and ATLAS.ti to support qualitative systematization and analysis. This workflow made it possible to transform the data-collection datasets, job

openings, stakeholder matrices, and sectoral codings into consistent, traceable outputs that are comparable across chapters.

In the case of the quantitative information, the datasets were first reviewed, cleaned, and structured to ensure consistency in variable names, response categories, missing values, inclusion filters, and analytical universes. From this process, descriptive tabulations, cross-tabulations by city or subgroup, composite indicators, year-over-year comparisons, sectoral distributions, gap matrices, network visualizations, scatter plots, flow diagrams, and specialized charts such as UpSet and Sankey were generated. When the analysis required distinguishing between the general analytical sample and the youth target subsample, the visualizations were generated with the corresponding universe, as indicated in the text or in the figure title.

For the qualitative component, ATLAS.ti was used as a support tool to organize interviews, field notes, and narrative evidence, making it possible to identify codes, thematic patterns, recurrences, barriers, stakeholders, and relationships among analytical dimensions. The findings derived from this process were subsequently integrated into interpretive matrices and, where appropriate, translated into visual schematics, concept maps, or synthetic representations of the care ecosystem, the reintegration chain, and the gaps in institutional capacity.




All visualizations were designed for an analytical purpose and not merely an illustrative one. Their aim was to synthesize relevant patterns, facilitate comparison across locations, show relationships among variables, represent the accumulation of barriers, identify competency gaps, and communicate key findings for programmatic decision-making. In this sense, the charts function as inputs for applied interpretation for the design of the pilot, and should therefore be read in conjunction with the analytical text that accompanies them.

# Chapter 4. Returnees and Migrants in Mobility

This chapter presents the sociodemographic, migration, educational, and language profile of the returnees and migrants in mobility identified by the study. Its purpose is to answer a central program-design question: who are the young people that a workforce development support model would seek to serve?

Reading the profile is not limited to describing frequencies. From a social and labor-market reintegration perspective, the characteristics observed make it possible to identify starting conditions, potential barriers, accumulated assets, and differentiated support needs. In this sense, the chapter seeks to translate the descriptive findings into programmatic implications for designing pathways for guidance, training, certification, and job placement.

The overall findings point to a population that is largely recently arrived in Mexico, highly exposed to the United States, marked by long migration trajectories, and characterized by low to moderate educational attainment and limited formal English proficiency. At the same time, the data show more widespread functional use of English than self-reported proficiency alone would suggest, along with work and adaptation experiences that may serve as assets for productive reintegration[1].

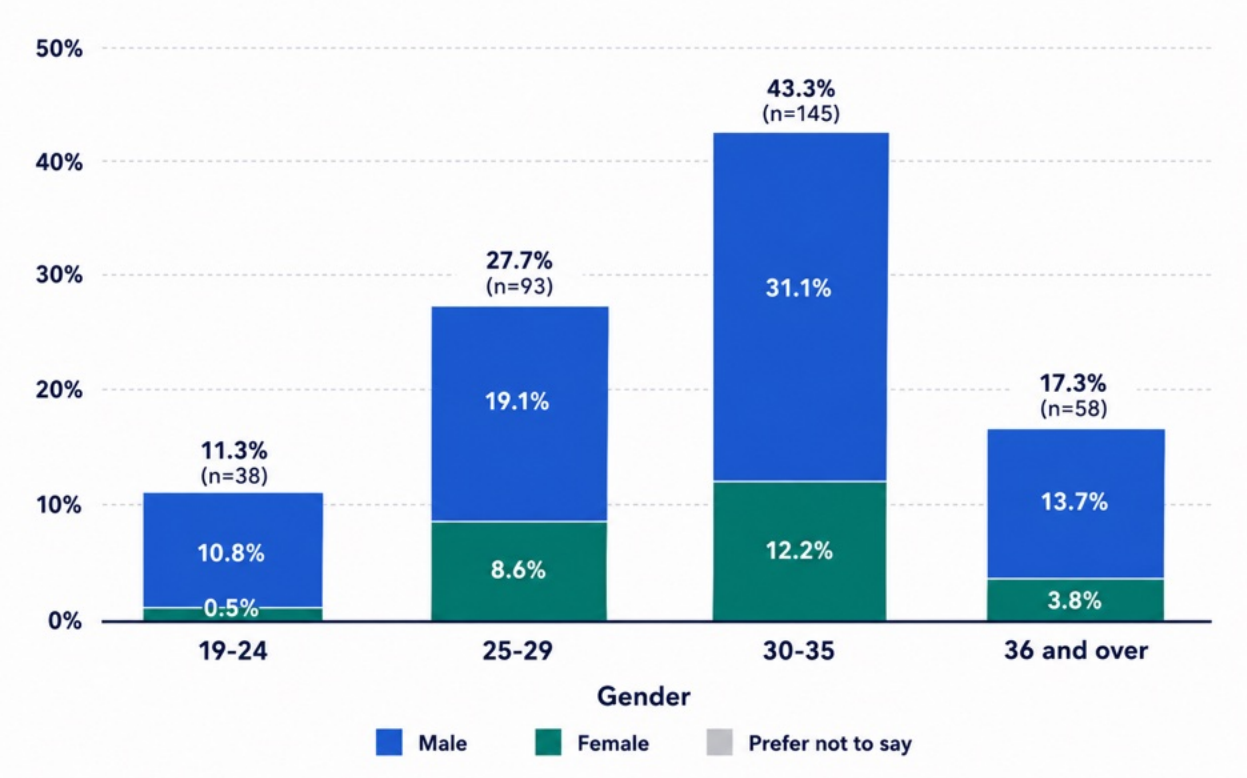
## 4.1 Sociodemographic characteristics

**Age.** The sample is concentrated among a young-adult population in their prime working years. Approximately 44% of respondents are between 30 and 35 years old, which places the study's center of gravity in a group that combines youth, accumulated work experience, and potentially significant family or economic responsibilities.

This finding is important from a workforce development perspective. People in this age group are not necessarily entering the workforce for the first time; rather, they are often rebuilding, redirecting, or reactivating existing work trajectories.

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, the descriptive results in this chapter are presented for the valid analytical sample of N = 392. When the analysis refers exclusively to young people, the target analytical subsample of N = 336 is used, corresponding to people aged 18 to 35.

***Figure 11.*** *Distribution of the sample by age group.*

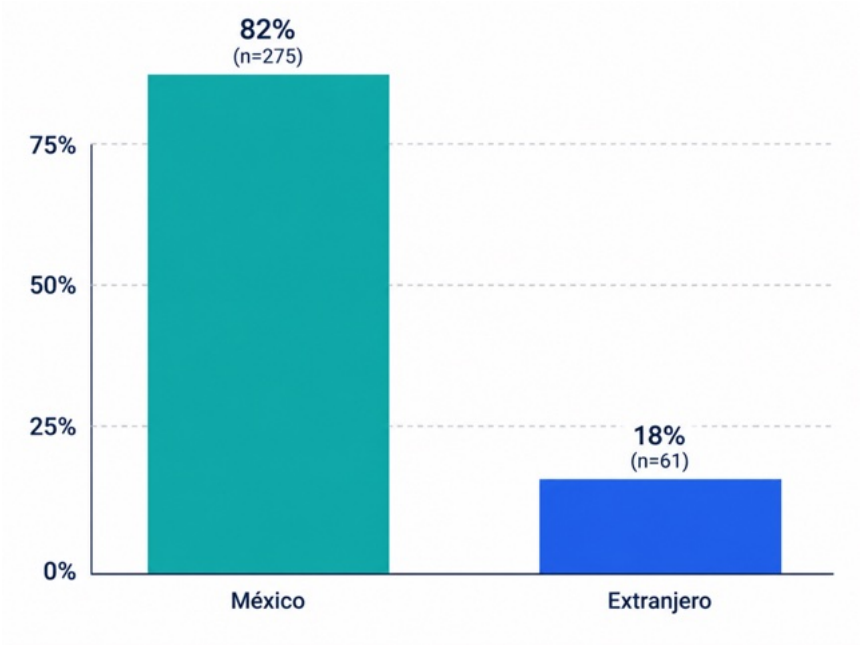



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

**Place of birth.** Some 82% of respondents were born in Mexico, while the remaining 18% are foreign-born. This composition confirms that the study primarily captured a returning Mexican population, but it also incorporated the trajectories of people of other nationalities in mobility, transit, waiting, or eventual settlement in Mexico.

Among those born in Mexico, the sample shows a geographic concentration of **origin in states along the country's Bajío–central–south corridor**, with the presence of **Chihuahua as an atypical node in the north**. Among respondents born in Mexico, Chihuahua accounts for a larger share of states of birth than Baja California, even though both states were included as data-collection sites. This suggests that the geographic distribution of place of birth is not simply a reflection of where the fieldwork took place. Rather, the sample captures a broader dispersion of origins, with visible concentrations in states historically linked to Mexico–United States migration.

***Figure 12.*** *Country of birth of the sample (82% Mexico).*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

***Figure 13.*** *Geographic distribution of place of birth in Mexico.*



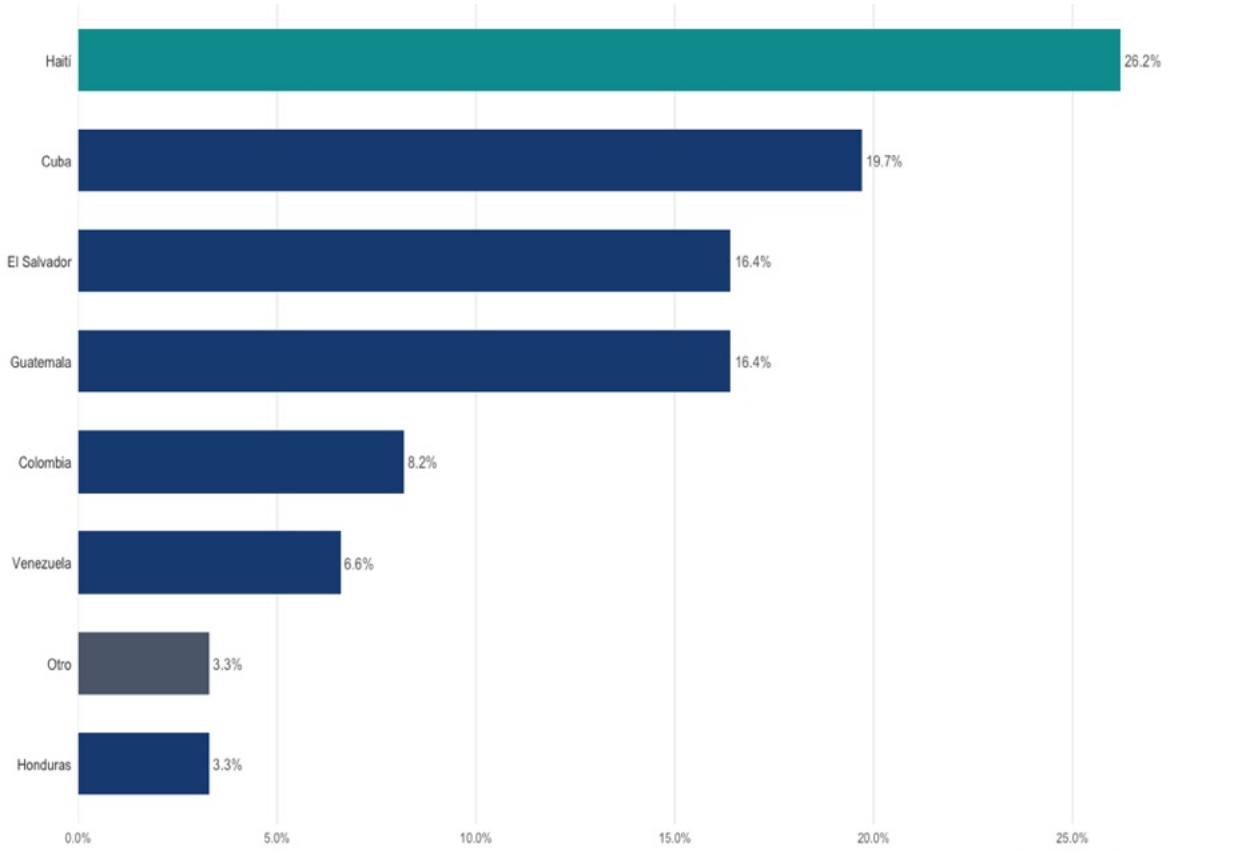

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

**Nationality and migration corridors.** Among the foreign-born population, Haiti accounts for the largest share of the sample. The geographic pattern by nationality suggests that international migration does not follow uniform settlement or transit patterns, but rather responds to specific corridors, pre-existing migration networks, waiting opportunities, and differing reception conditions.

The Haitian population is heavily concentrated in Tijuana, while Ciudad Juárez emerges as a more relevant point for people from Guatemala and El Salvador. The remaining nationalities are distributed more diffusely toward the center-south of the country.

From a programmatic perspective, this finding suggests that a pilot model must distinguish between at least two profiles: Mexicans returning from the United States and foreign nationals in mobility or waiting in Mexico. Although both groups may share labor-market and social barriers, their documentation needs, regularization pathways, support networks, and time horizons for remaining may differ.

***Figure 14.*** *Distribution by nationality and migration corridors.*



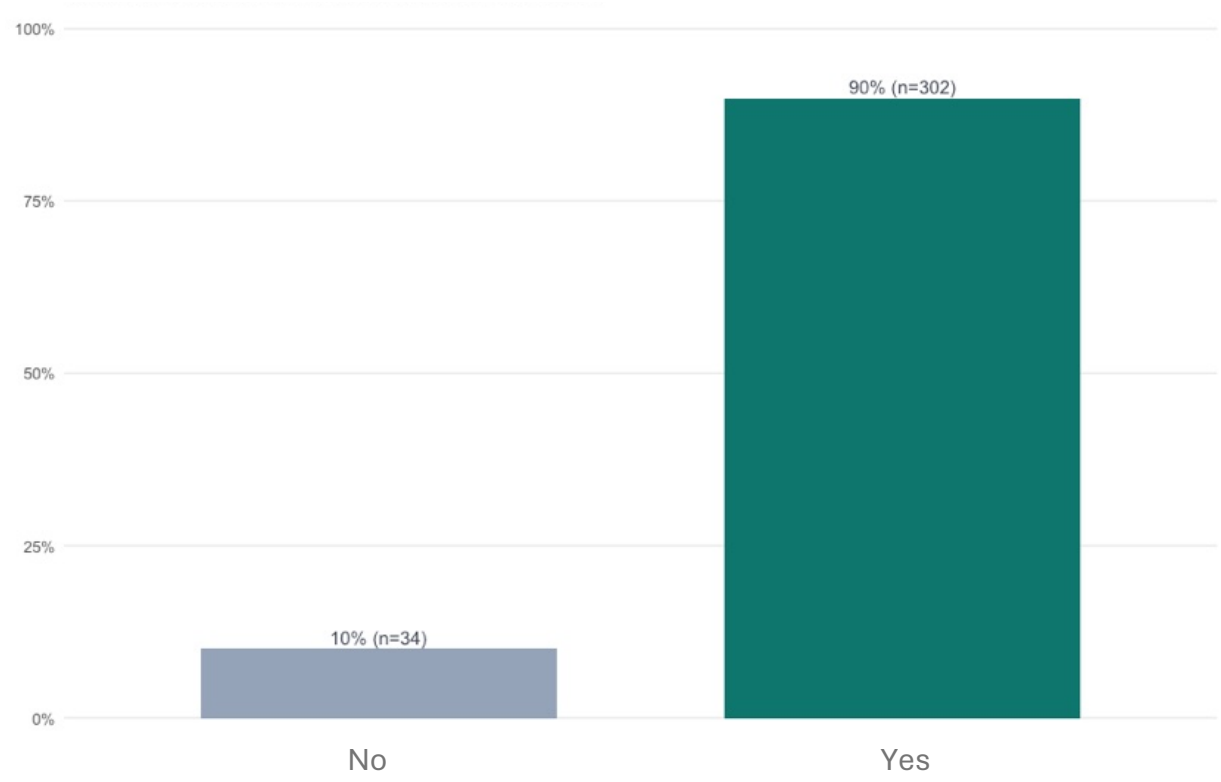

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

## 4.2 Return and Mobility Trajectories

**Experience in the United States.** Nine out of ten respondents reported having lived in the United States, confirming a profile dominated by return from that country. This figure is central to the study, because it suggests that a substantial portion of the sample has experience of living, working, cultural adaptation, or institutional exposure in the United States.

Nonetheless, the 10% who had not lived in the United States represent a group with interrupted or reoriented migration trajectories, for whom Mexico functions as a space for waiting, resolving their migration status, prolonged transit, potential settlement. This group matters because it broadens the study's reading: not all people in mobility require "reintegration" processes in the strict sense; some require integration, stabilization, or labor-market entry pathways in Mexico.

***Figure 15.*** *Share of people who lived in the United States.*



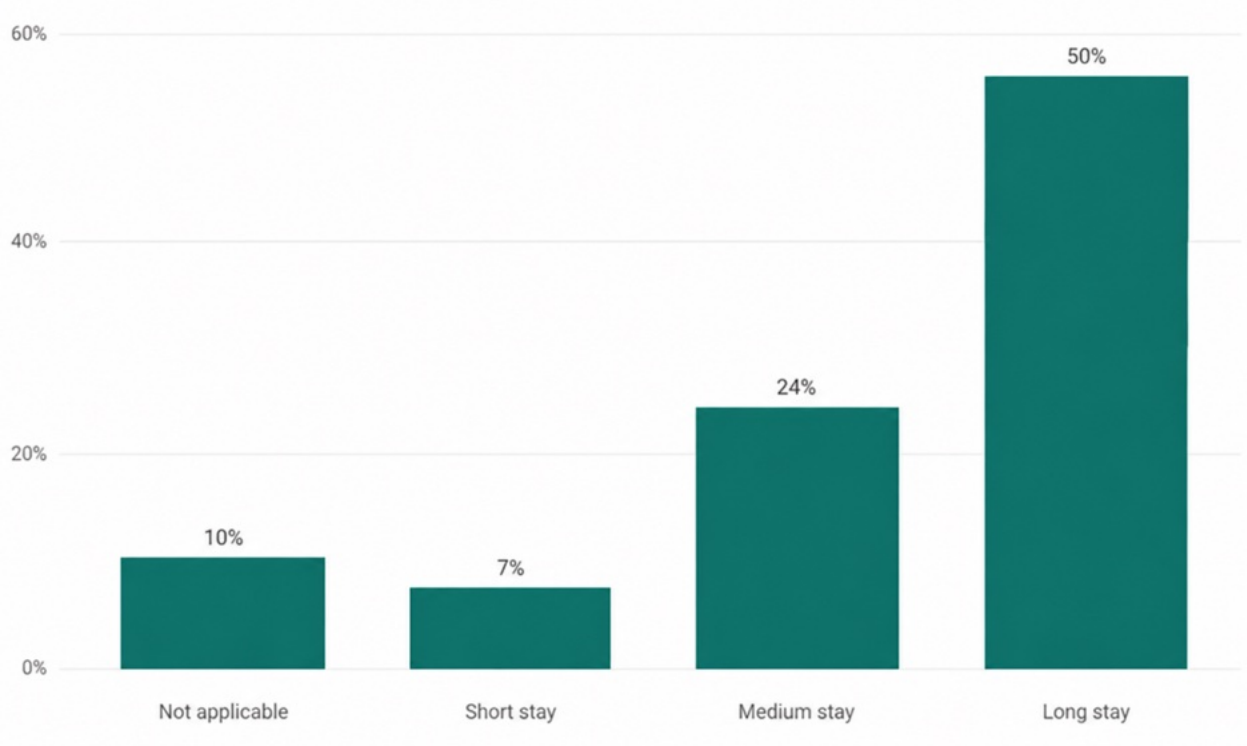

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

**Length of stay.** Long-duration migration trajectories predominate. Six out of ten people lived in the United States for more than five years, and one in three for over a decade. This level of rootedness points to prolonged processes of social and labor-market integration prior to return or to the interruption of the migration project.

People with prolonged stays may have accumulated significant work experience, occupational learning, work habits, cultural reference points, and, in some cases, functional language skills.

However, they may also face greater mismatches upon return: unfamiliarity with the Mexican labor market, loss of local networks, lack of up-to-date national documentation, difficulties validating studies or work experience, and gaps between the expectations built up in the United States and the real opportunities available in Mexico.

***Figure 16.*** *Length of stay in the United States.*

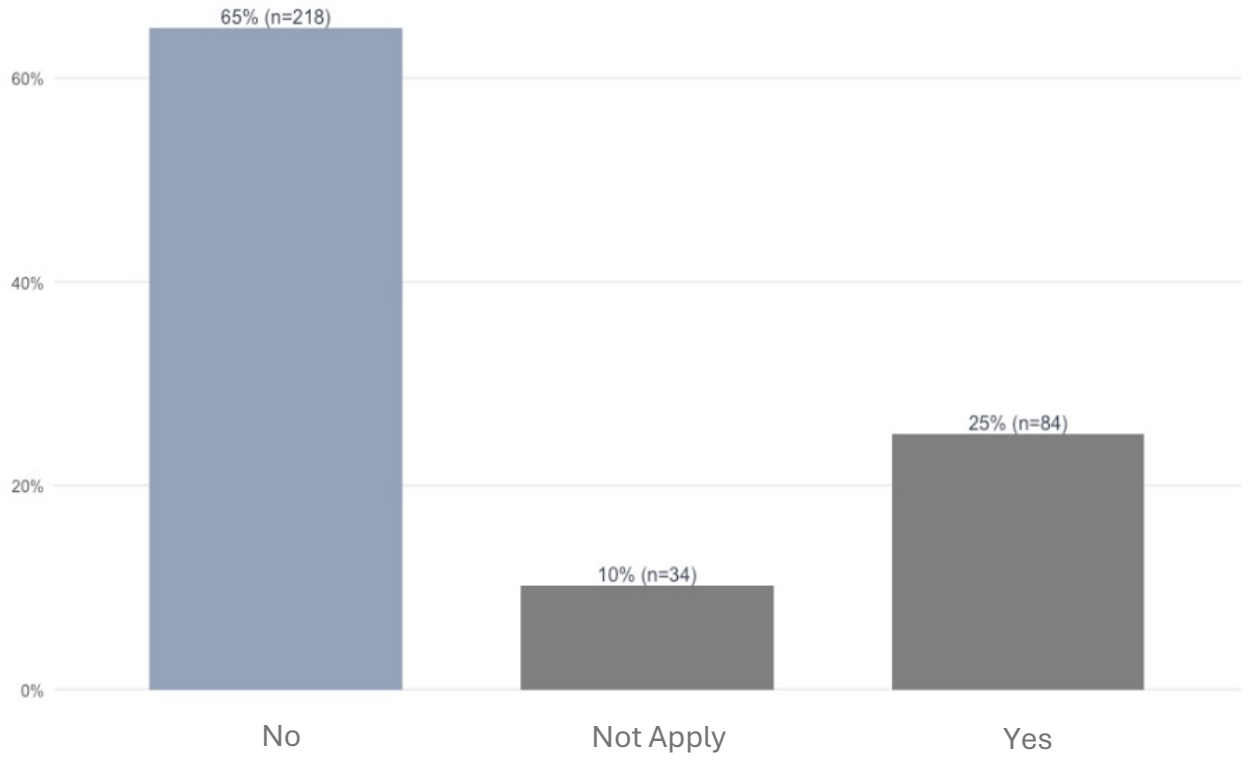



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

**Migration cycles.** The experience of a single migration cycle predominates. Most people did not report multiple back-and-forth trips to the United States, which points to **trajectories that are more linear than circular.**

From a reintegration perspective, this point is relevant because people with a single migration cycle may face a sharper rupture upon returning to or remaining in Mexico. Unlike those who have developed recurrent circular-mobility strategies, this group may once again have less familiarity with local support networks, administrative procedures, job opportunities, and institutional conditions in Mexico.

***Figure 17.*** *Number of migration cycles to the United States.*

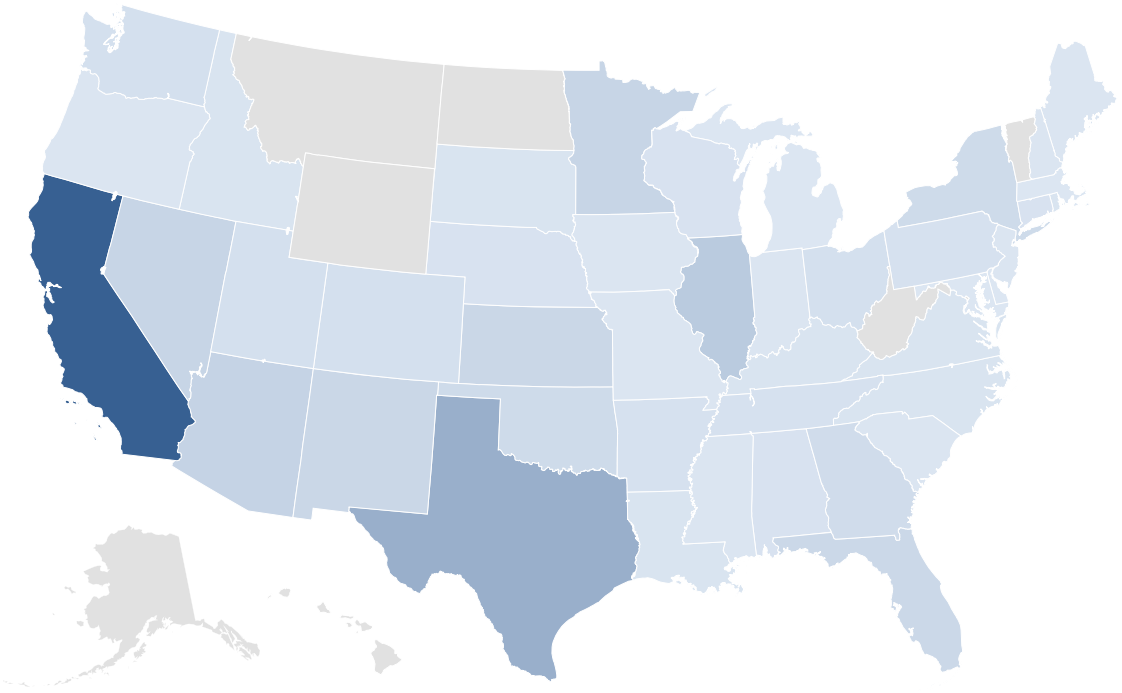



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

**States of residence in the United States.** As shown in Figure 18, California and Texas account for the predominant migration experience, at 28% and 12%, respectively. Illinois appears at a second level, with 6%, followed at a lower relative weight by Arizona, Nevada, and Minnesota, at around 4% each. This pattern suggests a relatively focused geographic concentration in certain U.S. states, rather than a fully open dispersion.

The concentration in California and Texas is consistent with the historical importance of both states as migration destinations for Mexican and Latin American populations.

***Figure 18.*** *U.S. states where the sample resided.*

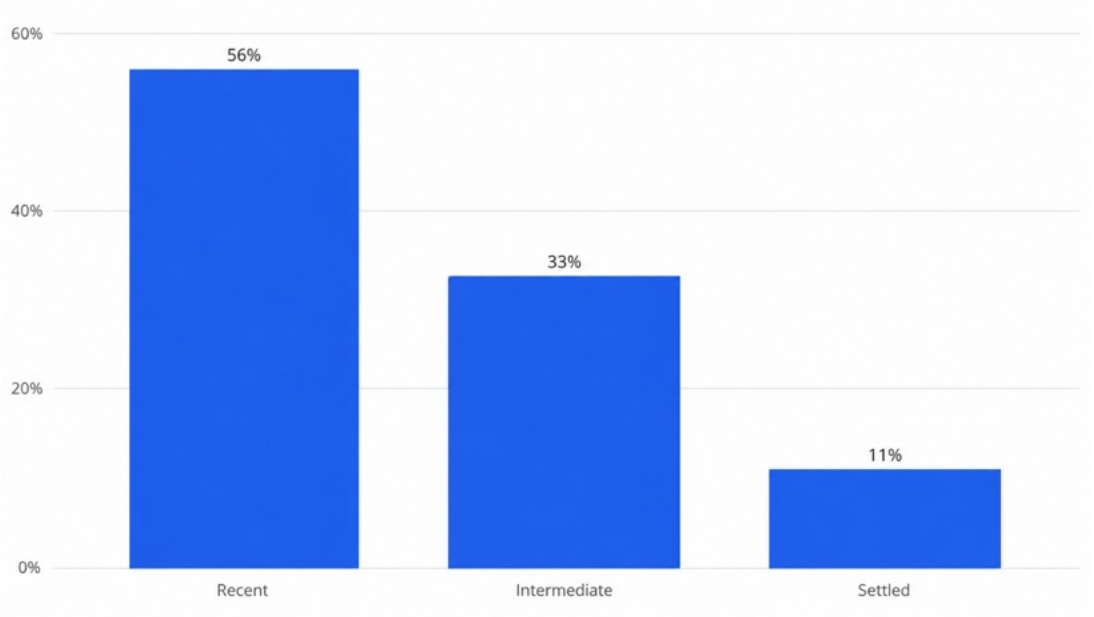


**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample.

**Time in Mexico since arrival.** At the time of data collection, the recently arrived population predominated: 56% have been in Mexico for less than three months. This places much of the sample in an initial phase of return, transit, or temporary settlement, marked by immediate needs for guidance, regularization, documentation, job placement, access to services, and the rebuilding of support networks.

From the perspective of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), post-return reintegration should be understood as a multidimensional process that may include economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions, and not solely as physical arrival in the country of origin. In this sense, length of stay in Mexico helps identify the moment for intervention and the type of support required.

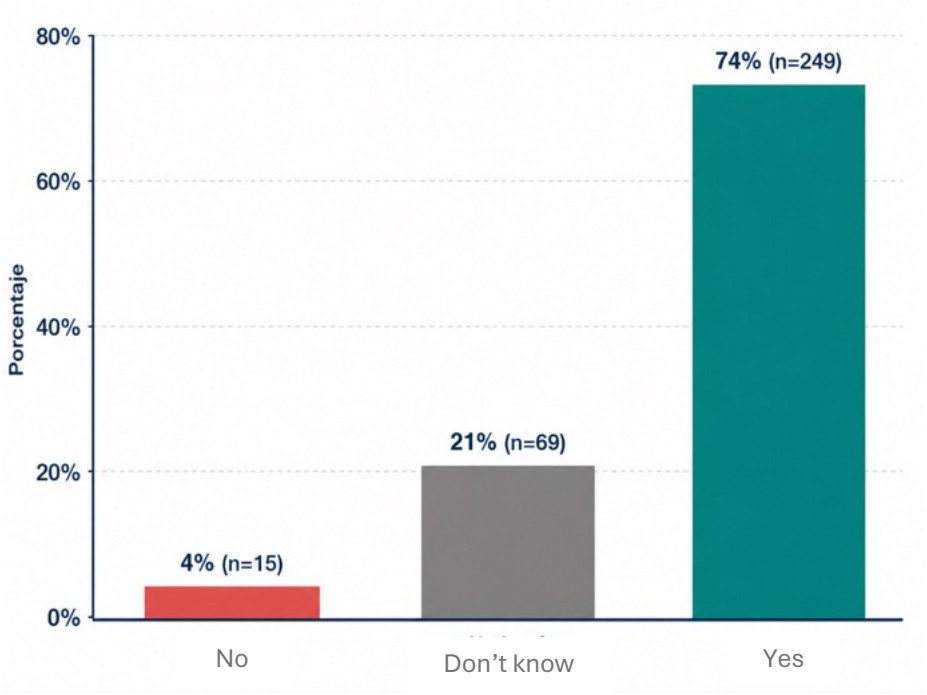
***Figure 19.*** *Length of stay in Mexico since arrival.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

**Plans to remain in Mexico.** Some 75% of respondents indicated that they plan to stay in Mexico for at least the next twelve months. However, this result should not necessarily be interpreted as an intention to settle in Mexico permanently.

***Figure 20.*** *Intention to remain in Mexico over the next 12 months.*

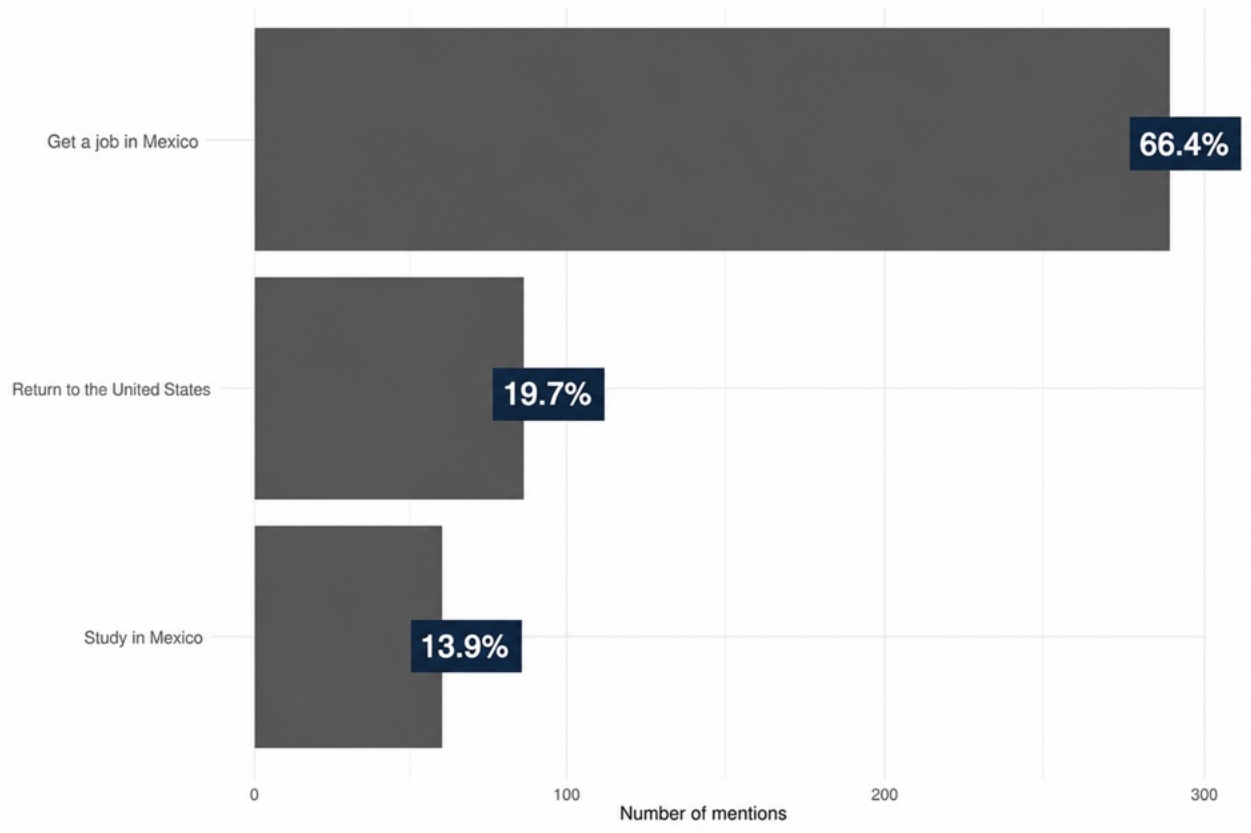



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

In many cases, especially among recent arrivals or those with family ties in the United States, remaining may reflect a temporary logic of waiting, shaped by uncertainty about the U.S. political and migration context, the possibility of regularizing documentation, the need to generate income, or the search for future mobility options. Several respondents indicated that they will stay in Mexico until the situation in the United States changes.

**Intention to return to the United States.** About 20% of people intend to return to the United States, compared with a majority—around two-thirds—who do not contemplate such a return and a share of close to 14% who remain undecided. This figure qualifies the reading on rootedness: for part of the population, Mexico functions as a space for transition, waiting, or reorganizing options, not necessarily as a final destination.

***Figure 21.*** *Intention to return to the United States.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

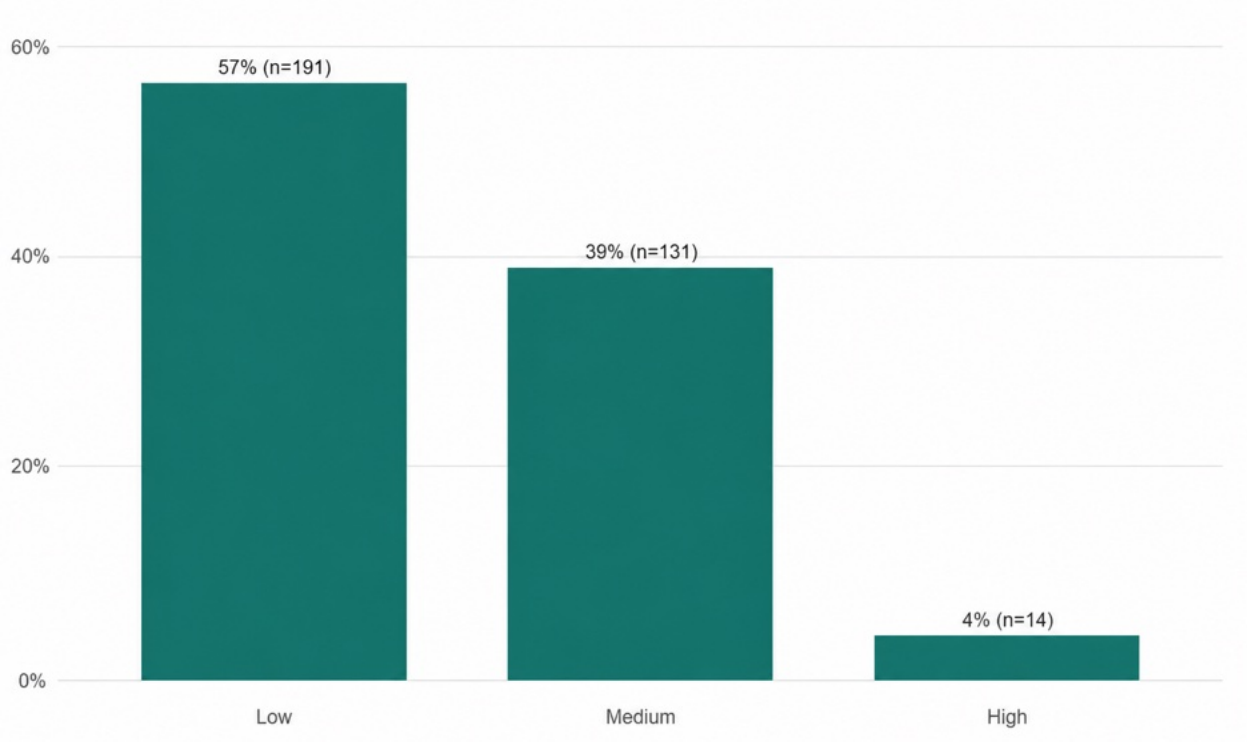
## 4.3 Educational profile

Educational profiles of low and medium educational attainment predominate, frequently with unfinished trajectories. Some 57% of the sample falls within a low educational level and 39% within a medium level. The breakdown by grade shows a strong concentration in incomplete lower secondary and upper secondary education.

This pattern reinforces the need to design labor-market entry pathways based less on completed academic credentials and more on demonstrable competencies, flexible certification, modular training, and recognition of prior learning. It suggests that a substantial share of the population could face barriers to immediate access to jobs that require certificates, school records, or formal levels of educational attainment.

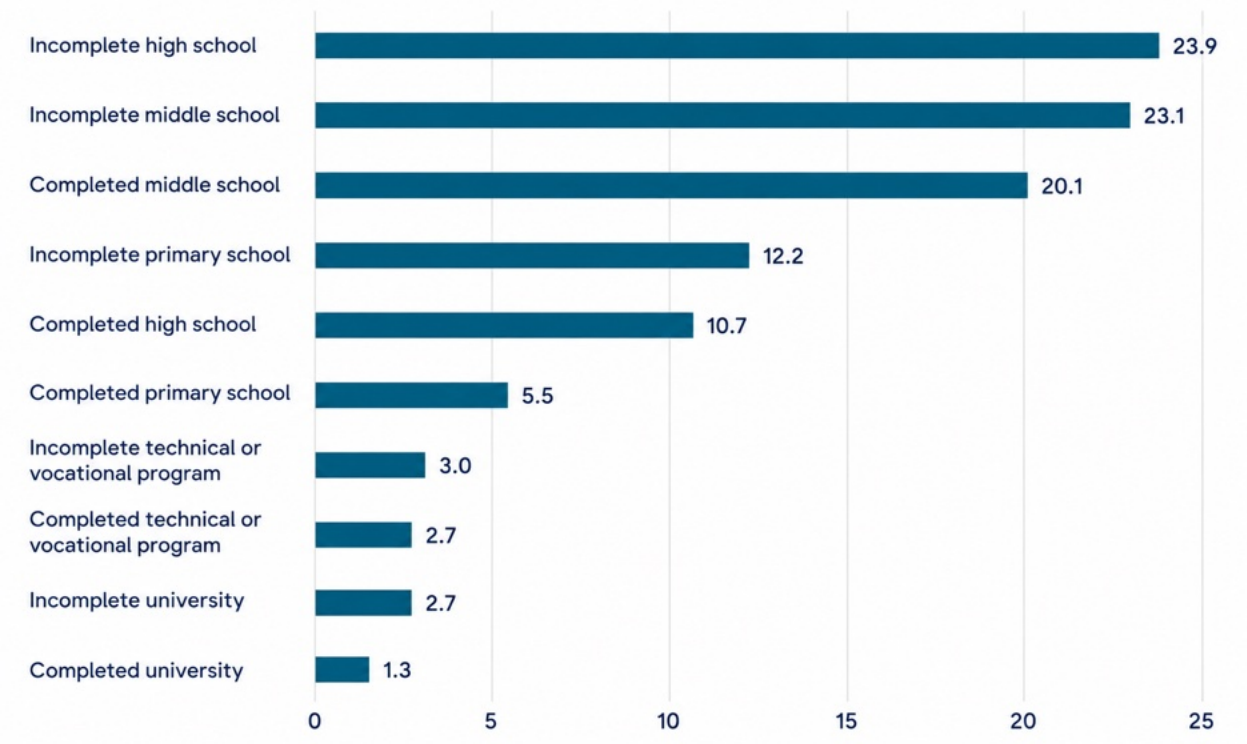
The International Labour Organization (ILO) has noted that the recognition of prior learning can help people without formal qualifications obtain a certification that reflects knowledge and skills acquired in formal, non-formal, or informal settings. This approach is especially relevant for returning migrants, whose work experience may have been accumulated outside the credential frameworks recognized in Mexico.

***Figure 22.*** *Detailed educational attainment of the sample.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

*Figure 23. Educational attainment grouped by level.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

## 4.4 English proficiency and functional use

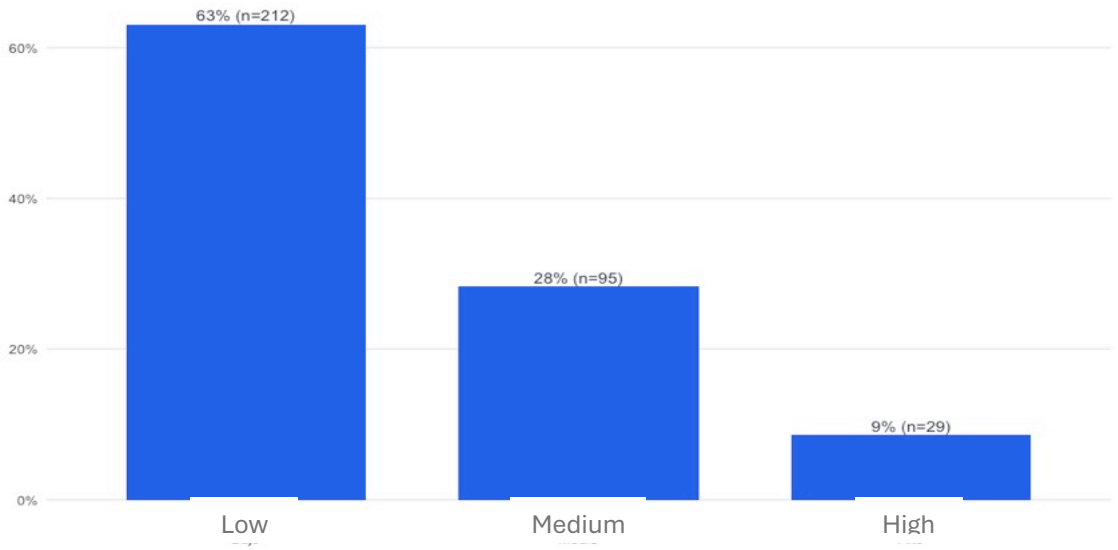
Although most respondents had migration experience in the United States, **63% self-report a basic or very basic level of English**. This result suggests that formal command of the language may pose a barrier to immediate access to higher-value-added occupations, particularly those that require constant interaction with customers, supervisors, or English-language work systems.

That said, the use of English in prior jobs was more significant than the self-reported level suggests. That is, when asked how much and in what ways they used English in their jobs in the United States, **56% report having used it at least occasionally in their last job, and 28% used it more frequently**. This gap between declared proficiency and functional use is analytically important: a person may not identify as an intermediate or advanced English speaker yet still possess occupational vocabulary, a practical understanding of instructions, basic interaction skills, or experience in bilingual environments—which in itself constitutes a high-potential cross-cutting skill.

This distinction opens up an opportunity. Rather than assuming that low self-reported proficiency excludes this population from sectors that require English, the pilot's design

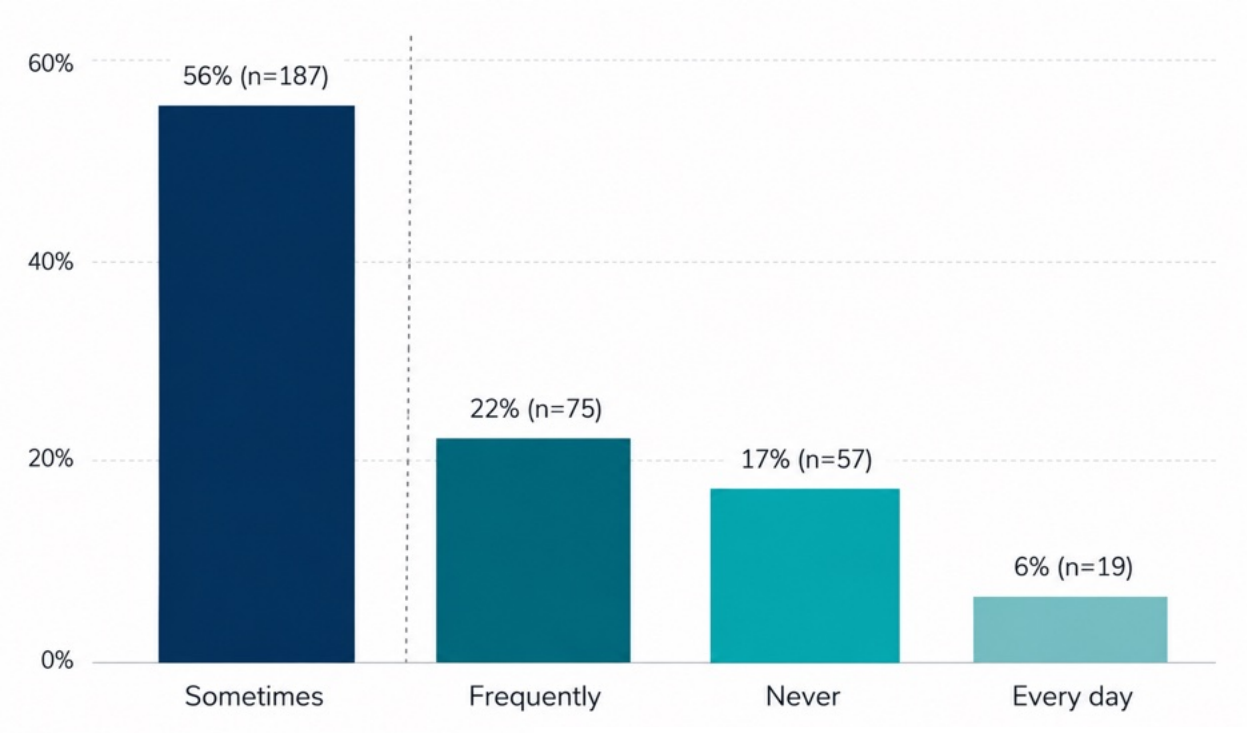
could incorporate mechanisms for practical language assessment, work-oriented language upskilling, and differentiated pathways according to functional level. For certain profiles, English may be a barrier to entry; for others, it can become a usable asset if strengthened through contextualized training.

***Figure 24.*** *Self-reported level of English.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

***Figure 25.*** *Frequency of English use in the last job.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

## 4.5 Analytical reading of the profile

The observed profile reveals a diverse population. First, it consists mainly of returning Mexicans, though with a significant presence of foreign-born individuals that requires broadening the lens beyond national return. This composition confirms that **Mexico functions simultaneously as a country of return, transit, waiting, and potential integration.**

Second, the sample is concentrated among **young adults**, with migration experience in the United States and trajectories of prolonged stay. This means that many people do not arrive without work or social experience, but rather with accumulated learning, work habits, exposure to different labor markets, and possible transferable skills. The challenge is not only to train from scratch, but to identify, organize, recognize, and connect these capabilities with real opportunities in Mexico.

Third, the recent arrival of a significant portion of the sample shows that reintegration takes place under conditions of high vulnerability and uncertainty. Return should not be assumed to be a closed event, but rather a **transition process.**

Fourth, the educational and linguistic profile reveals a central tension for design from a workforce development perspective. On the one hand, low or medium educational attainment may limit access to formal employment, advanced technical pathways, or sectors that require credentials. On the other hand, work experience, the functional use of English, and the capabilities acquired in migration contexts can constitute valuable assets if they are translated into a language of competencies, complemented with modular training, and connected with employers willing to recognize skills beyond traditional academic certificates.

The population is not a homogeneous group or to a single return pathway. The study identifies at least three segments relevant to the pilot's design:

1. Returning Mexicans who arrived recently, with prior work experience and a need for stabilization, guidance, and initial placement.

2. People with long stays in the United States, practical skills, and possible functional use of English, who could benefit from pathways for competency recognition, language upskilling, and connection to the services, logistics, manufacturing, hospitality, or customer service sectors.

3. Foreign nationals in mobility or waiting in Mexico, whose needs may combine labor-market entry, documentation guidance, access to services, and the clarification of their expected length of stay.

These segments suggest that the pilot's design should avoid a single pathway. Instead, it is advisable to envision a modular and differentiated model, capable of combining stabilization, skills assessment, recognition of prior learning, short-term training, strengthening of functional English, flexible certification, and job placement.



# Chapter 5. Skills, Work Experience, and Employment Pathways

This chapter analyzes the skills, occupational trajectories, and employability conditions of the returnees and migrants in mobility identified by the study. Its purpose is to answer three questions central to the pilot's design: what work experience the target population has accumulated, which skills are transferable to sectors with labor demand, and what conditions enable or restrict their access to employment pathways.

From a workforce development perspective, the analysis goes beyond identifying respondents' most recent jobs or sectors of origin. It examines the work-related assets they have accumulated through migration and employment: tasks performed, levels of responsibility, practical skills, English use, digital readiness, existing certifications, interest in validating prior learning, and potential for reskilling toward sectors with greater formality or occupational mobility.

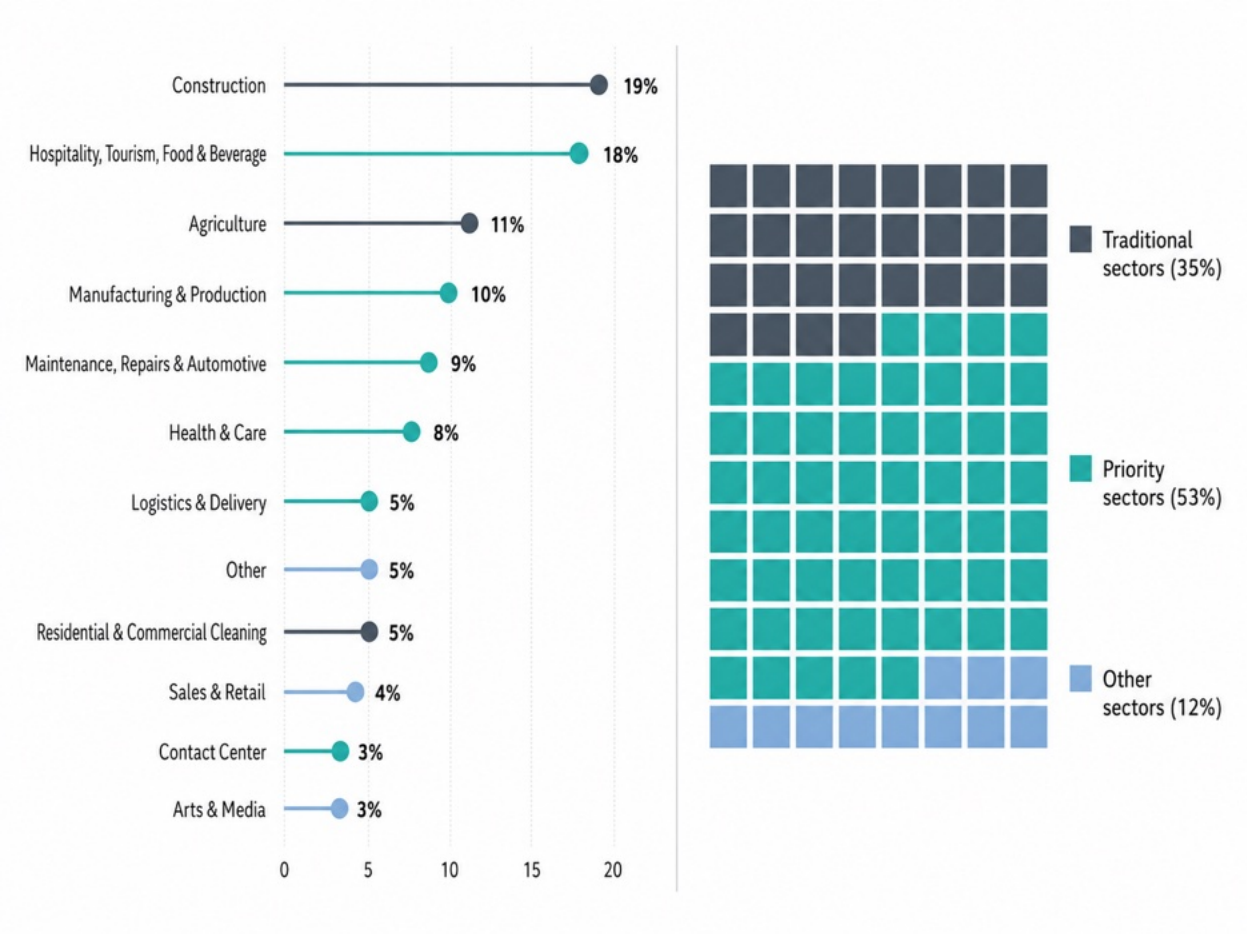
The cross-cutting finding of the chapter is that the target population does not constitute a homogeneous bloc. There are profiles with differing proximity to formal employment, different levels of labor-market activation, and unequal capacities to move into strategic sectors. In some cases, skills are already close to the language of the market, as occurs in contact center, hospitality, sales, logistics, or certain manufacturing profiles; in others, the experience is solid but remains underrecognized or hard to translate, as occurs in agriculture, cleaning, and part of construction.

## 5.1 Occupational Trajectories and Sectors of Experience

Prior work experience spans both traditional return-migration sectors and sectors with stronger potential for formal employment pathways. Traditional sectors account for 35% of reported experience, while priority sectors—hospitality, manufacturing, maintenance, health, logistics, and contact centers—represent 53%. The remaining 12% corresponds to other sectors.

This pattern shows that the target population is not located exclusively in low-transferability occupations or in sectors historically associated with labor migration. Although traditional activities still carry significant weight, there is a sufficient base to design more segmented reintegration pathways, connected to labor demand and oriented toward viable trajectories of formal employment, certification, and occupational mobility.

***Figure 26.*** *Distribution of experience by sectoral blocks (traditional, priority, and other).*

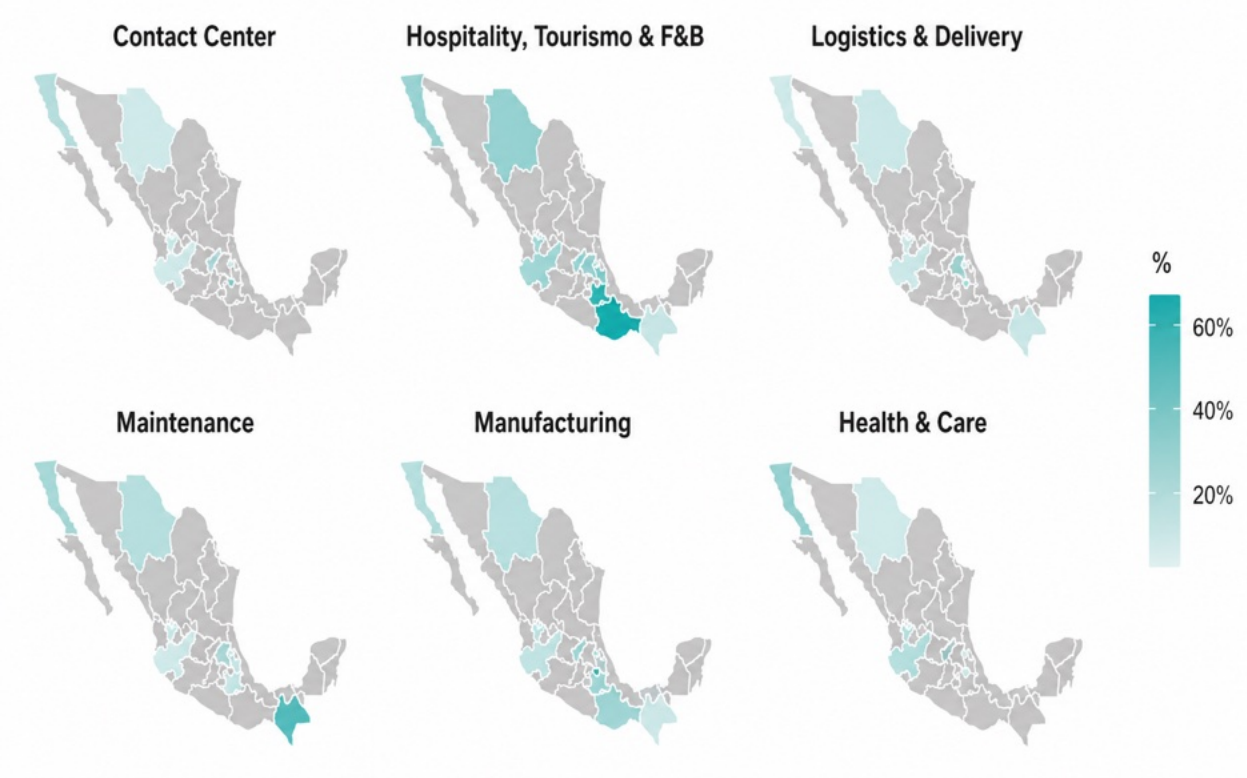



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The geographic distribution of the priority sectors also shows differentiated patterns of concentration. This makes it possible to move from a generalist strategy to a place-based targeting logic: not all locations offer the same opportunities or concentrate the same labor profiles. This information makes it possible to align three dimensions: observed profiles, local sectoral vocation, and potential training or placement partners.

In design terms, the evidence suggests that the pilot will need to combine two types of pathways. The first corresponds to relatively immediate labor-market-entry pathways for profiles with skills already close to services, customer service, logistics, light manufacturing, or contact center. The second corresponds to reskilling or staged-preparation pathways for profiles with valuable operational experience but with less immediate translation into formal job openings or higher-productivity sectors.

*Figure 27. Geographic distribution of the priority sectors.*



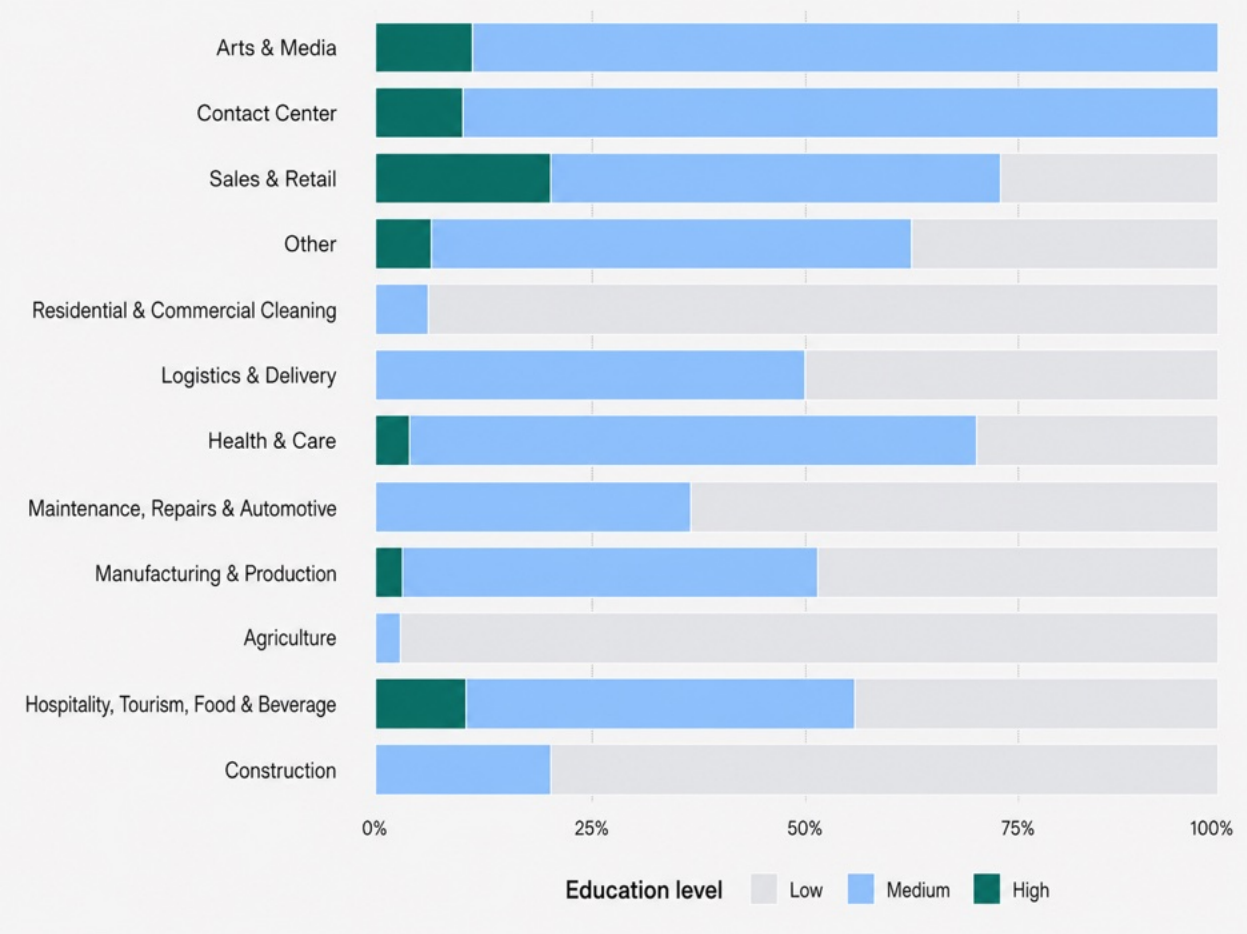

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

## 5.2 Educational Capital, Level of Responsibility, and Proximity to Employment

Educational capital is a cross-cutting factor of employability, but it is not distributed homogeneously across sectors. Contact Center, Arts and Media, and Hospitality show an educational base that could facilitate more agile placement and reskilling processes. In contrast, Construction, Agriculture, Cleaning, and part of Maintenance concentrate profiles that will likely require more staged interventions, centered on remedial leveling, recognition of prior learning, basic certification, and more intensive support.

This difference does not imply that the sectors where respondents tend to have lower levels of formal education. Rather, it indicates that the accumulated experience may be less formalized, less documented, or less aligned with the recruitment codes of the formal labor market. For this reason, if an intervention is launched, it must avoid an overly credential-based view of employability and, instead, incorporate mechanisms to identify, demonstrate, and certify practical competencies.

***Figure 28.*** *Educational capital by sector.*

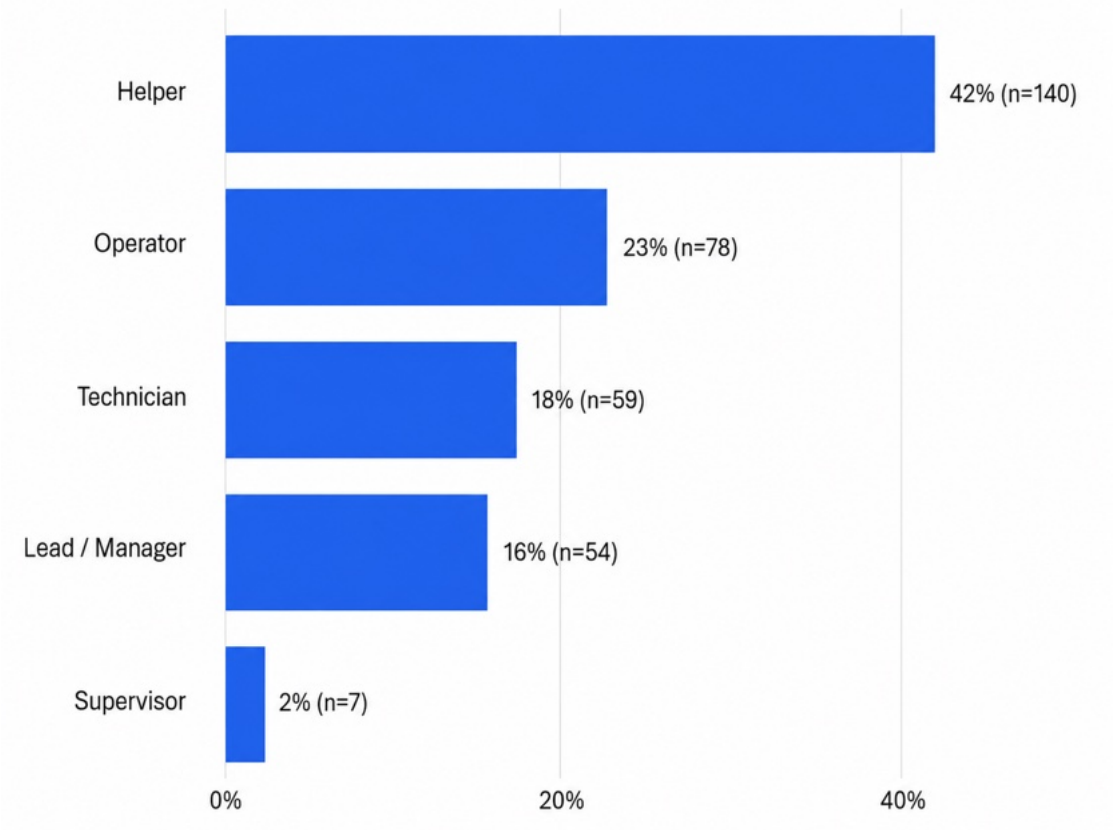



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The reported level of responsibility also provides key information about proximity to employment. Although operational experience predominates, **nearly one in three profiles has performed technical or mid-level-responsibility functions**. This finding is important because it avoids reducing the target population to a labor pool for entry-level positions.

There is a segment with accumulated experience that could move into occupational-advancement trajectories if adequate mechanisms for assessment, certification, technical updating, and engagement with employers are incorporated.

***Figure 29.*** *Level of responsibility and type of functions performed.*

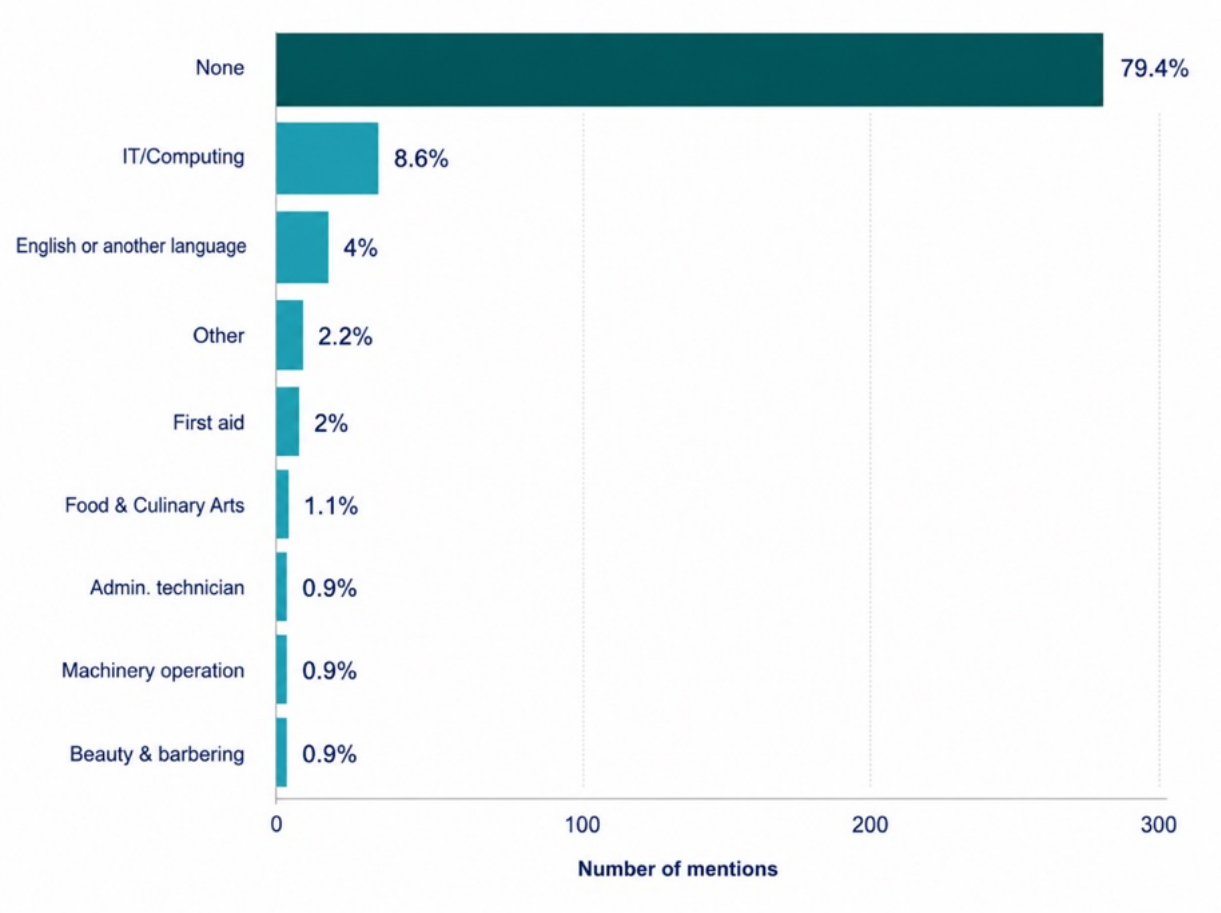



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

## 5.3 Certification of Competencies and Recognition of Prior Learning

The main challenge is not the absence of capabilities, but the lack of formal recognition. Nearly eight out of ten respondents do not hold any certification. However, when accredited training is present, it tends to be concentrated in areas with clear value for employment, such as IT and languages.

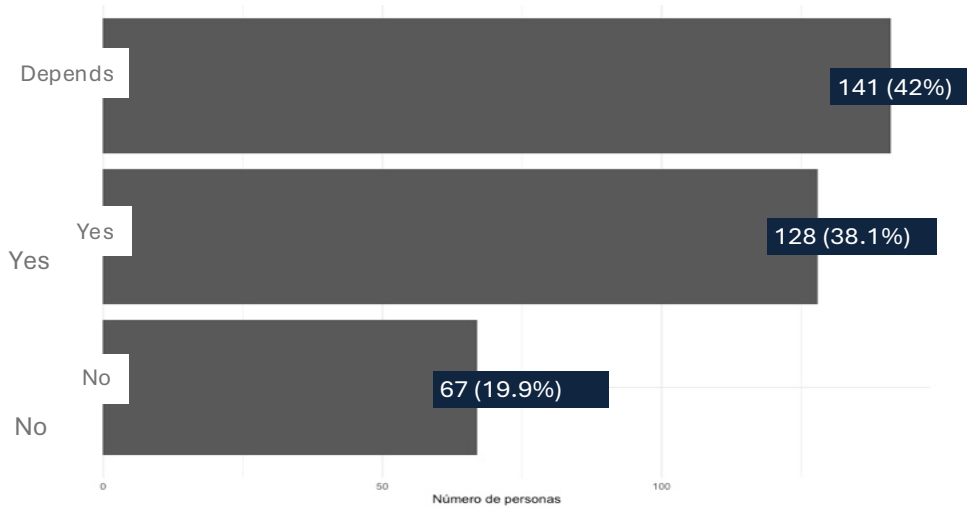
***Figure 30.*** *Existing certifications in the sample.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

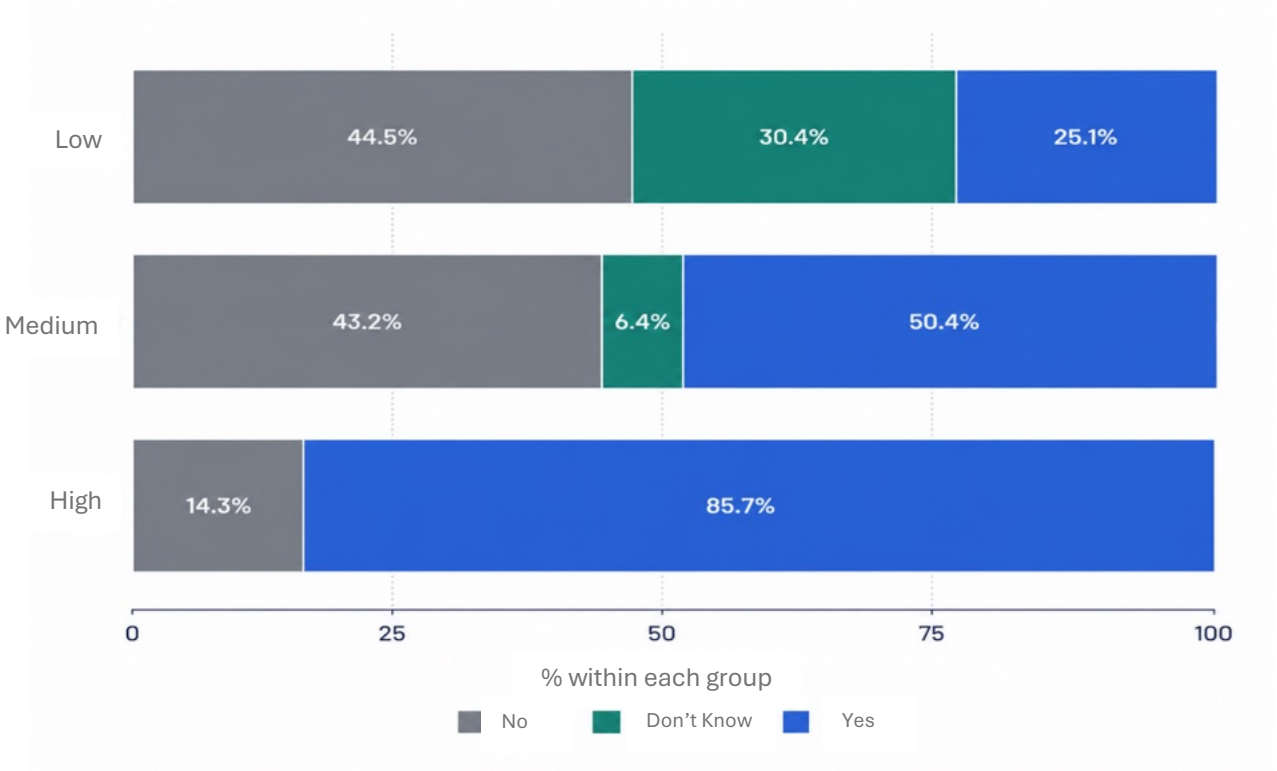
As shown in Figures 31 and 32, interest in certifying or validating knowledge reveals an opportunity, but also an operational caution. In the full analytical sample, 38.1% of respondents expressed explicit interest in certifying or validating knowledge, 42% did not express such interest, and 19.9% said their decision would depend on factors such as cost, time, or perceived usefulness. Interest rises as educational attainment grows, which suggests that people with greater educational capital more clearly recognize the instrumental value of certification.

***Figure 31.*** *Interest in certifying or validating knowledge.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

***Figure 32.*** *Interest in certifying by level of educational attainment.*

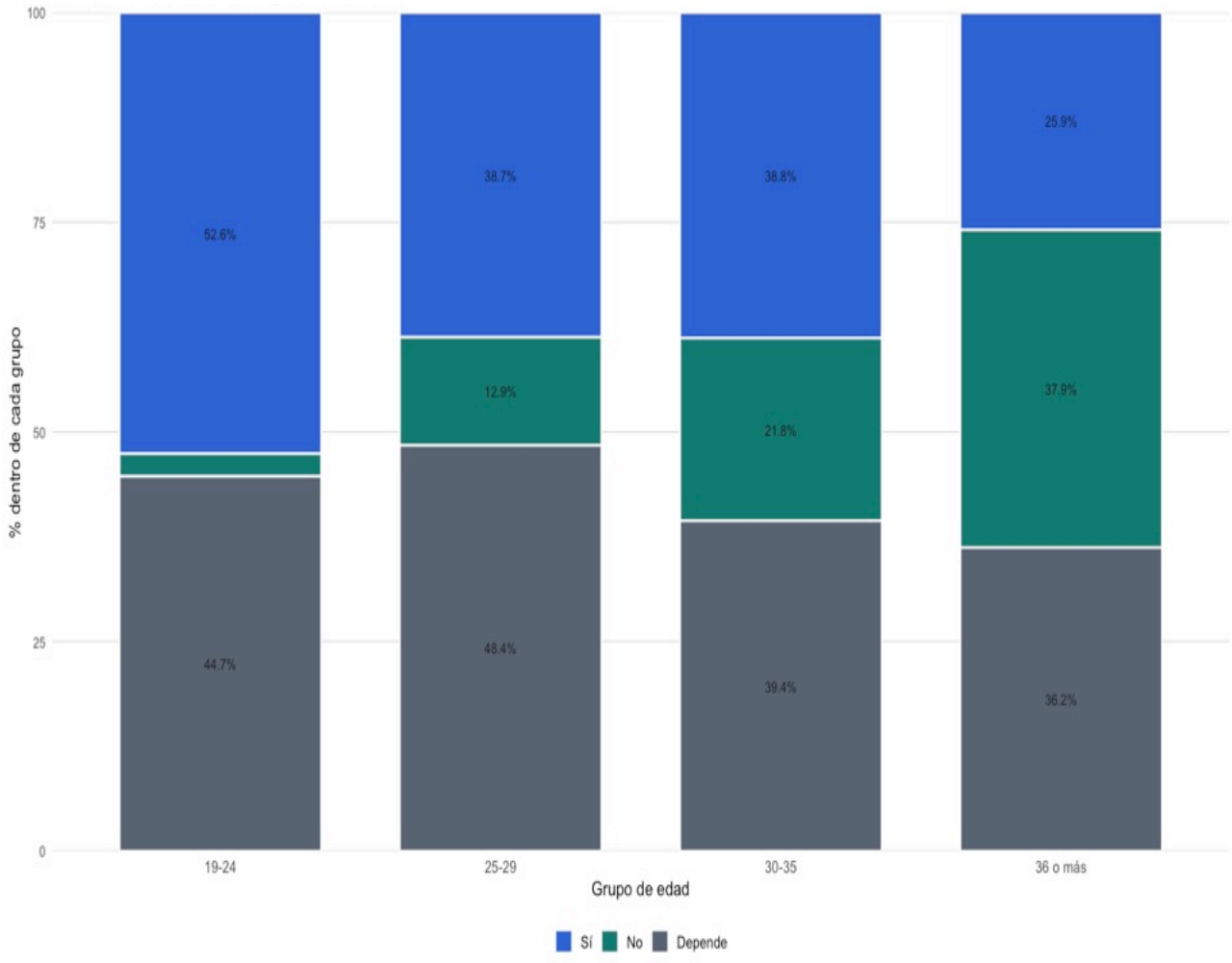



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Among profiles with lower educational attainment, a more cautious or ambivalent attitude predominates. This should not be automatically interpreted as a lack of motivation, but as a rational response to economic constraints, urgency of income, prior experiences of exclusion, or little clarity about the real benefit of getting certified. For this reason, certification should not be offered as an isolated mechanism, but as part of a supported pathway linked to concrete employment opportunities.

The validation of prior knowledge also appears more attractive among younger groups, which makes it an especially useful tool for early labor-market-entry and reskilling pathways. Among older groups, interest exists, but it requires greater clarity about benefits, timeframes, costs, and expected return.

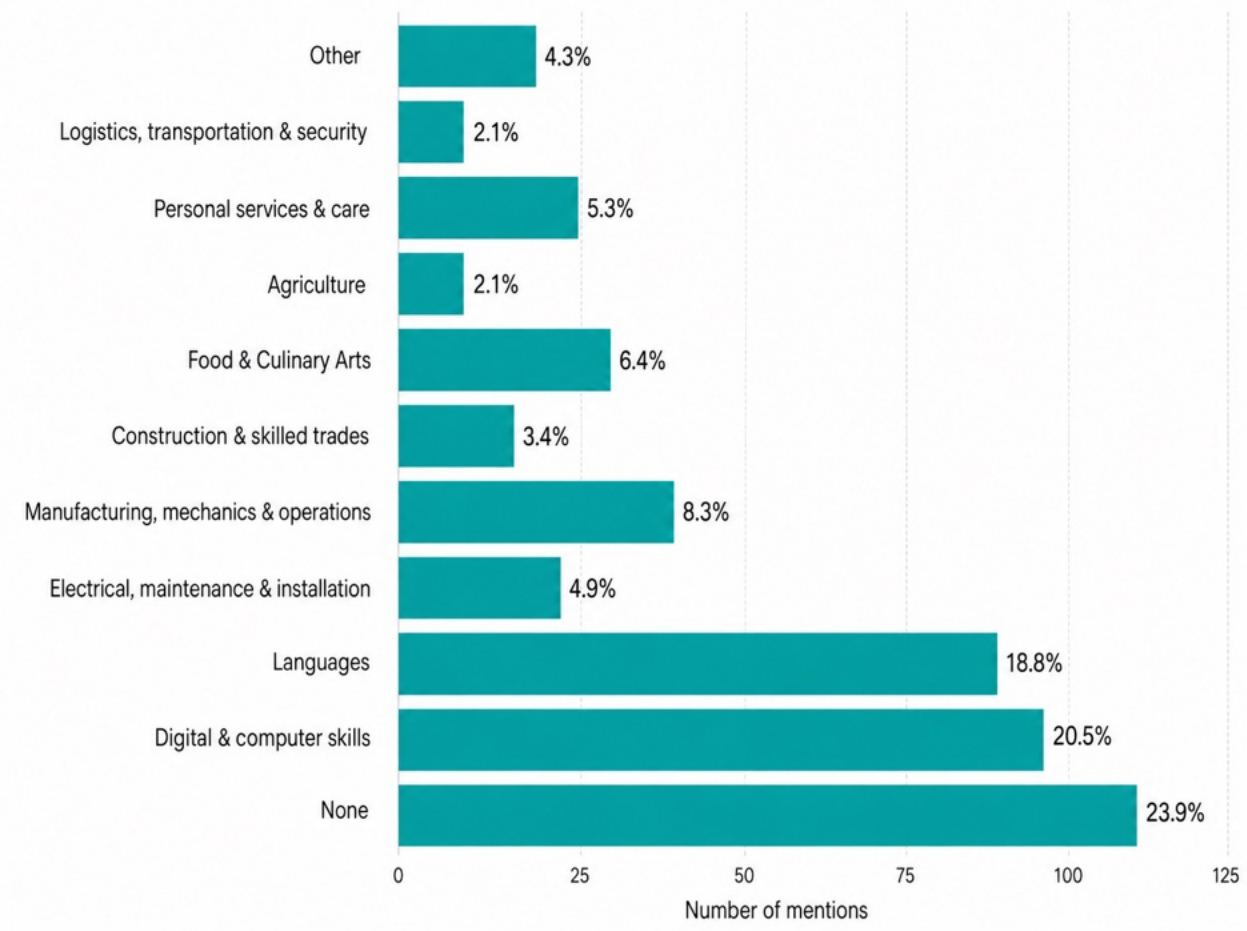
***Figure 33.*** *Interest in certifying by age group.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

There is also a broad pool of practical experience not yet translated into credentials. Of those surveyed, 76% report practical learning that could be certified. The most frequent areas are digital and IT competencies, at 20.5%; languages, at 18.8%; manufacturing, mechanics, and operations, at 8.3%; and food and culinary skills, at 6.4%.

***Figure 34.*** *Areas of practical learning that could be certified.*

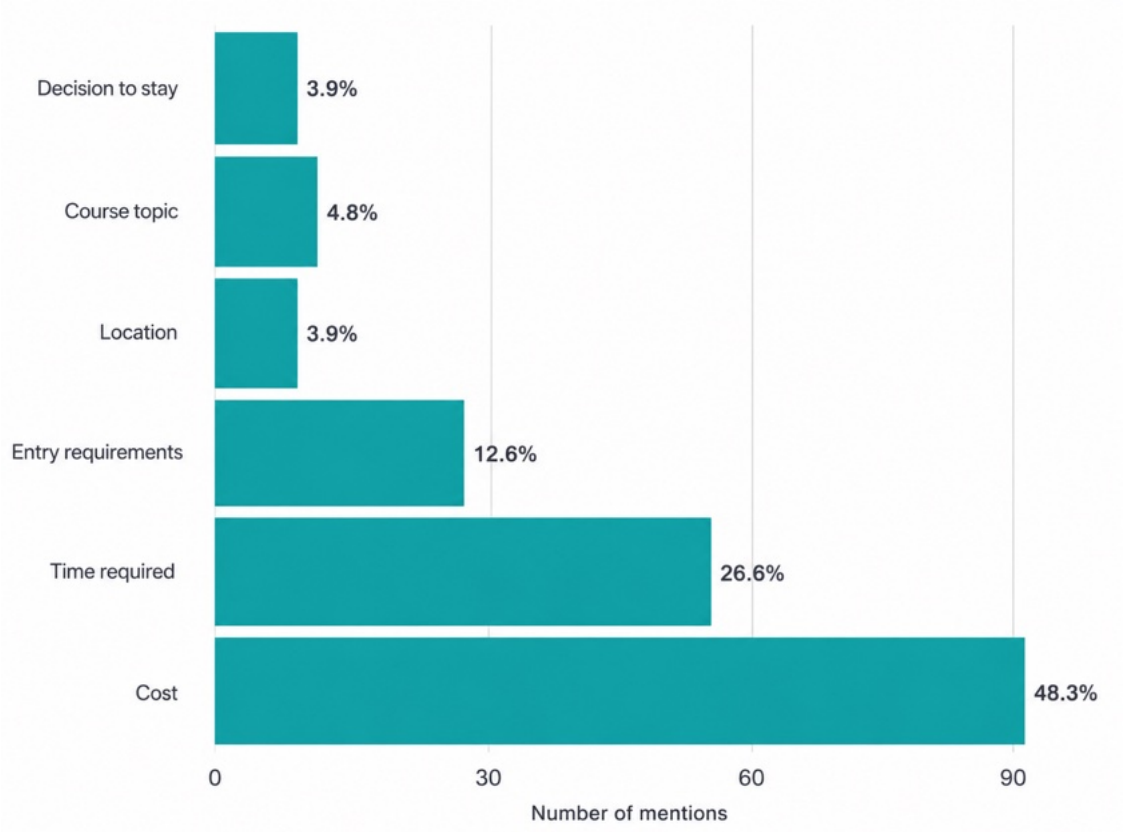



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Migration and work experience can become a verifiable asset if the program manages to translate it into standards, performance evidence, or microcredentials with value to employers.

Among those who conditioned their decision on certification being feasible, the most decisive factors are cost, at 48.3%, and the time required, at 26.6%. In operational terms, the main barrier is not necessarily a lack of interest, but the difficulty of reconciling certification processes with economic constraints, mobility, family responsibilities, and the urgency of finding work.

***Figure 35.*** *Factors that condition the decision to certify (cost and time).*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

For this reason, certification schemes will have a greater likelihood of adoption if they meet four conditions: low cost for the participant, short duration, operational flexibility, and an explicit connection to tangible employability benefits. Certification will not be effective if it is disconnected from employment opportunities; certification must be part of a visible pathway toward employment, better working conditions, or access to subsequent training.

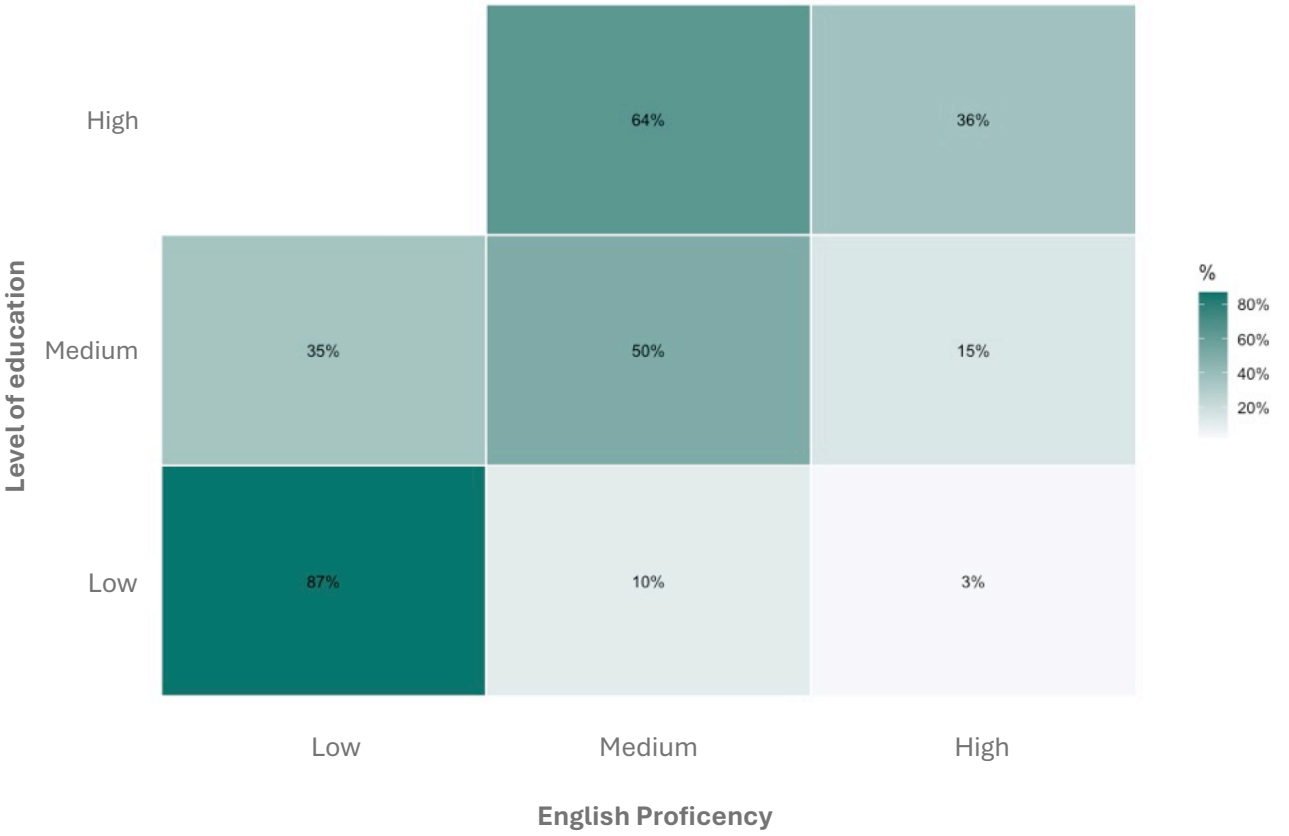
## 5.4 English and Digital Readiness as Differentiating Assets

English proficiency and digital readiness are differentiating assets for accessing formal employment and higher-productivity sectors. Higher educational attainment is associated with stronger work-relevant language skills, while English gaps reflect prior educational inequalities. For this reason, the pilot should not assume a uniform starting point.

For profiles with lower educational attainment, it will be necessary to strengthen functional language foundations, especially occupational vocabulary, comprehension of instructions, basic interaction with customers or supervisors, and work-applied communication.

For profiles with higher educational attainment or prior experience in bilingual environments, English can become an immediate tool for connection to higher-productivity sectors, such as contact center, remote customer service, tourism, hospitality, administrative services, operational support, or Global Digital Services.

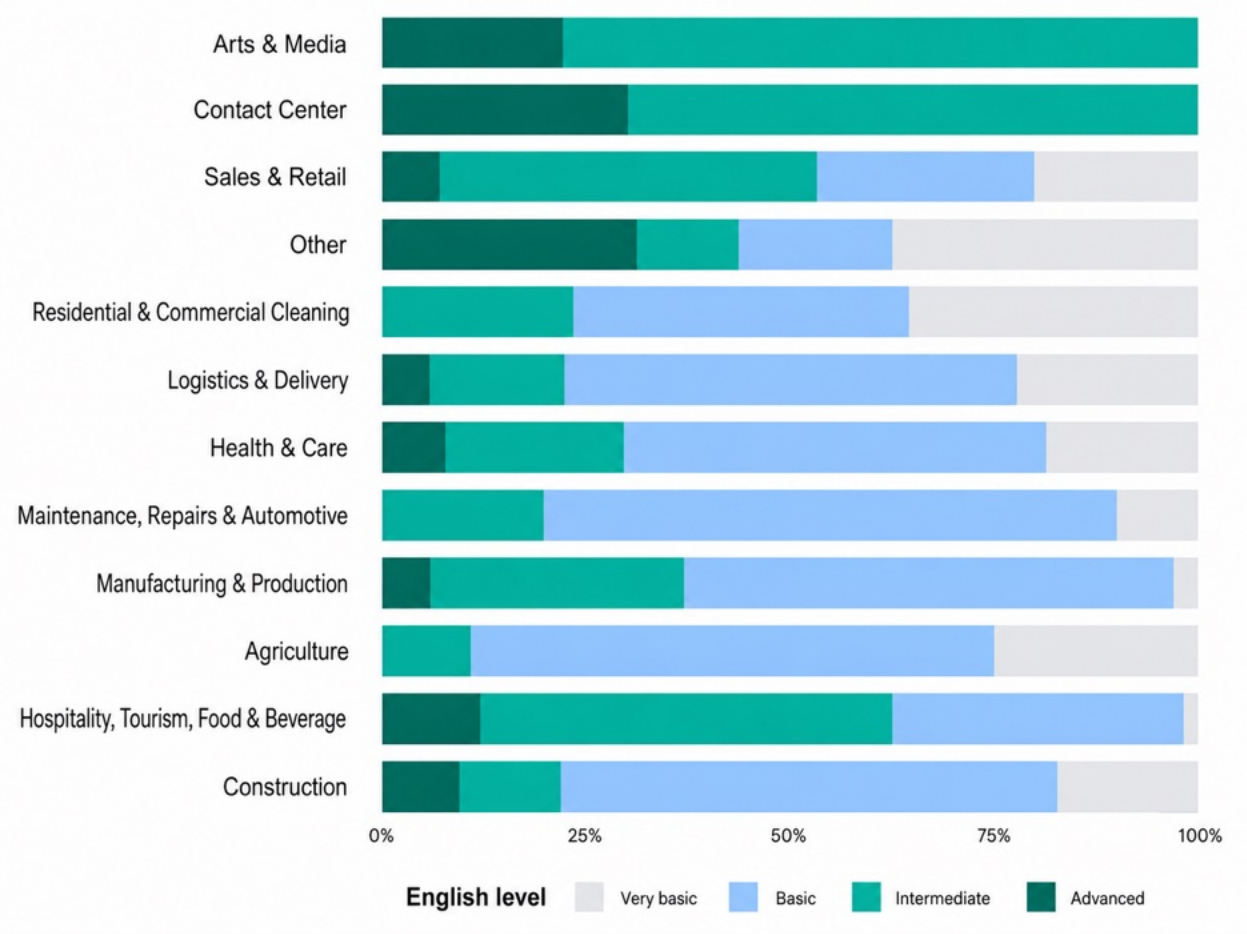
***Figure 36.*** *English level by educational attainment.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

English is likewise not distributed homogeneously across sectors. Some fields concentrate a clearer competitive advantage, which makes it possible to identify where this competency can be activated immediately as an employability differentiator. In other sectors, the language must be incorporated as a gradual component of employability, not as an exclusionary entry requirement.

***Figure 37.*** *English level by sector.*

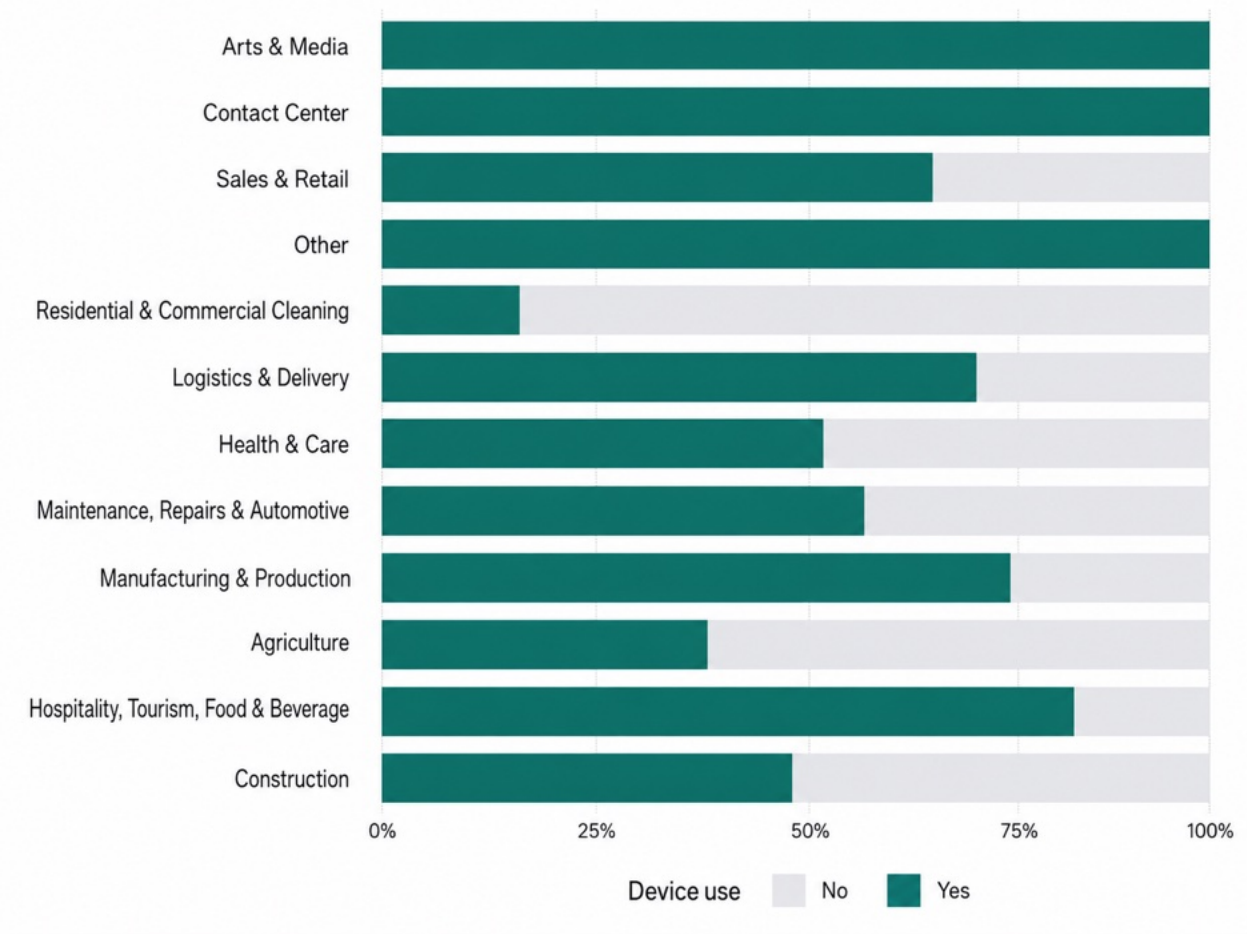



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Digital readiness follows a similar logic. The general base of device access and use is high, which can facilitate processes of training, certification, registration, follow-up, and job placement. However, significant sectoral gaps exist.

In sectors with greater digital use, more digitalized processes can be promoted; in sectors with lower adoption, it is advisable to combine functional digital literacy, close support, and modalities that are not exclusively online.

***Figure 38.*** *Digital access and use at the general level.*

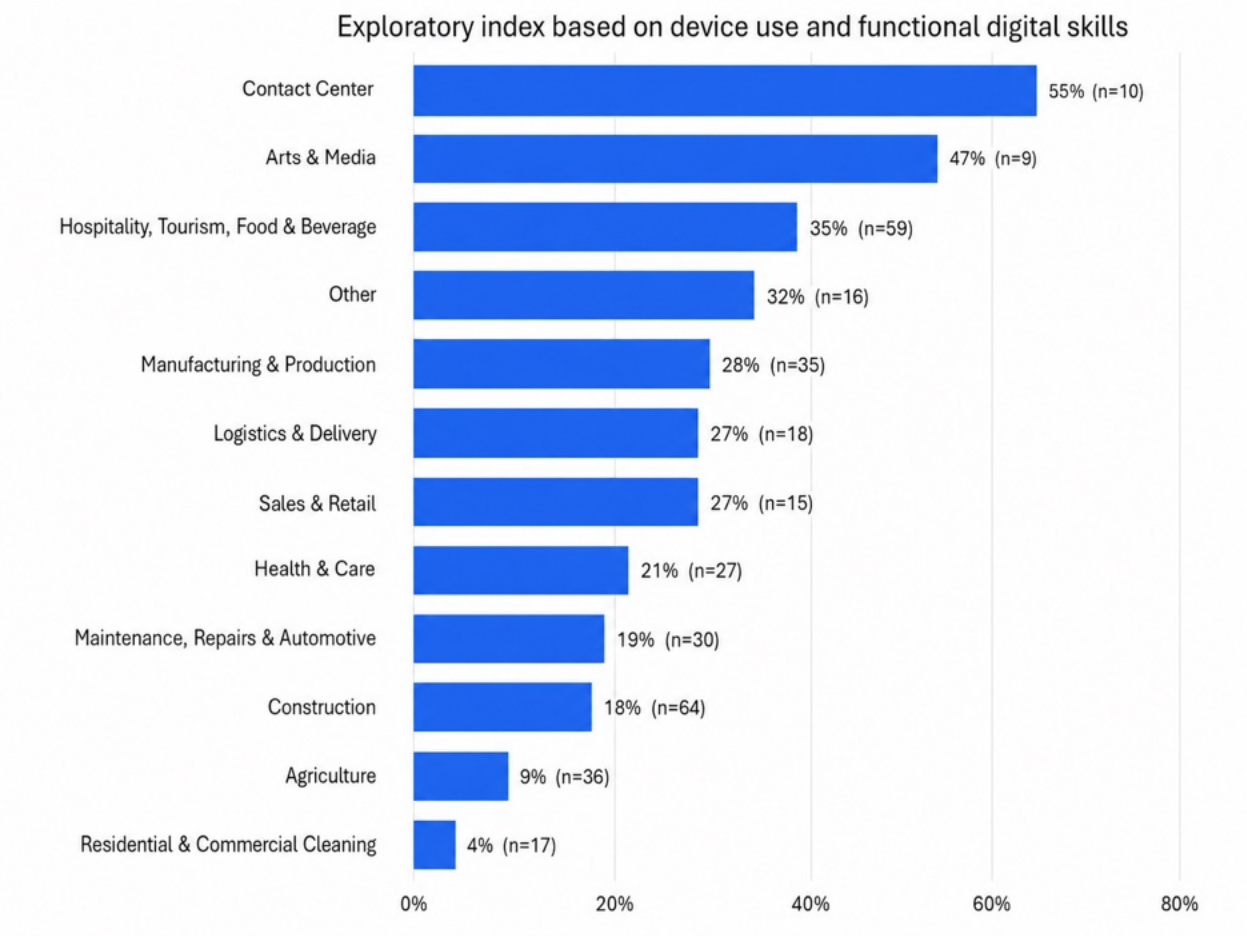



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Basic digital readiness is concentrated in fields more exposed to services, customer service, and technological interaction. Contact Center and Arts and Media start with an advantage; Hospitality shows a favorable base; and Manufacturing, Logistics, and Sales offer reasonable conditions to scale up with short, applied training.

By contrast, Agriculture and especially Cleaning face a deeper disadvantage, which requires basic digital-literacy interventions before other types of processes.

***Figure 39.*** *Basic digital readiness by sector.*



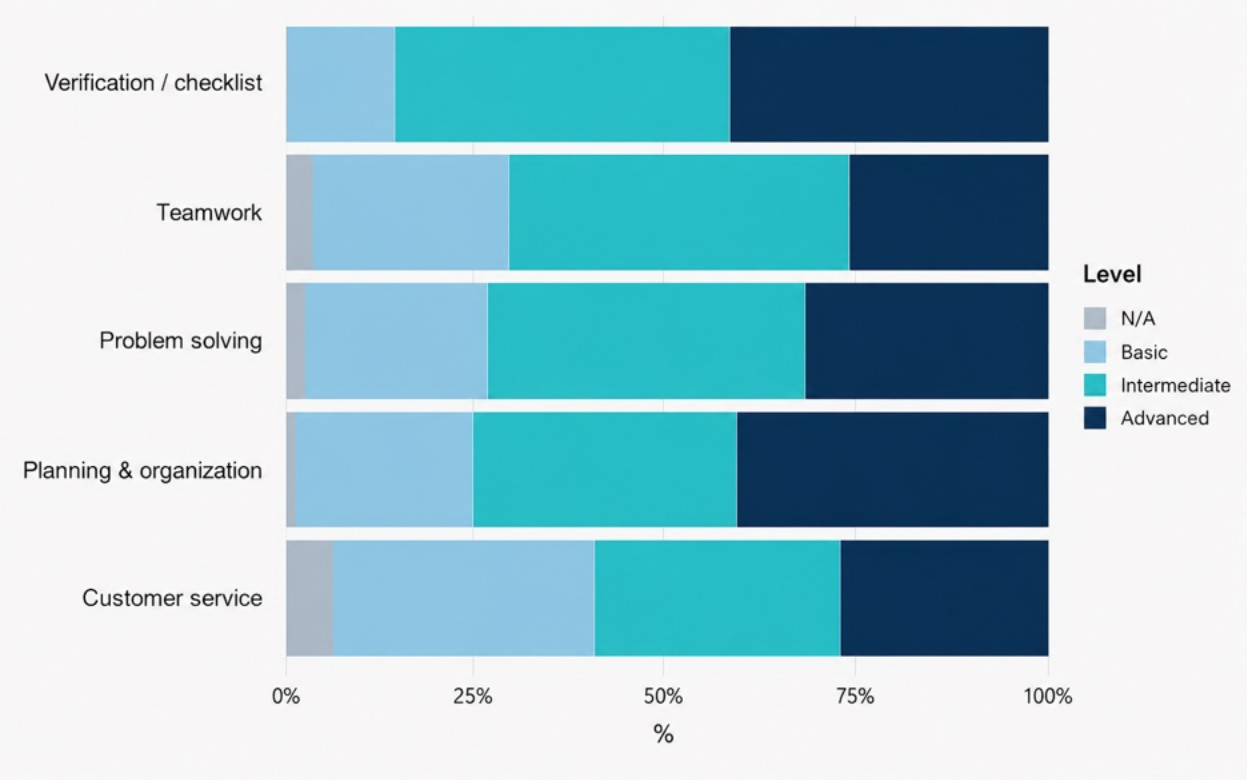

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

This means that **digitalization must be used as a means and not as a filter**. If the program relies excessively on online processes, it could exclude precisely the profiles most in need of support. The solution is not to avoid digital tools, but to design differentiated pathways: self-directed for those who already have sufficient readiness; assisted for those who require support; and in-person or hybrid for those who face greater barriers of connectivity, confidence, or digital literacy.

## 5.5 Transferable and Cross-Cutting Skills

The general mapping shows a significant concentration of intermediate and advanced levels in key skills for employment pathways, such as verification and checklists, planning and organization, problem-solving, and teamwork. This functional base indicates that many returnees have relevant capabilities to integrate into operational occupations, services, light manufacturing, logistics, customer service, and support.

***Figure 40.*** *General mapping of transferable skills and level of proficiency.*

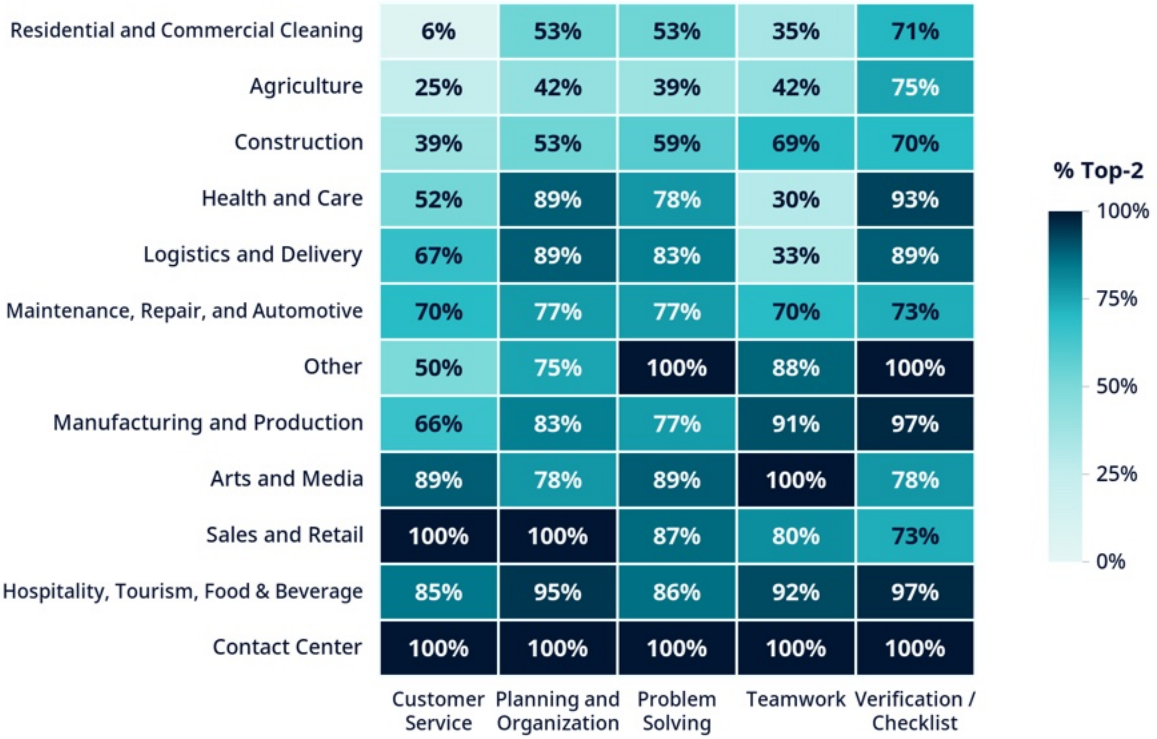



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The main gap appears in **customer service**, where more basic levels predominate. This skill works as a **bridge competency** toward several priority sectors: hospitality, sales, contact center, administrative services, remote support, health and care, and some Global Digital Services profiles. For this reason, training in customer service can be a short, high-value intervention, provided it is contextualized by sector and complemented with communication, complaint handling, problem-solving, and basic use of digital tools.

The evidence confirms that there are sectors with a high concentration of skills ready to be activated in the short term, particularly services, manufacturing, and remote customer service. Other sectors concentrate profiles with more operational trajectories and less depth in visible cross-cutting competencies. This does not mean they lack capabilities, but rather that their skills are less codified in the language of formal employability.

***Figure 41.*** *Top-2 (Intermediate+Advanced) by sector and skill.*

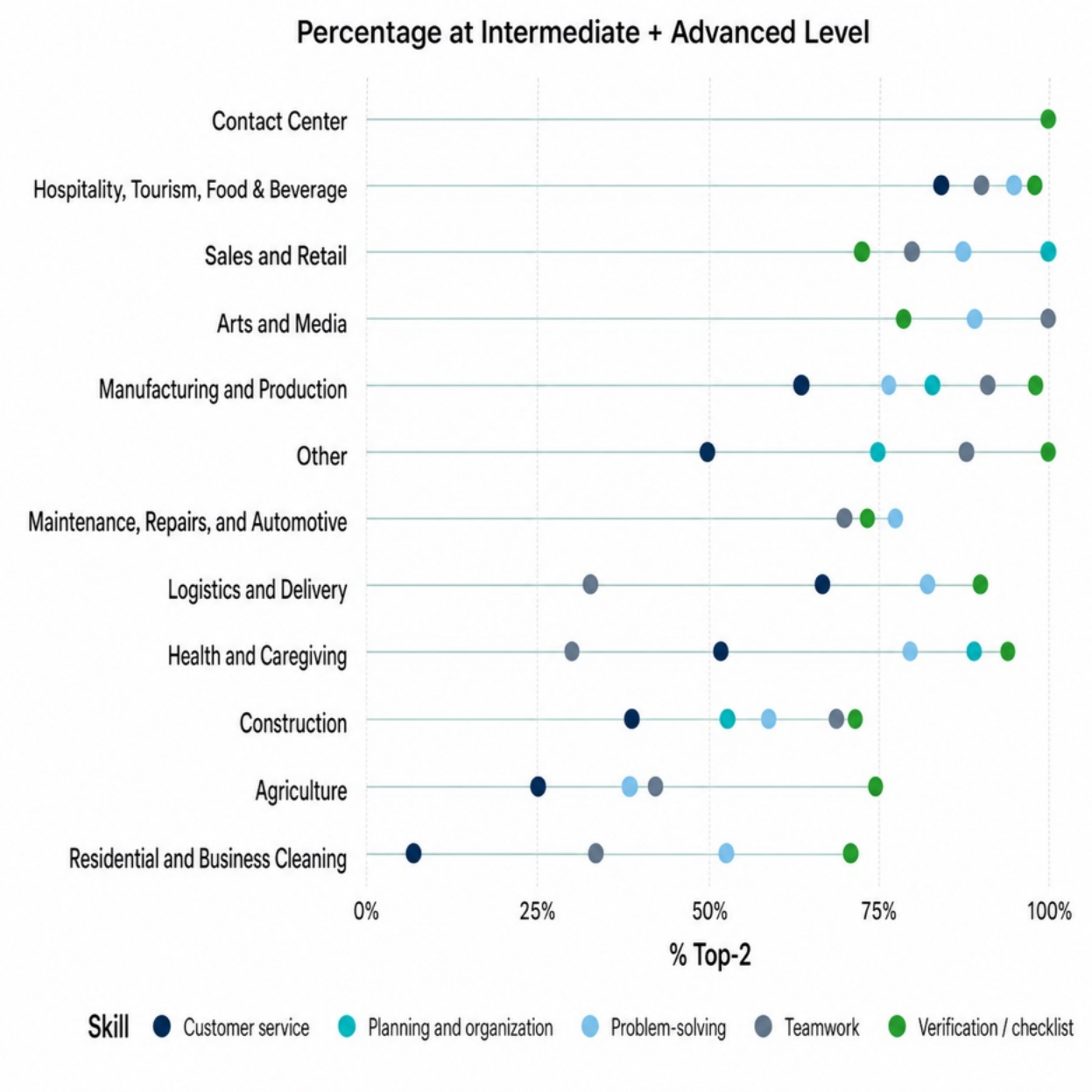



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The value of prior experience depends on which skills it left in place. Contact Center, Hospitality, Sales, and some Manufacturing occupations concentrate high and relatively balanced strengths. Agriculture, Cleaning, and Construction present more mixed profiles: they have clear operational strengths, but larger gaps in key skills for service sectors or jobs involving direct interaction with users.

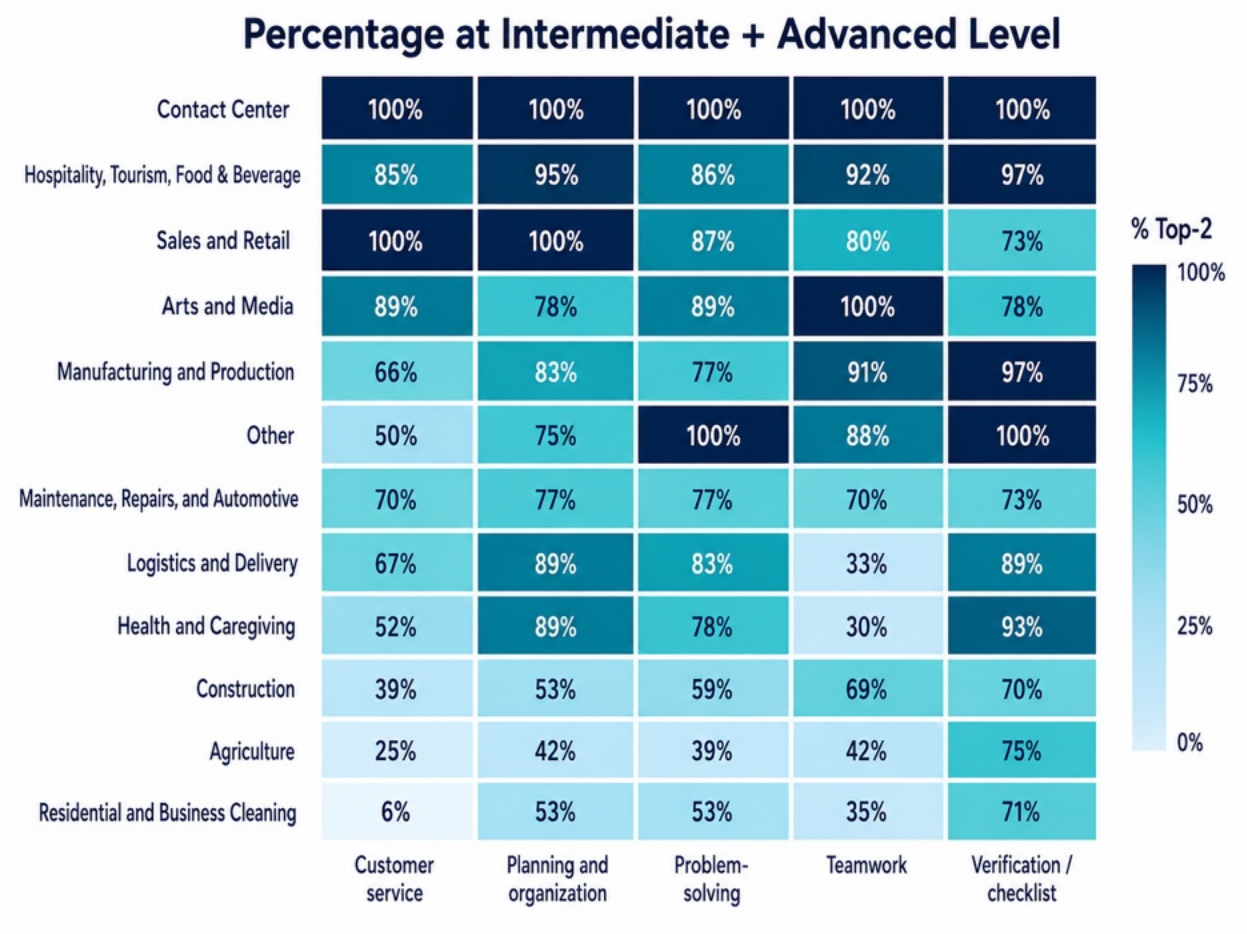
The programmatic implication is consistent with the rest of the analysis: **segmenting, profiling, and adapting the** intervention will be more effective than offering a uniform pathway. The population is not divided between “employable” and “not employable”; rather, it presents **different speeds of labor-market activation**. Some profiles can move quickly into formal job openings with light support; while others require certification, digital literacy, strengthening of functional English, or more intensive support to translate their experience into effective employability.

***Figure 42.*** *Top-2 transferable skills by sector.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

*Figure 43. Strengths map by sector and skill.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

## 5.6 Deeper Analysis of Skills by Sector

### Methodological note on reading the UpSet and Sankey charts

The sector-level analysis relies on two complementary visualizations that make it possible to move from a descriptive reading of frequencies to a structural reading of the observed labor capital: the UpSet chart and the Sankey diagram. Both visualizations were built from responses about the occupational sector of the most recent job held by those surveyed — whether before deportation, before return, or before arrival in Mexico, in the case of those who did not manage to reach the United States— and about the specific activities performed in that job.

On the basis of this information, the reported activities were coded as sectoral skills, technical profiles, and transferable skills, which made it possible to identify both the individual presence of certain capabilities and their most frequent combinations and possible pathways for occupational translation.

The UpSet chart shows the internal structure of skills within each sector. On the left appear the set sizes, that is, how many people report each skill separately; at the top are the intersection sizes, which indicate how many people share a specific combination of skills; and at the bottom, the dots and lines show which skills make up each combination. This visualization makes it possible to answer not only which skills are most frequent, but which combinations appear together most recurrently, revealing more complex and realistic labor profiles.

The Sankey diagram is built on the cases observed within each sectoral sample. Its flows represent the number of survey respondents who move between three dimensions: technical profile, English level, and transferable profile. Its purpose is to identify functional pathways of mobility or occupational translation within each sector. For this reason, it should be read as an analytical representation of patterns observed in the sample, not as a population estimate.

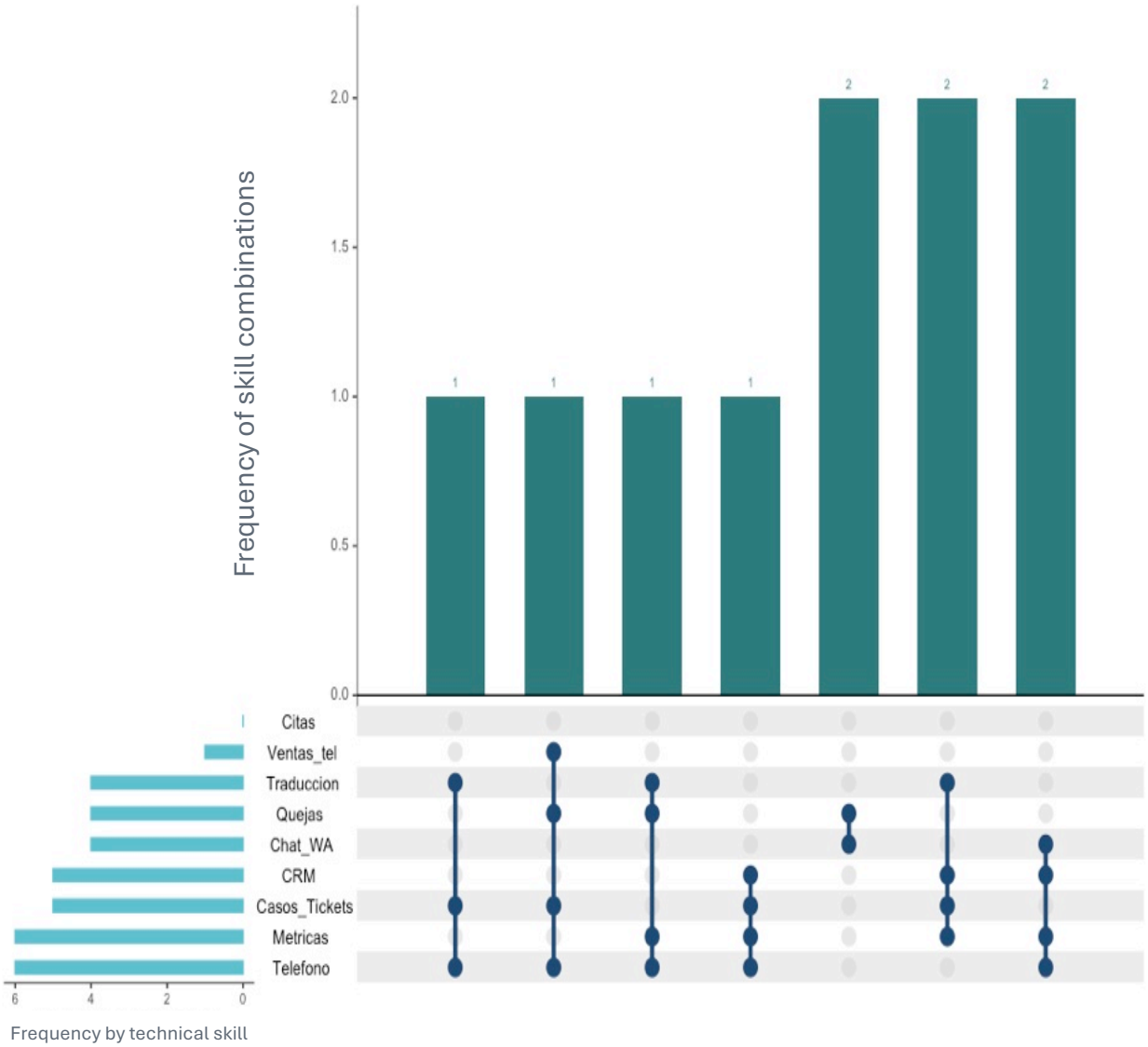
Both charts make it possible to identify which functional pathways are most common within each sector, what type of technical experience aligns with different English levels, and toward which transferable profiles that experience appears to project. This reading is useful for thinking through differentiated trajectories of employment pathways, certification, or reskilling.

### 5.6.1 Contact Center

Although Contact Center represents a small group within the sample —around 3%— and should not be interpreted with population-level statistical significance, it shows one of the most robust patterns of transferability. The sector's UpSet chart concentrates combinations associated with phone, metrics, cases and tickets, CRM, chat and WhatsApp, complaints and, to a lesser extent, telephone sales, translation, and appointments.

This pattern reveals experience in structured customer-service environments, case follow-up, multichannel operation, and digital traceability. Unlike other sectors where less codified operational functions predominate, here the skills already appear very close to the employability language of remote services, user support, incident management, and standardized processes.

***Figure 44.*** *UpSet chart — Contact Center.*

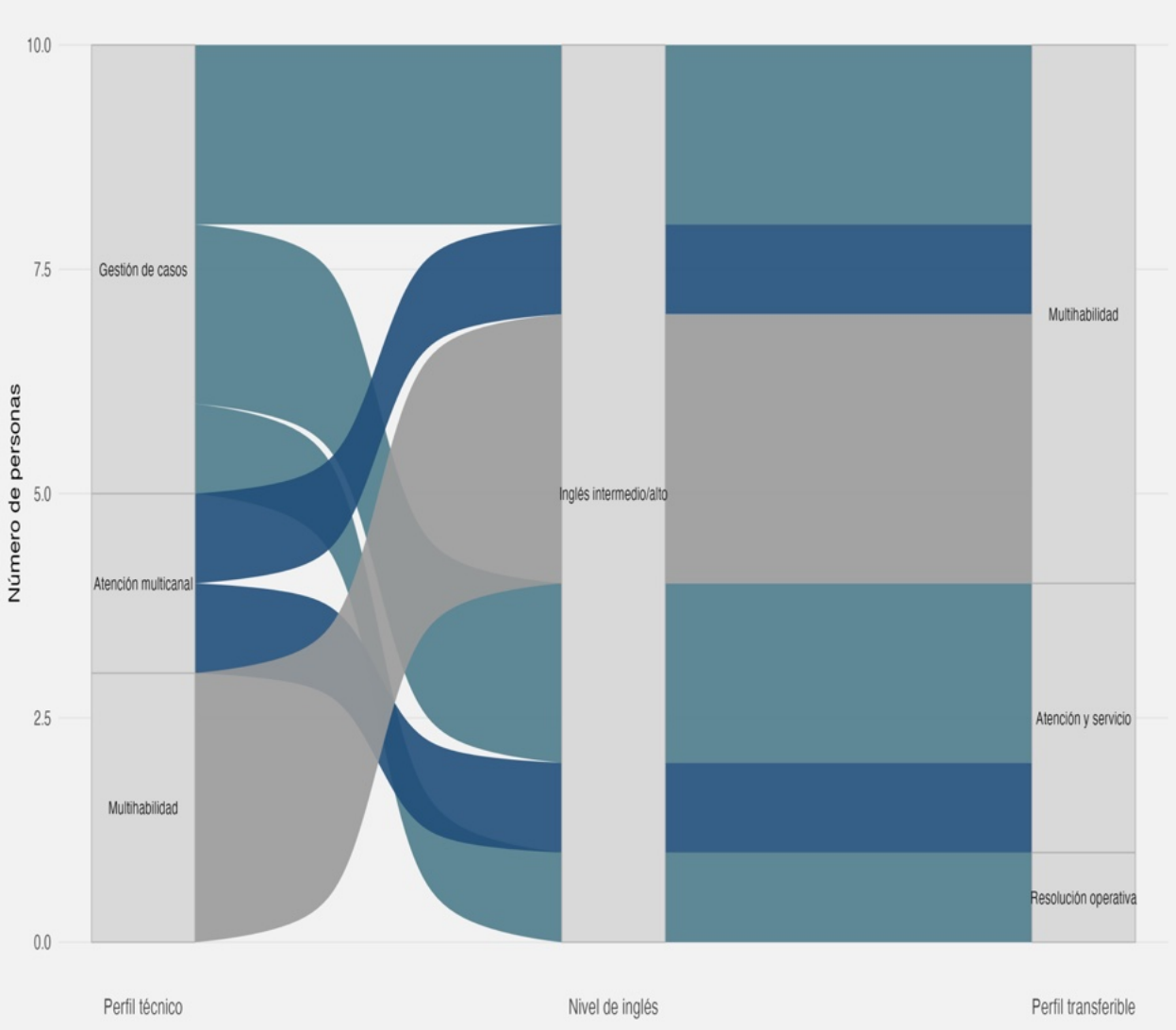



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The Sankey confirms that the experience translates clearly into high-value transferable profiles. The flows start from case management, multichannel customer service, and multiskilling, pass mainly through intermediate English levels, and end in multiskilling, customer service, and operational problem-solving.

Contact Center should be interpreted as a highly relevant but limited-size pathway. Its value lies not in representing the majority of the population, but in showing that there is a subgroup with favorable conditions to move into Global Digital Services, remote support, bilingual customer service, back office, process digitalization, or user support.

***Figure 45.*** *Sankey diagram — Contact Center (technical profile → English → transferable profile).*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

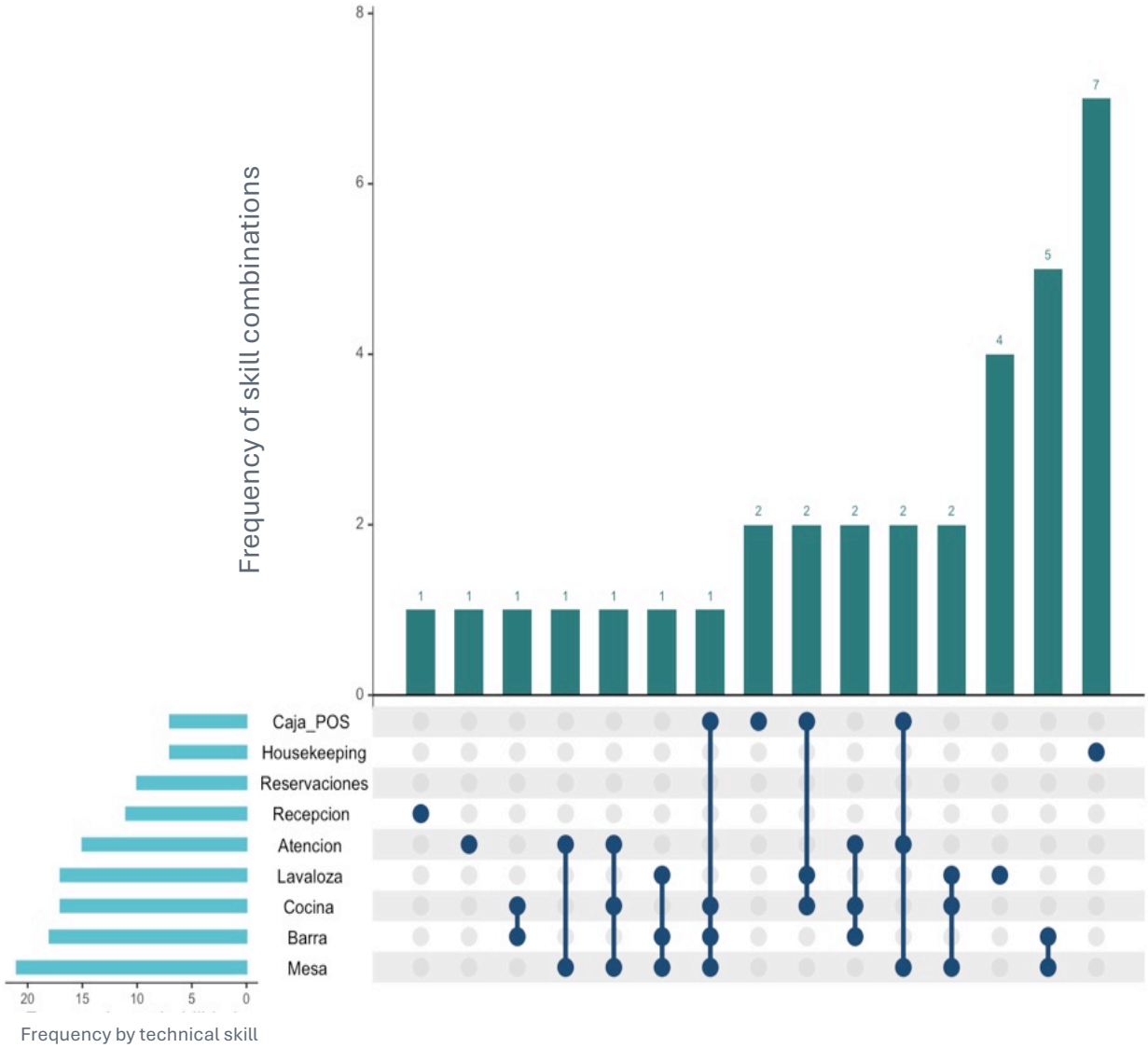
### 5.6.2 Hospitality, Tourism, Food and Beverage (HTF&B)

This sector concentrates a robust core of operational service skills. The most frequent combinations —waiting tables, bar, kitchen, dishwashing, and customer service— show **versatile profiles**, accustomed to operating under pressure, covering multiple functions, and adapting to the pace of the establishment.

The skills associated with reception, reservations, housekeeping, and cashier or point of sale appear with lower presence, which indicates that the experience is located mainly in the frontline or operational roles in the sector and not necessarily in administrative or front-

office functions. Even so, exposure to service, multitasking, and customer attention generates a valuable base for occupational mobility.

***Figure 46.*** *UpSet chart — Hospitality, Tourism, Food and Beverage.*



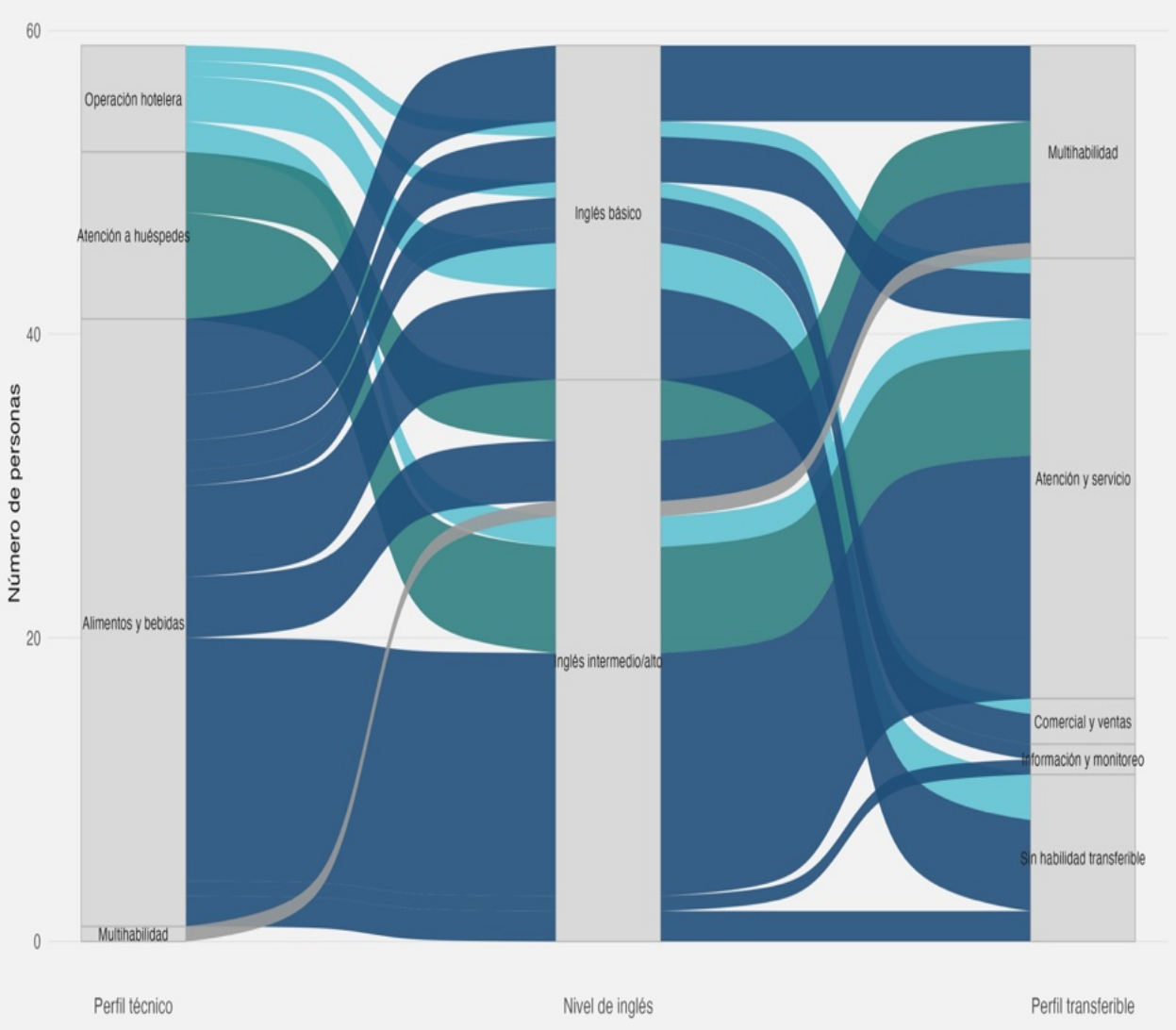

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The Sankey shows that the flows starting from hotel operations, guest service, and food and beverage converge mainly on basic and intermediate English levels, and from there project toward customer service, multiskilling, and commercial or information-and-monitoring functions.

This sector represents an important **pool of transferable skills**. The experience can support both employment pathways within the same sector and transitions into sales, customer

service, frontline service roles, operational support, and, for profiles with functional English, entry-level pathways into remote customer service.

***Figure 47.*** *Sankey diagram — Hospitality, Tourism, Food and Beverage.*

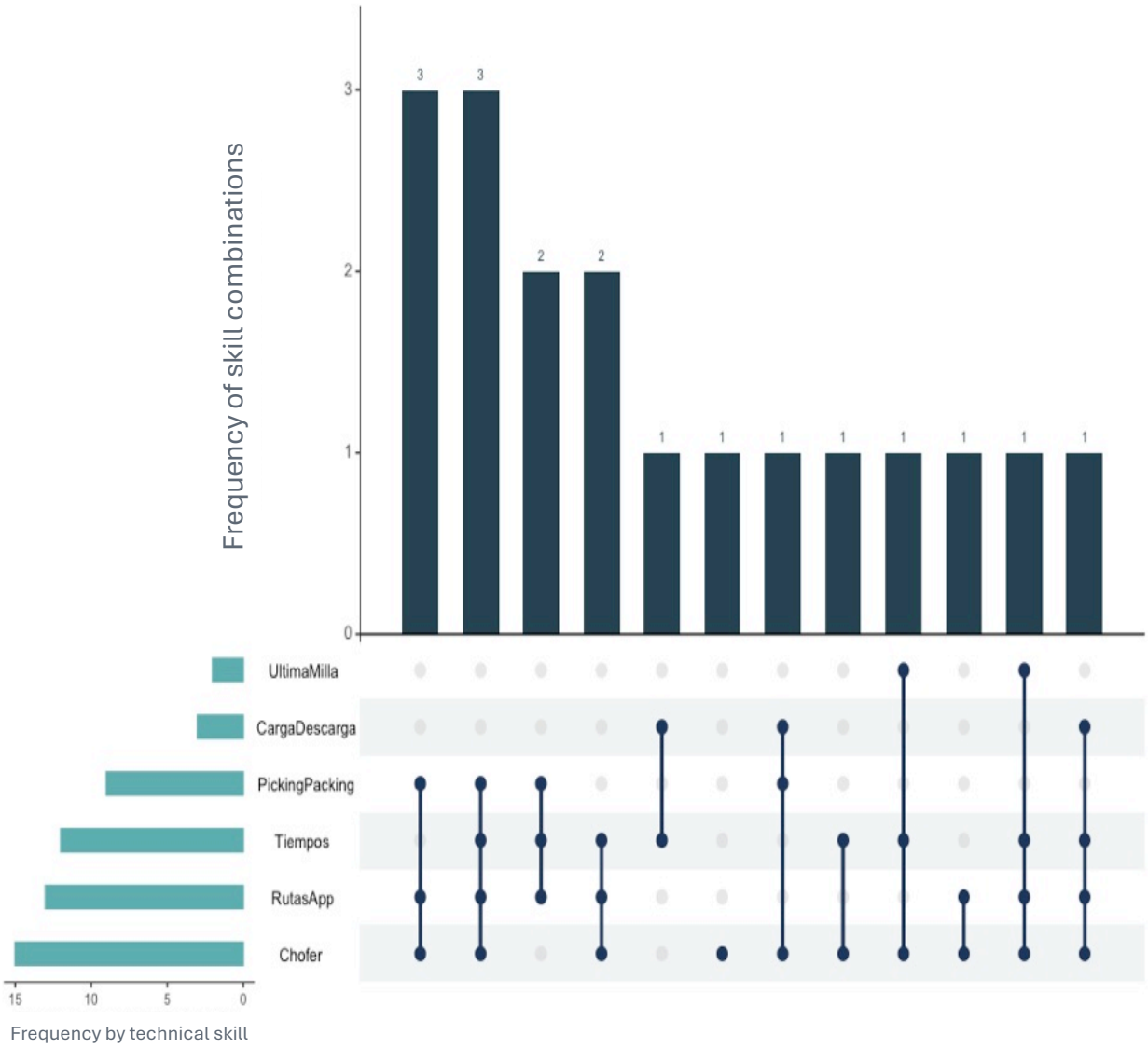



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

### 5.6.3 Logistics and Transportation

Logistics and Transportation concentrates technical-operational skills linked to mobility, route organization, and operational compliance. The most frequent combinations cluster around driver, routes, use of apps, and timing, which suggests trajectories built in environments where execution depends on coordination, orientation, work pace, and quick response.

***Figure 48.*** *UpSet chart — Logistics and Transportation.*



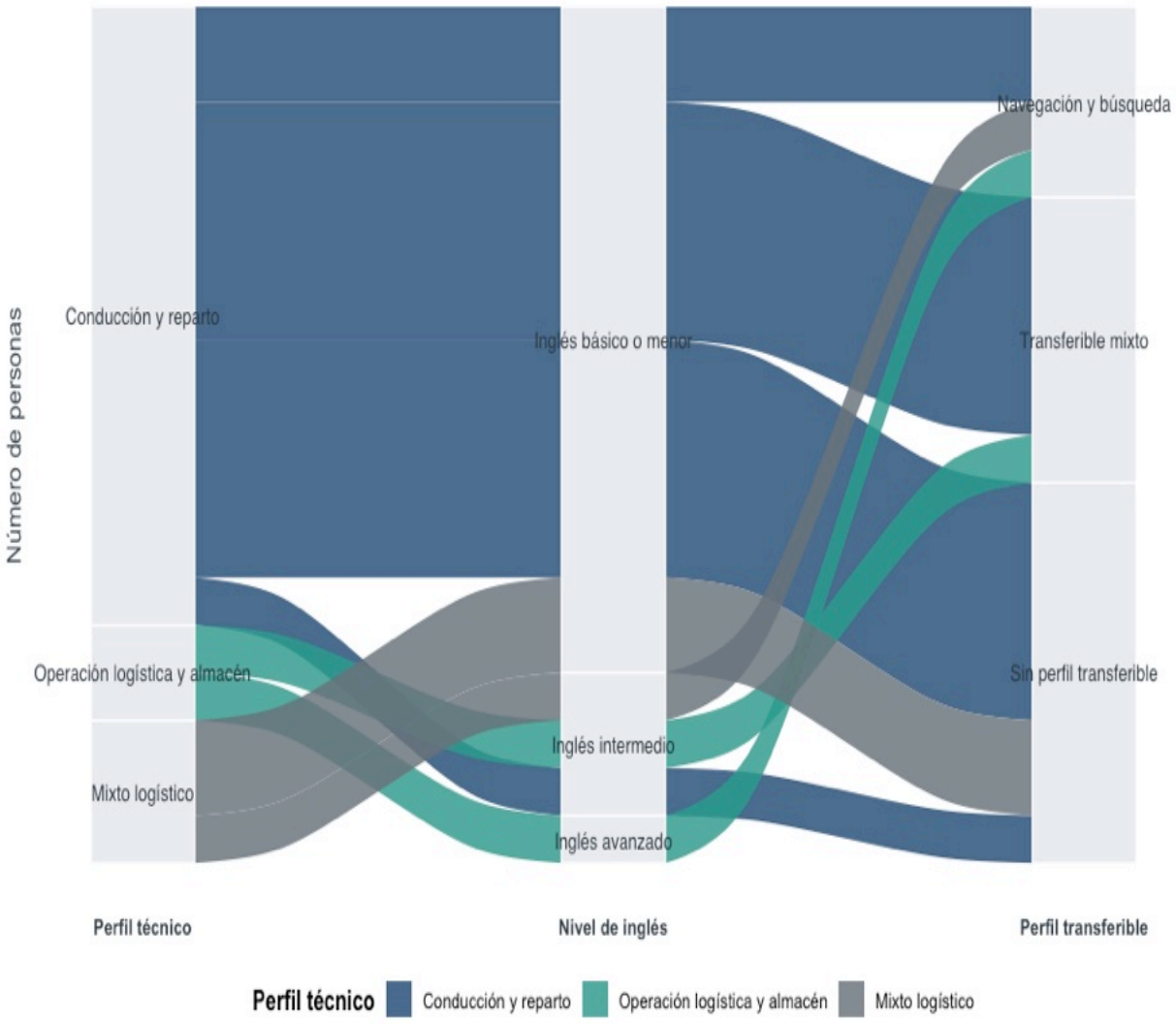

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

When skills such as picking and packing or loading and unloading are incorporated, a more versatile profile emerges, capable of covering transport functions and logistics-support tasks. This broadens the range of employment pathways available to this profile, including warehousing, last-mile delivery, distribution, inventory management, logistics operations, and workplace operations support.

The Sankey shows flows that start mainly from driving and delivery, logistics operations and warehousing, and mixed profiles. These align with different English levels before projecting toward mixed transferable profiles, navigation and search, and in some cases trajectories without immediate translation.

Logistics experience is not trapped in its sector of origin. Skills such as spatial orientation, route management, operational coordination, meeting deadlines, use of apps, and adaptation in dynamic contexts can have value in other work environments, especially if they are complemented with digital literacy and short certifications in safety, inventory, warehouse operations, or equipment handling.

***Figure 49.*** *Sankey diagram — Logistics and Transportation.*



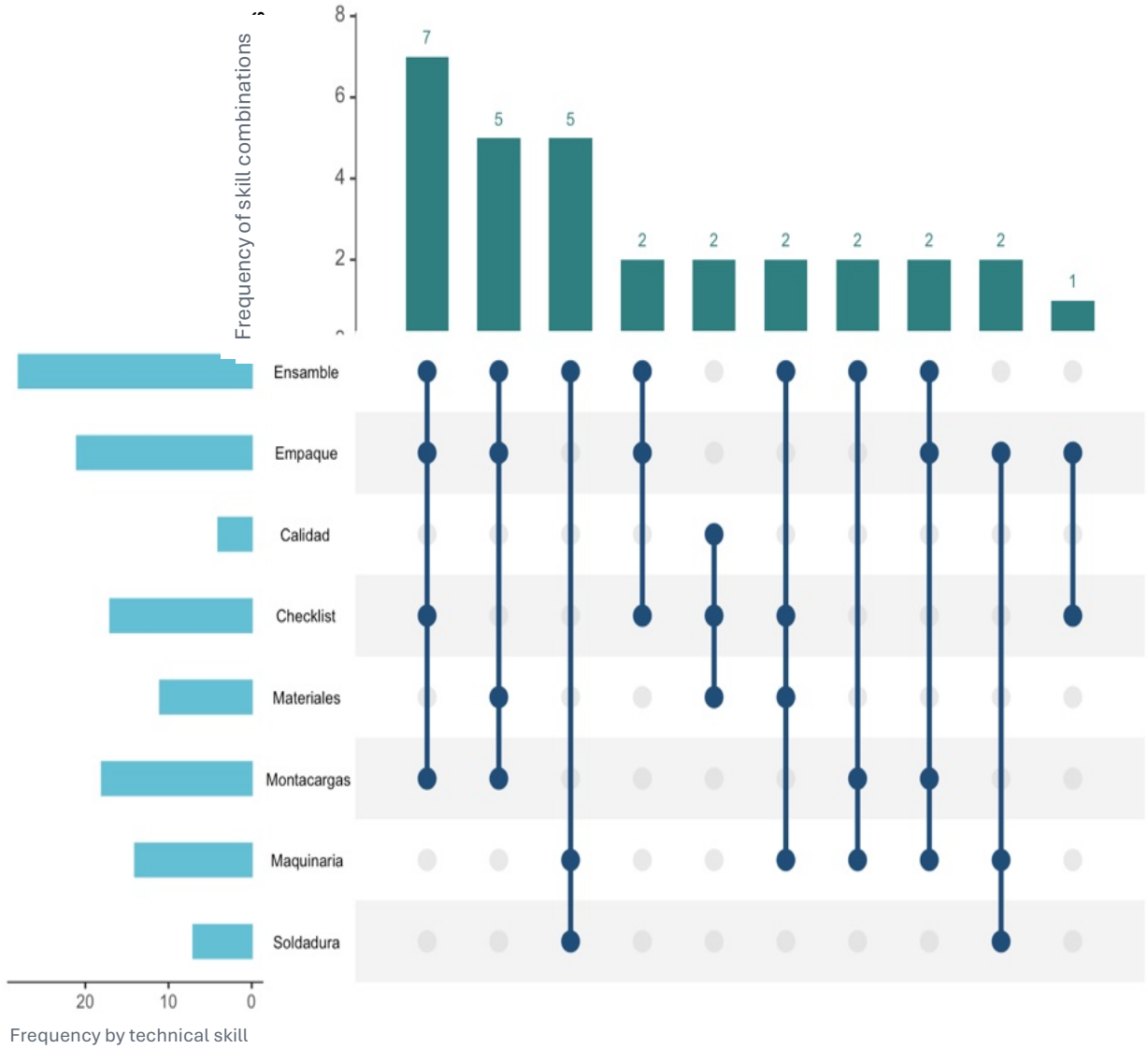

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

### 5.6.4 Manufacturing and Production

Manufacturing and Production concentrates experience in operational skills directly linked to line execution and support for the production process: assembly, packaging, checklists, forklift, and machinery. These are trajectories built in environments where operational continuity, compliance with procedures, and coordination across stages are central.

The most frequent combinations do not reflect isolated skills, but functional profiles that articulate several tasks of the production flow, from supply and movement of materials to operational execution and verification.

***Figure 50.*** *UpSet chart — Manufacturing and Production.*

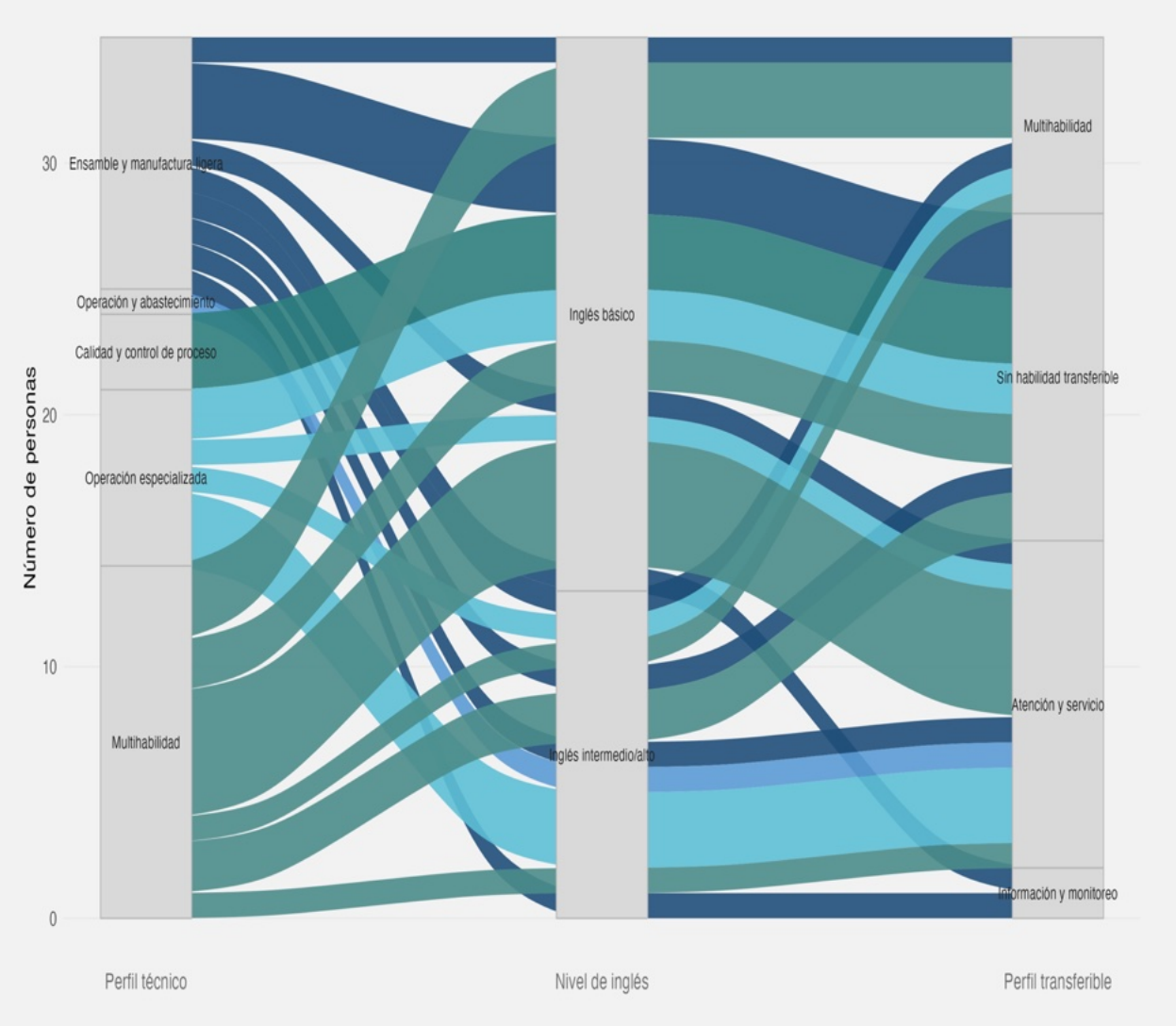



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The skills of greater technical specialization, such as welding and quality, appear with lower relative presence, which places the experience mainly at operational and production-support levels.

The Sankey indicates that the experience contains a broad technical base, although its translation into transferable skills occurs more partially than in sectors such as Contact Center, Hospitality, or Sales. The flows start from assembly, supply, process control, specialized operation, and multiskilling; they concentrate on basic and intermediate English levels; and they end both in transferable profiles and in a significant proportion of trajectories with no clearly identified transferable skill.

***Figure 51.*** *Sankey diagram — Manufacturing and Production.*



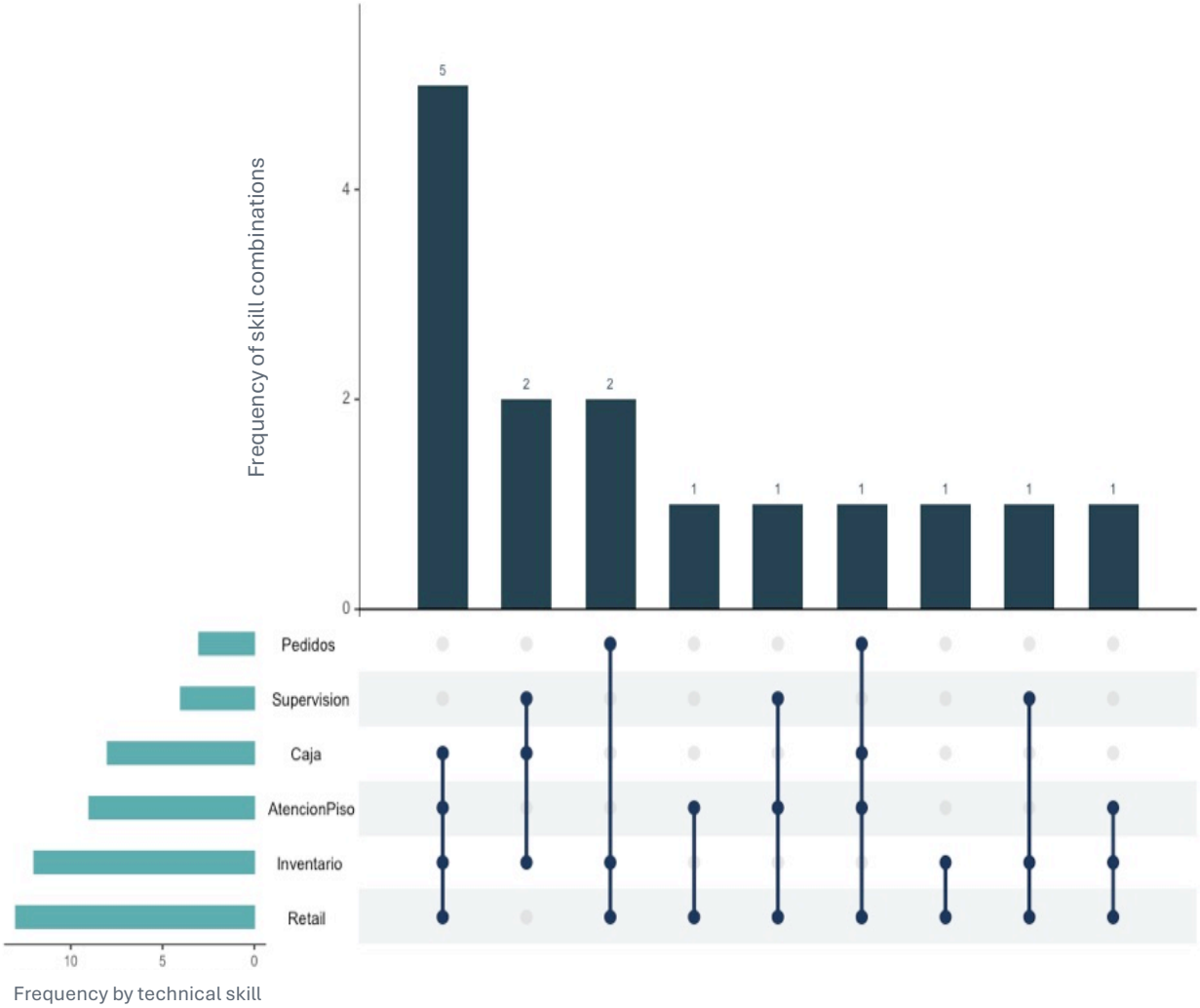

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Manufacturing experience generates valuable capabilities—operational discipline, process monitoring, quality control, supply support, technical execution, and coordinated work—but these capabilities are not always expressed in language that is easily transferable to other employment contexts. Unlocking this profile's employment potential depends on making these competencies visible through practical assessment, short technical certifications, and employer engagement in manufacturing, logistics, or maintenance.

### 5.6.5 Sales and Retail

This sector concentrates skills linked to everyday commercial operations: retail, inventory, floor service, and cashier. These are trajectories where interaction with customers combines with tasks of control, restocking, payment processing, and sales support.

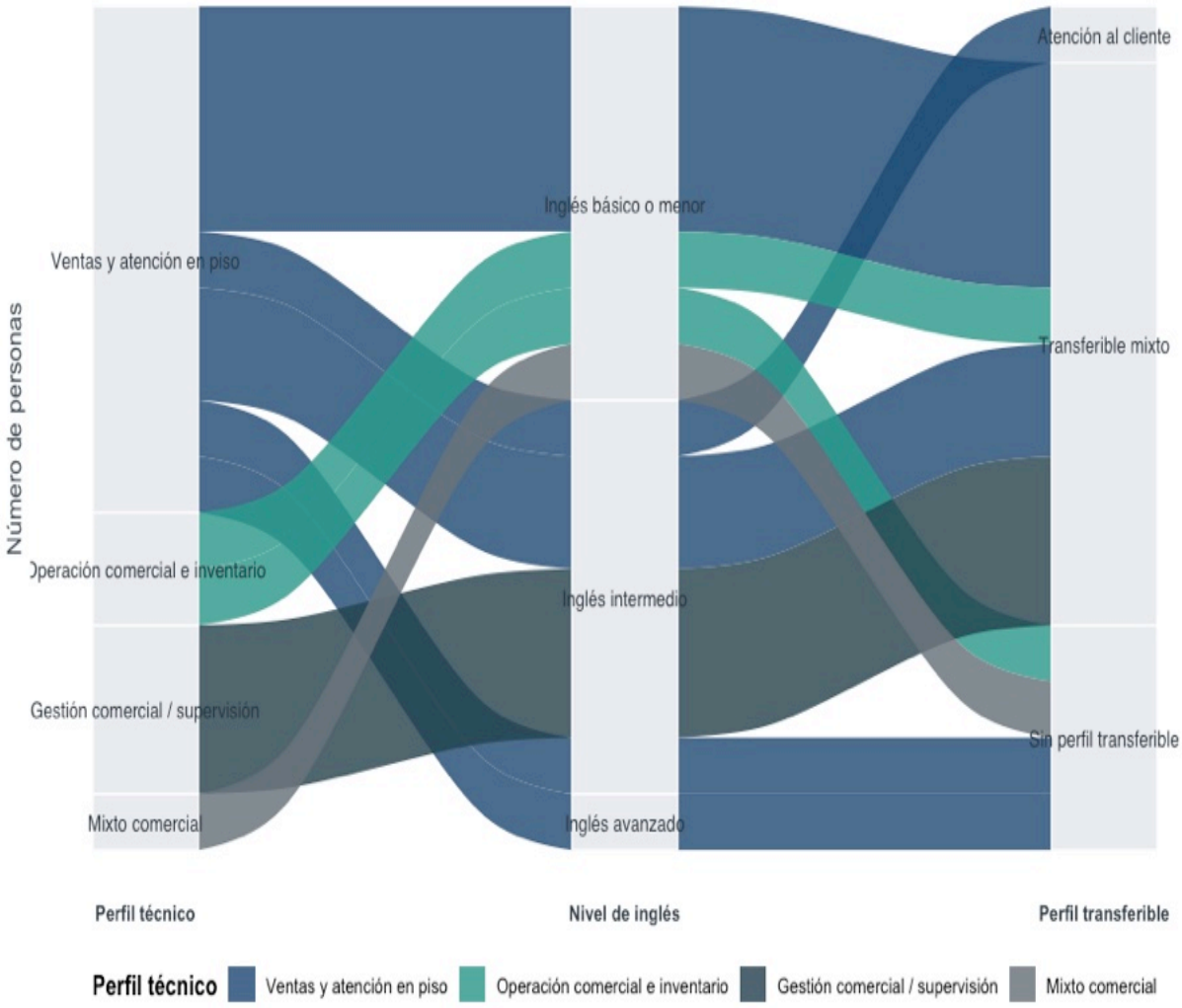
***Figure 52.*** *UpSet chart — Sales and Retail.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The most frequent combinations reveal **functional profiles of comprehensive execution**. A significant share of people have articulated several point-of-sale functions, from customer contact to inventory management and payment processing. Skills such as supervision and ordering appear with lower relative weight, which places the experience mainly in the sector's operational base.

***Figure 53.*** *Sankey diagram — Sales and Retail.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

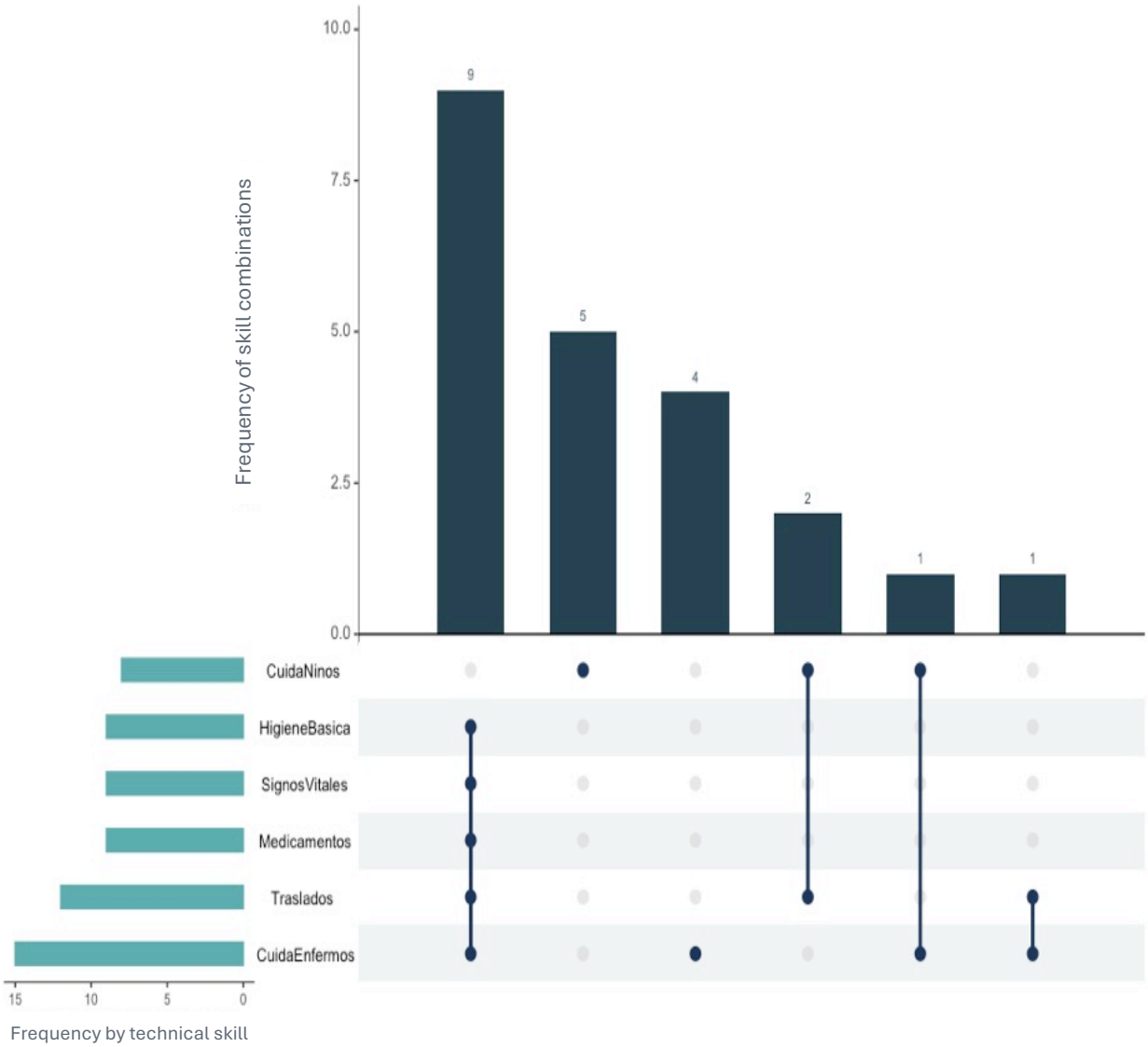
The Sankey confirms a significant capacity to translate into transferable skills, especially in customer service and mixed transferable profiles. The flows start from sales and floor service, commercial operations and inventory, and commercial management or supervision; they pass above all through basic and intermediate English levels; and they project toward service occupations and direct interaction with users.

This sector has high value as an employability bridge. Its capabilities can transfer toward customer service, service roles, hospitality, basic contact center, reception, formal sales, store support, inventory management, and entry-level positions in administrative services.

### 5.6.6 Health and Care

In this case, experience in the sector concentrates skills linked to direct care of people: care of the sick, transfers, medication administration, monitoring of vital signs, and basic hygiene. The most frequent combinations reflect comprehensive-care profiles rather than isolated tasks.

***Figure 54.*** *UpSet chart — Health and Care.*

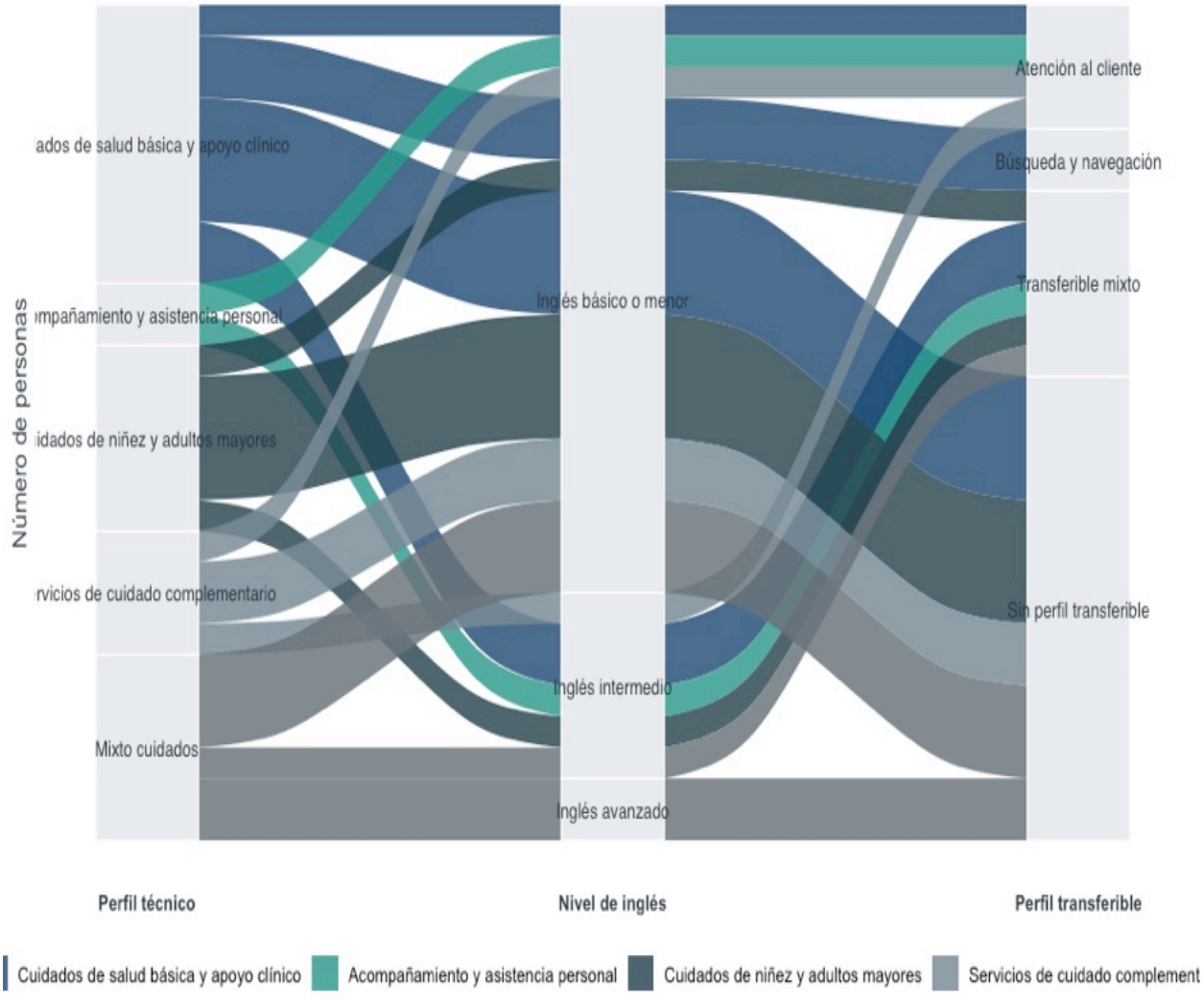



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Childcare appears with lower relative weight, which concentrates the experience in sick, dependent, or older adults. The pattern reveals labor capital with value in occupations where direct attention, continuity of care, trust, responsibility, and the capacity to respond to practical needs matter.

The Sankey shows multiple flows among technical profiles, English levels, and transferable skills. The paths start from basic health care, clinical support, personal assistance, childcare and care of older adults, and complementary services; they pass above all through basic English levels, and they project toward customer service, search and navigation, and mixed transferable profiles.

***Figure 55.*** *Sankey diagram — Health and Care.*



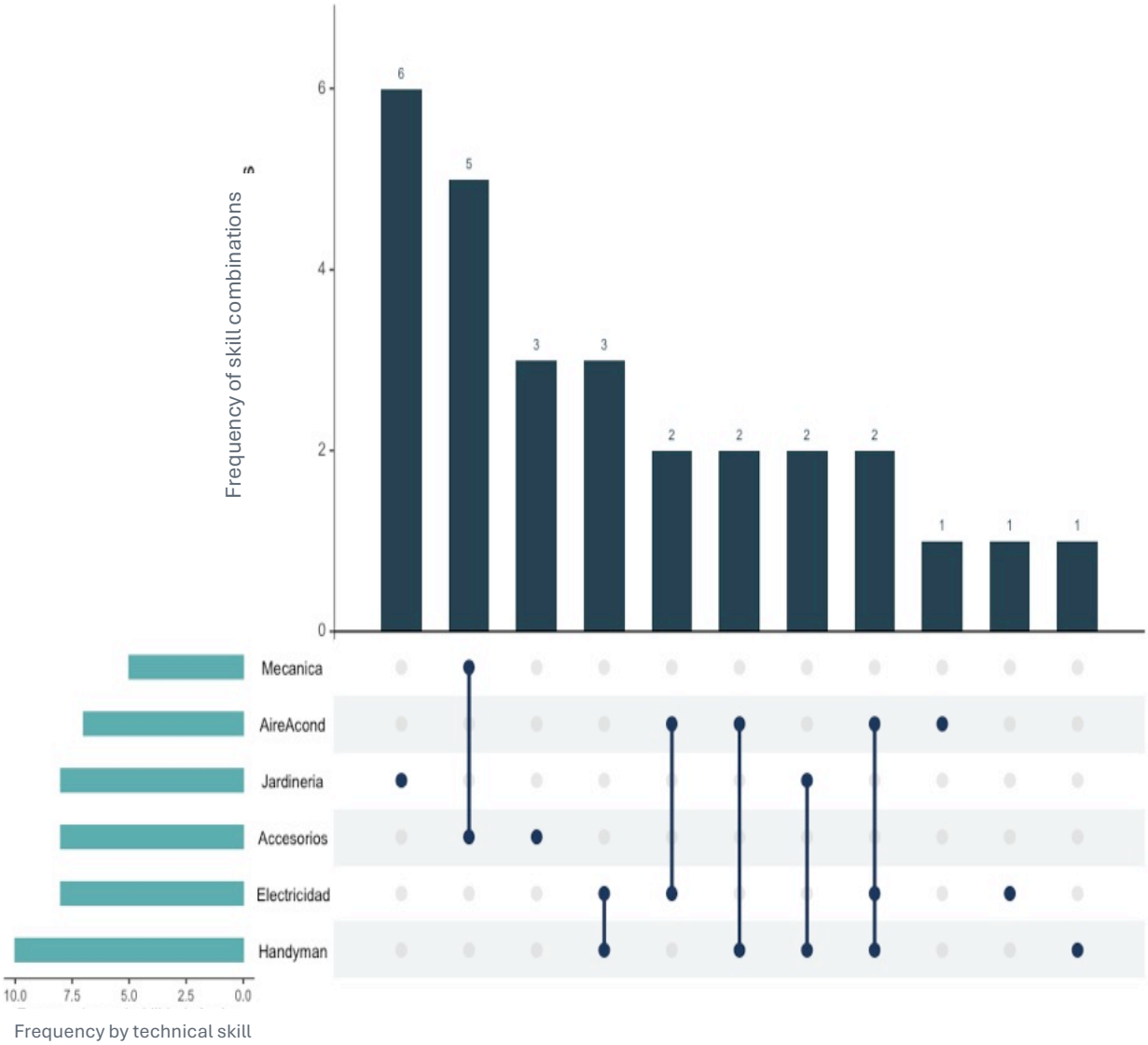

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The sector combines an active base of experience with mobility potential, but it requires making the acquired competencies more legible. For formal labor pathways, it will be important to distinguish among non-certified care, personal assistance, community support, basic first-aid training, care of older adults, and possible pathways for certification or specialized training.

### 5.6.7 Maintenance, Repairs, and Automotive

The sector concentrates practical technical skills: handyman, electricity, accessories, air conditioning, and mechanics. Tasks of fault resolution, component adjustment, corrective maintenance, and operational support across different systems predominate.

***Figure 56.*** *UpSet chart — Maintenance, Repairs, and Automotive.*

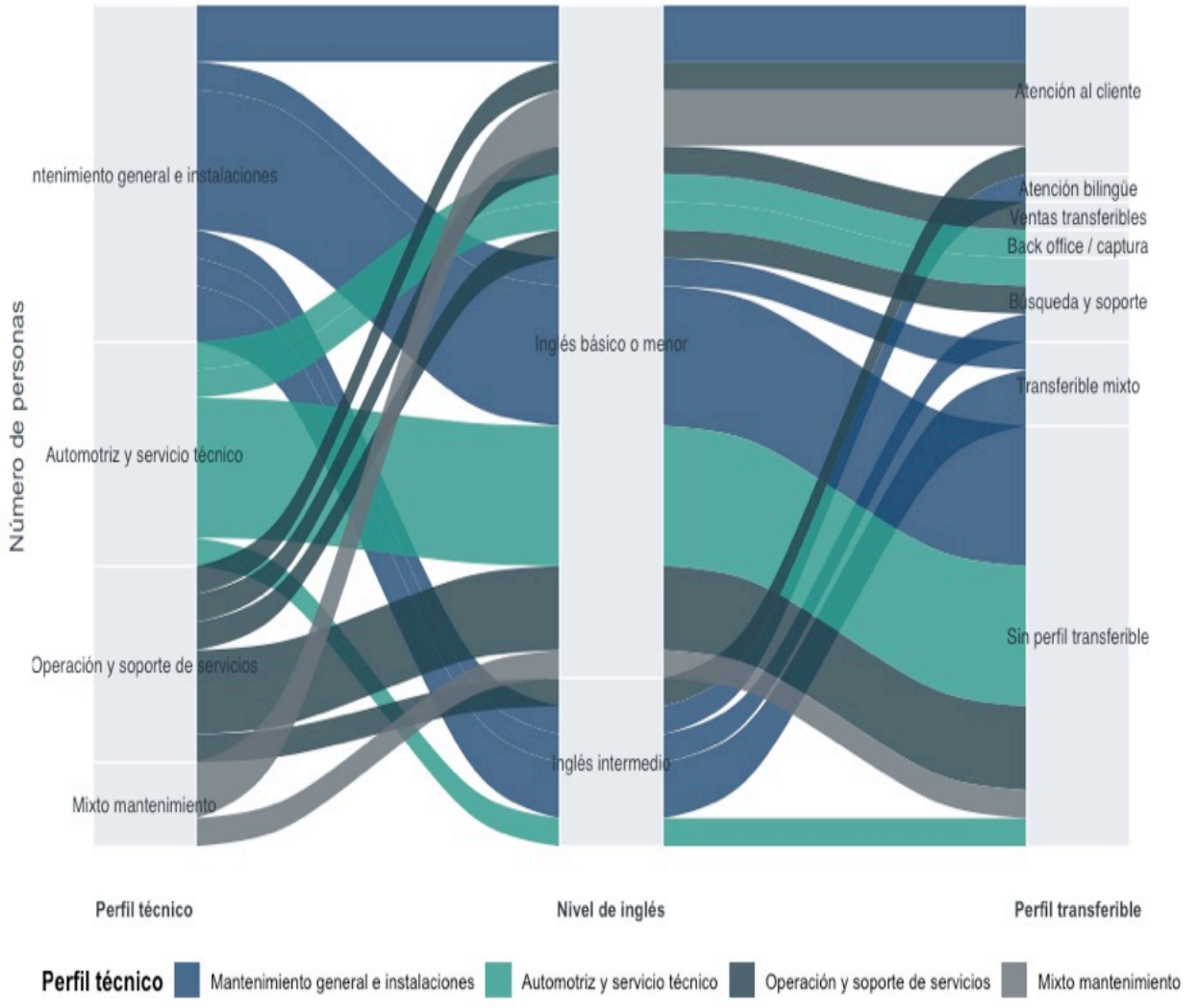



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The most frequent combinations reveal **versatile profiles**, closer to comprehensive maintenance than to a single specialization. The pattern outlines labor capital with a strong practical base, oriented toward execution, problem-solving, and technical adaptability.

The Sankey shows that the experience does not remain confined to the technical domain, but generates pathways into transferable profile, albeit in a dispersed way. The flows start from general maintenance and installations, automotive and technical service, and service operation and support; they pass through basic or lower English levels, and they project toward customer service, search and support, mixed profiles, transferable sales, back office and data entry, and even bilingual customer service.

***Figure 57.*** *Sankey diagram — Maintenance, Repairs, and Automotive.*



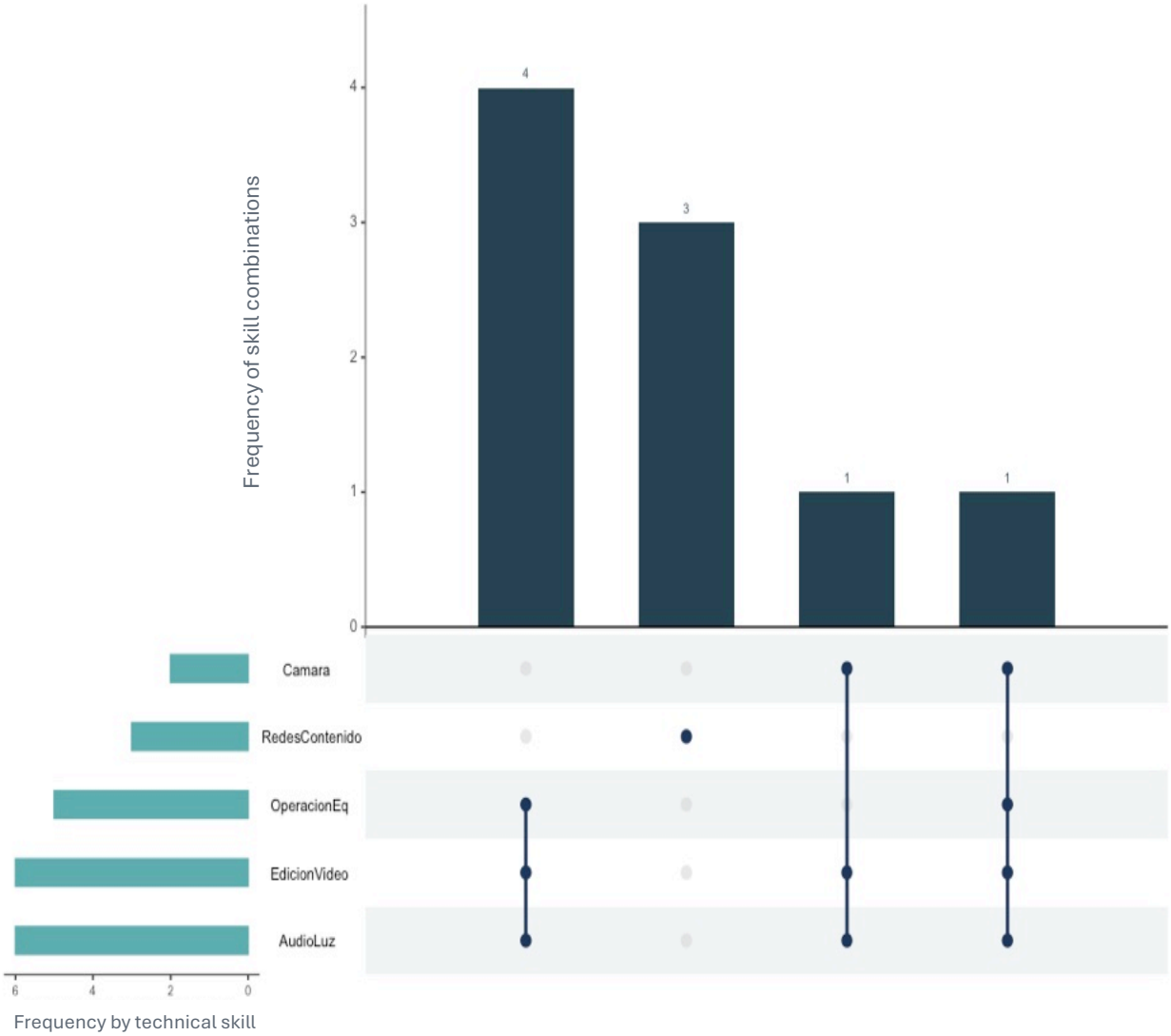

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

This sector requires strategies for **making competencies visible**. Practical experience can be linked to short certifications in basic electricity, preventive maintenance, refrigeration, light mechanics, occupational safety, or technical user support. Its potential increases if combined with documentation of experience, practical assessment, and engagement with local employers.

### 5.6.8 Arts and Media

Here, skills linked to audiovisual production and operation are concentrated: audio and lighting, video editing, equipment operation and, to a lesser extent, networks, content, and camera. The experience is located more in technical execution and the production of pieces or events than in isolated creative functions.

***Figure 58.*** *UpSet chart — Arts and Media.*

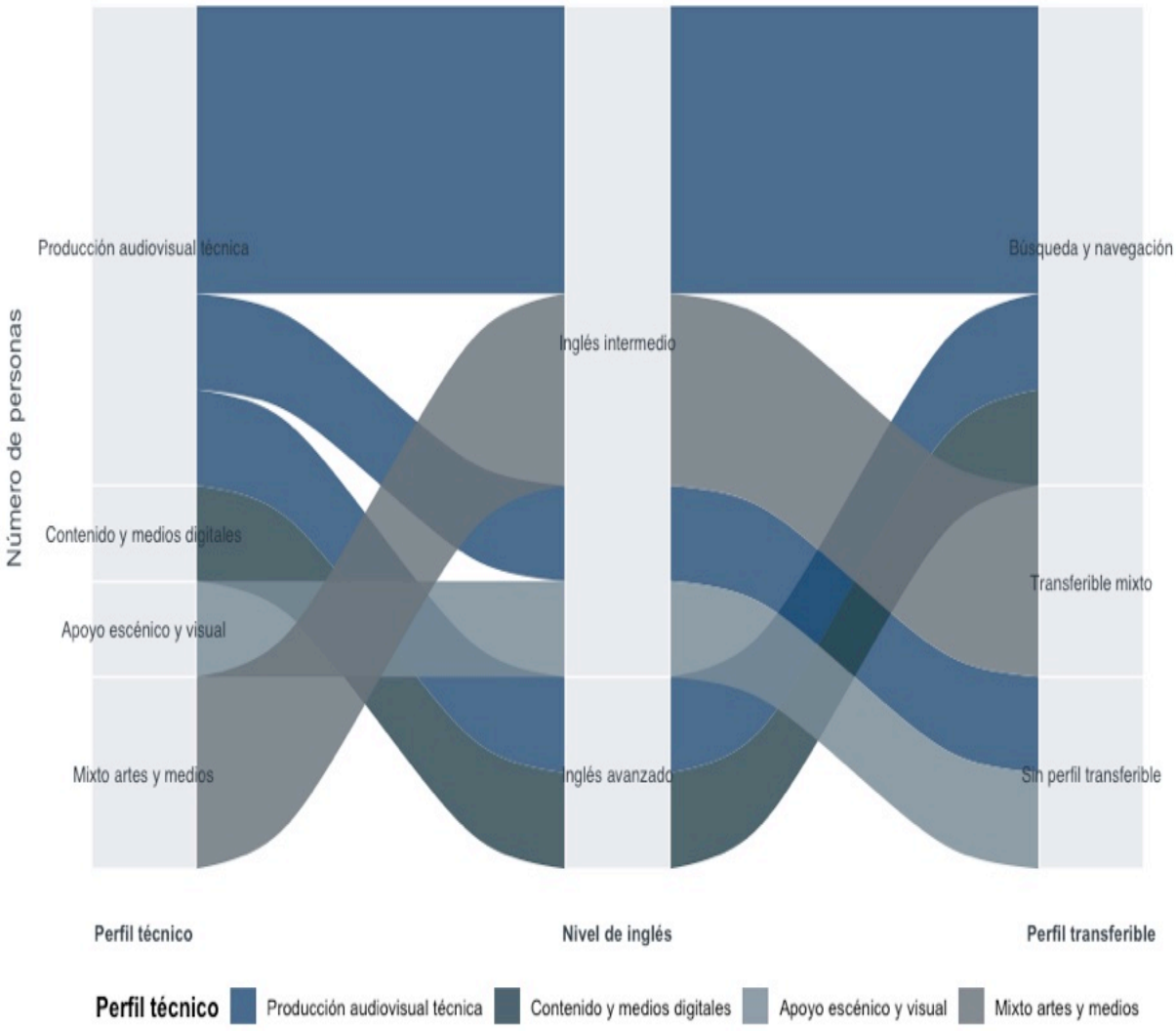



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The most frequent combinations reveal functional profiles articulated around audio, lighting, video editing, and equipment operation. The sector outlines labor capital with value in contexts where technical execution, operational coordination, adaptation to tools, and multimedia production matter.

The Sankey shows that the experience projects toward transferable skills with value in other contexts. The flows start from technical audiovisual production, content and digital media, stage and visual support, and mixed profiles; they pass above all through intermediate and advanced English levels; and they end mainly in search and navigation and mixed transferable profiles.

***Figure 59.*** *Sankey diagram — Arts and Media.*



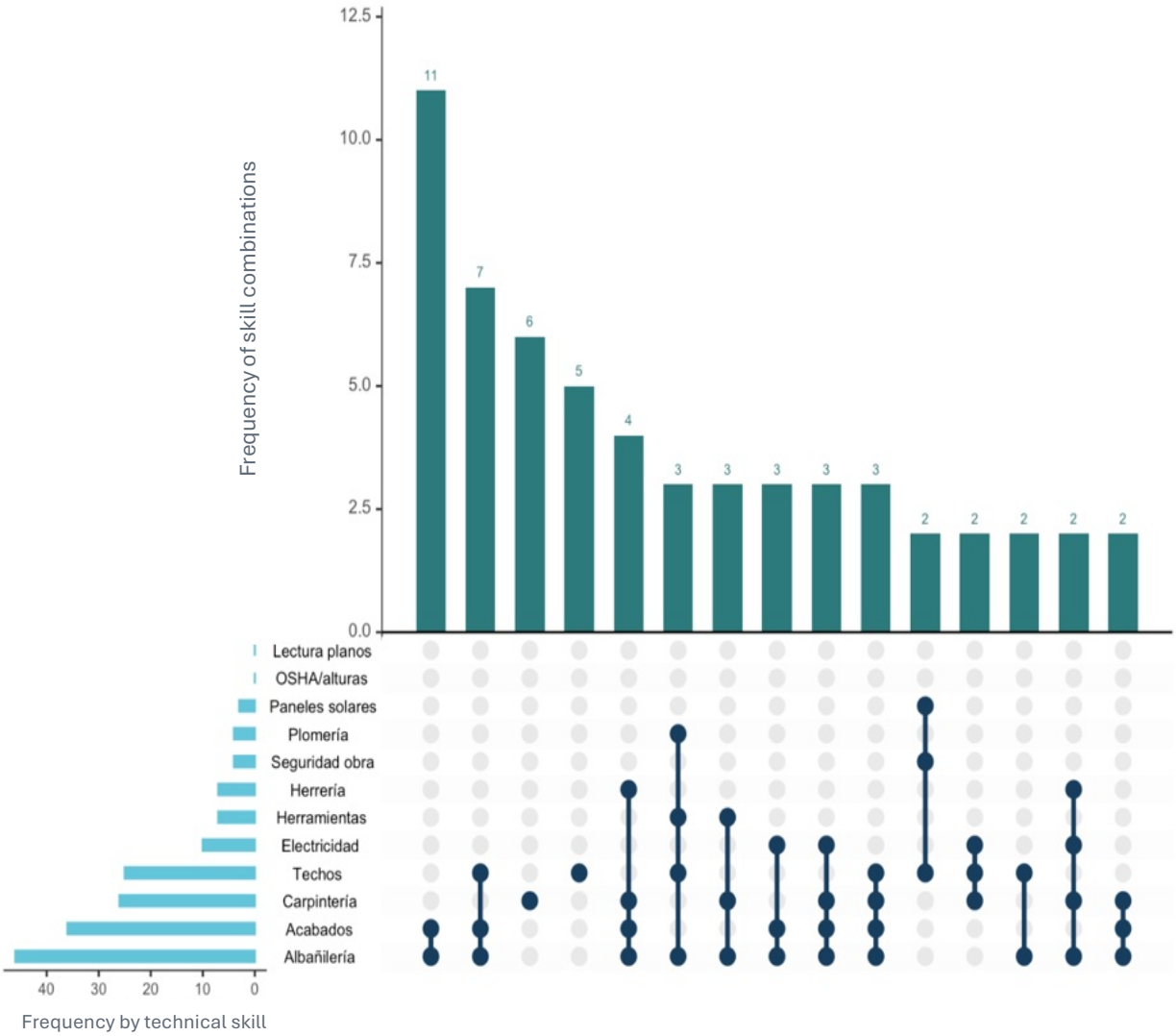

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Although the sector may be small, it shows interesting potential for functions of digital operation, content production, audiovisual support, visual communication, event assistance, documentation of activities, and active information search. It can operate as a specialized pathway for profiles with greater digital and linguistic readiness.

### 5.6.9 Construction

Construction concentrates traditional operational skills, led by masonry, finishing, carpentry, and roofing. The more specialized or emerging competencies, such as solar panels, blueprint reading, safety certifications, OSHA, or working at heights, have a reduced or nonexistent presence.

***Figure 60.*** *UpSet chart — Construction.*

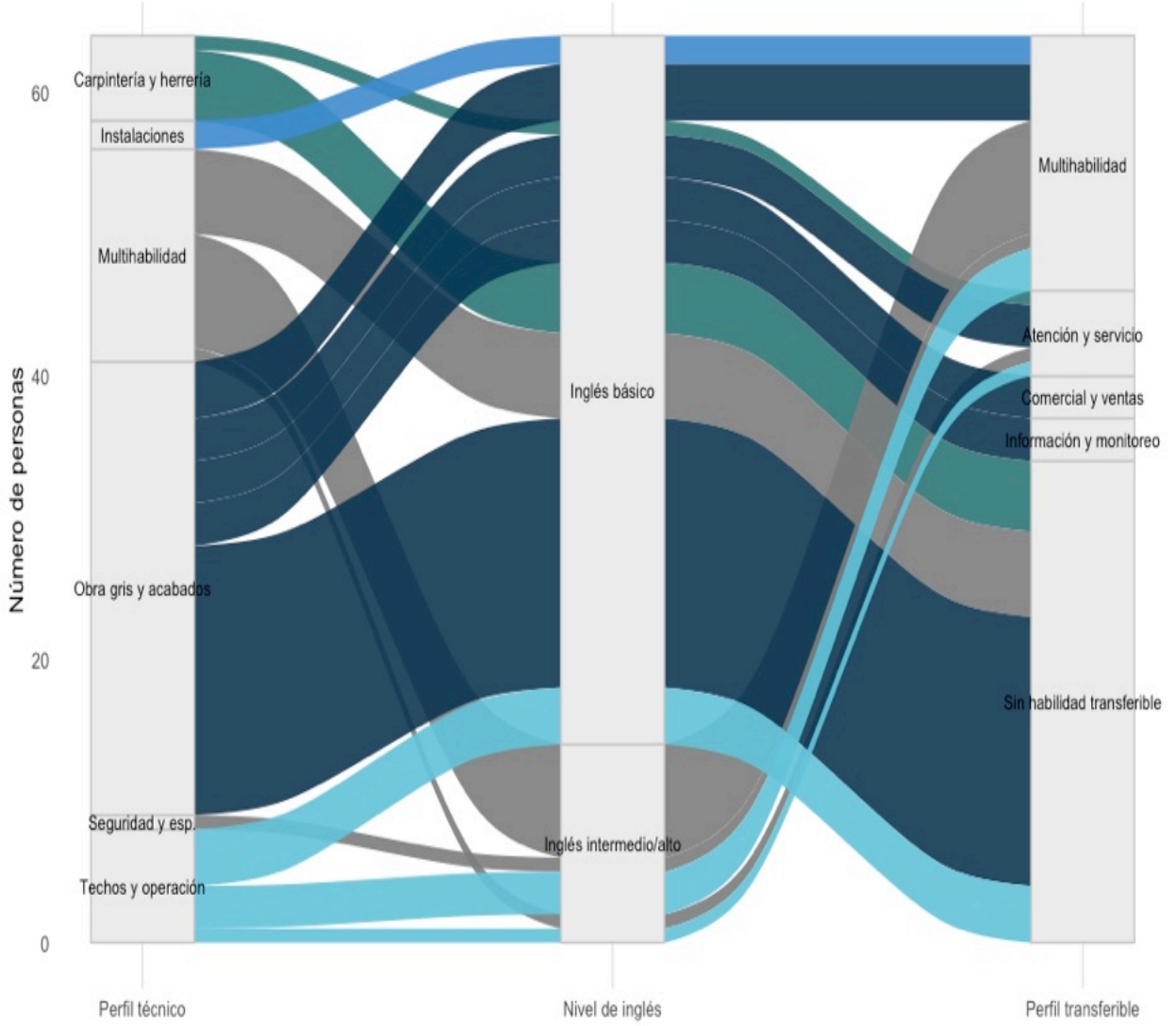



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The most frequent combinations cluster into packages of closely related skills within the trade, not into highly diversified profiles. This suggests trajectories built from practice and the accumulation of field experience, rather than from formal processes of certification or advanced technical specialization.

The Sankey suggests that this profile's employment pathways are anchored primarily in trade-based skills and practical experience, rather than in competencies that are immediately portable across sectors. Basic English predominates, and a significant share of cases does not show a clearly coded transferable skill within the analytical framework. The most visible transferable profiles are multiskilling and, to a lesser extent, customer service, commercial and sales functions, and information monitoring.

***Figure 61.*** *Sankey diagram — Construction.*



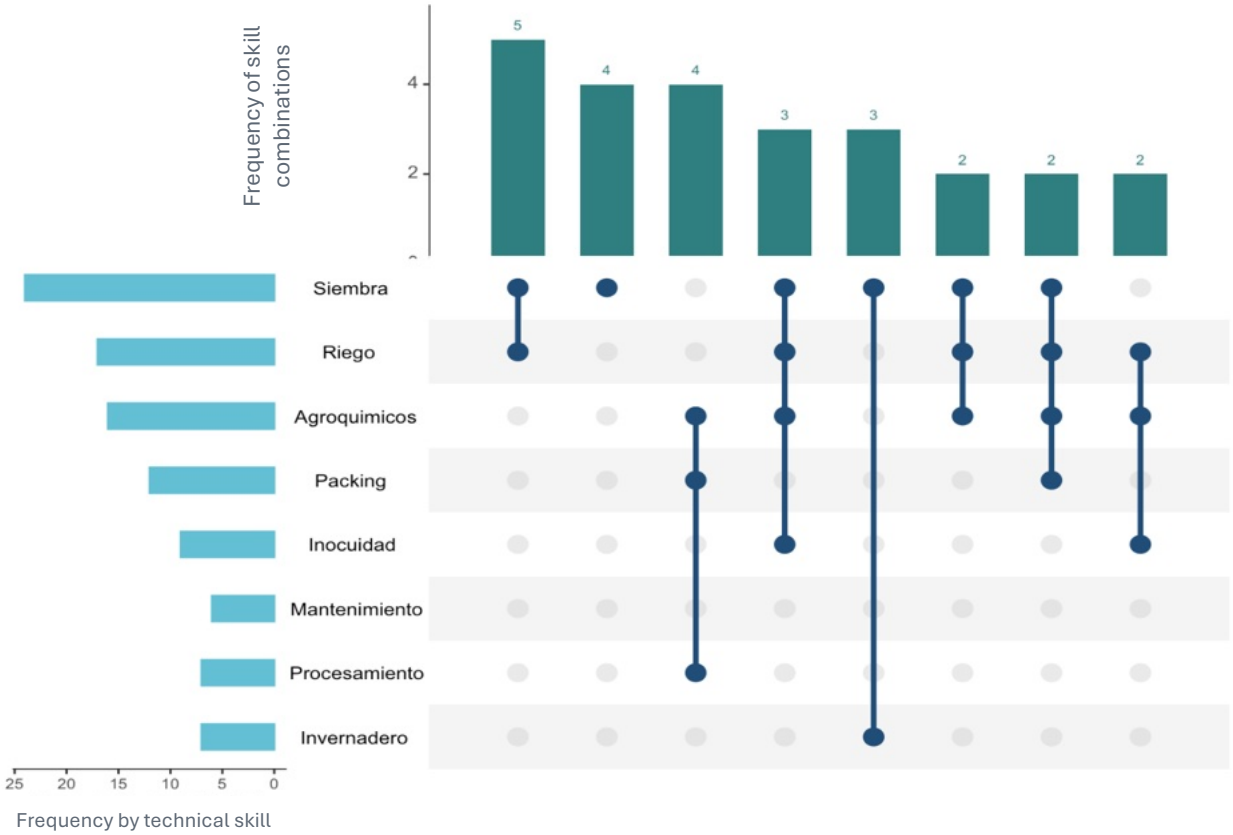

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

It is not enough to connect this population to construction job openings. Recognition and translation of competencies, basic safety certification, strengthening of functional English, and explicit development of transferable skills are required. Pathways toward maintenance, installations, energy efficiency, solar panels, light construction, or basic supervision could also be explored, provided that technical partners and local demand exist.

### 5.6.10 Agriculture

This sector concentrates operational field skills: planting, irrigation, and agrochemicals. The competencies associated with higher-value-added processes —food safety, maintenance, processing, or greenhouse— appear less frequently and in more limited combinations.

***Figure 62.*** *UpSet chart — Agriculture.*

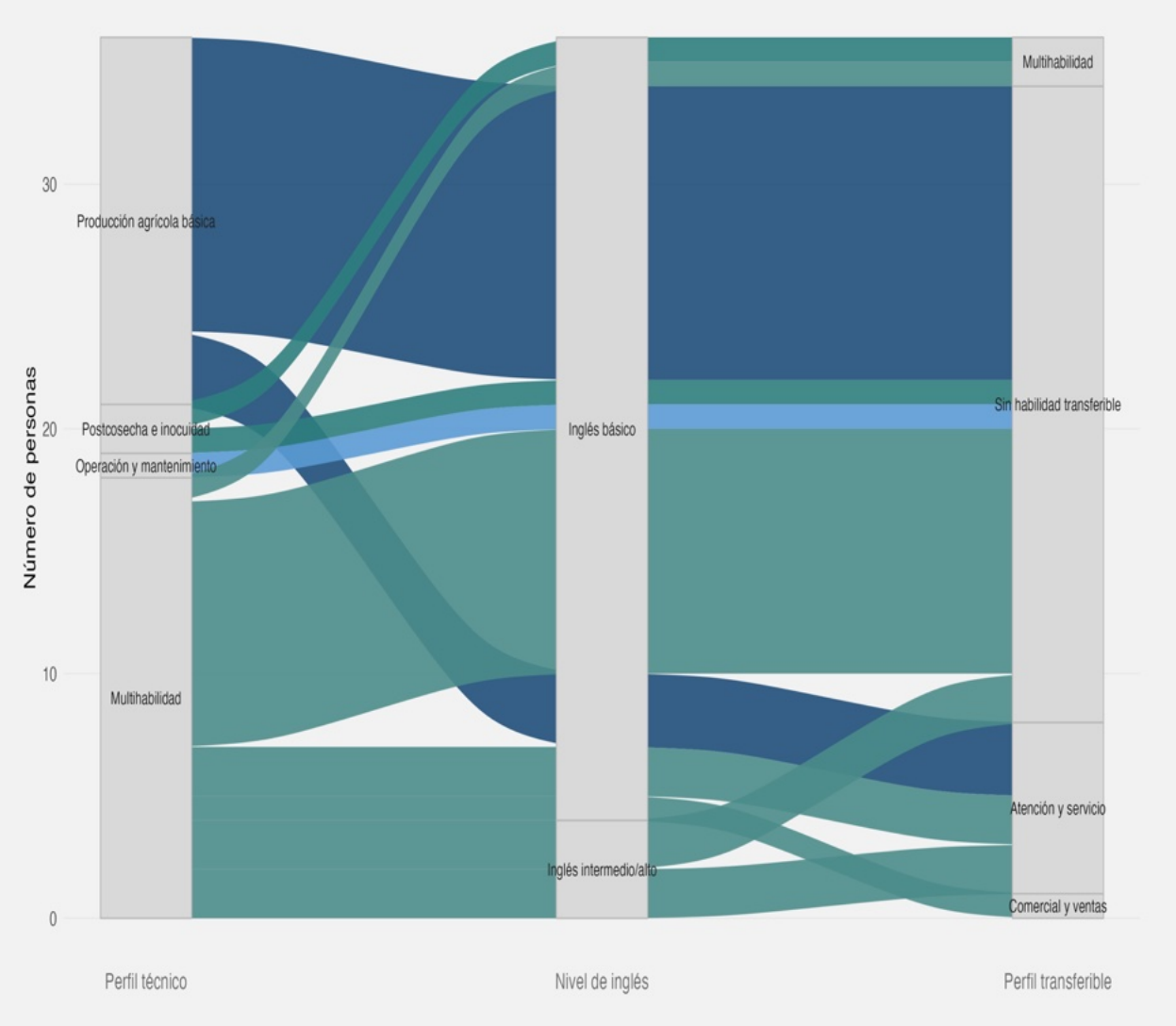



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The most frequent combinations reflect packages of skills tied to specific stages of agricultural work, which suggests solid practical experience but one historically concentrated in primary tasks. This type of experience tends to have low visibility in formal employability systems, even though it involves discipline, physical endurance, adherence to routines, coordination, and process management.

The Sankey shows a trajectory concentrated in basic agricultural production and task multiskilling, with a predominance of basic English. When moving toward the transferable profile, most of the flow ends in “no clearly coded transferable skill identified in the instrument,” while a smaller fraction projects toward customer service, commercial and sales, or multiskilling recognizable outside the sector.

***Figure 63.*** *Sankey diagram — Agriculture.*



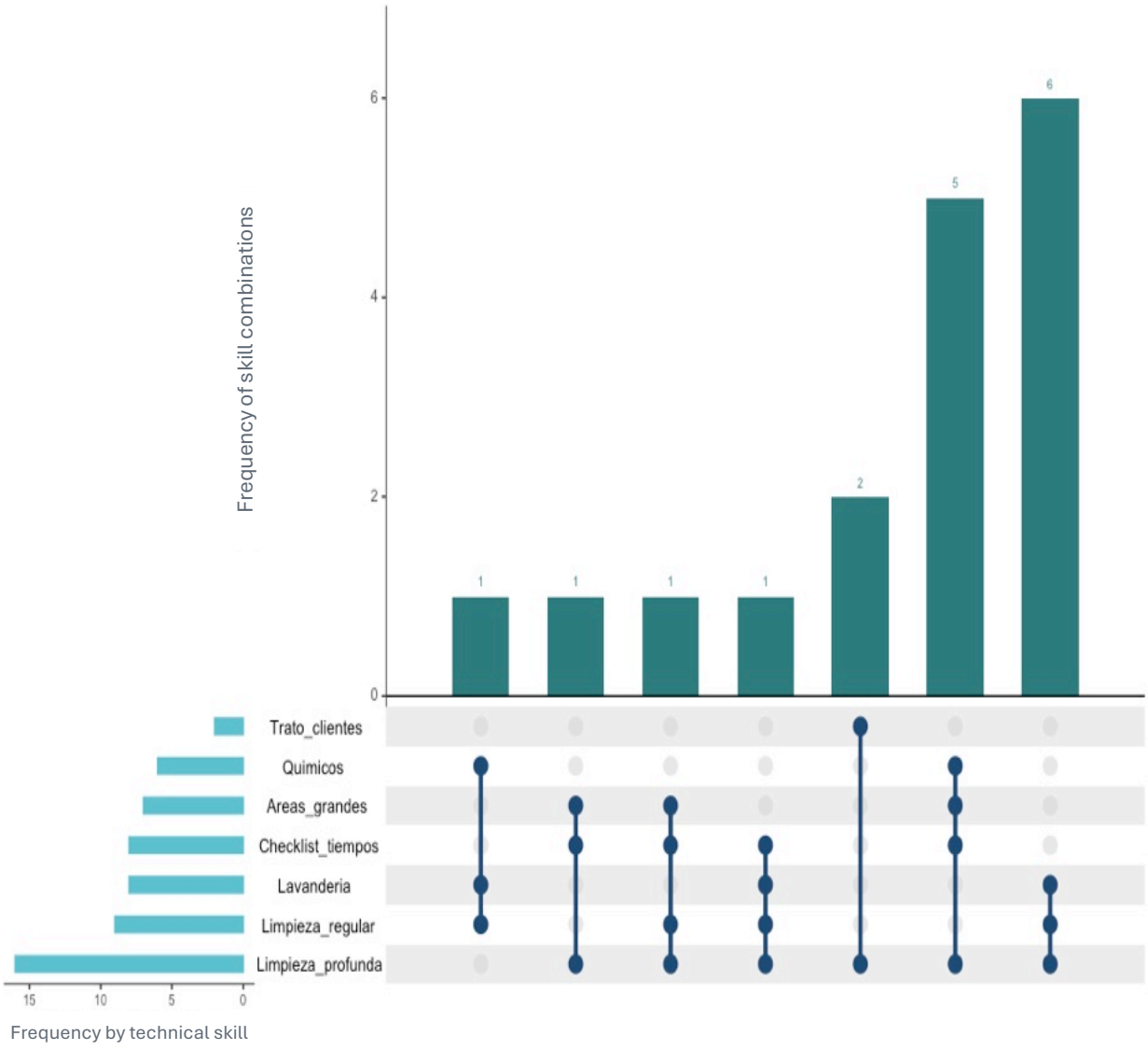

**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Agricultural competencies are underrecognized and poorly codified. To broaden labor-market-entry pathways, strategies are needed for identifying transferable skills, basic digital literacy, strengthening of functional English, certification in food safety or safety, and reskilling toward agri-food logistics, processing, packaging, basic maintenance, or related services.

### 5.6.11 Residential and Business Cleaning

In this case, the sector concentrates a structured operational core: deep cleaning, regular cleaning, laundry, management of checklists and timing, cleaning of large areas, and use of chemicals. These are trajectories built in environments where standardized execution, order, work pace, and adherence to routines are central.

***Figure 64.*** *UpSet chart — Residential and Business Cleaning.*

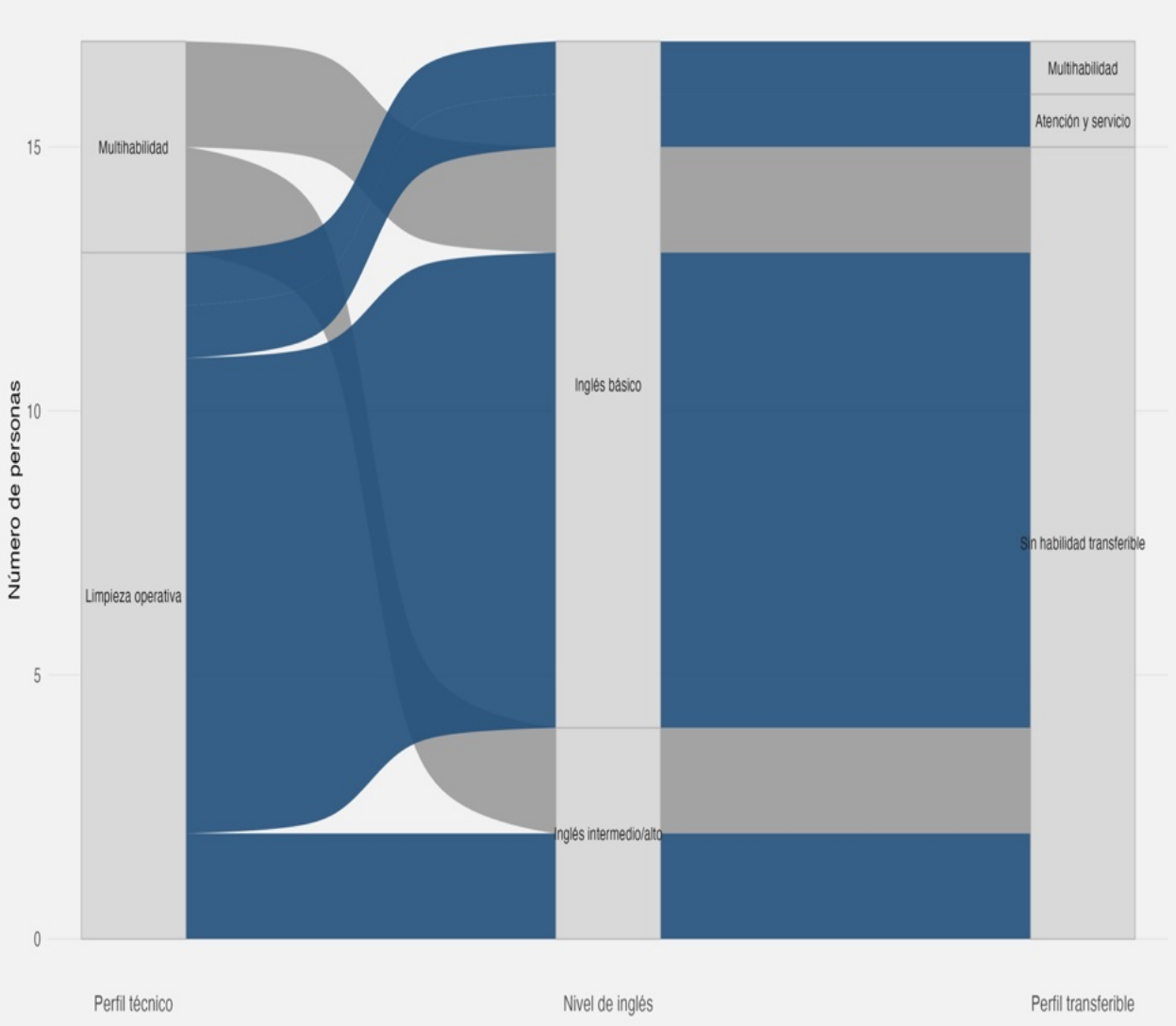



**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The presence of checklists and compliance timing stands out among the most frequent combinations, which indicates experience in organized, measurable, standards-oriented work schemes. In contrast, dealing with customers appears with lower relative weight, which concentrates the experience in service operations rather than in direct-interaction functions.

The Sankey shows a relatively limited translation into transferable skills. The flows pass mainly through basic English levels and end above all in trajectories with no clearly identified transferable skill, with lighter outlets toward customer service and multiskilling.

***Figure 65.*** *Sankey diagram — Residential and Business Cleaning.*




**Source:** authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

The sector generates **valuable competencies** —operational discipline, adherence to routines, execution to standards, time management, and the capacity to sustain several tasks at once—, but these are strongly associated with the specific context of the cleaning service. Their cross-sector mobility will depend on making those functional competencies visible and on complementing them with digital literacy, basic customer service, safety, chemical handling, and short certifications in standardized operations.

## 5.7 Implications for Training, Certification, and Placement Pathways

The analysis confirms that the returning or in-mobility population **does not require a uniform training pathway.** It requires a **segmented employability model**, capable of recognizing different starting points and different speeds of labor-market activation. From a workforce-development perspective, the pilot should be structured around five programmatic pathways.

The first pathway corresponds to **immediate employment activation**. This pathway would be relevant for people with experience in contact center, sales, hospitality, logistics, arts and media, or certain manufacturing profiles who already have transferable skills, functional use of English, or sufficient digital readiness. For these profiles, the intervention should focus on profiling, interview preparation, rapid validation of skills, connection to job openings, and post-placement follow-up.

The second pathway corresponds to **recognition and certification of prior learning**. This pathway would be useful for people with solid practical experience but without formal credentials, especially in manufacturing, maintenance, care, construction, food, logistics, and cleaning. The objective would not be to train from scratch, but to convert experience into verifiable evidence through practical assessment, records, microcredentials, or short certifications with value to employers.

The third pathway corresponds to **modular upskilling**. This pathway would address specific gaps in functional English, customer service, digital skills, workplace communication, occupational safety, use of tools, working to standards, or basic process management. It must be short, flexible, and connected to concrete sectors, avoiding generic courses that do not translate into job opportunities.

The fourth pathway corresponds to **occupational reskilling**. This pathway would be necessary for profiles whose experience comes from sectors with less immediate transferability —such as agriculture, cleaning, or part of construction—, but who have operational discipline, practical experience, and a willingness to work. The reskilling should

be oriented toward sectors with local demand and reasonable barriers to entry: logistics, light manufacturing, services, basic maintenance, hospitality, food processing, or care.

The fifth pathway corresponds to **assisted employment entry** and intensive support. This pathway would be relevant for people with lower educational levels, low digital readiness, little clarity about certification, documentation barriers, or economic urgency. In these cases, job placement must be accompanied by guidance, service navigation, documentation support, skills assessment, labor-market intermediation with employers, and follow-up.

In design terms, the pilot should start from an **individual employability assessment** that classifies people not only by sector of experience, but by a combination of variables: educational attainment, prior experience, level of responsibility, transferable skills, functional English, digital readiness, interest in getting certified, time and cost barriers, and time horizon for remaining in Mexico. This segmentation would make it possible to assign differentiated pathways and to avoid two common risks in employment programs: over-training those who are already close to the labor market, or under-serving those who require prior supports to sustain a labor-market-entry trajectory.

The chapter shows that **employment potential exists**, but it is not activated automatically. The work experience accumulated by returnees and migrants in mobility must be recognized, translated, and connected to real demand. For this reason, the pilot should operate as a bridge between migration trajectories and employment opportunities: identifying skills, validating competencies, closing specific gaps, and connecting people with employers, sectors, and locations where those capabilities can become pathways to productive inclusion.



# Chapter 6. Place-based analysis of labor demand and site recommendation for the pilot

This chapter examines the place-based feasibility of operating a pilot to support the social and labor-market integration or reintegration of returnees and migrants in mobility. Its purpose is to translate the accumulated evidence —the population's profile, skills, barriers, local ecosystems, and labor demand— into a concrete place-based recommendation for implementation.

The analysis is organized as a decision funnel. First, it explains why, out of the 11 data-collection sites, four states were selected to deepen the labor-demand analysis: Baja California, Chihuahua, Mexico City, and the State of Mexico. Second, it examines the structure of job openings in those states, considering volume, sector composition, change over time, salary transparency, and median earnings. Third, it analyzes the behavior of priority sectors by state. Finally, it presents the criteria supporting the recommendation of Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez as priority cities for the pilot's initial operation.

The chapter's central logic is that site selection should not rest solely on the volume of job openings or only on the presence of a migrant population. A workforce-development pilot requires the convergence of four conditions: an accessible target population, sufficient labor demand, a local ecosystem capable of operating or supporting the intervention, and the institutional viability to sustain training, certification, labor-market intermediation, and follow-up. From this perspective, the site decision must weigh both need and implementation capacity.

## 6.1 Place-based targeting criteria: from 11 data-collection sites to four states for labor-market analysis

Data collection was deployed across 11 sites, making it possible to capture experiences linked to different contexts of return, transit, reception, and care. For the labor-demand analysis, however, the focus was narrowed to four states: Baja California, Chihuahua, Mexico City, and the State of Mexico. This decision followed a programmatic logic: to concentrate the analysis on states where the migration phenomenon, labor-market demand, IYF's strategic interest, and operational feasibility converge. Some states were essential for broadening the sample's territorial diversity and understanding migration trajectories, but at this stage they did not necessarily offer the strongest conditions for deepening the labor-market analysis, coordinating local stakeholders, and envisioning pilot implementation.

The focus on four states rested on the convergence of three types of evidence: migration, labor, and operational. From a workforce-development perspective, a viable site for a pilot is not merely one where there is a returnee population or where job openings exist, but one where both dimensions can be connected through institutional infrastructure, trusted partners, conditions of access, and follow-up capacity.

The ten criteria used were as follows:

1. **Presence of a returning or in-mobility population.** Priority was given to territories with flows, reception points, or sites of transit, waiting, or settlement of the target population.

2. **Relative weight within the data collection.** States with a greater concentration of responses, or with a substantive contribution to the analysis of profiles, barriers, and trajectories, were considered.

3. **Local labor demand.** The analysis weighed the existence of markets with sufficient volume, sector diversity, stable job openings, and sectors with reasonable barriers to entry.

4. **Compatibility between profiles and demand.** It examined the alignment between the skills, work experience, and sectors of origin observed in the surveyed population and the potential absorption opportunities in each territory.

5. **Support ecosystem.** It considered the presence of shelters, civil-society organizations, public institutions, training centers, community stakeholders, employers, or business chambers able to take part in a labor-market reintegration pathway.

6. **Capacity for operational anchoring.** The analysis weighed the existence of local infrastructure, institutional relationships, prior intervention experience, or the minimum conditions to operate assessment, training, certification, labor-market intermediation, and follow-up activities.

7. **IYF's prior presence or experience.** It considered the possibility of drawing on IYF's institutional relationships, place-based knowledge, or prior operational capacity as a viability factor to shorten setup times and increase the pilot's feasibility.

8. **Security, access, and field feasibility.** It took into account the real-world conditions for recruiting participants, running activities, protecting the people involved, and sustaining ties with local stakeholders.

9. **Value added by the pilot.** It assessed whether the intervention could complement existing services without duplicating efforts, especially by adding a workforce-development layer where current services concentrate on humanitarian assistance, lodging, documentation, or initial support.

10. **Scalability potential.** It analyzed whether the lessons generated in the territory could later be transferred, adapted, or replicated in other contexts.

***Figure 66.*** *Map of the states selected for the analysis.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample

Under these criteria, Baja California and Chihuahua make it possible to analyze the northern border as a space of reception, transit, return, and possible early labor-market integration. Mexico City and the State of Mexico allow observation of metropolitan markets with greater volume, sector diversity, and institutional density. This selection offers comparative value because it contrasts two broad types of territory: on one hand, border states closer to the migration phenomenon and to initial care; on the other, metropolitan states with broader labor markets but also greater institutional competition and more differentiated barriers to entry.

Selecting these four states does not imply that the remaining sites lack importance. Rather, it makes it possible to move from a broad reading of 11 territories to a more strategic labor-market analysis, able to contrast implementation scenarios and guide decisions about where a complete reintegration pathway can be built: profile identification, minimum stabilization, relevant training, certification, engagement with employers, and post-placement follow-up.

## 6.2 Methodological note on the job-vacancy analysis

The labor-demand analysis was built from IYF's job-openings database, which aggregates postings from multiple digital employment platforms active in Mexico, including LinkedIn, Portal del Empleo, OCC, Indeed, among others. The analysis involved building an analytical catalog of 17 occupational sectors, developed from the information available in the LOT Occupation Group and LOT Specialized Occupation fields of IYF's job-openings database. This classification was supplemented with additional recovery rules based on job-opening titles, in order to capture relevant occupations that the original occupational taxonomy did not consistently identify.

The catalog's purpose was to organize job openings into sectors that are interpretable from the standpoint of employability, labor-market entry, and possible training pathways for the in-mobility population. The classification therefore did not merely reproduce existing occupational categories; rather, it sought to group job openings into sectors that are analytically useful for programmatic decision-making.

Records that did not provide enough information for a reliable classification, as well as those with ambiguous, overly generic, or potentially informal-occupation titles, were kept in the "Unclassified" category. This methodological decision made it possible to avoid forced assignments that could distort the sectoral reading of demand. Rather than excluding such records, they were kept within the observed universe to preserve the traceability of the information and to allow comparative analyses with and without this category.

In addition, an analytical flag was created for potentially suspicious or low-reliability job openings, designed to identify postings with textual patterns associated with informal, ambiguous, or potentially risky offers. This flag considered, among other elements, titles or descriptions linked to atypical income promises, hard-to-verify work arrangements, at-home packing activities, offers lacking occupational clarity, or postings that might correspond to unconventional forms of employment. The variable neither modifies nor removes the original universe of job openings: its function is to enable sensitivity exercises and differentiated readings, so that results can be analyzed both over the full set and over

more conservative subsets. This strengthens the robustness of the analysis by making it possible to verify whether certain sectoral or salary patterns hold when potentially ambiguous or low-reliability records are excluded.

**Observation time window.** To ensure temporal comparability, the analysis used only the job openings observed during the month of March of each year over the 2021–2026 period. This decision made it possible to compare labor demand under a single window and to reduce distortions associated with labor-market seasonality —year-end hiring increases, vacation periods, budget closings, agricultural cycles, tourism upticks, or specific sectoral peaks. March was deemed a suitable window because it falls after the initial labor-market adjustment of January and February but before the Holy Week and summer vacation cycles; in that sense, it offers a relatively more stable reading of regular demand and allows year-over-year trends to be observed with less exposure to short-term seasonal fluctuations.

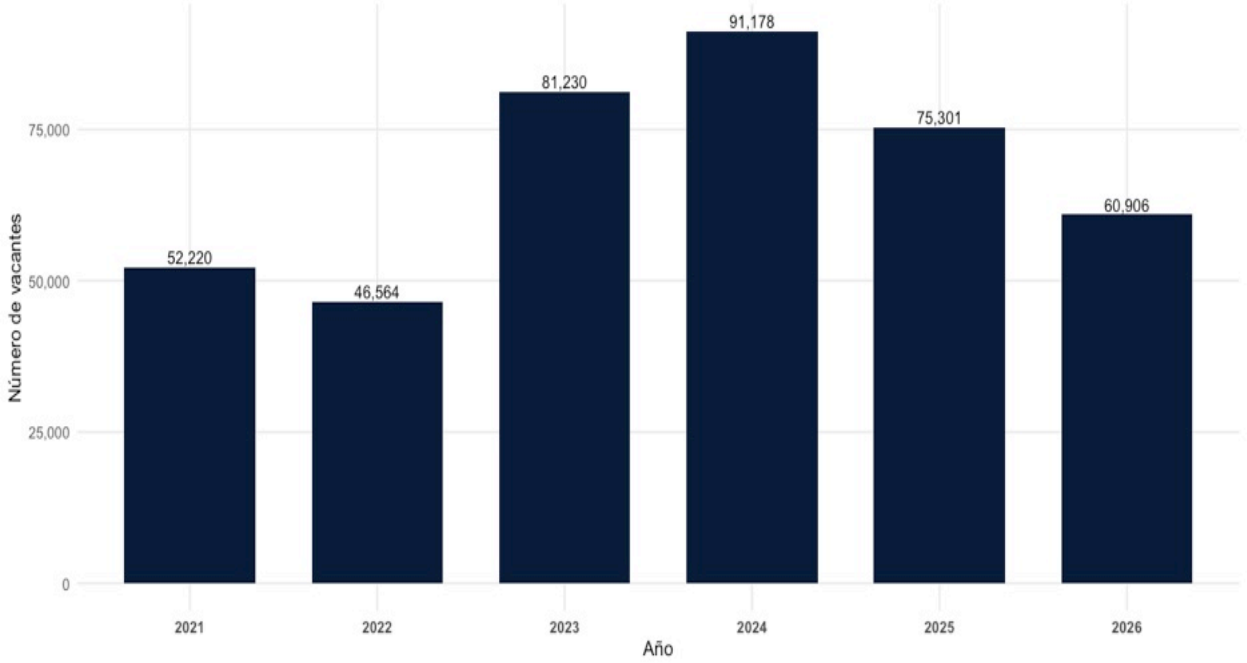
Taken together, these decisions made it possible to build a more consistent analytical base for examining the evolution of job openings by sector, state, and year, as well as for identifying potential entry-level labor-market-entry opportunities for the in-mobility population in the selected territories.

## 6.3 Regional analysis of job openings in the target states

The first finding of the analysis is that the four states concentrate a sufficient volume of labor demand to assess the feasibility of labor-market entry. The analysis compares the job openings recorded in March of each year between 2021 and 2026, holding the observation window constant to reduce biases associated with seasonal variation.

The volume of job openings should not be interpreted in isolation. A state with a higher absolute number of job openings does not necessarily offer better conditions for the pilot if those openings are concentrated in sectors with higher barriers to entry, if the care ecosystem is saturated, or if the target population has less effective access to those jobs. The analysis therefore combines volume, composition, trajectory, and salary.

*Figure 67. Total volume of job openings recorded in March by state and year (2021–2026)*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

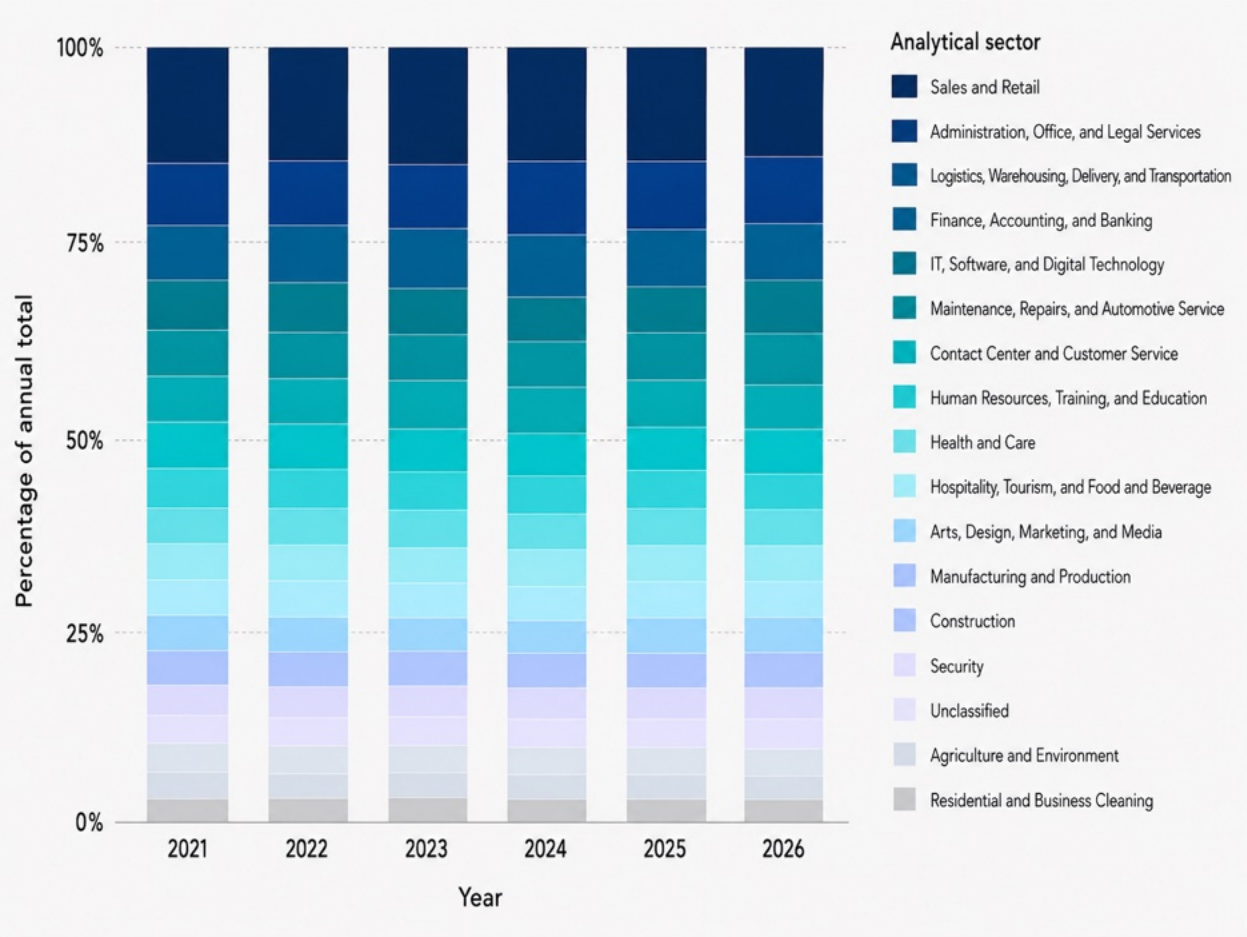
### 6.3.1 Sectoral stability and differentiated employment pathways

The sectoral composition of demand remains relatively stable between 2021 and 2026. This stability is programmatically valuable because it allows the pilot to be designed around differentiated employment pathways rather than around a single sector or a short-term hiring cycle. The relevant question is not which sector "wins," but which sectors combine recurrence, absorption capacity, manageable barriers to entry, and realistic opportunities for the profiles identified in the study.

Demand is made up of sectors with different levels of barriers to entry. Some —such as sales and retail, logistics, maintenance, contact centers, hospitality, manufacturing, construction, security, and support services— can offer opportunities closer to initial labor-market entry or rapid reskilling. Others —such as IT, finance, specialized administration, or higher-value-added technical profiles— can function as selective pathways for people with greater educational attainment, prior experience, functional English, or digital competencies.

Consequently, the pilot should be organized as a basket of differentiated employment pathways rather than as a bet on a single sector. The goal is not to identify "the winning sector," but to build a flexible strategy that connects diverse profiles with diverse sectors, prioritizing available jobs, manageable barriers to access, and real absorption capacity.

*Figure 68. Sectoral composition of job openings by year (2021–2026). Percentage distribution of the 17 analytical sectors within each year.*



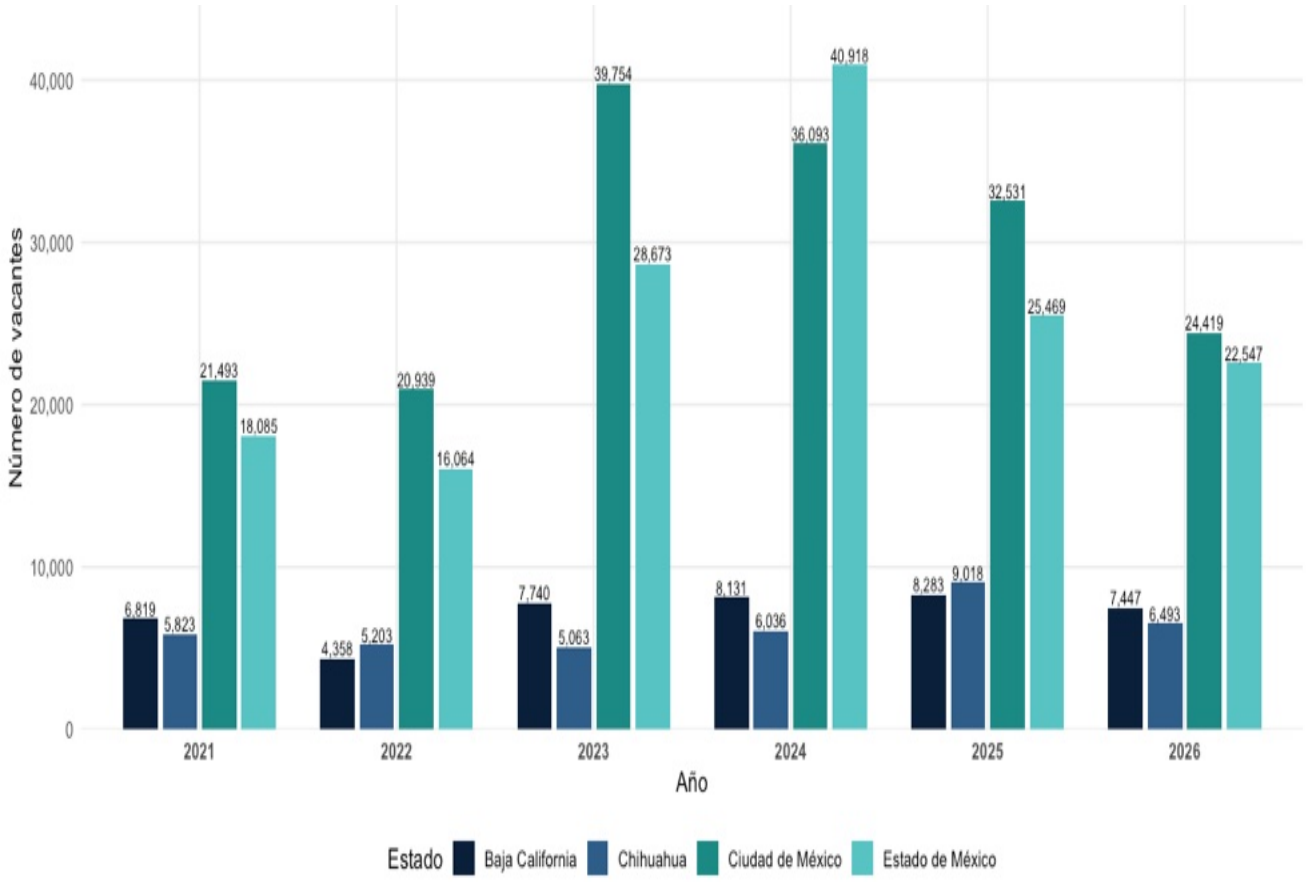

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

### 6.3.2 Metropolitan depth and border relevance

The comparative reading across states confirms that labor demand is not homogeneous. Mexico City and the State of Mexico provide market depth, greater volume, and a wider variety of job openings. Baja California and Chihuahua provide border relevance, proximity to the dynamics of mobility, return, and reception, as well as greater compatibility with technical-operational and productive-support pathways.

This difference should not be read as a simple hierarchy between "better" and "worse" markets. These are two distinct territorial logics. The metropolitan area offers breadth, institutional density, and diversity. The northern border offers greater proximity to the target population, migrant-serving stakeholders, and opportunities to add a workforce-development layer that is less likely to duplicate existing employability programs.

***Figure 69**. Sectoral composition of job openings by state.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

For the pilot's design, this distinction is central. In metropolitan territories, the market may be broader but also more competitive, fragmented, and saturated with actors. On the northern border, the market may be more limited in absolute volume but closer to the migration phenomenon and with greater scope to articulate a comprehensive pathway from reception through to labor-market entry.

## 6.4 Evolution, structure, and transparency of demand

The labor-demand analysis in the four candidate states is approached from several complementary angles: the sectoral composition by state, the year-over-year variation in the volume of job openings, the recent adjustment between 2025 and 2026, the medium-term expansion between 2021 and 2026, and the level of salary transparency. This reading makes it possible to distinguish between structure, short-term conditions, and the quality of the information available to guide decisions tied to the real possibilities for labor-market entry.

It is not enough to identify where there are more job openings; it is also necessary to observe which sectors have a sustained presence, which show recent dynamism, which maintain sufficient volume, how transparent the salary information is, and how compatible demand is with the profiles, skills, and barriers identified in the returning or in-mobility population.

### 6.4.1 Sectoral composition: relatively stable demand across states

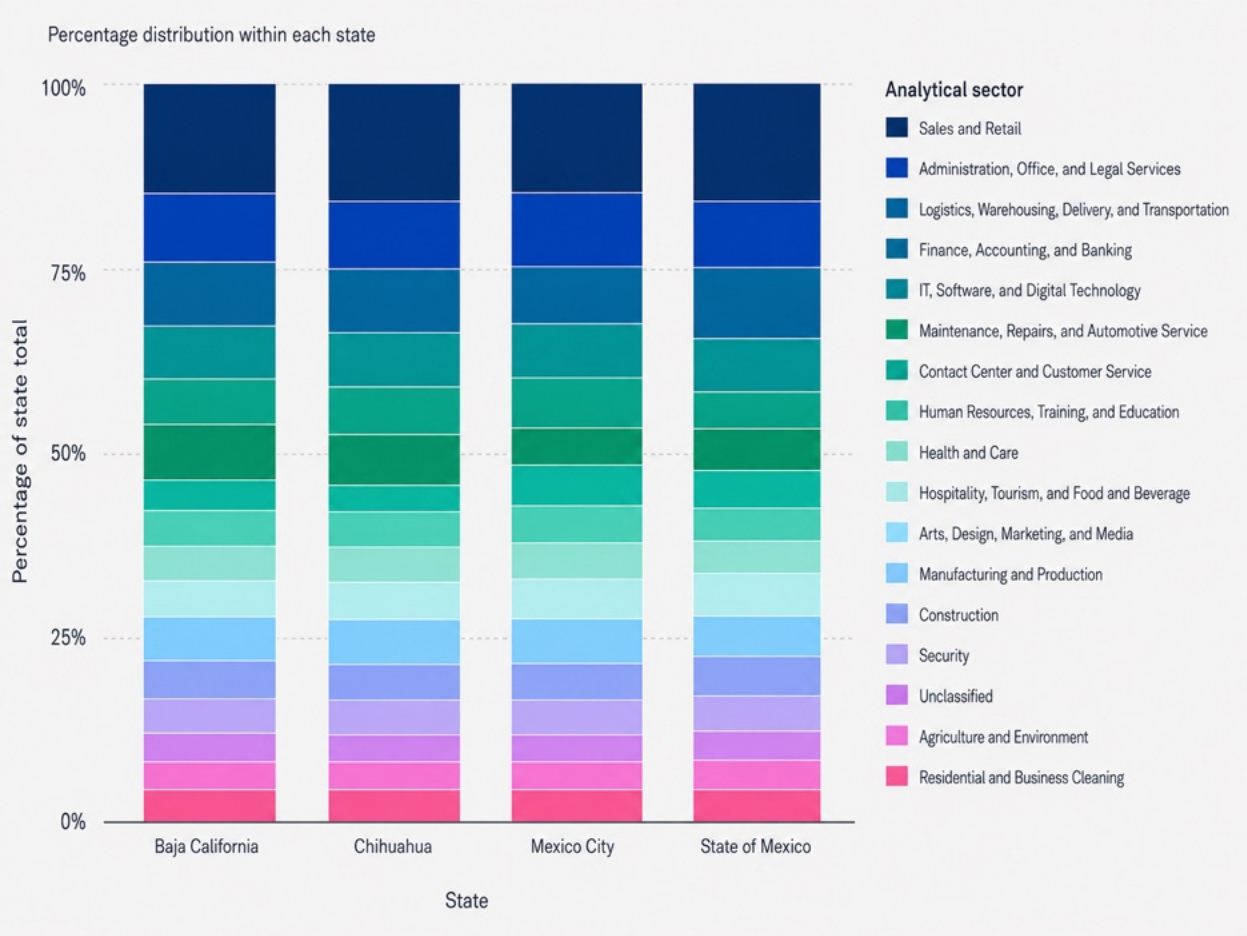
The sectoral composition of job openings shows a relatively similar structure across the four states analyzed. In every case, Sales and Retail appears as one of the largest blocks, followed by sectors such as Administration, Office, and Legal Services; Logistics, Warehousing, Delivery, and Transportation; Finance, Accounting, and Banking; Maintenance, Repairs, and Automotive Service; and Contact Center and Customer Service.

Figure 70 shows that, although territorial differences exist, no state presents a wholly exceptional structure. Baja California, Chihuahua, Mexico City, and the State of Mexico share a broad base of service, operations, administration, logistics, and support sectors.

The pattern also confirms that the observed demand combines sectors with different levels of barriers to entry. Sales, logistics, maintenance, manufacturing, hospitality, cleaning, security, and some service occupations can function as relatively accessible entry or reskilling pathways. By contrast, sectors such as IT, finance, specialized administration, or corporate functions can operate as selective pathways for profiles with greater educational attainment, digital skills, functional English, or prior experience that is more easily credentialed.

In design terms, the sectoral composition suggests that the employability strategy should avoid two risks: concentrating solely on the highest-volume sectors, which may not offer better conditions, or betting only on higher-value-added sectors, which may have higher barriers to entry. The programmatic decision should sit at the midpoint: sectors with sufficient demand, manageable barriers, the possibility of short-term training, and a realistic connection to the observed profiles.

*Figure 70. Sectoral composition of job openings by state analyzed*



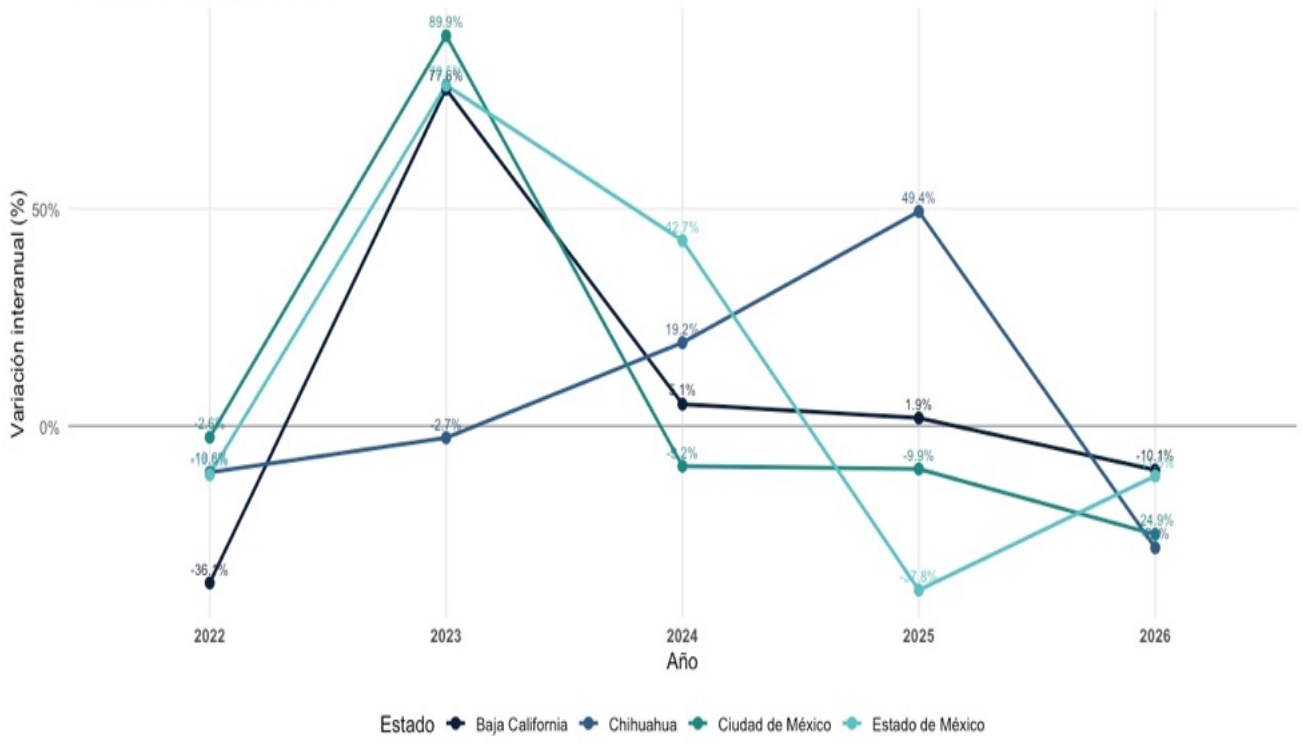

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

### 6.4.2 Year-over-year variation: demand volatility and the need for prudent reading

The year-over-year evolution of job openings shows volatile behavior in the four states. Figure 71 reveals a very pronounced growth peak in 2023, followed by differentiated trajectories in 2024 and 2025, and a general adjustment in 2026.

2023 shows the largest year-over-year increase in the four states, with variations near or above 75% in several cases. This behavior may be associated with the post-pandemic recovery, the reactivation of hiring processes, and the greater digitalization of job openings on employment platforms. After that peak, however, the trajectories diverge: some states sustain partial growth in 2024 or 2025, while others begin to adjust earlier.

***Figure 71.*** *Year-over-year growth or decline in job openings by state, 2022 to 2026*



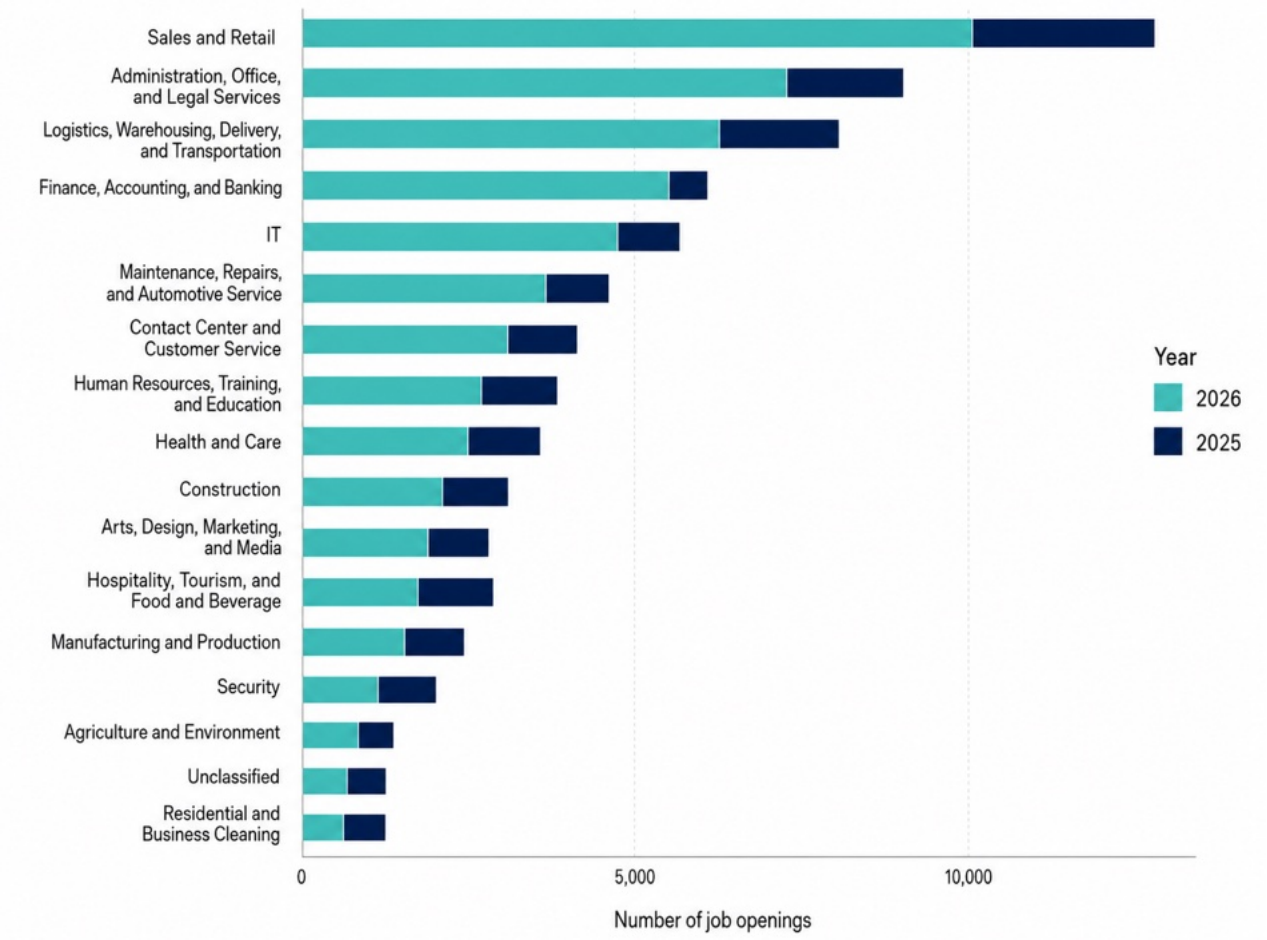

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

In 2026, the year-over-year variation returns to negative or near-zero territory in most cases. This does not necessarily mean an absence of job opportunities, but rather a less expansive demand environment than that observed in prior years. For the pilot, this has direct implications: if the program is expected to support participants through placement, it will require more active labor-market intermediation, careful employer selection, profile segmentation, and prioritization of sectors with sustained demand rather than sectors showing only cyclical growth.

### 6.4.3 Short-term reading: sectoral adjustment between 2025 and 2026

The 2025–2026 comparison shows a differentiated sectoral adjustment. There is no uniform decline across all sectors. Some reduce volume, others remain relatively stable, and others grow. Figure 72 shows that Sales and Retail rises clearly in 2026 and consolidates as the sector with the largest aggregate volume across the four states. By contrast, Logistics, Warehousing, Delivery, and Transportation shows a significant reduction relative to 2025. Finance, Accounting, and Banking remains practically stable, while sectors such as Manufacturing, Hospitality, Construction, Security, and Agriculture present lower volumes or more limited variations.

***Figure 72.*** *Job openings by analytical sector, total across the four states. 2025 vs 2026 comparison (number of job openings by sector)*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

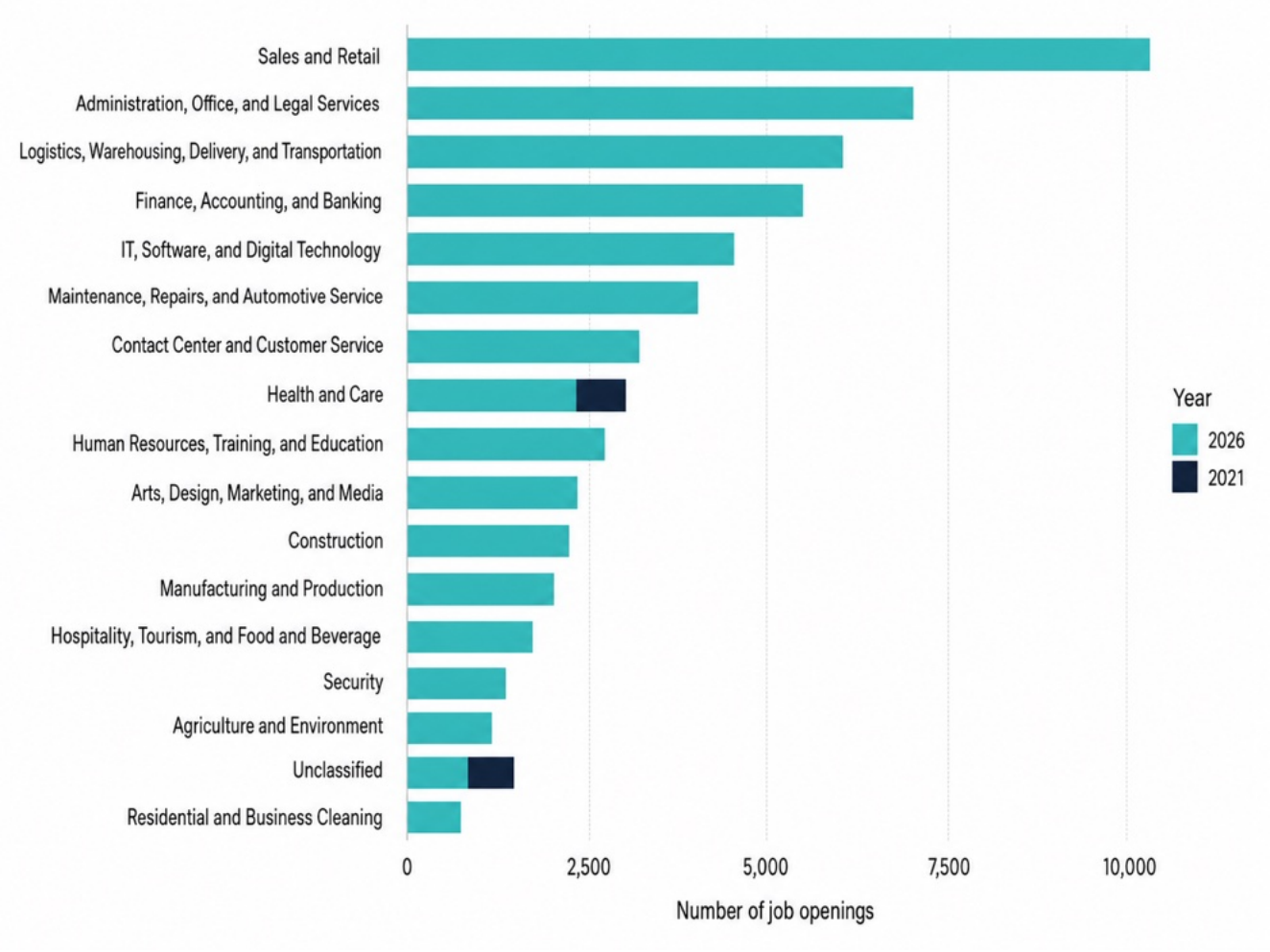
This behavior calls for a more nuanced reading. The recent adjustment does not eliminate the relevance of sectors such as logistics or manufacturing, but it does suggest that the labor-market-entry strategy should not depend on them alone. At the same time, the growth of Sales and Retail confirms that there are broad gateways into the labor market, though not necessarily with the best conditions for advancement or pay.

From a workforce-development perspective, the short term suggests three decisions. First, maintain a diversified portfolio of sectors so as not to depend on more volatile categories. Second, distinguish between fast-absorption sectors and advancement sectors. Third, strengthen labor-market intermediation with employers, because in an adjustment context the availability of job openings does not automatically translate into placements for the returning or in-mobility population.

### 6.4.4 Medium-term reading: expansion of demand between 2021 and 2026

When the comparison is broadened to 2021–2026, the reading changes substantially. Figure 73 shows that 2026 presents a higher volume of job openings than 2021 in most sectors. The growth is especially visible in Sales and Retail, Administration and Legal Services, Logistics, Finance, Maintenance, Contact Center, and Health and Care.

***Figure 73**. Job openings by analytical sector, total across the four states. 2021 vs 2026 comparison*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

This medium-term expansion suggests that, beyond the recent adjustment relative to 2025, the labor demand captured on digital platforms is greater than at the start of the period. This may reflect two simultaneous processes: the post-pandemic recovery of the labor market and the greater digitalization of recruitment processes, even for operational, administrative, logistics, and service occupations.

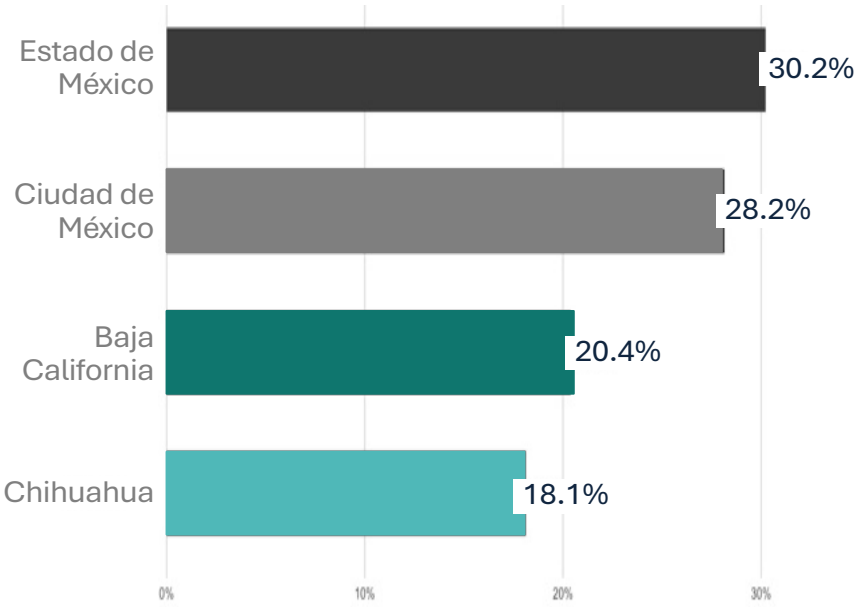
For the pilot's design, the 2021–2026 reading is more structural than the 2025–2026 comparison. The message is not that all sectors are growing linearly, but that the demand observed in 2026 sits on a broader base than in 2021. This makes it possible to justify training and job-placement pathways in sectors with a sustained presence, provided they are accompanied by a fine-grained reading of barriers to entry, salaries, and compatibility with profiles.

The difference between the short- and medium-term readings is important. The short term warns of caution and active intermediation; the medium term confirms that there is a sufficient base of demand to design differentiated employment pathways. Consequently, the pilot should respond not to a snapshot of short-term conditions, but to sectors with recurrence, volume, and absorption potential.

### 6.4.5 Salary transparency: a critical condition for guiding labor-market-entry decisions

Salary transparency is a critical element for guiding labor-market entry among returnees and migrants in mobility. In the observed set, only about a quarter of job postings include pay information. Figure 74 shows relevant differences by state: the State of Mexico reports salary in 30.2% of its openings, Mexico City in 28.2%, Baja California in 20.4%, and Chihuahua in 18.1%.

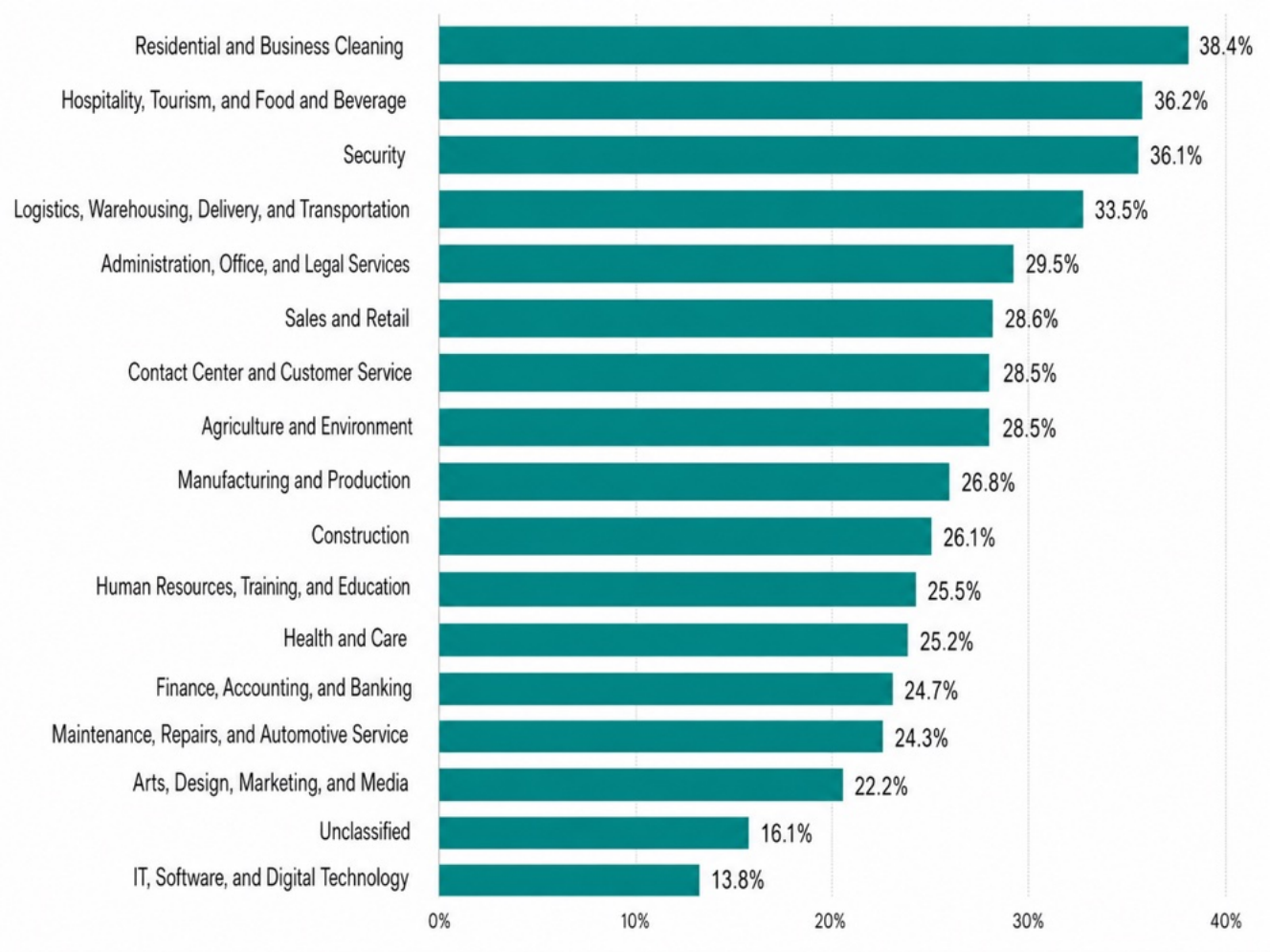
***Figure 74**. Percentage of job openings that publish salary by state*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

By sector (Figure 75), the postings that most often include pay information belong to categories such as Residential and Business Cleaning; Hospitality, Tourism, Food and Beverage; Security; and Logistics and Transportation. This is consistent with occupations that tend to have more standardized pay ranges, high turnover, frequent hiring, and less room for individual negotiation. In these cases, publishing pay can work as a mechanism for faster attraction and as a filter for expectations.

***Figure 75**. Job openings that report salary by analytical sector*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

By contrast, sectors such as IT, software, and digital technology report salary in only a low share of openings (13.8%), which probably reflects more heterogeneous profiles, significant differences by seniority, hybrid or remote arrangements, variable benefits, and processes in which salary is negotiated according to experience, certifications, or technical command. For workforce development, this implies that sectors with greater salary transparency can

facilitate more immediate labor-market-entry decisions, whereas more specialized sectors require more personalized guidance on salary expectations, negotiation, and advancement.

This finding has two implications. The first is that **the availability of job openings is not automatically equivalent to enough information to make employment decisions**. For returnees facing economic urgency, uncertainty, wage shock, and a need for stabilization, the lack of income information can raise unrealistic expectations, reduce search efficiency, and make it harder to choose between training, immediate employment, or reskilling.

The second implication is **place-based**. Metropolitan states show greater relative salary transparency than border states. The State of Mexico and Mexico City publish salary more frequently, whereas Baja California and Chihuahua show lower levels of transparency. This could indicate that a pilot in Tijuana or Ciudad Juárez will probably require more active intermediation work: verification of working conditions, direct dialogue with employers, the construction of reference salary ranges, and individualized guidance on income expectations.

From the pilot's perspective, salary transparency should be treated as part of the labor-market intermediation service. It is not enough to refer people to job postings; the pilot must help participants interpret entry conditions, pay, schedules, benefits, requirements, advancement opportunities, and informality risks. In sectors with greater salary transparency, it may be easier to guide immediate decisions. In sectors with greater specialization or wider salary dispersion —such as IT, finance, or administrative functions— more personalized guidance will be required on requirements, negotiation, and advancement trajectories.

The figures show **a labor market with a relatively stable sectoral base, medium-term expansion, recent adjustment, and low salary transparency**. For the pilot's design, this implies that the strategy must be diversified, place-based, and supported by active labor-market intermediation. The opportunity lies not only in identifying job openings, but in translating them into **realistic labor-market-entry pathways** for profiles with different levels of experience, barriers, and preparation.

## 6.5. Northern Border and Metropolitan Markets: Two Logics of Demand

The state-by-state pattern confirms that Baja California, Chihuahua, Mexico City, and the State of Mexico are not equivalent markets. Each state offers distinct combinations of

volume, specialization, wages, barriers to entry, and potential to connect with the migrant population.

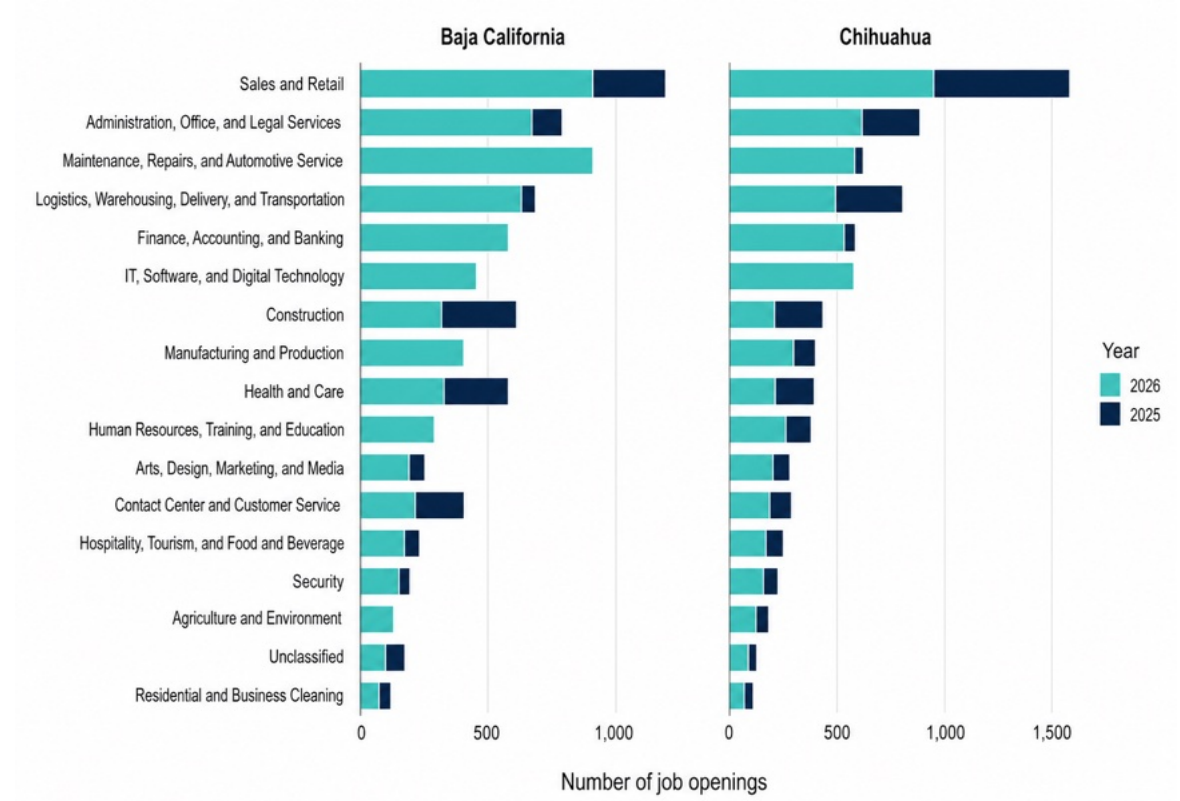
### 6.5.1 Short-Term Reading by State (2025–2026)

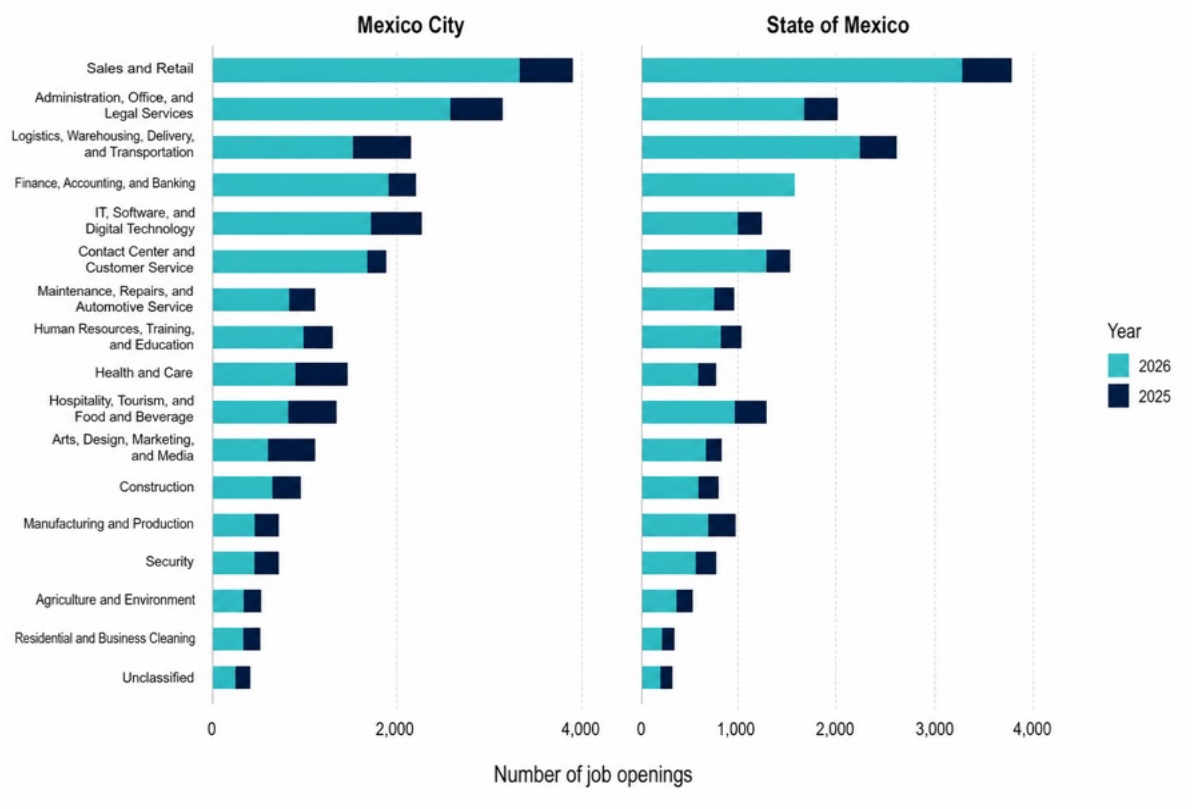
The 2025–2026 pattern shows that Sales and Retail has the largest volume of job openings in all four states. While this confirms that the sector can operate as a broad gateway into the labor market, it does not necessarily mean that it offers the strongest conditions for placement quality, stability, or advancement. Beyond this shared feature, each state presents its own structure:

- **Baja California.** Maintenance, Repairs, and Automotive Service; Logistics, Warehousing, Delivery, and Transportation; and Administration, Office, and Legal Services stand out. This composition suggests a market with technical-operational and support opportunities, potentially compatible with profiles that have prior experience in trades, operations, mobility, maintenance, or services.
- **Chihuahua.** Administration, Logistics, Maintenance, IT, and Manufacturing stand out. The structure reflects a border and industrial market, with opportunities in productive, operational, and technical-support sectors.
- **Mexico City.** The structure is more oriented toward urban, corporate, administrative, and customer-service activities. Although it maintains a high volume of job openings, several sectors show visible reductions relative to 2025, especially logistics, IT, hospitality, health, security, and manufacturing.
- **State of Mexico.** Demand combines scale in Logistics, Administration, Maintenance, Finance, IT, Health, and Manufacturing. Its profile is hybrid: connected to metropolitan dynamics, but also to logistics and productive-support activities.

The comparative reading points to programmatically relevant differences. In the metropolitan area, opportunities exist in a broader and more diversified market, but they may require finer profile segmentation, digital skills, prior experience, or specific credentials. The northern border markets are more tied to operational, industrial, logistics, and support activities, where there may be greater compatibility with entry-level profiles, rapid reskilling, and employer-based training.

***Figure 76**. Job openings by analytical sector and state. 2025 vs 2026 comparison disaggregated by state.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

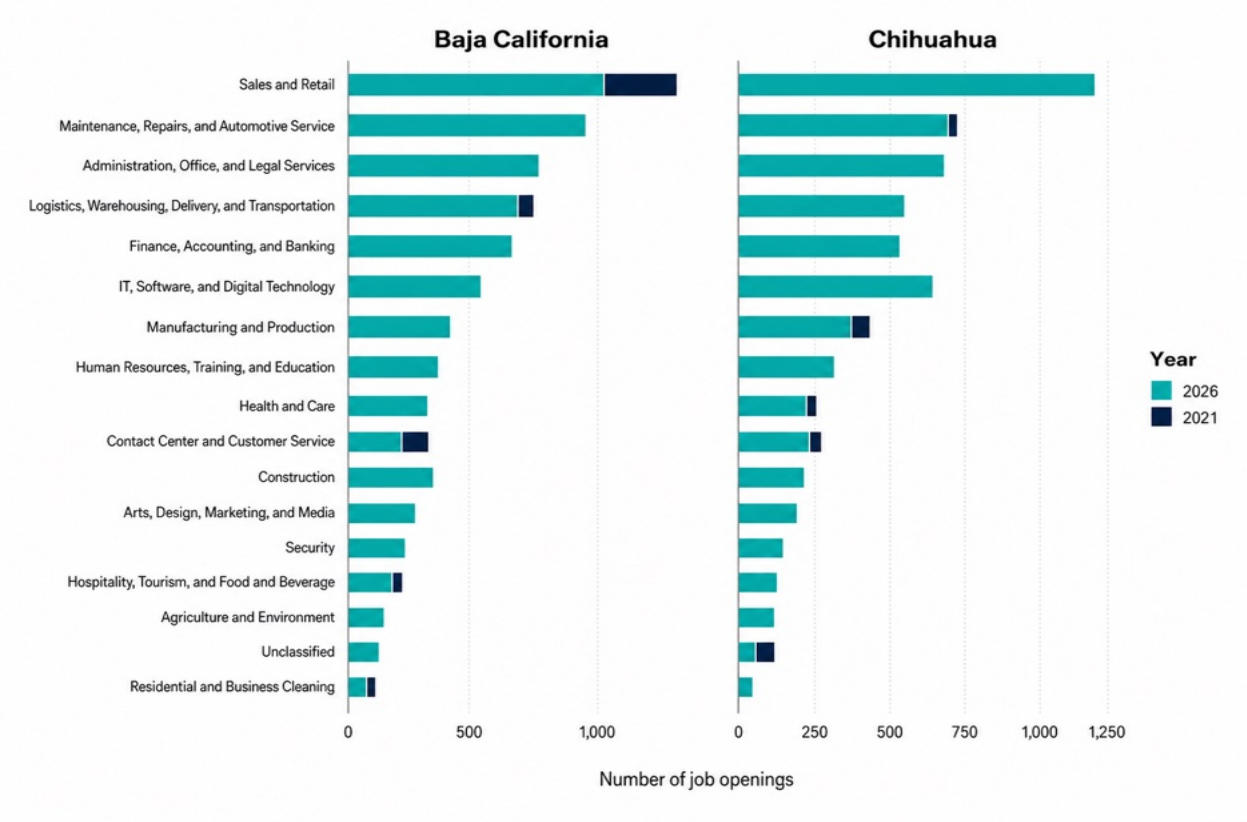
Accordingly, Baja California and Chihuahua show clearer signs of demand associated with technical-operational and productive-support sectors, which can facilitate short-term training pathways, basic certification, work-readiness skills, and direct engagement with employers. Mexico City and the State of Mexico offer greater volume and diversity, but would likely require more complex labor-market intermediation, given institutional competition, the heterogeneity of positions, and more differentiated barriers to entry. In practical terms, the northern border appears better suited to testing a labor-market-entry model with a strong hands-on component, while the metropolitan territories would require a more complex operational architecture and would likely face greater competition from existing employability actors.

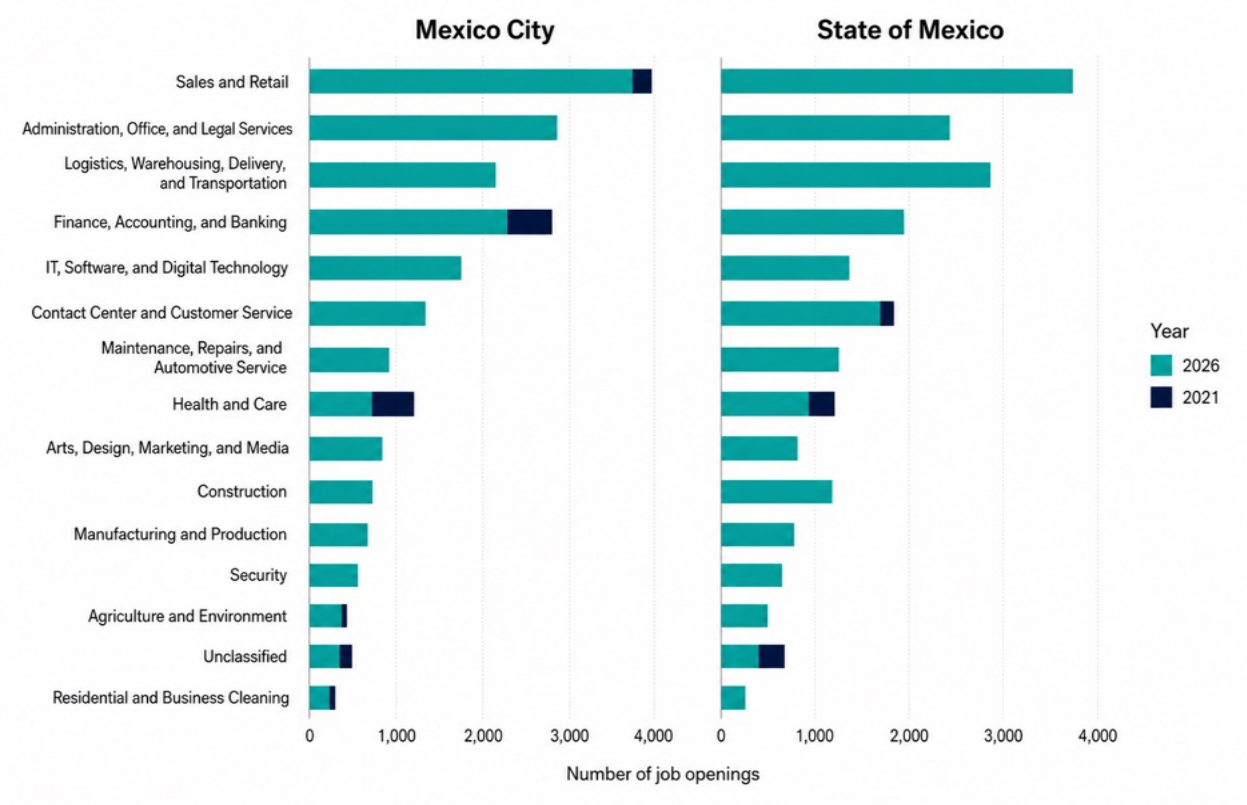
### 6.5.2 Medium-Term Reading by State (2021–2026)

In the 2021–2026 comparison, the reading changes relative to the adjustment observed between 2025 and 2026: here a clearer expansion in the volume of job openings is visible across nearly all sectors and states, which makes it possible to distinguish structural growth from cyclical adjustments. Although Sales and Retail grows in every state, the territorial differences are significant:

- **Baja California and Chihuahua.** The increase appears strongly in Maintenance, Administrative Services, Logistics, Finance, IT, Manufacturing, and Human Resources/Training, pointing to border labor markets with a productive and service base broader than what is usually associated solely with low-skilled employment.
- **Mexico City.** It concentrates relevant increases in Administrative Services, Finance, Contact Center, Hospitality, Human Resources, and creative sectors, confirming its role as a diversified urban market with demand more oriented toward services, management, customer service, and corporate functions.
- **State of Mexico.** It shows a more hybrid profile: Logistics, Administration, Maintenance, Finance, Health, Manufacturing, Construction, and Security grow strongly. This suggests a market that combines metropolitan dynamics with a significant operational and logistics base, likely tied to its role as a territory for connectivity, storage, distribution, and productive support for the central region.

***Figure 77**. Job openings by analytical sector and state. 2021 vs 2026 comparison disaggregated by state.*



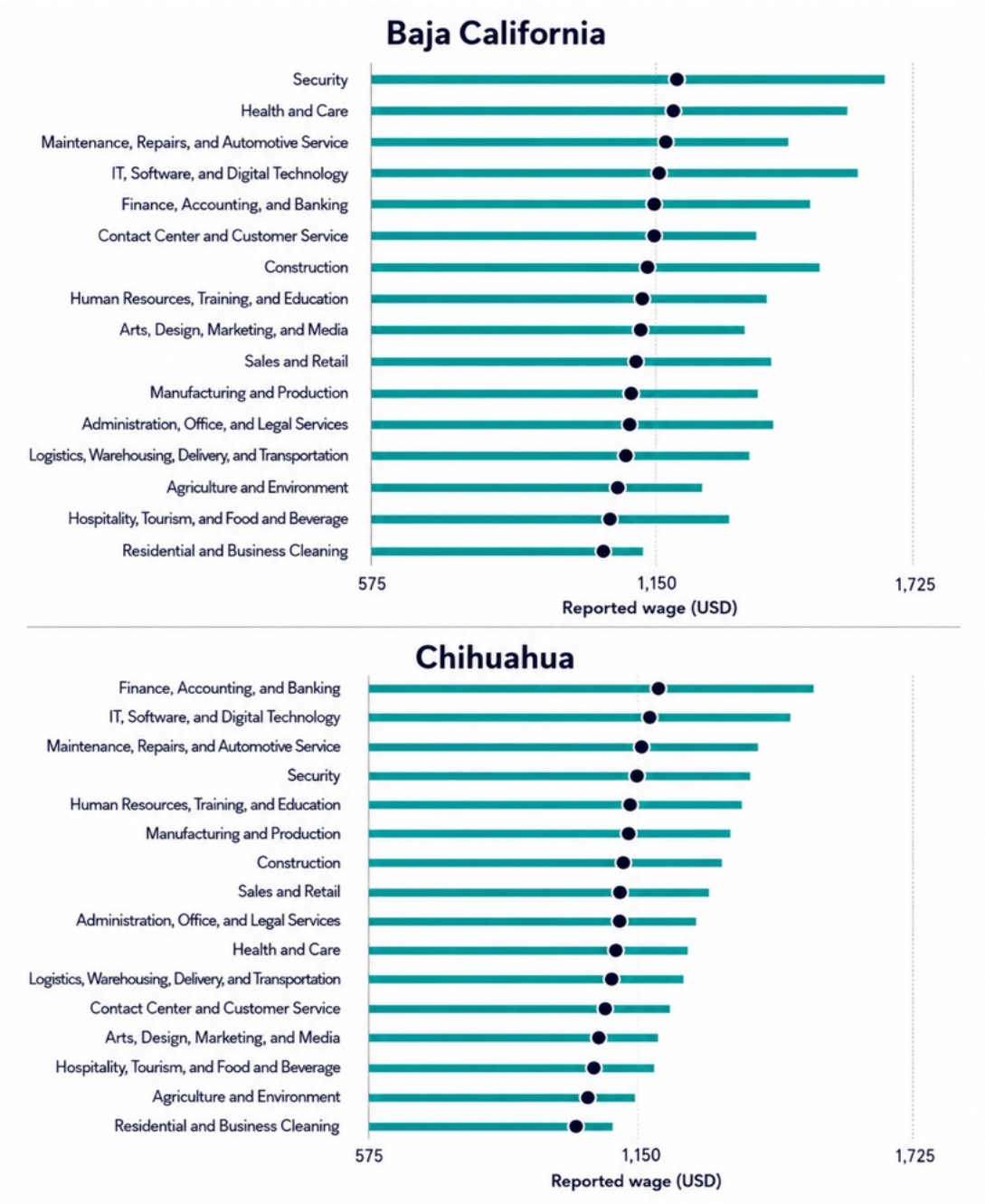



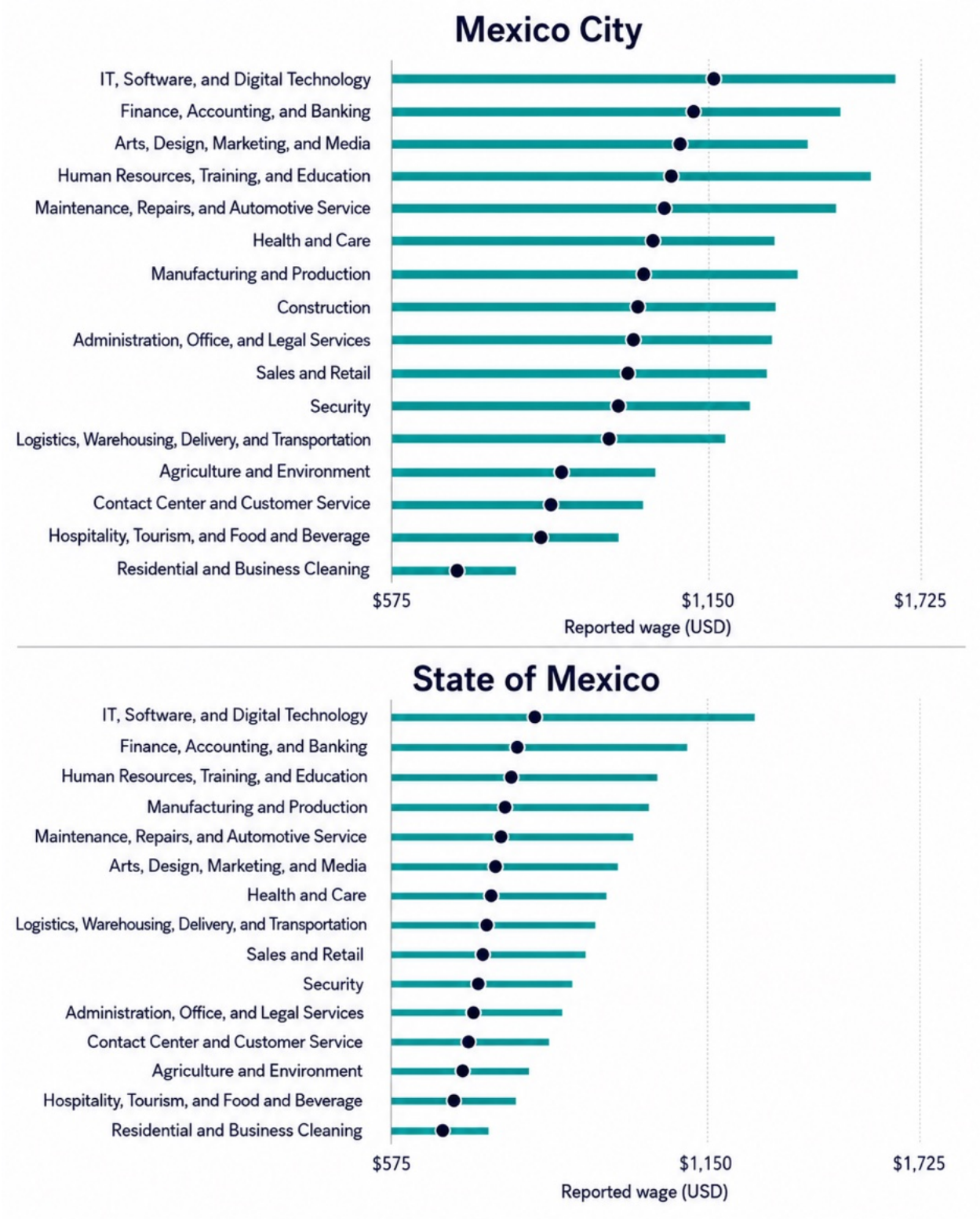

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

## 6.6 Wages and Feasibility of Labor-Market Entry

The analysis of reported pay cannot be reduced to identifying “the best-paid sectors,” because the pattern varies considerably by territory, wage dispersion, and type of occupation. The analysis of reported median wages in 2026 offers a differentiated picture by state.

***Figure 78**. Reported median wage in 2026 by analytical sector and state, wage bands. The line represents P10–P90*

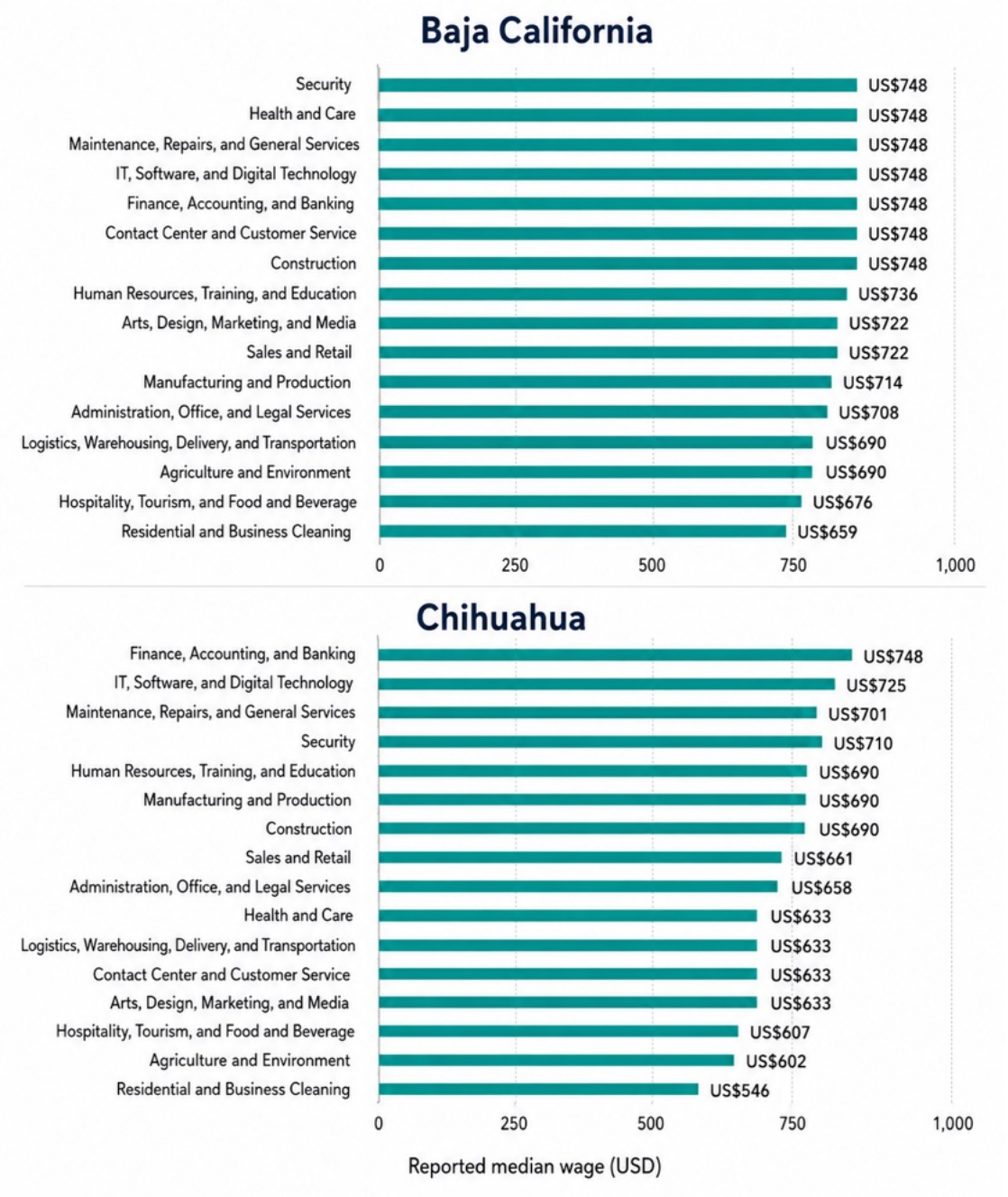





**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database. The Unclassified category was excluded.

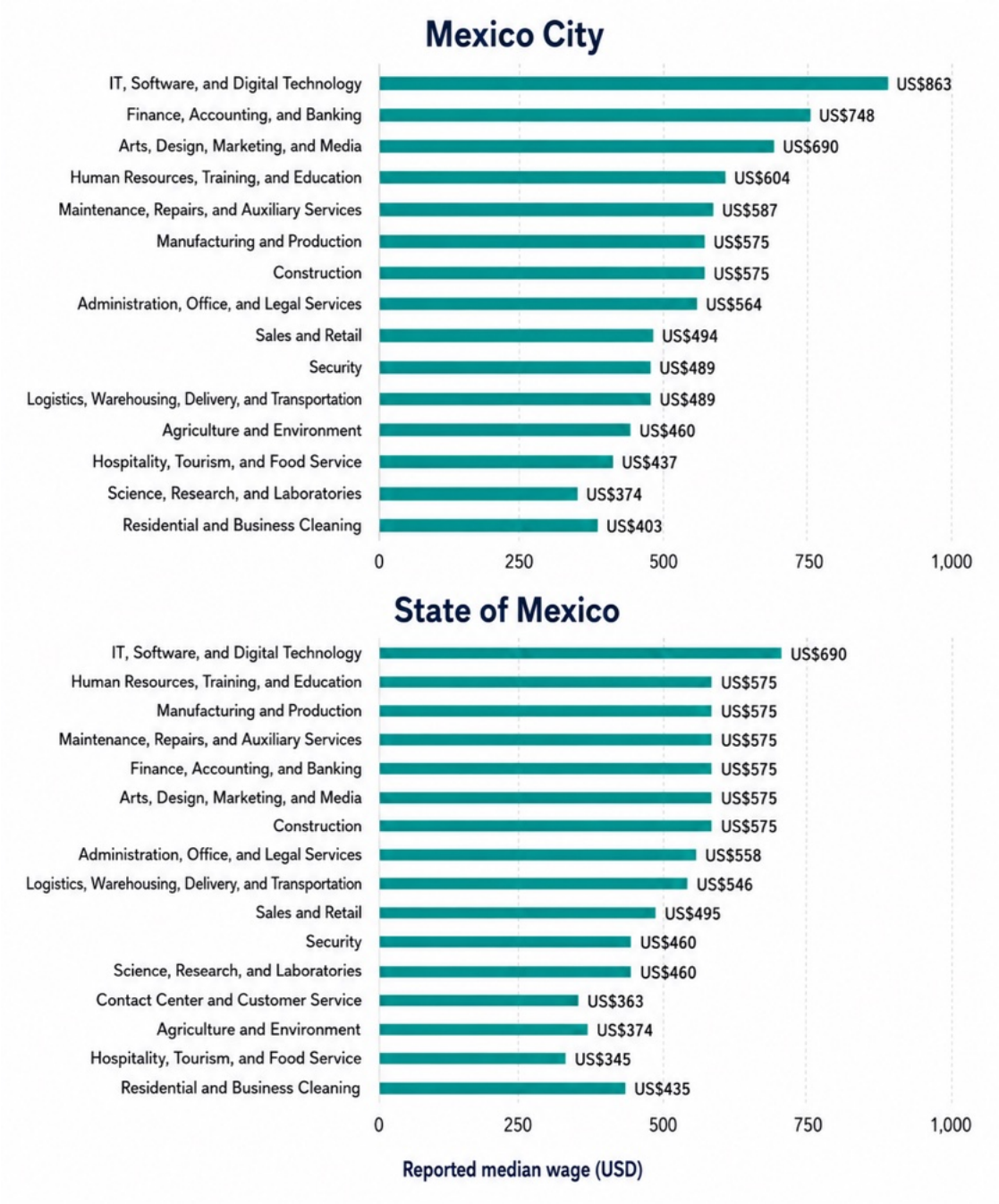
- **Baja California.** It presents a relatively compact and competitive structure: several sectors cluster around 12,000 to 13,000 pesos. This suggests a market where different entry pathways can offer similar wages, allowing sectors to be prioritized not only by income but also by accessibility, volume of job openings, the possibility of short-term training, and speed of labor-market entry. The wage differential across sectors does not appear marked enough to justify a bet exclusively on the highest-paying segments: the decision should be guided more by barriers to entry and absorption capacity.
- **Chihuahua.** The wage ranking shows a favorable pattern, with a clearer hierarchy: Finance, IT, Maintenance, Security, Human Resources, Manufacturing, and Construction fall in the upper or upper-middle part of the distribution. Several of these sectors combine competitive wages with a possible connection to technical-operational, industrial, or productive-support trajectories. Unlike sectors of pure high specialization, some of these occupations could be more attainable for the population in mobility if short-term training pathways, basic certification, validation of prior experience, and engagement with employers are designed.
- **Mexico City.** It shows a more unequal wage structure. IT clearly stands out with the highest median (16,000 pesos) and a wide wage band, revealing strong internal heterogeneity: entry-level positions, semi-technical profiles, specialized positions, and better-paid functions coexist within the same category. However, many urban and service activities cluster around 9,000 to 10,500 pesos (Sales, Logistics, Contact Center, Hospitality, Cleaning, and Security). The capital offers more diversity and some higher-value niches, but it does not guarantee better conditions for entry-level profiles: the opportunity requires finer segmentation between those who could access digital, administrative, or corporate pathways and those who would likely enter through urban services at more moderate wages.
- **State of Mexico.** It presents the most contained wage structure of the four territories. Although IT again appears at the top, with a median near 12,000 pesos, most sectors fall between 8,000 and 10,000 pesos. This suggests a broad market with absorption capacity but a smaller wage premium. It is not ruled out as a relevant territory, but it calls for caution: a strategy centered on this state should ensure that labor-market entry does not reproduce low-paying jobs without progression, identifying occupations that serve as an entry point with opportunities for upward mobility toward better conditions, especially in logistics, manufacturing, maintenance, construction, health, and administration.

***Figure 79.*** *Wage ranking of sectors by state (sectors ordered from highest to lowest by the median reported wage)*




Reported wages confirm the need to distinguish among entry-level jobs, bridge employment, and progression jobs. Some sectors may be suitable for rapid labor-market entry even if they do not offer the highest pay, while others offer better wages but require more preparation, screening, certification, or prior experience. For returnees and migrants in mobility, the key criterion should not be only where wages are highest, but where reported pay, accessibility, stability, training feasibility, employer openness, and potential for progression come

together in a realistic pathway. From this perspective, Baja California and Chihuahua offer a more balanced combination of competitive wages, potentially accessible sectors, and proximity to the target population. Mexico City and the State of Mexico offer greater breadth and diversity, but also greater complexity in translating demand into effective labor-market entry.

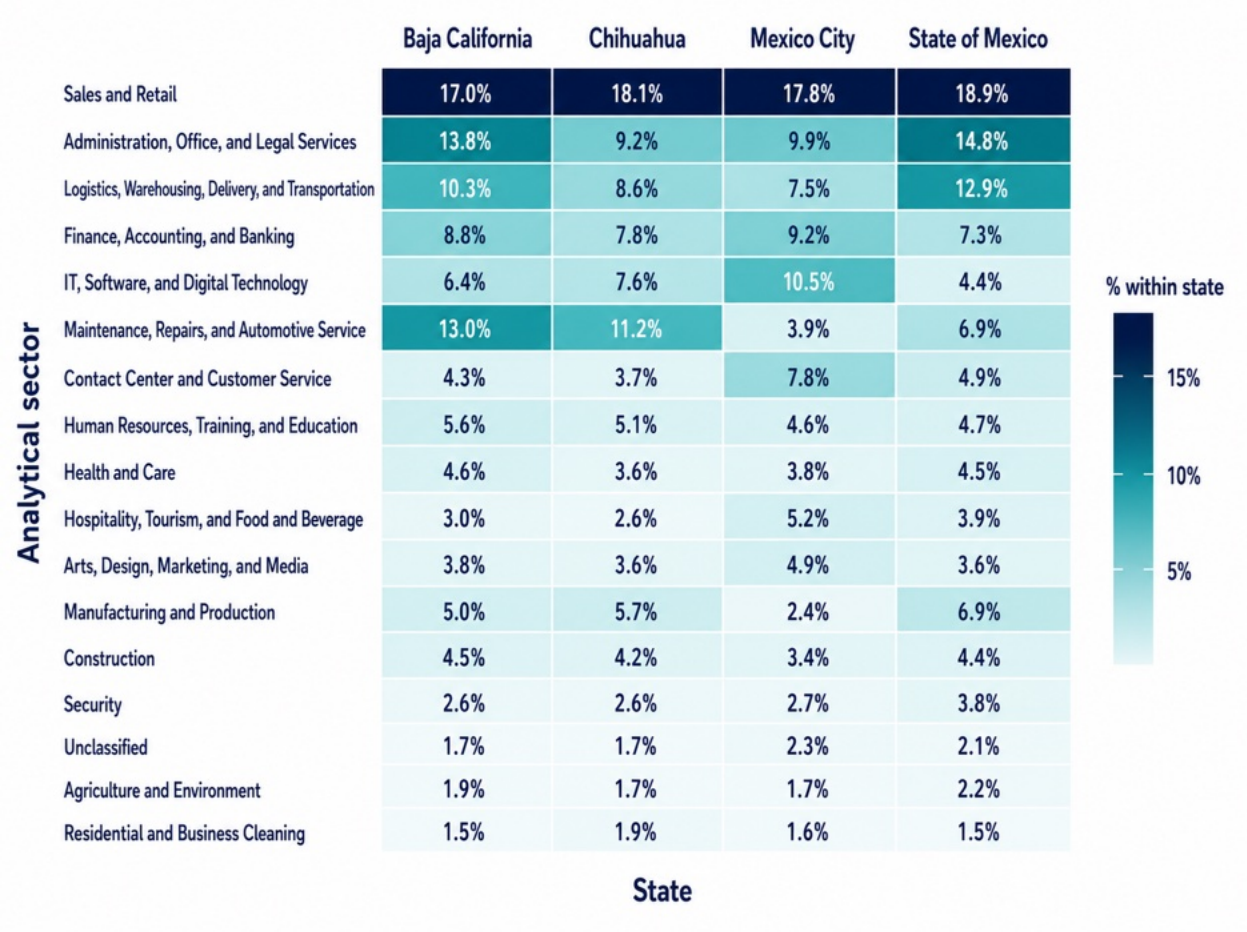



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database. The Unclassified category was excluded.

## 6.7 From Demand to Differentiated Labor Pathways

The four candidate states have a relatively diverse sector structure, but they share an important pattern: demand is not concentrated in a single sector. This reinforces the idea that the pilot should not be designed around a single occupational category, but around a basket of differentiated labor pathways. These pathways should combine cross-cutting skills, sector-specific modules, employer engagement, and different levels of support according to the participant's profile.

***Figure 80.*** *Sector profile of labor demand in the target states*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

Logistics offers a useful example. It appears across the four territories and can serve as a common foundation for short-term training, certification, and employer engagement. However, the pilot would still need to adapt the pathway to the demand structure and participant profile of each state. The goal is not to choose the largest sectors, but the sectors and occupations that are most useful for realistic labor-market entry.

Sales and Retail should be treated with caution. Although it represents a high-volume gateway into the labor market, it should not be prioritized as the main test sector unless job openings are vetted and employers meet minimum quality standards. The sector may include viable opportunities, especially in formal retail, customer service, and supervised sales roles, but it can also involve high turnover, low pay, commission-based arrangements, limited progression, or misleading offers. For that reason, Sales and Retail should be included only as part of a broader services and customer-service pathway, supported by employer screening and labor-condition verification.

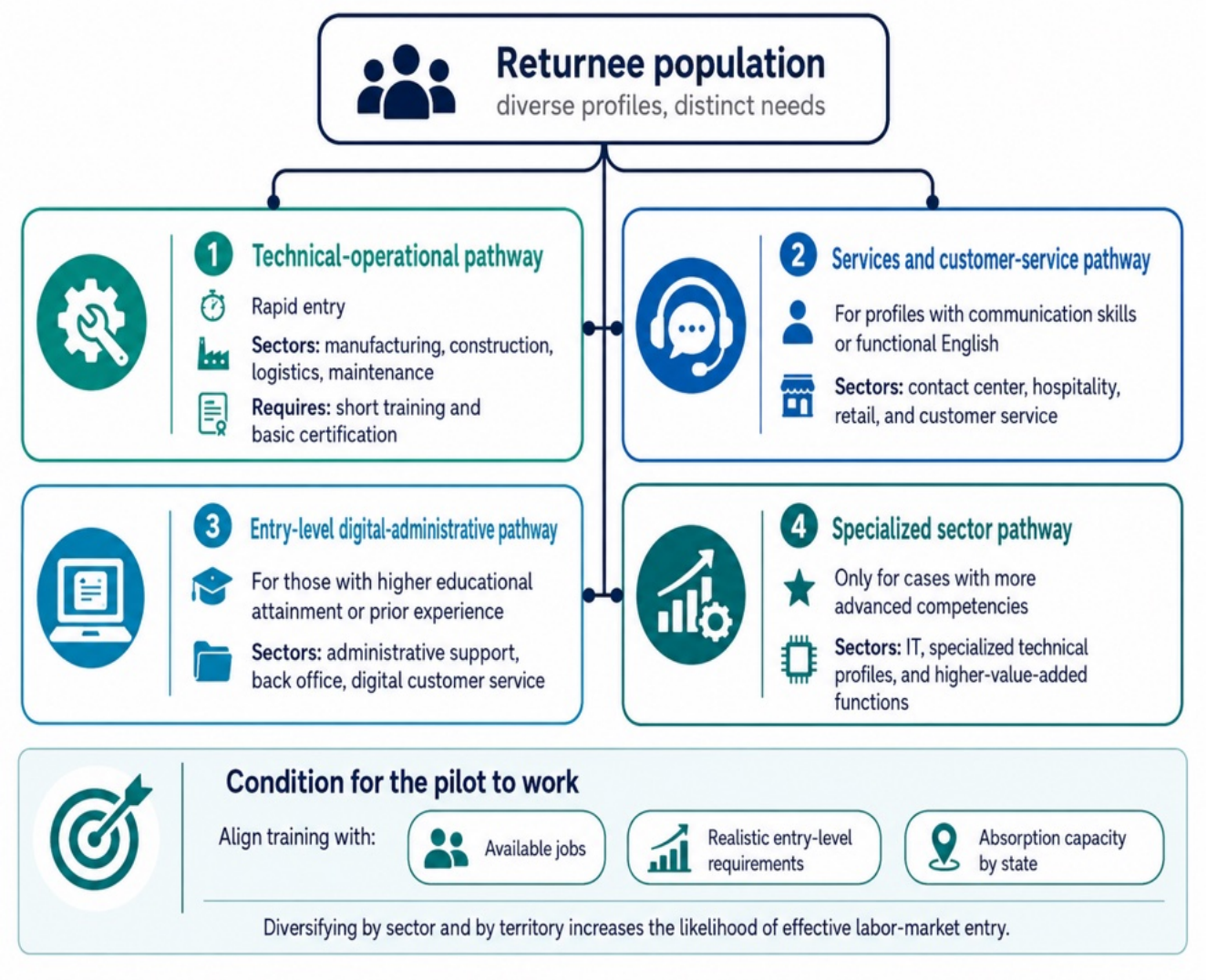
Based on the evidence, four differentiated labor pathways are identified:

1. **Technical-operational pathway.** This pathway makes particular sense given the presence of sectors such as logistics, maintenance, manufacturing, construction, and security. It is relevant for returnees and migrants in mobility with prior experience in operational work, trades, warehousing, transportation, construction, maintenance, or production. Its value lies in the possibility of connecting participants to entry-level positions, rapid reskilling, basic certification, and direct employer engagement.
2. **Services and customer-service pathway.** This is a cross-cutting pathway because sales and retail, contact center, hospitality, food and beverage, and customer service are present across the four states. It is especially relevant for people with communication skills, service experience, client interaction, functional English, or prior experience in customer-facing roles. Given the variability in job quality, this pathway should include employer vetting, clear information on pay and schedules, and guidance on advancement opportunities.
3. **Entry-level digital-administrative pathway.** The presence of administrative, office, legal, finance, IT, and back-office functions suggests that this pathway is viable, although not for the entire target population. It is better suited to profiles with higher educational attainment, prior office experience, basic computer skills, functional English, or willingness to undertake digital training. It can serve as a bridge between operational experience and more stable administrative or service-sector employment.
4. **Specialized sector pathway.** Although sectors such as IT, finance, and technical occupations appear in the composition of job openings, they should be treated as selective pathways. They do not constitute the best entry point for most people in mobility, but they may be relevant for subgroups with more advanced competencies, prior credentials, stronger digital skills, or higher English proficiency.

Labor demand in the four states is sufficiently diverse to support a combination of pathways. The pilot should therefore avoid a one-sector model and instead test a flexible approach that

connects participant profiles with different levels of readiness, different barriers to entry, and different opportunities for progression.

***Figure 81.*** *Possible differentiated labor pathways by sector*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

## 6.8 State Level Analysis

This section disaggregates the analysis for each of the four states. For each state, a sector positioning map is presented[2], cross-referencing three dimensions: growth in job openings between 2021 and 2026, the median wage reported in 2026, and the volume of job openings.

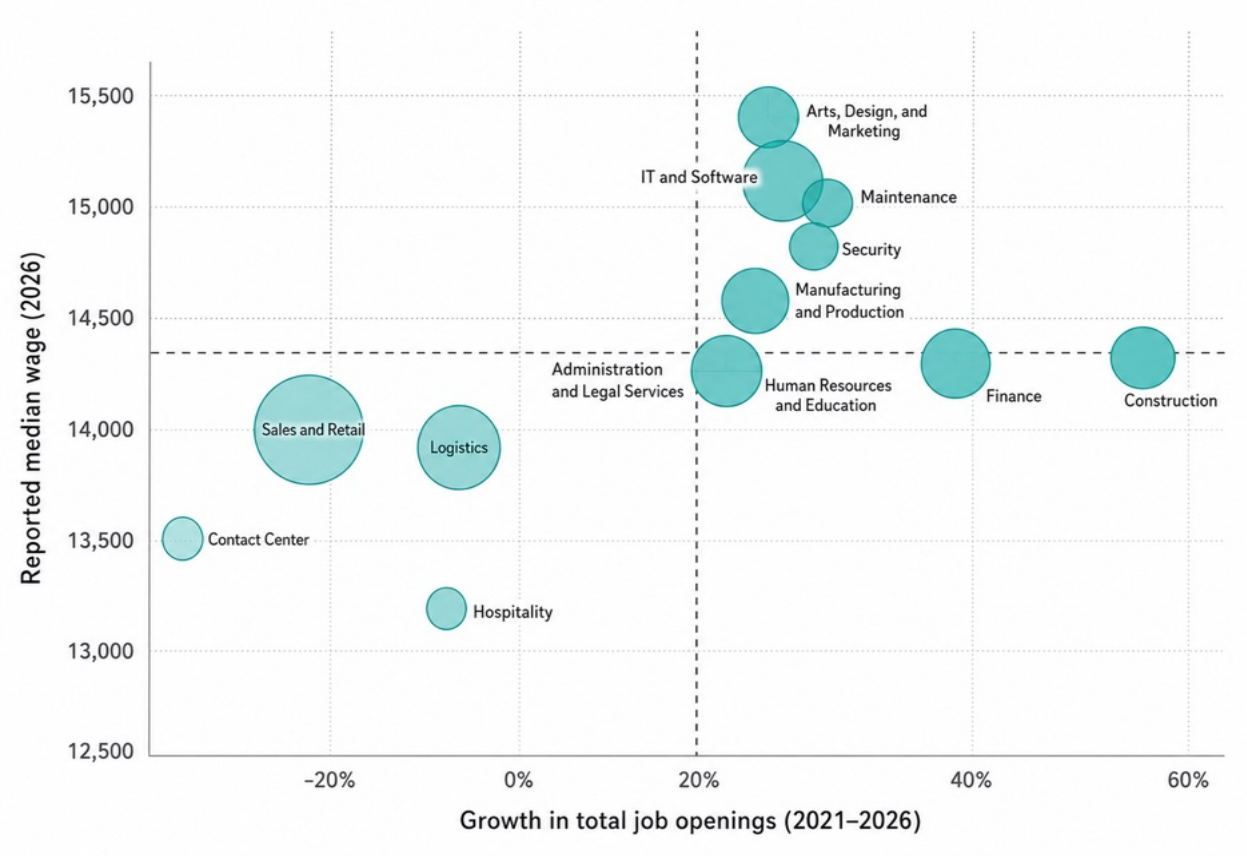
[2] The sector positioning maps are read as follows: growth in job openings 2021–2026 (X axis) against the median wage reported in 2026 (Y axis); and the size of the bubble represents the volume of job openings in the sector.

This reading makes it possible to distinguish sectors that contribute scale, sectors that offer stronger reported wage levels, and sectors that show recent momentum.

### 6.8.1 Baja California

In Baja California, sectors play distinct roles. Some stand out for their wage returns and growth, others for their strategic scale. The sector positioning map makes it possible to identify which sectors combine growth, wages, and volume, and which mainly contribute absorption capacity.

***Figure 82.*** *Baja California. Sector positioning map*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 83.*** *Baja California. Trend in volume of job openings by prioritized sector.*

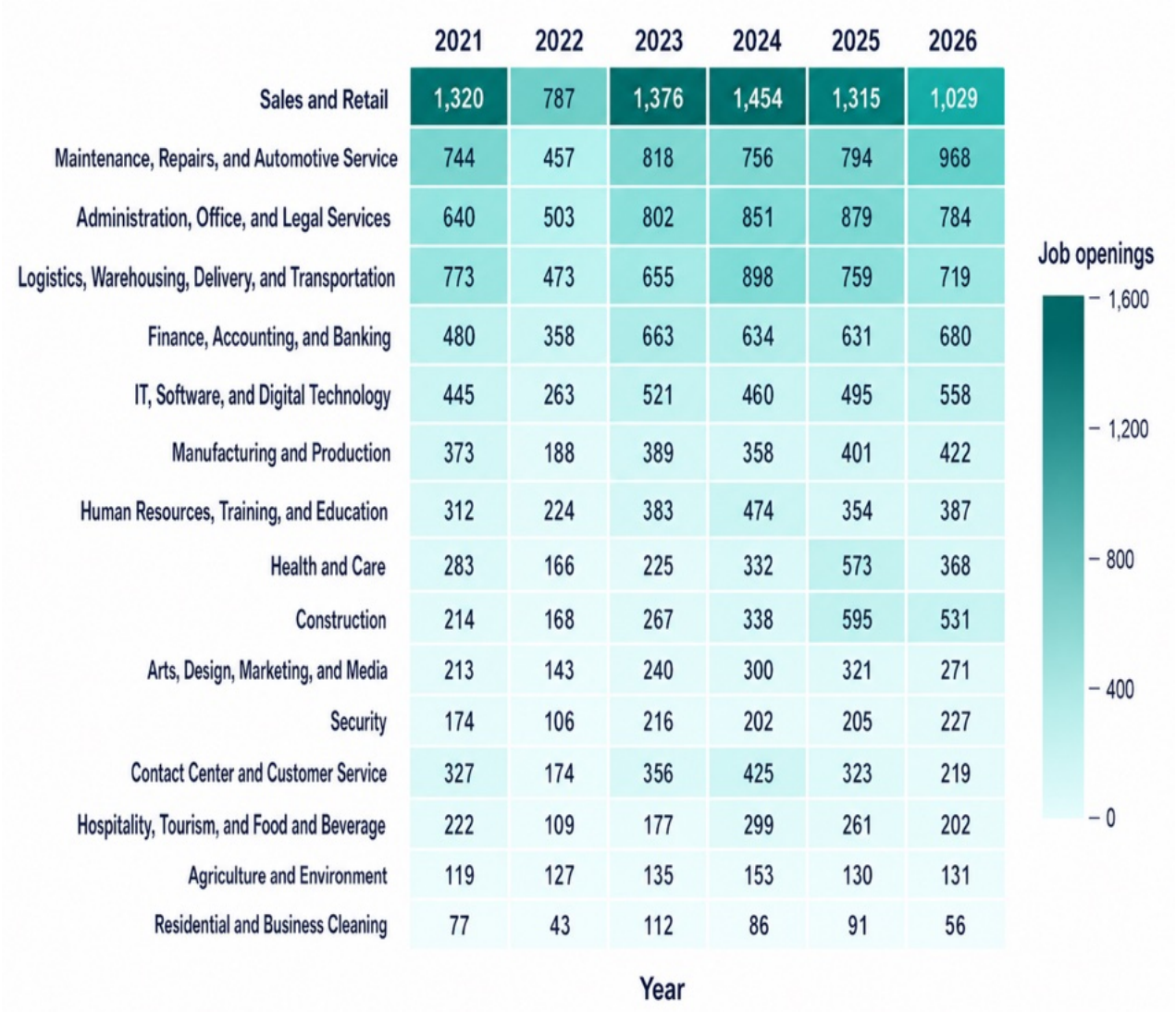
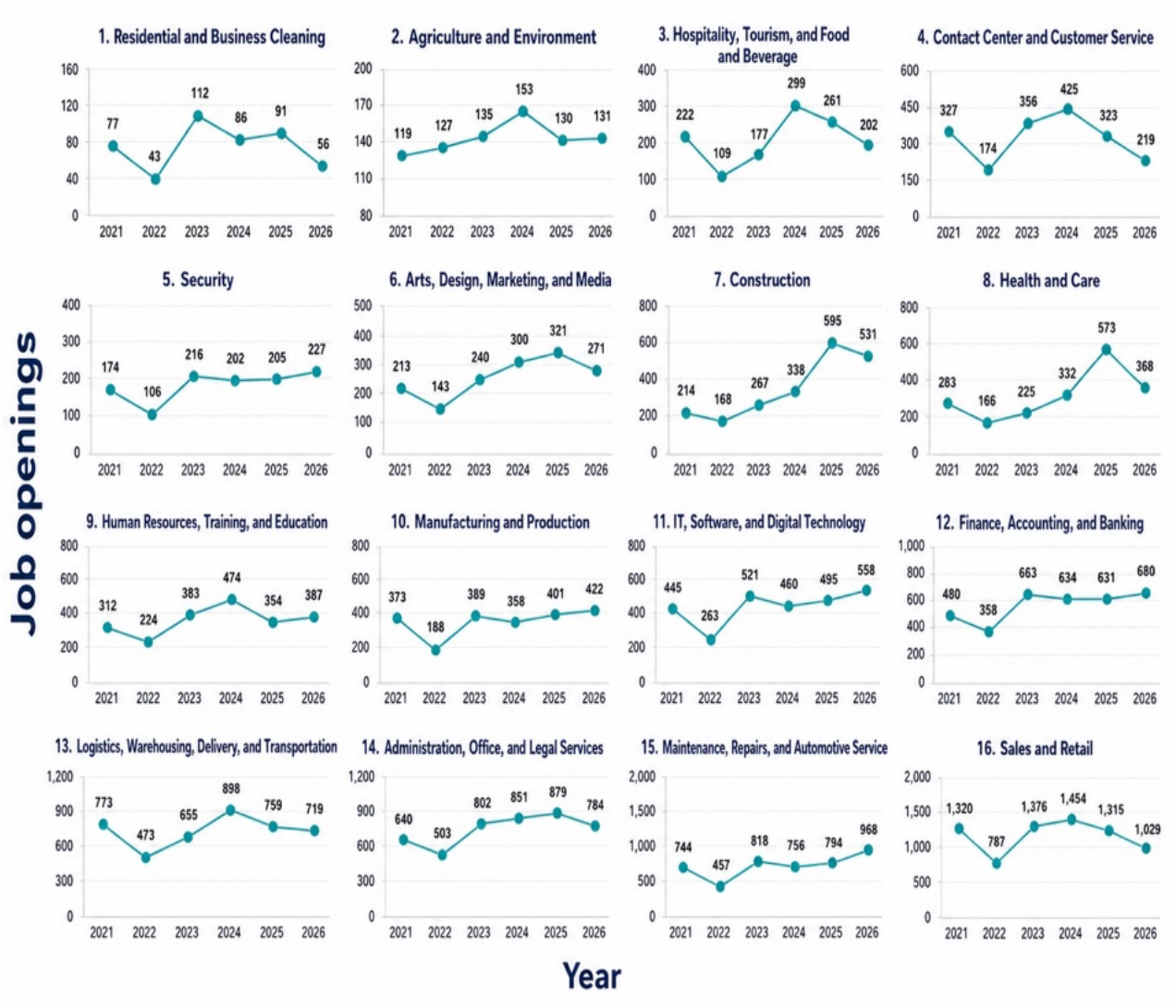


***Figure 84.*** *Baja California. Annual trajectory by sector.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

The wage trajectory also diverges. Logistics shows sustained improvement toward 2026; Health and Care maintains relatively high levels despite fluctuations; and Hospitality and contact center advance from lower bases, with lower relative returns.

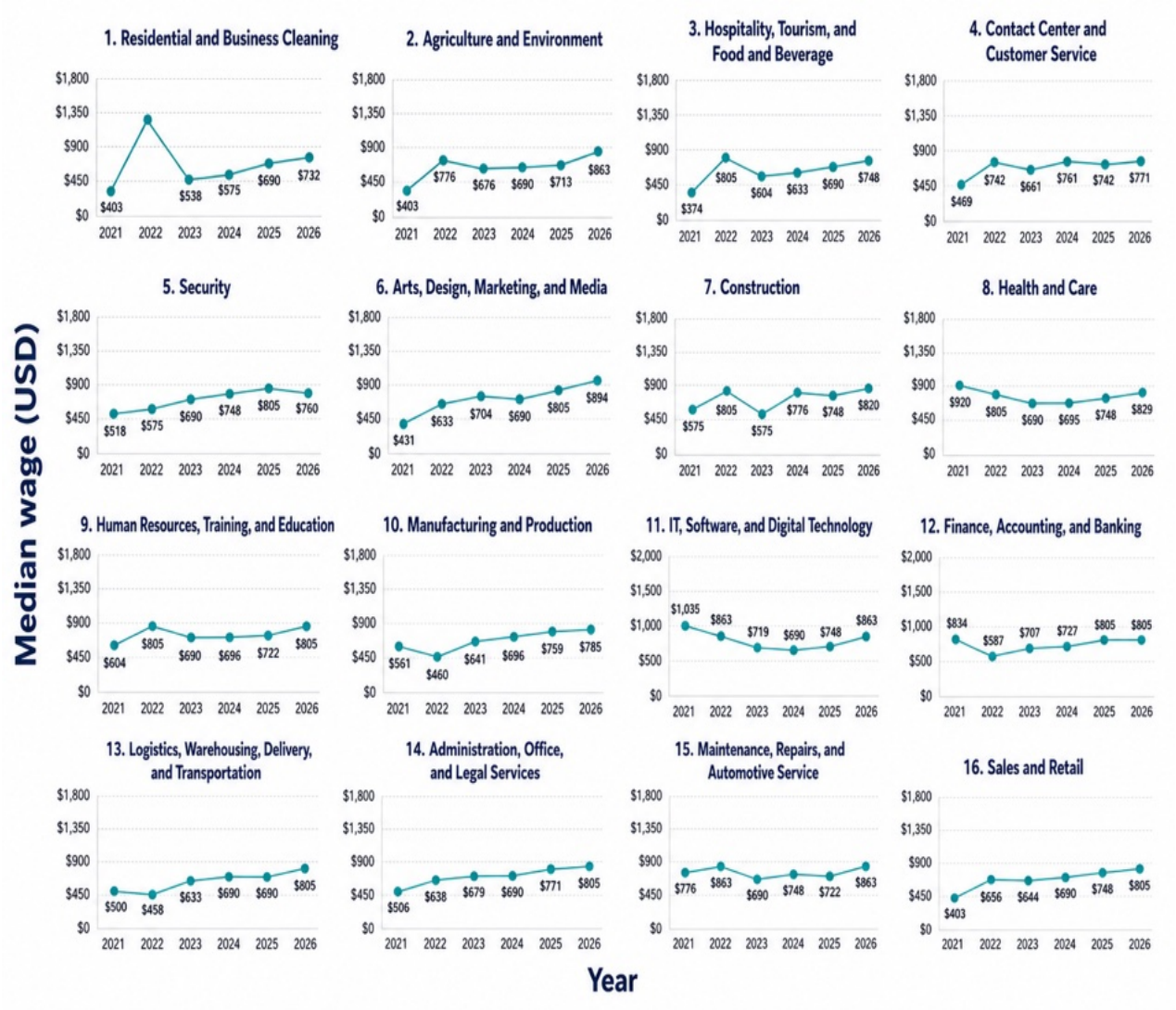
For the pilot, Baja California offers a relevant combination of migration-related mobility, migrant-serving infrastructure, technical-operational labor demand, and sectors with potential for labor-market entry. Tijuana, in particular, concentrates operational advantages because of its ecosystem of services for migrants, accumulated institutional experience, and the possibility of coordinating training, certification, and job placement on top of an existing support network.

***Figure 85**. Baja California. Trend in median wage by sector.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 86.*** *Baja California. Annual trajectory of the median wage by sector.*



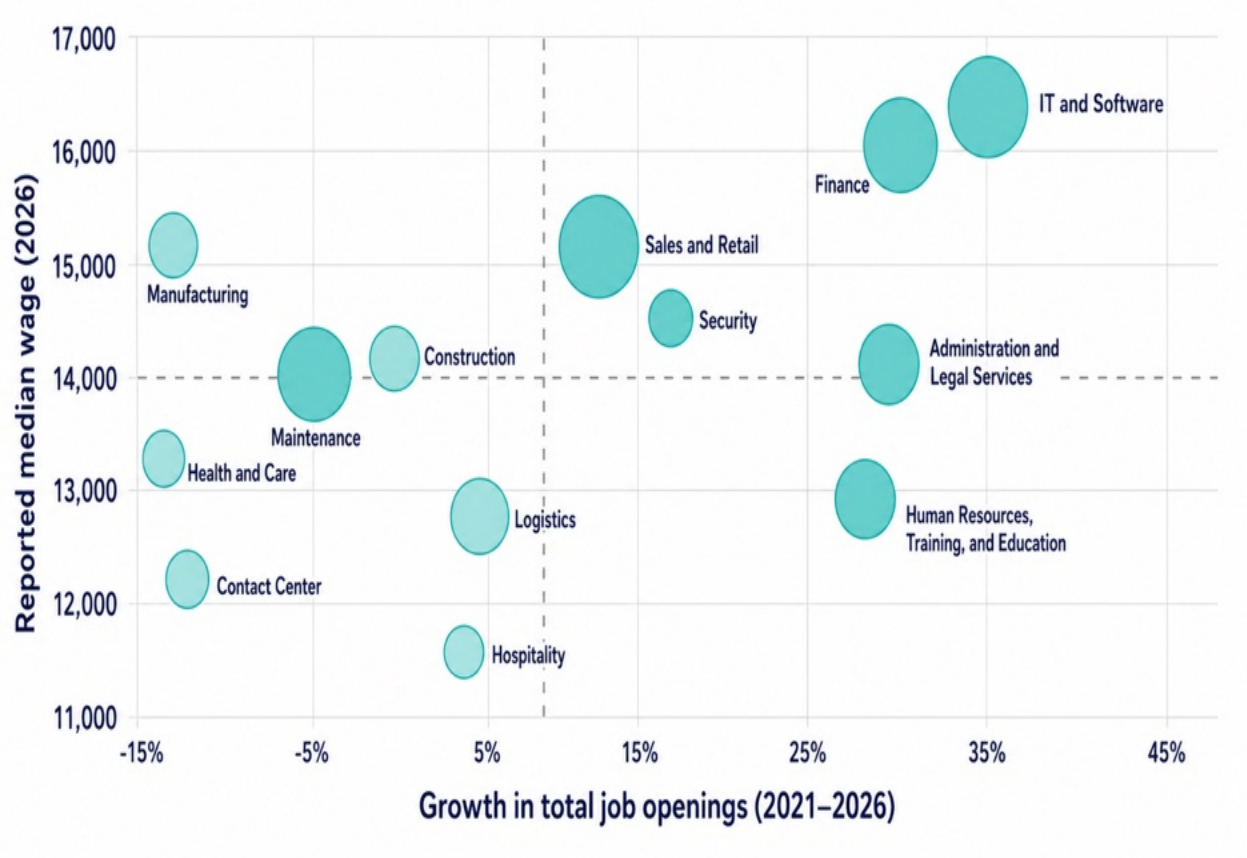

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

### 6.8.2 Chihuahua

In Chihuahua, the strongest programmatic opportunity lies in the combination of scale, stability, and wage improvement offered by Logistics, Maintenance, and Manufacturing. The sector positioning map confirms a more industrial, technical-operational, and productive-support market.

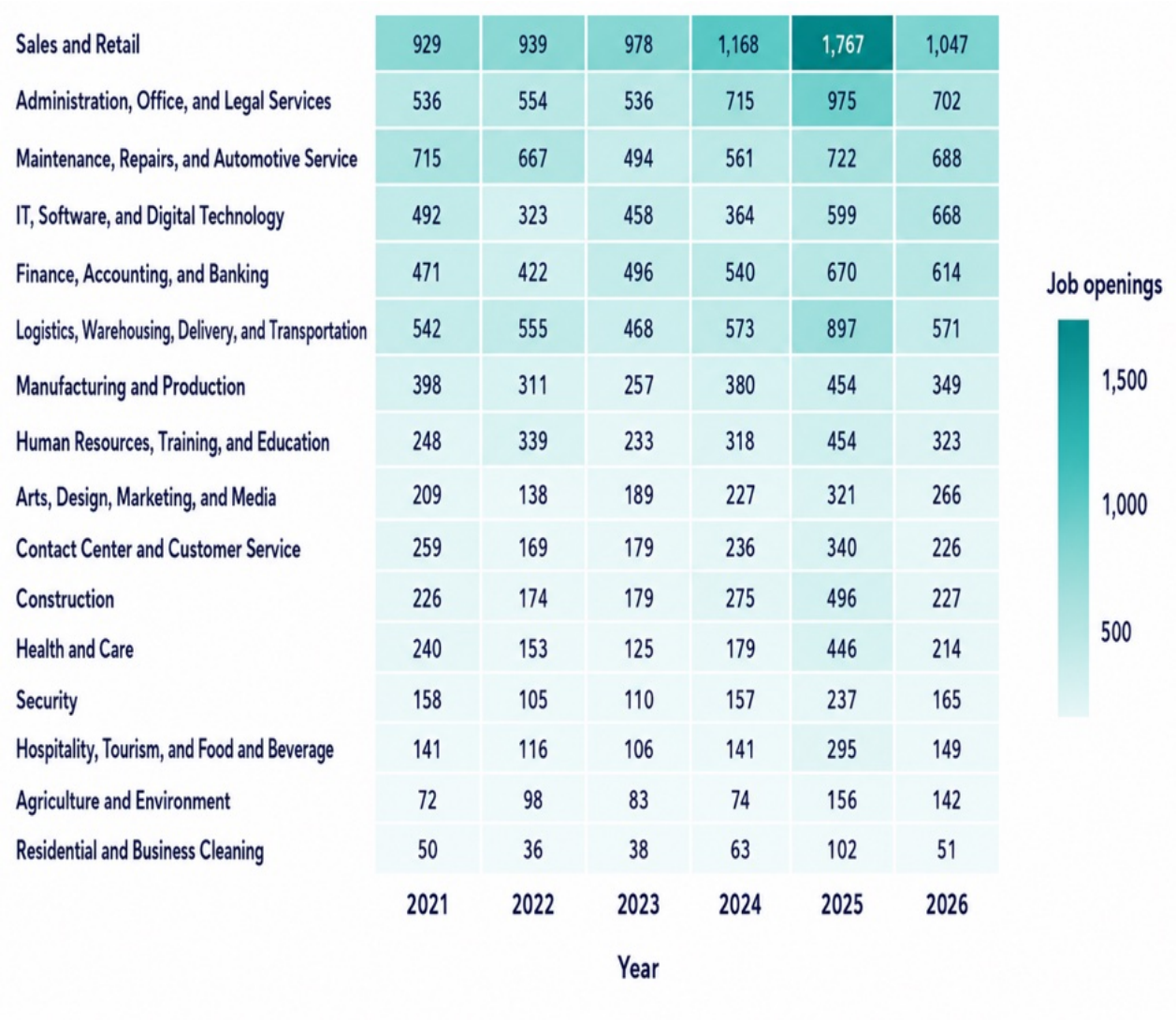
Among the key sectors, Logistics, Maintenance, and Manufacturing sustain scale. Logistics continues to concentrate the largest volume among the prioritized sectors, although it loses momentum after 2025; Maintenance and Manufacturing show more stable trajectories; and Health and Care rebounds in 2025, but without sustaining the same level by the end of the period.

***Figure 87**. Chihuahua. Sector positioning map*



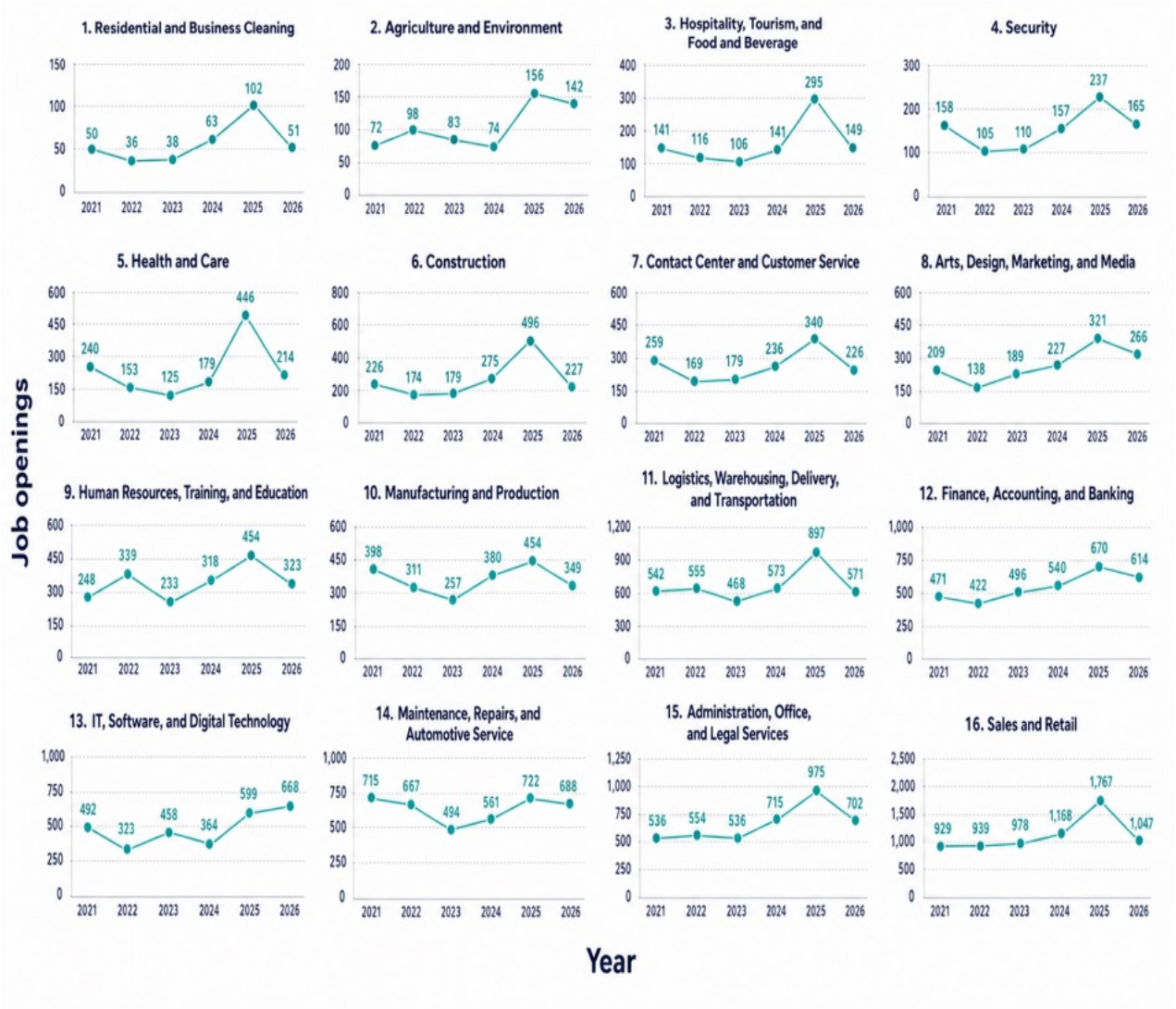

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

*Figure 88. Chihuahua. Trend in volume of job openings by prioritized sector.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

*Figure 89. Chihuahua. Annual trajectory by sector.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

The recent wage improvement reinforces the viability of a more industrial bet in Chihuahua. The wage trajectory confirms a clearer improvement since 2024, although at different paces by sector: Manufacturing and Maintenance concentrate the best returns by the end of the period; Logistics improves, but from a more gradual trajectory; and Health and Care and contact center converge upward, although with less prior consistency.

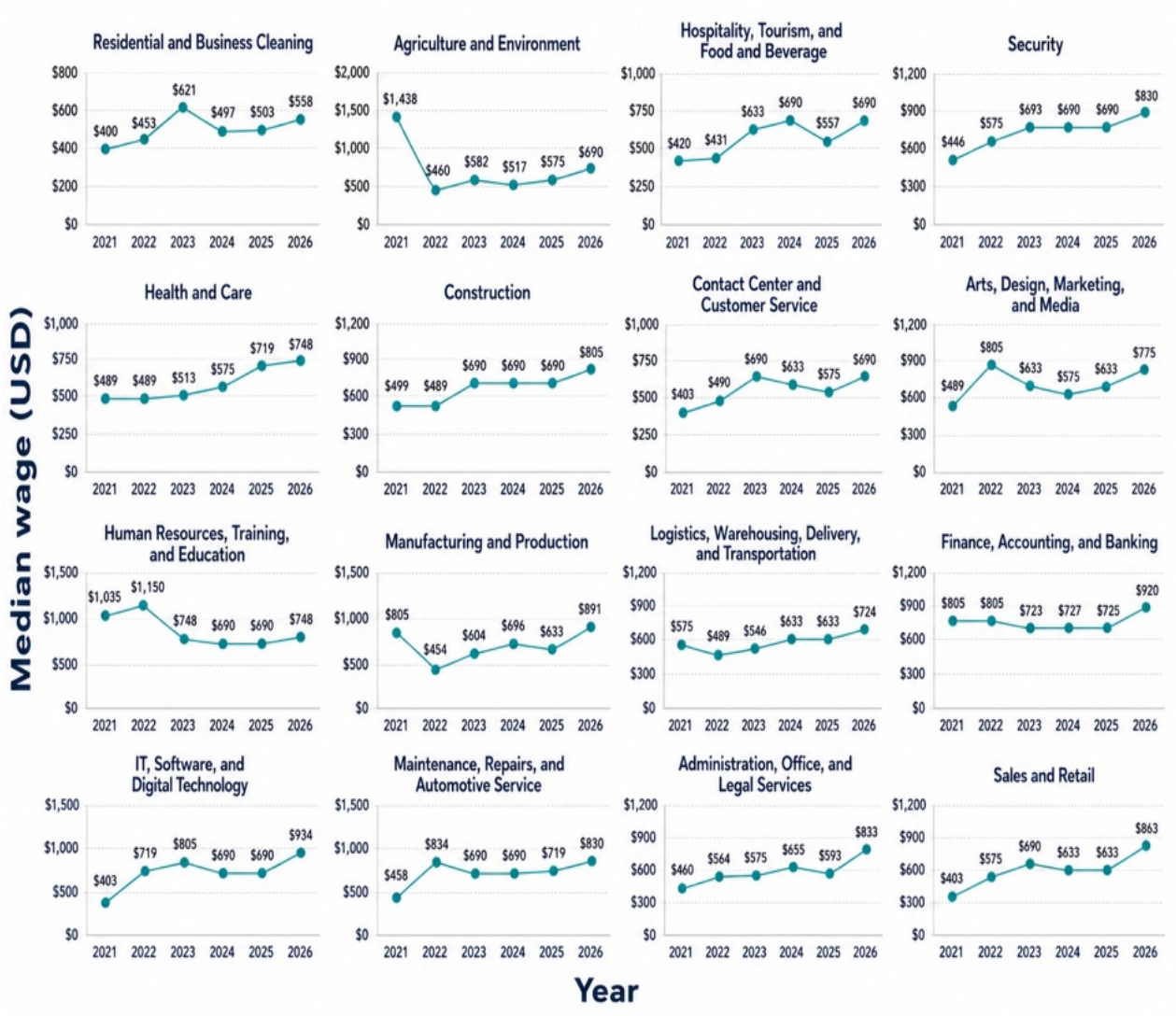
Ciudad Juárez presents particularly relevant conditions for the pilot because it combines a significant presence of young migrants in mobility, more severe and overlapping barriers, place-based support platforms, and labor demand connected to manufacturing, logistics, maintenance, and support services. Its context requires a more support-intensive model,

but it also offers a clear opportunity to test an integrated pathway of stabilization, training, certification, and placement.

***Figure 90.*** *Chihuahua. Trend in median wage by sector.*



***Figure 91.*** *Chihuahua. Annual trajectory of the median wage by sector.*

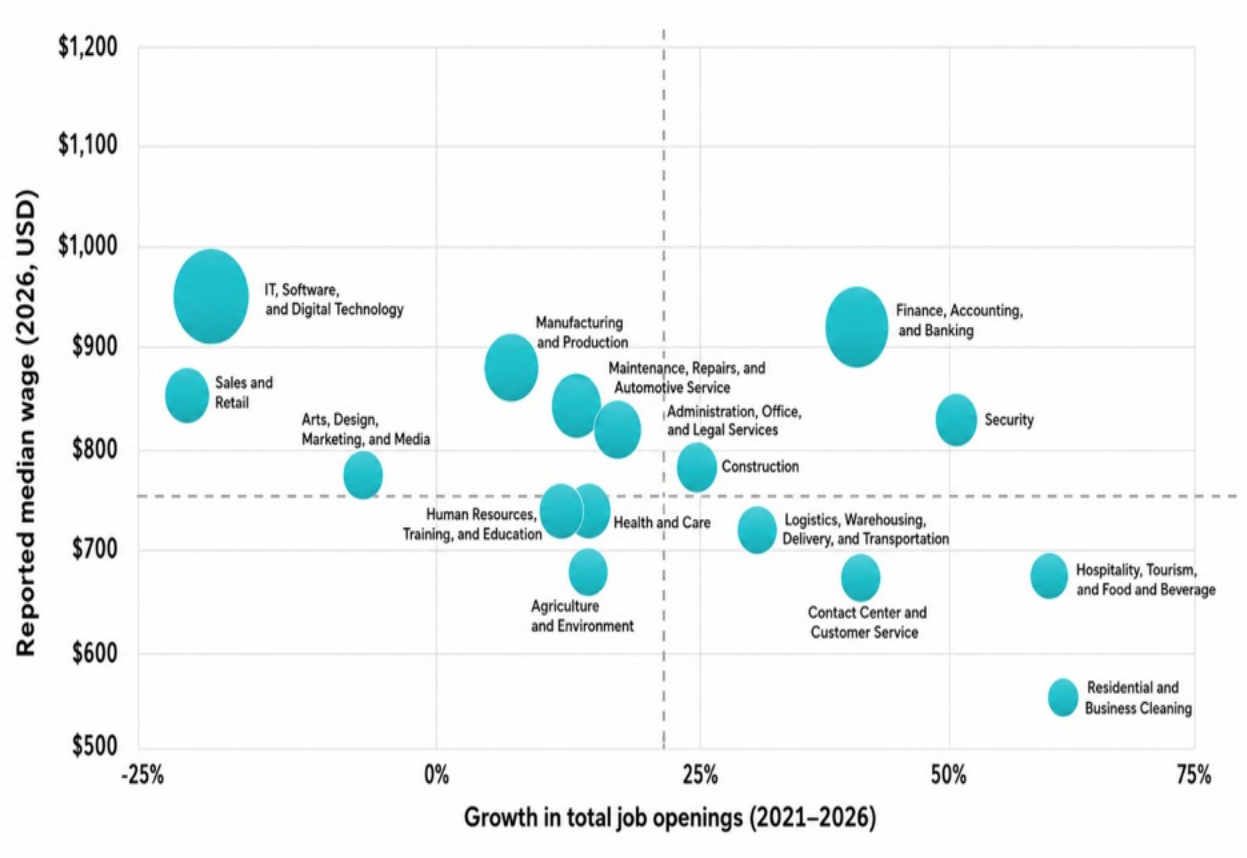



### 6.8.3 Mexico City

Mexico City presents a broad and diversified urban market. Logistics contributes scale, Maintenance contributes stability, and Health and Care shows recent improvement. The positioning map makes it possible to situate these roles within an economy of services, administration, customer service, corporate functions, and urban occupations.

After the 2024 peak, job openings adjust, but the market's scale is preserved. Contact center shows the sharpest decline; Logistics maintains the largest volume among the prioritized sectors, although it loses momentum after 2025; Maintenance offers a more stable trajectory; and Health and Care rebounds in 2025 without sustaining that level by the end of the period.

***Figure 92.*** *Mexico City. Sector positioning map*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

Although job openings adjust, the wage trajectory continues to improve since 2021 in the key sectors. While wages start from lower levels than at the border, the upward trend is clear: Maintenance and Logistics concentrate the best returns by the end of the period, Health and Care improves steadily, and contact center and Hospitality also advance, although with less prior consistency.

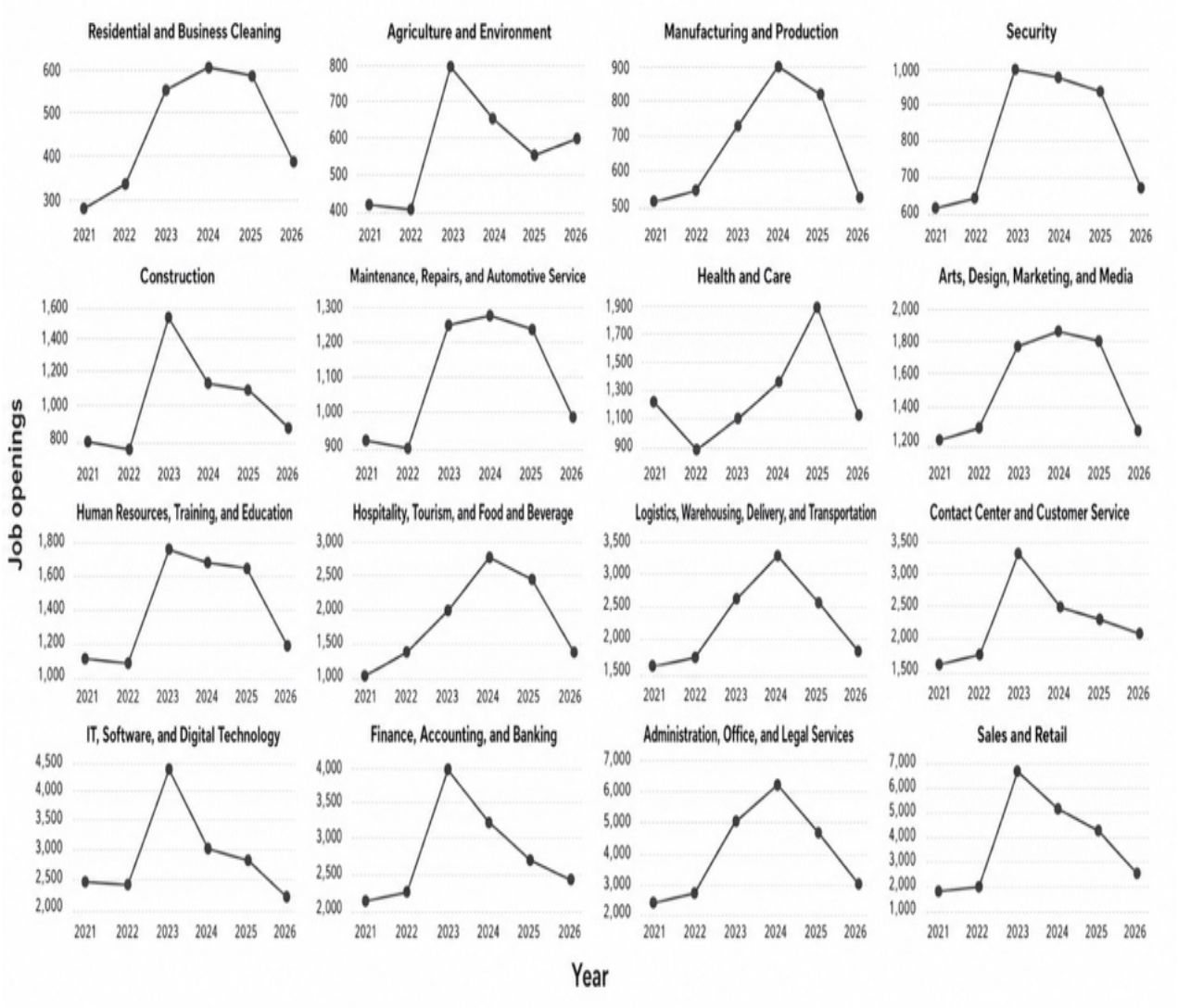
Mexico City has strategic value as a reference territory and a potential scaling site, especially because of its institutional density, diversity of employers, and capacity to coordinate administrative, service, customer-service, back-office, or digital training pathways. However, for an initial pilot focused on returnees and migrants in mobility, it presents greater institutional competition, greater geographic dispersion, and a more complex ecosystem, where the model's value added could be diluted by existing employability, assistance, and training programs.

***Figure 93.*** *Mexico City. Trend in volume of job openings by prioritized sector.*



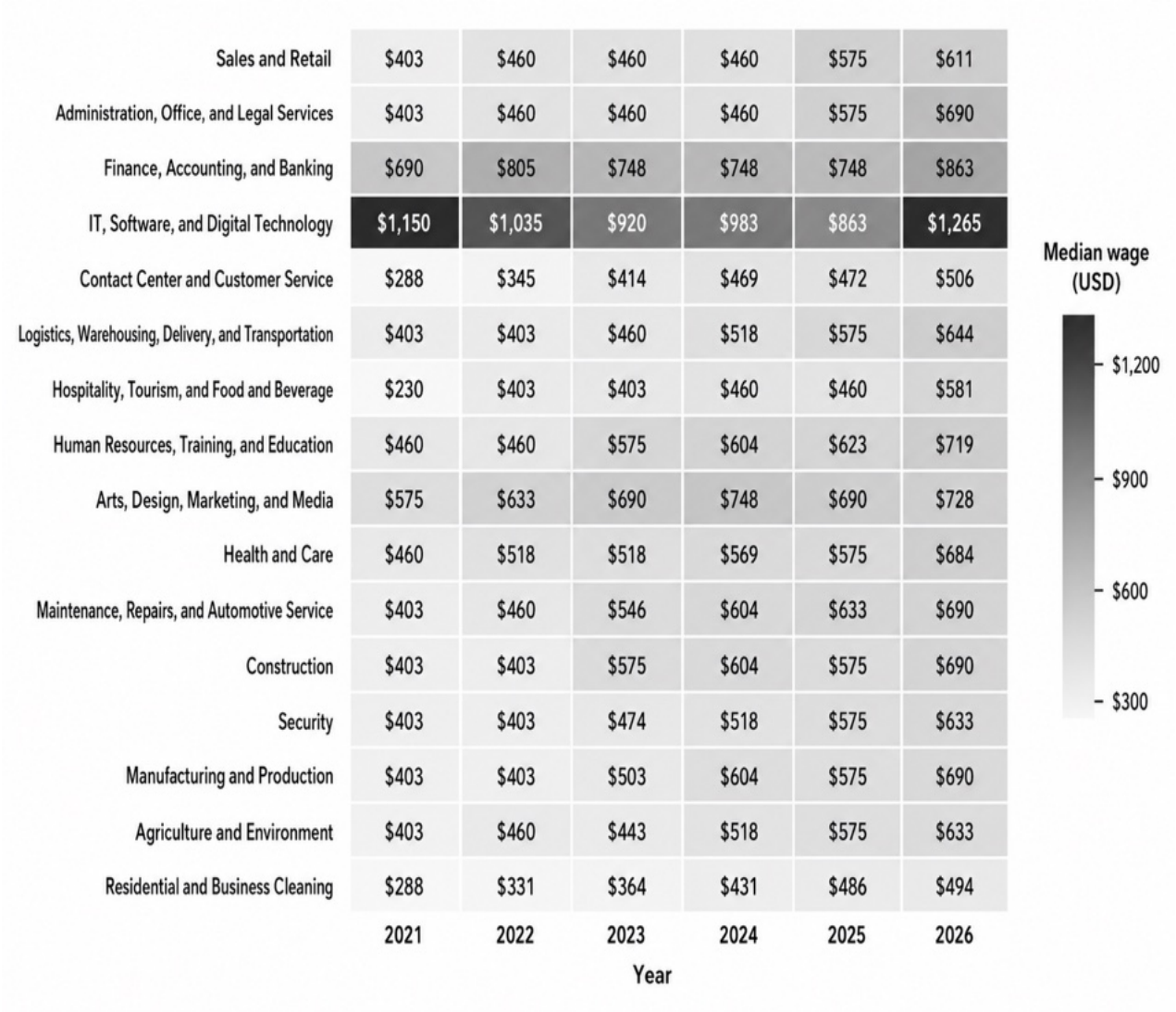

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 94**. Mexico City. Annual trajectory by sector.*



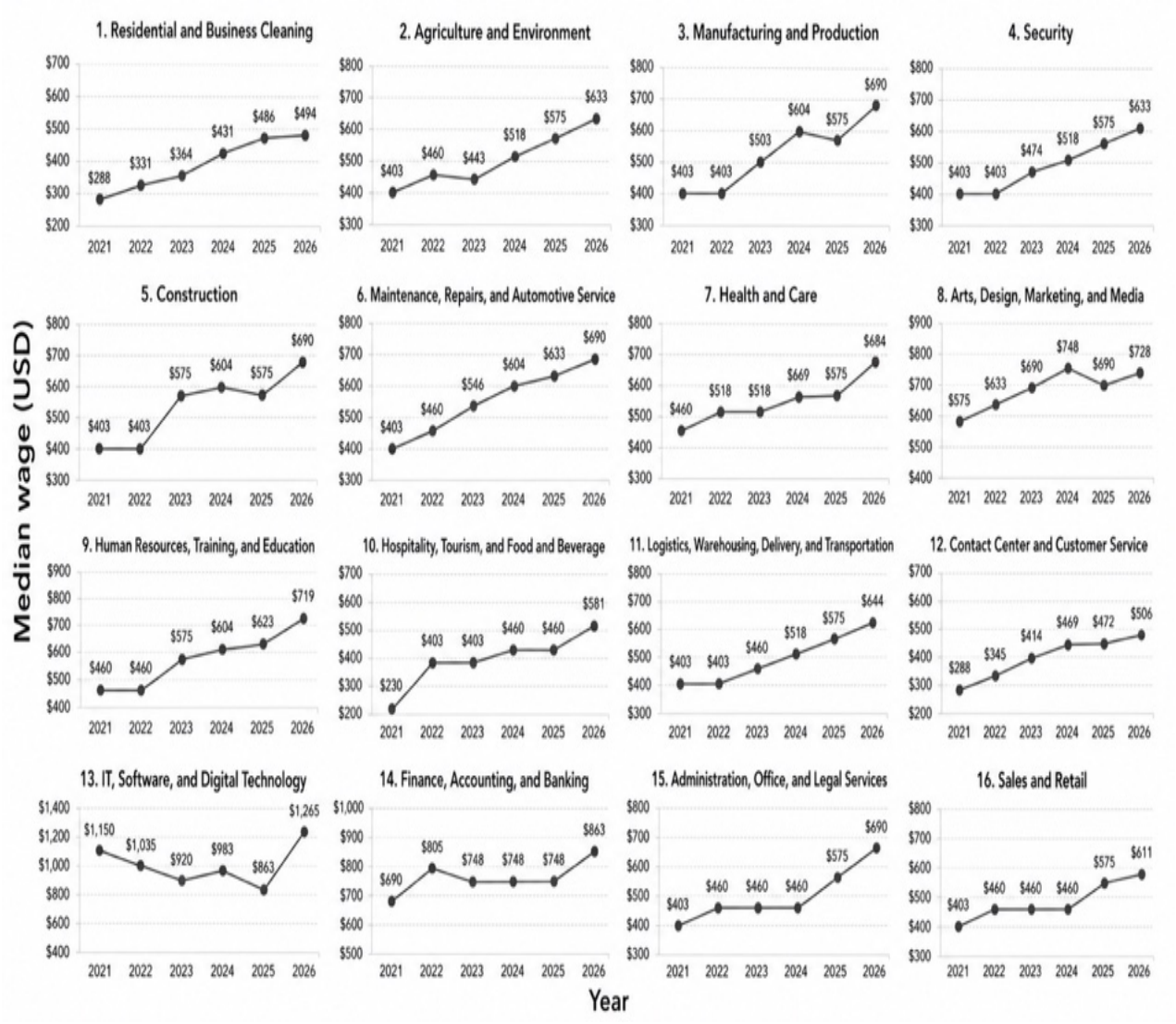

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 95.*** *Mexico City. Trend in median wage by sector.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 96.*** *Mexico City. Annual trajectory of the median wage by sector.*

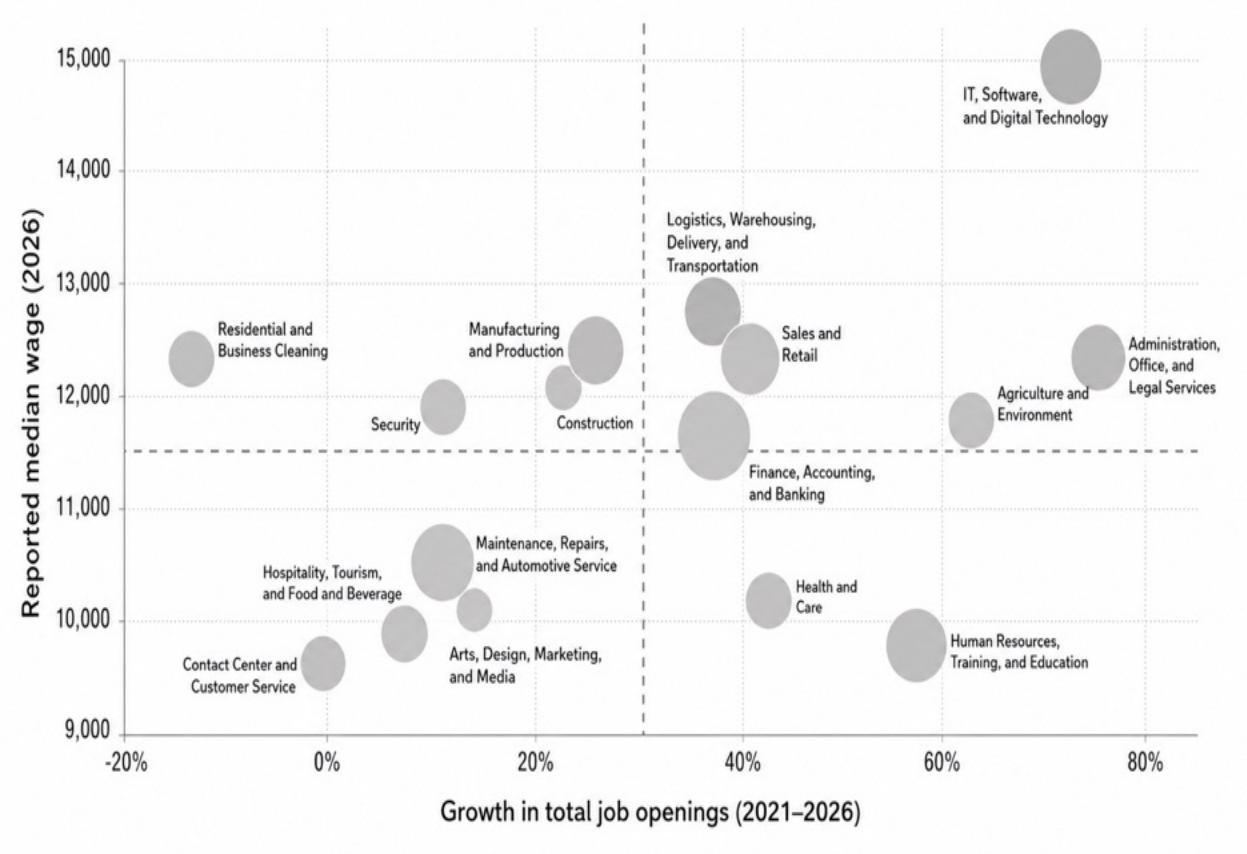



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

### 6.8.4 State of Mexico

The State of Mexico presents a large-scale market, with a more contained wage premium. Its structure combines logistics, manufacturing, maintenance, health, construction, security, retail, and services, which makes it a relevant territory for operational pathways and broad labor absorption.

***Figure 97.*** *State of Mexico. Sector positioning map*



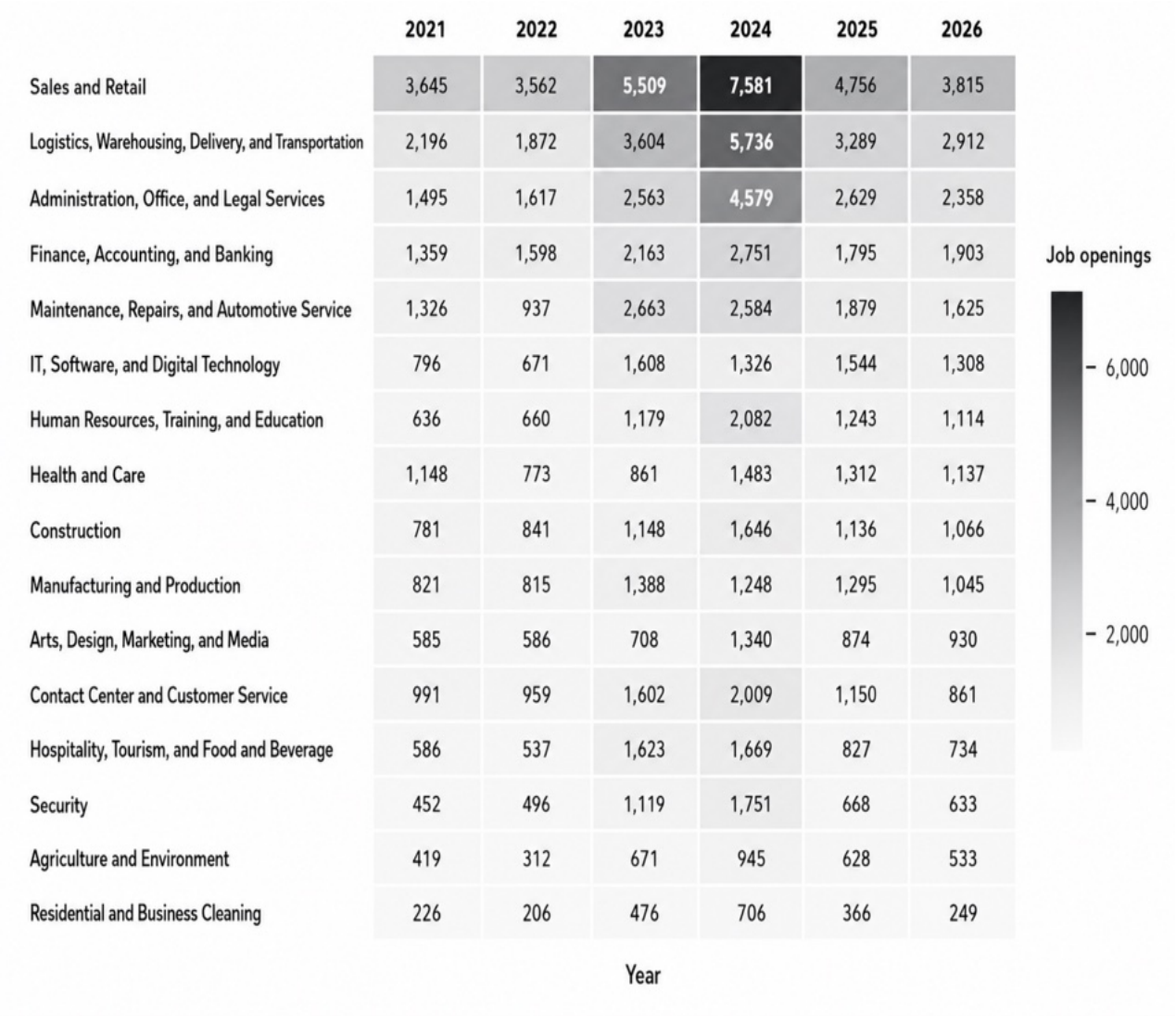

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

After the 2024 peak, the adjustment is concentrated in Logistics, but the market's base holds. Logistics concentrates the largest adjustment after the 2024 peak, although it continues to sustain the market's largest scale; Manufacturing, Maintenance, Health and Care, and Hospitality show more moderate and relatively stable trajectories.

The wage trajectory improves most strongly in Health and Care and Manufacturing, while Logistics advances gradually. As in the capital, wages start from lower levels than at the border, but the upward trend is clear: Health and Care and Manufacturing concentrate the best end-of-period wages; Logistics improves steadily, although more gradually; and Hospitality and Maintenance also advance, but from more contained levels.

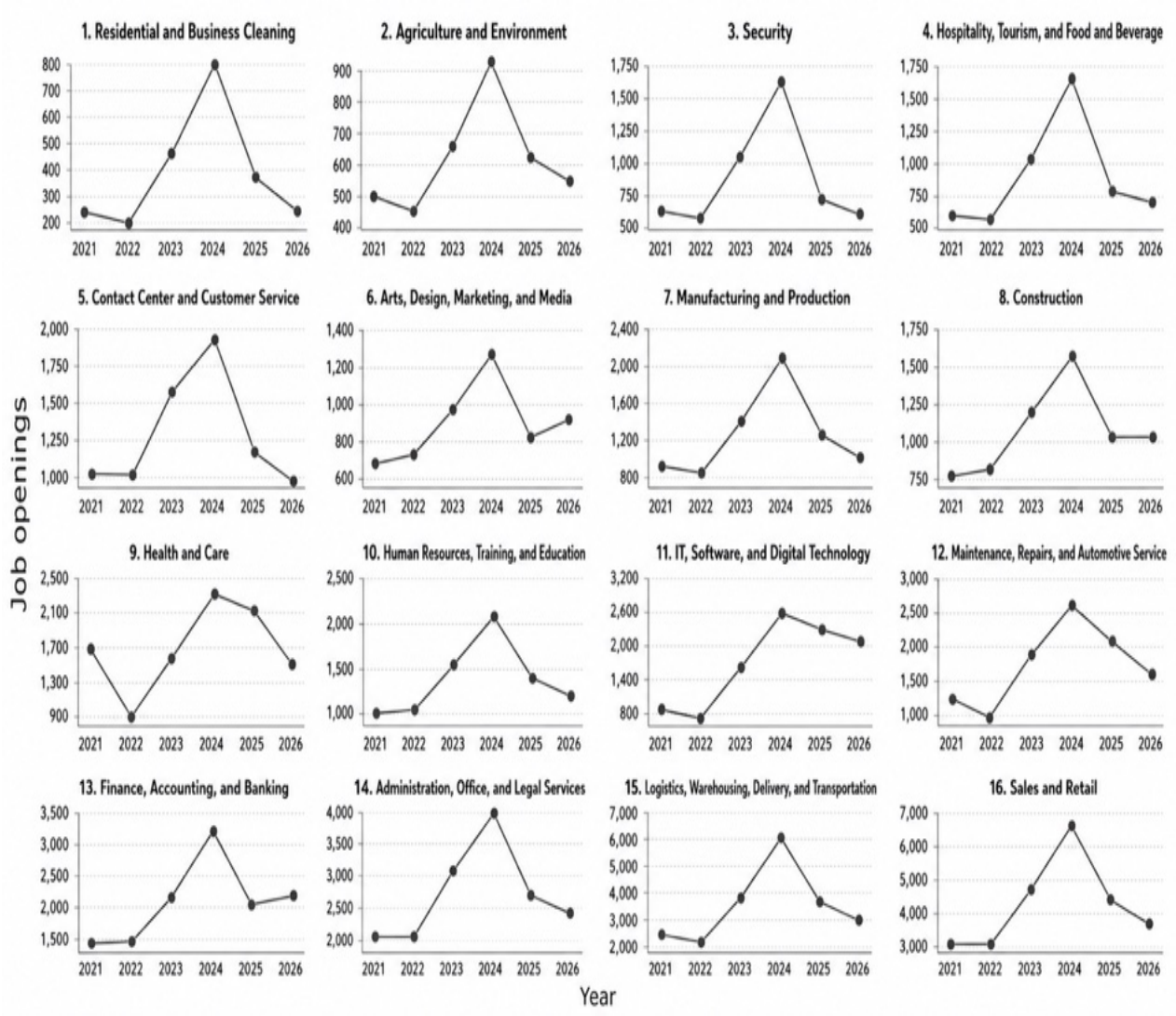
The State of Mexico may be relevant for a later scaling phase because of its labor-market volume, metropolitan connectivity, and operational base. Nonetheless, as an initial pilot site, it presents significant challenges: greater geographic dispersion, a lower concentration of specialized migrant-serving infrastructure, and the risk of reproducing low-paying labor-market entries if clear progression pathways are not designed from the outset.

***Figure 98**. State of Mexico. Trend in volume of job openings by prioritized sector.*



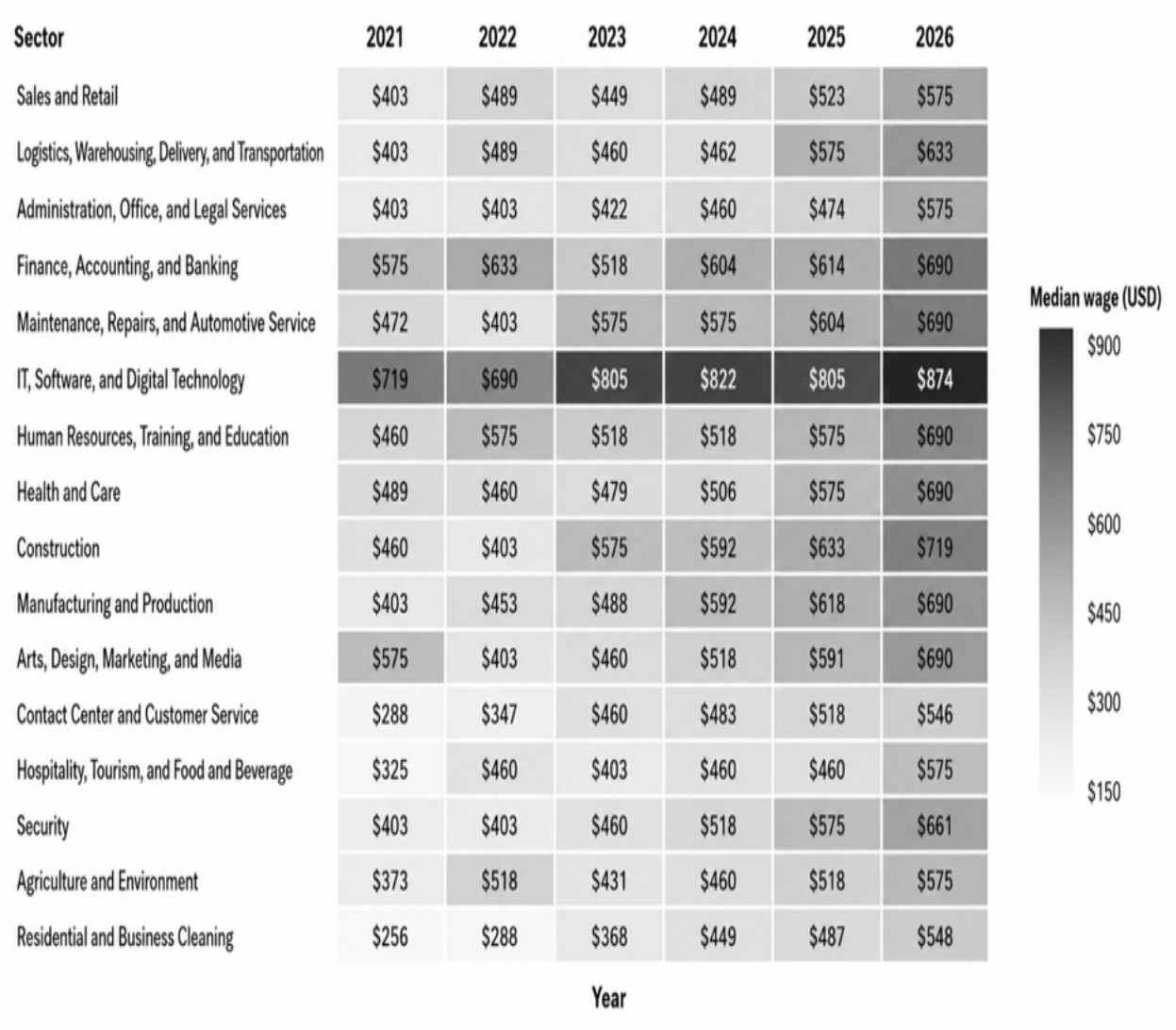

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 99.*** *State of Mexico. Annual trajectory by sector.*



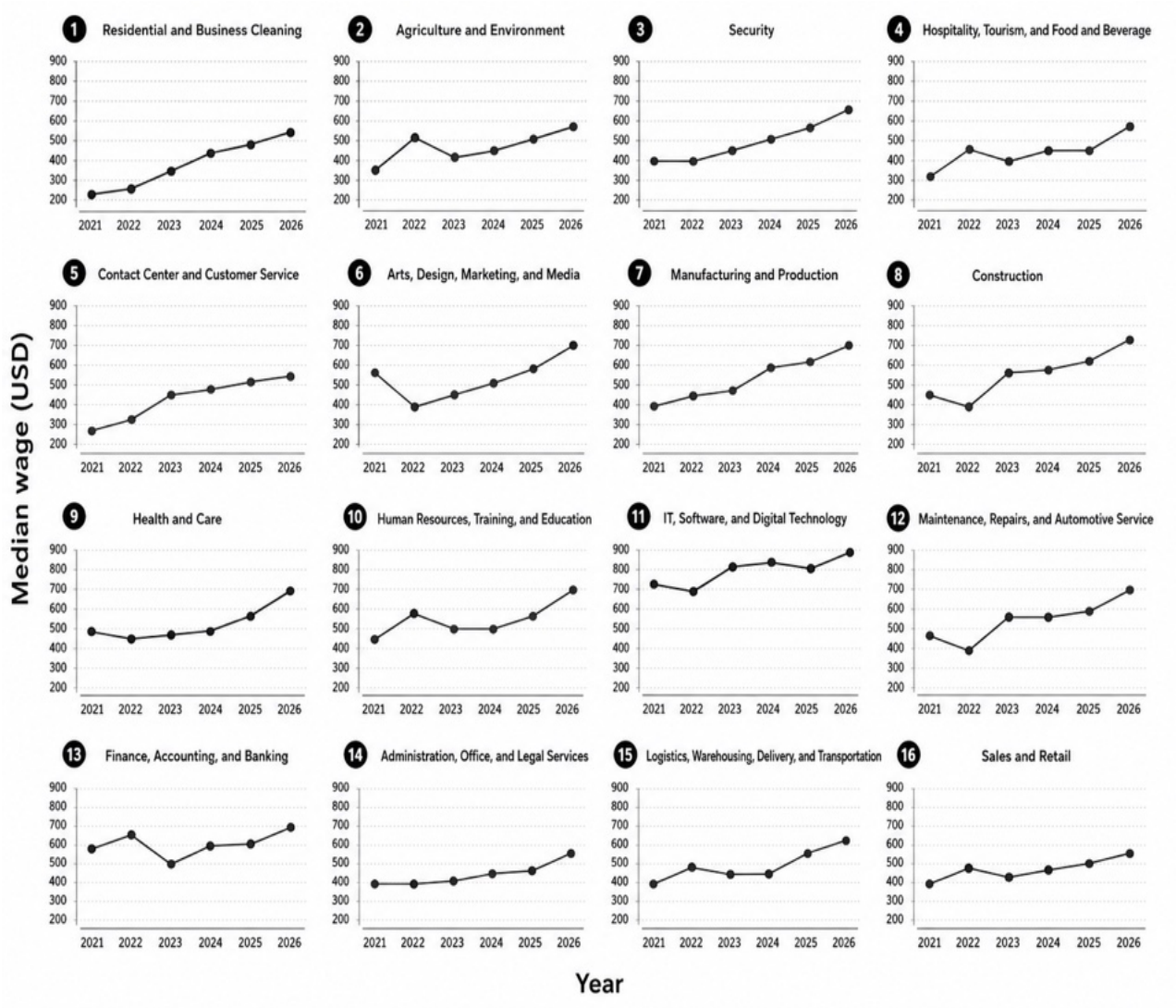

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 100.*** *State of Mexico. Trend in median wage by sector.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

***Figure 101.*** *State of Mexico. Annual trajectory of the median wage by sector.*




. **Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the IYF database.

## 6.9 Territorial comparison and implementation scenarios

The comparison among the four states makes it possible to distinguish two implementation scenarios. The first corresponds to the metropolitan territories —Mexico City and the State of Mexico— characterized by greater volume, sector diversity, and institutional density. The second corresponds to the northern border —Baja California and Chihuahua— characterized by greater proximity to the target population, migrant-serving infrastructure, and labor demand compatible with technical-operational and service pathways.

The **metropolitan** territories offer important advantages: market breadth, diversity of job openings, institutional presence, and the potential to coordinate with multiple stakeholders. However, they also present **challenges**: greater competition among programs, greater **geographic dispersion, more heterogeneous worker profiles, and more differentiated barriers to entry.**

The **northern border**, by contrast, offers **more favorable conditions for testing a pilot model with clear value added.** In Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez there are already points of contact with the migrant population, service organizations, place-based knowledge, and unmet needs in employability, certification, and job placement. The pilot could complement existing humanitarian assistance with a **workforce-development layer, without excessively duplicating institutional offerings.**

Based on the accumulated evidence, **it is recommended that the pilot begin in Tijuana, Baja California, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.** This recommendation rests on five main arguments.

1. **Proximity to the target population**. Both cities are border nodes with a presence of returned, in-transit, waiting, or settling populations. This proximity makes it possible to recruit participants more effectively and build support pathways from the early stages of return or mobility.
2. **Existence of local care infrastructure**. Both Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez have shelters, social organizations, community spaces, and actors with direct experience working with migrants. This infrastructure does not replace the pilot, but it offers a foundation of place-based trust on which an employability intervention can be built.
3. **Programmatic gap in workforce development**. Both cities have capacities for humanitarian assistance, emotional support, lodging, guidance, or protection, but the workforce-development layer —training, certification, labor profiling, employer intermediation, and post-placement follow-up— appears less consolidated. **This is where IYF's potential value added lies.**
4. **Compatibility between labor demand and observed profiles.** Baja California and Chihuahua show demand in technical-operational, logistics, manufacturing, maintenance, services, and customer-service sectors, which can be connected to labor trajectories identified among returnees and migrants in mobility. This makes it possible to design pathways based on short-term training, basic certification, and placement with manageable barriers to entry.
5. **Potential for comparative learning**. Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez share a border condition, but present distinct profiles of barriers. Tijuana shows greater

documentation pressure and relevant opportunities in certification, services, logistics, and the training ecosystem. Ciudad Juárez presents more severe and overlapping barriers, a greater concentration of young people, and a stronger relationship with trauma, care, certification, and place-based risk. Implementing in both cities would make it possible to test a common model with local adaptations, generating evidence useful for future replication.

This recommendation does not mean ruling out Mexico City or the State of Mexico. Both states retain value as reference territories, points of contrast, and possible scaling sites. However, for a first pilot phase, the northern border offers stronger conditions to demonstrate the model's value added: intervening where the target population is more accessible, where initial support infrastructure exists, where labor demand presents compatible pathways, and where the workforce-development layer can clearly complement the existing ecosystem.

Thus, Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez are not only viable sites; they are strategic territories for testing whether an evidence-based labor-market integration and reintegration model can connect migration services with real pathways to employment, certification, and economic inclusion.



# Chapter 7. Barriers to Social and Labor-Market Reintegration

This chapter examines the main barriers that returning migrants or in mobility migrants face in sustaining processes of social, educational, and labor-market reintegration in Mexico. Its purpose is to answer a question central to the pilot's design: what constraints limit the real possibility that returning migrants and migrants in mobility can access documentation, training, certification, formal employment, support networks, and minimum conditions of stability?

From a workforce development perspective, barriers should not be understood solely as individual shortcomings. In many cases, they are structural, institutional, and place-based constraints that reduce a person's effective capacity to enter a training or employment pathway. The study's evidence shows that reintegration does not depend only on a willingness to work or train; it is also conditioned by documentation, economic urgency, emotional health, housing, local networks, childcare, skills certification, language, digital access, and institutional follow-up capacity.

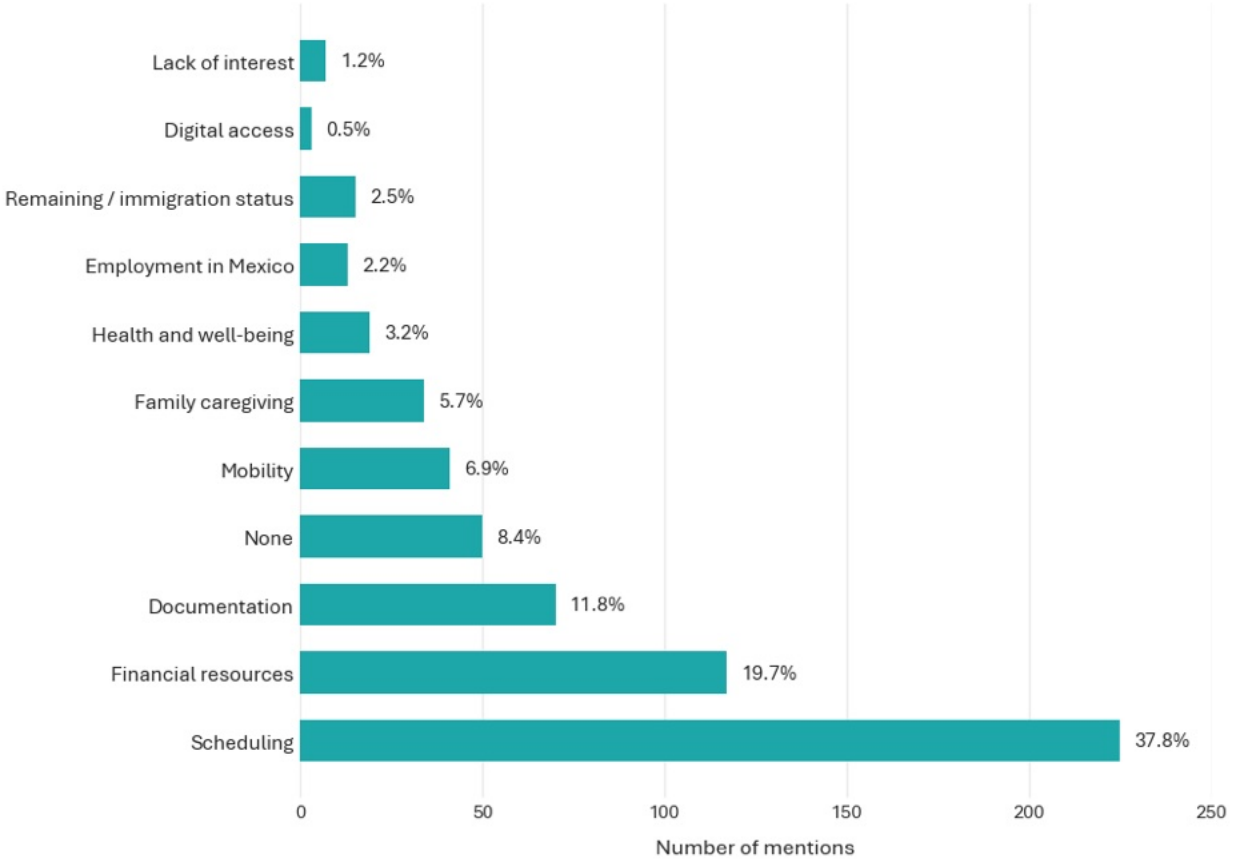
The chapter's central finding is that **barriers do not operate in isolation but cumulatively**. A single person may simultaneously face a lack of documents, an immediate need for income, the absence of a local network, trauma from detention or violence, low formal certification, and caregiving responsibilities. This accumulation changes the viability of any intervention: designing a training pathway for a person with one or two constraints is not the same as designing one for a person facing seven or eight barriers at once.

## 7.1 Barriers to accessing training and education

The quantitative evidence shows that the challenge is not only to open more courses but to make it possible for people to take them. The main barriers to enrolling in training or education programs while in Mexico are **practical and economic**. The most frequently cited obstacles are schedule constraints, at 37.8%, and lack of financial resources, at 19.7%. Together, these two constraints account for nearly six out of ten responses, ahead of limitations such as documentation, mobility, or caregiving.

The possibility of training is subordinate to the **urgency of generating income** and to living conditions marked by uncertainty, mobility, and material constraints. For many returning migrants and migrants in-mobility, taking part in training means assuming an opportunity cost: the time devoted to training competes with the time needed to seek income, complete administrative procedures, find housing, or rebuild support networks.

***Figure 102.*** *Barriers to enrolling in training processes, total sample.*

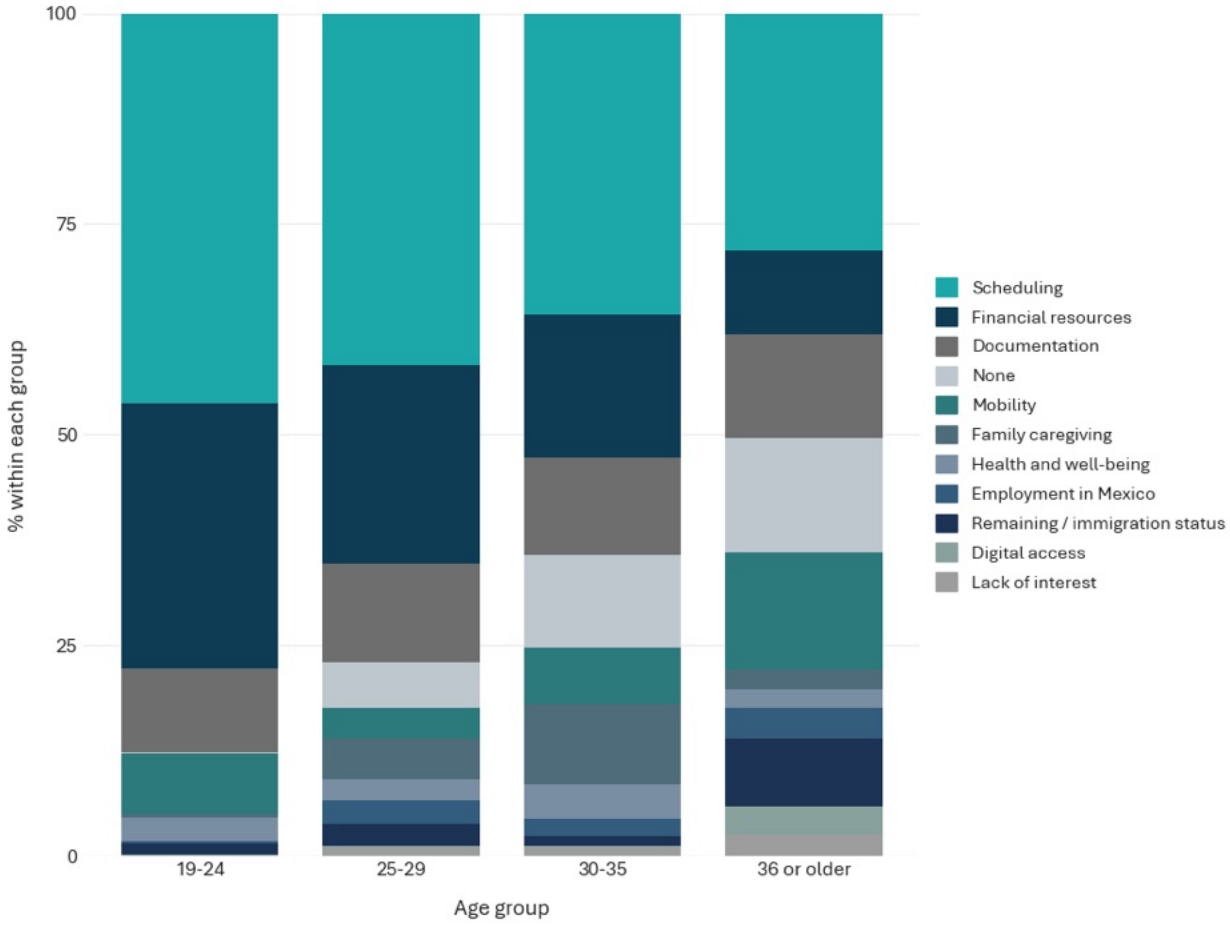



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed survey sample.

Barriers also vary by age. Among younger groups, the main adjustments needed involve reducing costs, making schedules more flexible, and linking training to visible employability benefits. Among older individuals, constraints become more cumulative: caregiving responsibilities, mobility, health, documentation, and economic urgency can limit participation and retention in training processes.

In this regard, training should be designed as an intervention compatible with participants' real lives. **Long, rigid, or disconnected formats** from concrete employment opportunities will have **a lower probability of retention**. By contrast, modular pathways with flexible schedules, transportation support, attendance-based incentives, childcare, and connection to employers can reduce barriers to entry and retention.

*Figure 103. Barriers to training by age group, total sample*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed survey sample.

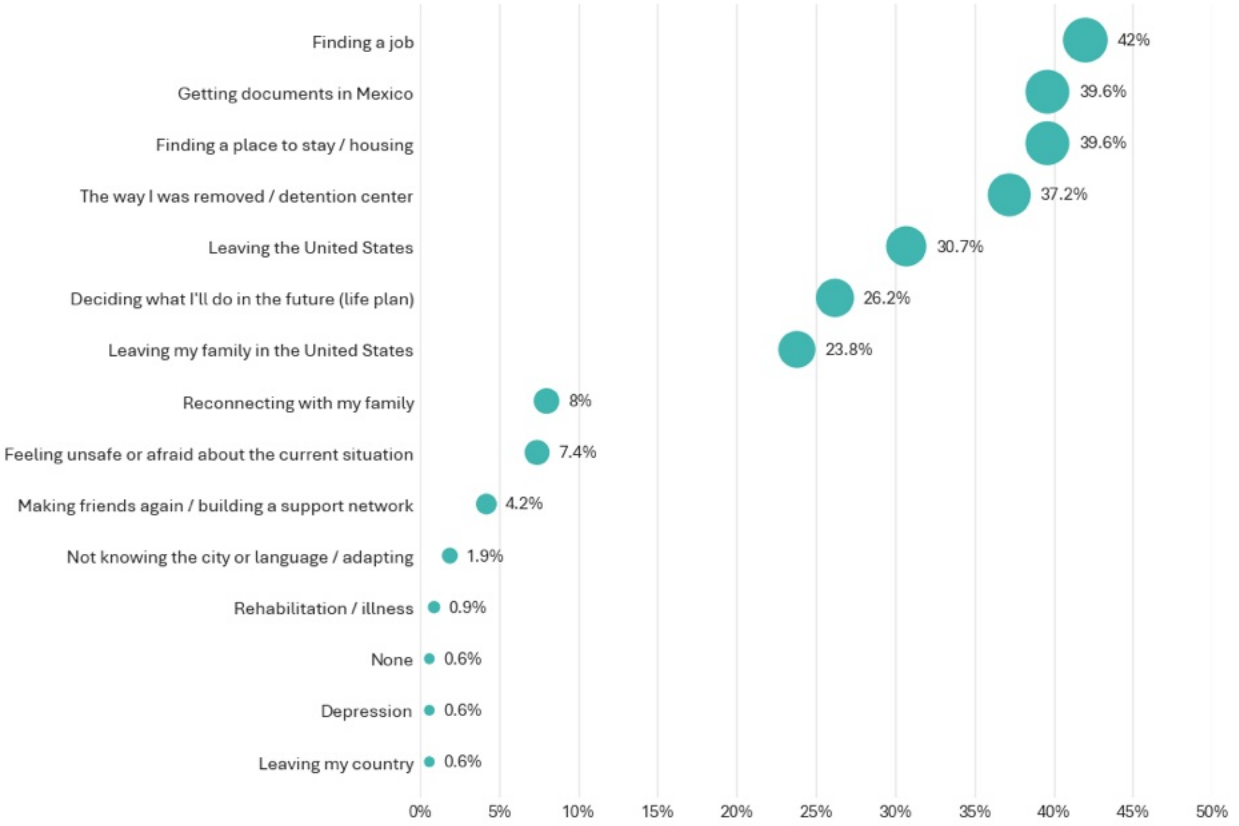
## 7.2 Stabilization barriers: psychosocial, family, and protection conditions

The qualitative component shows that the main difficulties of return are not only work-related. Reintegration often begins with the need to rebuild **basic living conditions**: employment, documentation, housing, support networks, and emotional stability. Added to this are experiences of forced departure, detention, violence in transit, family separation, and the abrupt loss of life plans.

Returnees do not face a single barrier but rather a **cumulative sequence of obstacles.** Detention, violence, documentation, housing, emotional shock, and occupational reskilling turn return into a process of forced restart rather than a simple reintegration. This reading is consistent with the reintegration approach of the International Organization for Migration

(IOM), which holds that return must be addressed in a multidimensional way, integrating economic, social, and psychosocial components.

***Figure 104.*** *Main barriers to return reported in the survey (total).*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed survey sample.

### 7.2.1. Psycho-emotional shock and family separation.

Return can produce a deep psycho-emotional shock that affects immediate employability. People arrive emotionally worn down, with a sense of rupture and, in many cases, with the experience of having left behind a life partly built in the United States. Return is experienced as **failure**, a loss of one's life plan, or the forced interruption of a personal, family, and work trajectory.

This reduces the capacity to respond during the first days or weeks and can trigger grief, anxiety, depression, disorientation, anger, or family breakdown. From an employability perspective, these conditions are not peripheral: they affect the willingness to look for work, make decisions, stay in training, or respond to labor-market intermediation processes.

Family separation deepens vulnerability. Many people return leaving children, a partner, or close networks in the United States. This rupture introduces stress, uncertainty, and ambivalence between remaining in Mexico, attempting to return to the United States, or seeking another destination. Labor-market reintegration therefore occurs in the midst of an **emotional crisis** and not necessarily under conditions of stability.

### 7.2.2 Stigma and institutional withdrawal

Social stigma also operates as a barrier to reintegration. Returnees may face the perception that they "did something wrong," that they were deported for committing a crime, or that their return is a source of shame. This stigma erodes self-esteem, reduces the willingness to seek support, and can push some people, especially young people, to hide or stay outside institutional channels.

This condition has direct implications for the pilot. Recruitment mechanisms cannot rely solely on people voluntarily coming forward to ask for help. They require strategies of outreach, trust, community mediation, and sensitive communication that reduce fear, shame, or institutional distrust.

### 7.2.3 Violence, detention, and the need for protection

Violence in transit has intensified and emerges as a critical barrier to reintegration. People may arrive with the aftermath of kidnapping, extortion, physical violence, psychological violence, threats, exploitation, recruitment by criminal networks, or human trafficking. These experiences affect health, emotional stability, interpersonal trust, and the capacity for labor-market entry.

Young people are a key group but also one of the most exposed. They tend to be highly mobile, travel in networks, adapt quickly, and can enter the labor market more readily; however, they can also face greater risks of kidnapping, recruitment, violence, or exploitation, particularly in high-insecurity corridors. For this reason, any intervention aimed at migrant youth must incorporate a **protection, safeguarding, and specialized-referral approach,** not only employability components.

## 7.3 Enabling barriers: documentation, housing, and local networks

Enabling barriers are those that determine the possibility of participating in any other component of the program. Without documentation, minimal housing, a local network, or basic conditions of stability, training and job placement lose effectiveness.

### 7.3.1 Documentation and identity

The lack of documents is a foundational barrier. It can block access to formal employment, medical care, opening bank accounts, receiving money, school enrollment, regularization procedures, certifications, or public services. In practice, it **undermines the right to identity** and places people in a **condition of administrative exclusion.**

Even in the case of deported Mexican nationals, assistance can be delayed or denied when they lack valid identification, a birth certificate, or supporting documents. For non-Mexican individuals, the restrictions can be greater: regularization costs, slow consular procedures, language barriers, and a lack of clarity about pathways for stay or employment.

From the standpoint of the pilot's design, documentation should not be treated as an external procedure or a prerequisite to the program, but as a component of service navigation. The employability pathway should incorporate a documentation assessment, referral, support, and basic follow-up until the person can access formal processes of training, certification, or employment.

### 7.3.2 Housing and minimum conditions for autonomy

Housing operates as a second major structural barrier. Securing a job does not resolve reintegration if the person cannot afford rent, food, basic furnishings, or transportation. Even when some people manage to access a job, the **transition toward autonomy** can fail if they lack bridge support to get through the first weeks or months.

This is particularly relevant for recently returned individuals, foreign nationals awaiting resolution of their status or next steps, women with children, people without local networks, and profiles marked by trauma or health conditions. Housing is not only an assistance component; it is an **enabling condition** for employability.

### 7.3.3 Local networks and place-based trust

The absence of a local network limits reintegration. Organizations, shelters, churches, community centers, or training spaces can function as provisional networks while the person rebuilds their own ties. However, these networks do not always have sufficient capacity to follow up, sustain long processes, or connect people to formal employment.

The pilot could draw on existing trusted nodes but should not assume that local networks form spontaneously. Integration requires intentional design: mixed groups, collaborative activities, mentoring, peer support, community guidance, and follow-up mechanisms after the person leaves the shelter or support center.

## 7.4 Systemic barriers: governance, follow-up, and institutional capacity

The institutional model for return assistance tends to be brief, fragmented, and characterized by limited follow-up capacity. In some settings, the initial stay is limited to very narrow windows, insufficient for a recently deported person to process what has happened, understand their options, resolve basic documentation, and make informed decisions about employment, mobility, or settlement.

The system registers people but **does not always manage to support them**. Once they leave the reception point or the shelter, many disappear from the institutional radar. This does not necessarily reflect a lack of individual willingness. Without a phone, money, lodging, a local network, or emotional stability, it is unrealistic to expect a person to check in on their own or navigate the service ecosystem alone.

Return policy is not always aligned with people's real trajectories either. Offering "returning to one's place of origin" as the primary response can be unviable when the person has been away for decades, retains no family ties, owns no property, has no support networks, or their life plan is no longer anchored in that territory. Reintegration requires a more place-based and personalized reading.

Added to this is the reduction or weakening of humanitarian actors in some territories. Several organizations face budget cuts, operational overload, or staffing limitations, precisely when cases require greater specialization. The system faces a paradox: there may be a smaller visible flow but greater complexity per case and fewer actors available to handle it. This heightens the relevance of models based on place-based partnerships, cost-efficient operations, scalable services, and inter-institutional coordination.

## 7.5 Socioeconomic inclusion barriers

Socioeconomic inclusion barriers encompass constraints linked to human capital, certification, language, digital skills, wage expectations, informality, training, and retention.

### 7.5.1 Low portability of human capital

Skills acquired in the United States or during mobility are not always easily transferable to the Mexican market. There is a mismatch between prior work experience and local demand: people with specific trades, experience in particular sectors, or skills acquired in very different contexts may not find an equivalent market in Mexico.

The problem is not an absence of experience but **low convertibility** of that experience. Specialized gardening, roofing, certain agricultural jobs, caregiving, maintenance, domestic services, cooking, welding, or manufacturing do not always translate automatically into credentials, formal job openings, or labor-mobility pathways in Mexico.

### 7.5.2 Lack of certification and uncredentialed experience

The inability to certify prior competencies wastes human capital. People with solid, even specialized, experience can become blocked because they cannot validate degrees, certifications, or track records. A paradox of overqualification without portability is observed: people with technical experience, professional training, or an international background end up seeking basic training options just to obtain something presentable to employers.

From a WFD perspective, this is a **systemic loss of talent**. It is not only about training people "without skills," but about creating mechanisms to identify, translate, and accredit capabilities that already exist. The recognition of prior learning, competency portfolios, practical assessments, and short certifications can be central tools for closing this gap.

### 7.5.3 Educational, linguistic, and digital barriers

Educational reintegration can advance administratively but fail substantively. Although some local governments have shown flexibility in facilitating revalidation or entry into the education system, clearing the administrative filter does not guarantee effective integration, especially when there are barriers of language, cultural adaptation, academic lag, a lack of support, or the need to work.

Language remains a structural barrier. For non-Spanish-speaking individuals, entering the education or labor system does not guarantee being able to stay in it. The language barrier affects retention, learning, performance, and access to services.

Digital skills also tend to be overestimated. **Being young is not equivalent to having job-related digital competencies.** Many people can use social media or basic apps but cannot necessarily handle email, a keyboard, office software, forms, spreadsheets, learning platforms, or the tools used in recruitment and employment processes. This calls into question the assumption that "youth equals digital employability" and makes it necessary to design practical digital-skills assessments.

### 7.5.4 Wage shock, informality, and labor urgency

Return produces a shock in wages and expectations. Many people return expecting their skills to command a value similar to what they had in the United States, but they face lower

wages, more precarious markets, and less recognition of their experience. This shock occurs even before the person grasps the need for occupational reskilling.

During the period of documentation, regularization, or the search for formal employment, informality appears as a survival mechanism. It is not necessarily a preferred choice; it is often the only available alternative while administrative procedures are resolved or labor networks are accessed. In this context, the program must recognize that the urgency of income can compete with retention in training or certification.

### 7.5.5 Training, mentoring, and retention incentives

The returnee population does not require only technical training. It requires **practical guidance** to reorganize their lives: how to make decisions, prioritize spending, save, sustain a training plan, understand the Mexican labor market, and build a realistic reintegration pathway.

Effective training must combine technical skills, social-emotional skills, dignified treatment, employment guidance, mental health, concrete incentives, and support. The problem is not only a lack of supply but a lack of activation and retention mechanisms.

**Tangible support** can make the difference between participating and dropping out. Transportation, food, childcare, work tools, trade kits, software licenses, or attendance-based support reduce the real cost of sustaining a transition. For a population in survival mode, these supports are not optional add-ons; they are conditions of access.

## 7.6 Composite Marginalization Index (IMC)

### 7.6.1 Foundations and construction

With the aim of synthesizing the accumulation of barriers and translating it into an operational segmentation tool, a Composite Marginalization Index (IMC) was constructed. The index was designed as an aggregate measure of barriers to labor-market, educational, and social reintegration. In methodological terms, a composite index synthesizes multiple individual indicators into a common measure that makes it possible to represent multidimensional phenomena that cannot be adequately observed through a single variable.

The IMC adopts a logic analogous to the multidimensional measurement of deprivation: it identifies relevant dimensions, defines the presence or absence of each barrier, and aggregates that information into an individual score. The substantive difference is that the **unit of analysis** is not the household or the territory but the **migrant** who has returned or is

in mobility; and the phenomenon measured is not monetary poverty but the accumulation of constraints that limit labor-market, educational, and social reintegration.

From this perspective, the index should not be interpreted as an abstract measure of vulnerability but as an operational tool for identifying how many and which constraints a person faces in accessing documentation, training, certification, formal employment, support networks, childcare, psychosocial support, and digital competencies.

The IMC was built using a binary matrix of ten structural barriers associated with reintegration:

1. Documentation.
2. Economic urgency.
3. Low educational attainment.
4. Lack of functional English for target employment pathways.
5. Absence of formal certification.
6. Uncredentialed work experience.
7. Scheduling and caregiving constraints.
8. Absence of a local network.
9. Detention, violence, or trauma.
10. Limited functional digital access.

Although absence of formal certification and uncredentialed work experience are closely related, they are treated separately because they capture different bottlenecks: the first refers to the lack of recognized credentials, while the second refers to the difficulty of documenting, translating, or validating prior work experience before employers or training institutions.

Each barrier present adds one point to the individual score, producing a scale from 0 to 10. The score does not measure an isolated deficit but the accumulation of simultaneous constraints. For this reason, a person with seven barriers does not simply face “more problems” than a person with two; they face a qualitatively more complex condition in which the barriers reinforce one another and reduce their real capacity to take part in a standard training or employment pathway.

The IMC should be read as an operational segmentation and case-management tool rather than as a population-level prevalence estimate. Given the purposive, shelter-supported nature of the sample, its main value lies in identifying profiles, combinations of barriers, and levels of support needed for program design.

To facilitate programmatic interpretation, the score was classified into four levels:

- Low marginalization: 0 to 2 barriers.
- Moderate marginalization: 3 to 4 barriers.
- High marginalization: 5 to 6 barriers.
- Severe marginalization: 7 to 10 barriers.

This classification makes it possible to move from a descriptive dataset to an operational segmentation tool. In design terms, it helps distinguish who can join a light guidance pathway, who requires intensive support, and who needs prior or simultaneous support to sustain any process of training, certification, or placement.

The IMC not only measures the prevalence of barriers separately but identifies how they combine within a single trajectory. This logic connects to the intersectional approach, which recognizes that inequalities do not operate in isolation but through the interaction of social, institutional, and place-based conditions. It is also consistent with the IOM's model of migrant vulnerability determinants, which recommends analyzing risk and protective factors at the individual, family, community, and structural levels.

The index's empirical base drew on two sources. The first consists of 12 interviews conducted with people in direct contact with the migrant population, selected for their experience in shelters or support centers. These interviews made it possible to build and qualitatively validate the ten barriers. The second consists of 193 in-person, interviewer-administered surveys, lasting approximately 20 to 95 minutes, conducted in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez with the support of local shelters and organizations: 89 in Tijuana and 104 in Ciudad Juárez.

### 7.6.2 IMC Tijuana: qualitative composition of the barriers

The qualitative analysis of Tijuana draws on six interviews with three partner organizations: Casa del Migrante, the Scalabrini Training Center for Migrants, and Salesianos. The barrier-by-barrier reading reveals an ecosystem with relevant capacities but also critical bottlenecks.

**Documentation** emerges as a **foundational barrier.** It was identified as a high-intensity barrier in five of six interviews. The lack of documents hinders formal employment and access to services, especially for the non-Spanish-speaking population. Partial solutions exist, such as municipal IDs or educational revalidation pathways, but the bottleneck remains obtaining formal identification and documents with sufficient recognition before institutions and employers.

**Economic urgency** appears in all the interviews. The need for immediate income competes with training, so cash assistance or conditional stipends are a critical tool for reducing the opportunity cost of training. Basic educational attainment appears as a differentiated barrier: more pronounced among the repatriated adult population and more moderate among the younger population linked to training centers.

The lack of **functional English** is a relevant barrier. Some participants have informal or conversational English, but not necessarily the level required to access better positions in call centers, hospitality, or customer service. The absence of formal certification and uncredentialed experience are two of the most significant gaps in the ecosystem. People with real track records in welding, cooking, caregiving, nursing, or other trades cannot convert their experience into formal employment for lack of documents, portfolios, or certifications.

**Scheduling and caregiving constraints** particularly affect women with children. Without childcare, the likelihood of dropping out increases substantially. Local evidence shows that childcare arrangements during workshops can improve retention without necessarily requiring a formal daycare. The **absence of a local network** also emerges as a critical barrier: organizations operate as a provisional network, especially in the first moments after arrival.

**Trauma associated with detention, deportation, or violence is a cross-cutting barrier**. Organizations identify the need for emotional stabilization before any training component. Finally, functional digital access is more limited than expected: having a smartphone is not equivalent to handling a keyboard, office software, forms, or the digital tools needed for training and employment.

***Figure 105.*** *IMC barrier matrix for Tijuana, Baja California*

| BARRIER | GILBERTO MARTÍNEZ (Director, Casa del Migrante) | RAÚL OCHOA (Director, CESFOM) | DENISSE QUIJANO (Teacher at CESFOM) | MANUEL ÁLVAREZ (Deputy Director, CESFOM) | CLAUDIA PORTELA (Director, Salesians) | ANGÉLICA TAMAYO (Director, Contra Corriente shelter) | BARRIER TYPE / KEY NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B1. Documentation** | *"If you don't have all your documents, the employer ends up handling the paperwork. For example, one woman took about 6 months just to get her RFC [tax ID]."* | *Notes migrants' difficulty regularizing their status. "You have to have a legal status; once you take care of that, you can move forward."* | Does not mention directly. | *"They suddenly become afraid of the CONARE [asylum] process—afraid of being detained," and the idea also takes hold that asylum carries the assumption that they're going to work.* | *"We spent 5 years getting the INM's Migration Office to clear an undocumented worker so he wouldn't run into problems."* | *"I have to take people off the applicant list. If someone married without filing an application, how are they working? Some have even ended up in deportation. They don't bring documentation, and they'll have to obtain it the hard way."* | **FOUNDATIONAL barrier.** The lack of legal documents blocks formal access to employment and creates costs, wait times, and institutional dependence. It is tied to every other barrier (digital access, education, experience, etc.) and works as an initial enabling condition. |
| **B2. Economic urgency** | *"A worker—just let him know, because they're going to pay me $20 an hour and I'll pay him $20, and then he gets upset." They already lack the resources to get into a stable setup where things are in order, because they owe so much and they need to work.* | *"Because of economic urgency, the students in the balloon-decorating course asked to start before they had their immigration papers. They needed it, and we've helped them—it's when the need is greatest, and to manage it they have to stretch themselves to the breaking point."* | *"They're in such a difficult situation that, for many of them, the urgency is what shows through."* | *"We run the assessments factoring in their economic challenges, since their income isn't fixed... We have staged income, self-employment, and, specifically, covering the cost of sustaining themselves and providing work..."* | *"...the 45–48 hours they put into training, and becoming aware of a new way of life—having a job and seeing the fruit of their effort—is so different for them; it helps them absorb more content, retain that information to live on, and generate real added value..."* | *"Families with no program—where everyone is brought along, from the eldest on down, just so they show up. I think they no longer see any point in working and spend their time looking around... they're given a lot of leeway." "I think the limiting factor is 90%+ correlated with the economic one."* | **CRITICAL barrier.** Immediate economic pressure that forces short-term decisions and undermines retention in training programs. It directly affects retention, participation, and sustained access to employment. |
| **B3. Basic education** | HIGH *"In general, the migrant didn't come in with much schooling. Of the 7,200,000, the data shows that 3 in 10 don't finish lower secondary, on average—based on the employment data from our sources..."* | MEDIUM *"It's hard to pin down an applicant's appropriate schooling level, because they run into barriers like illiteracy, hearing difficulties, an inadequate reading level, or gaps in basic arithmetic (e.g., times tables), for example."* | Does not mention directly. | MEDIUM *"On average at CESFOM, high school is a school of poverty. Their ability is hit hard by the poverty they come from; it affects the ones who join the most."* | HIGH *"Two—there are big gaps in adults' schooling, something they left back in third grade, like just knowing how to start writing. Imagine how much the basic foundation failed them." "Many adults fell behind because of the assessments and ended up frustrated..."* | HIGH *"...young people who come in at 12 or 15, or who are slow to read and write. It's an obstacle when we see an adult who's missing more than primary school, and when they read, it shows..."* | **DIFFERENTIATED barrier.** A low or incomplete education level limits access to better-paid, higher-quality programs and jobs. The impact differs by age, origin, and prior educational trajectories. |
| **B4. No functional English** | HIGH *"Our work suddenly has 4–5 years of ties with the United States, where there's a lot of English. The immigrant's connection, communication, and strong cultural similarity mean they're flexible and ready to work; we've shifted much more toward the U.S. than toward Europe."* | MEDIUM *"We work in Creole, French, and Spanish–Portuguese; the participants we bring in range from monolingual Mexicans..."* | HIGH *"Many come without knowing English—that's the obstacle. When a lot of them come in, education is part of the root cause; many don't know it, and on arrival you adjust the records, but with foundations and support they can learn."* | HIGH *"English is a huge barrier here. With the children and young people, we face challenges in every household—the pandemic, for example, left them without any skills: listening, speaking, presenting work—and they're left in a kind of limbo, like partly-certified tracks..."* | HIGH *"...never that; the 14- and 15-year-olds we haven't seen here, nor has it fallen to us to work with them on English—they're at home. It's the little ones we saw, and they like to grow."* | HIGH *"Without English, they don't even think about the United States. Math—you can't do anything—because you'd need another kind of schooling taught in Spanish. English, because you need to be able to express yourself in English in order to work."* | **CRITICAL barrier.** The lack of functional English hampers access to better-paid jobs and limits full integration into the labor market, especially in settings like the United States. |
| **B5. No formal certification** | HIGH *"Investment in the field and capitalizing on the degree. There's interest in building a cultural toolkit of skills for their résumés—but they don't have certificates, and it doesn't validate their qualifications."* | HIGH *"CESFOM diplomas aren't formally recognized the way others can be. They want a certification so they can issue official credentials, but that hasn't happened yet."* | HIGH *"For example, with the validation of the high-school diploma and the training, they don't meet all the requirements to have nationally valid frameworks that schools should keep updated..."* | HIGH *"We ask for backing through AMAR certifications at the basic level; we get to Mexico and there's no one to regularize it—not everyone has them. The job-placement link still isn't well understood; we're missing something that would let them show their experience..."* | HIGH *"Students certified through Provencaf on a competency basis—a 30-day call—work under a commitment to hire..."* | HIGH *"Young people with no work-focused support programs, and it doesn't validate what's been formalized—with rulings to recognize a package for the LOAD, good labor practices, and historical authorizations..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.** The absence of formal certification limits labor mobility and reduces opportunities to access better jobs. There is an urgent need for mechanisms to validate prior learning and for accessible certification. |

| BARRIER | GILBERTO MARTÍNEZ (Director, Casa del Migrante) | RAÚL OCHOA (Director, CESFOM) | DENISSE QUIJANO (Teacher at CESFOM) | MANUEL ÁLVAREZ (Deputy Director, CESFOM) | CLAUDIA PORTELA (Director, Salesians) | ANGÉLICA TAMAYO (Director, Contra Corriente shelter) | BARRIER TYPE / KEY NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B6. Uncredentialed experience** | HIGH<br>*"They have experience, but they don't know how to document it. Many pick up significant skills on the job, but they don't put it in writing—or they do, but incorrectly."* | MEDIUM<br>*"Accreditation is something we're pretty limited on at our level, and they can fall through the cracks here..."* | HIGH<br>*"Because they don't have papers backing up that experience; or because of how hard it is to validate the certificates and diplomas they hold—the ones that earned them confidence in their skills—we then don't recognize them as formal credentials."* | HIGH<br>*"We can teach them tools and strengthen their competencies, but in the end they have nothing to back up what they've done—even if they've done it for decades or their whole lives."* | HIGH<br>*"Sometimes they don't even have papers—would-be successful residency or passport applicants who have years of experience they can't prove."* | HIGH<br>*"Uncredentialed experience, because of the lack of documents to recognize it, since many learned through hands-on practice without any formal backing."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>The lack of mechanisms to recognize and validate prior experience limits access to formal jobs, especially in trades and technical fields, directly affecting employability and income. |
| **B7. Schedules and caregiving** | HIGH<br>*"The biggest barrier, in hindsight, would be schedules—because they may be juggling their kids, school schedules, and their own work or study schedule."* | HIGH<br>*"Out of every 15 or so, 7 or 8 feel it the most, because the burden falls hardest on whoever is always the one handling everything—all at once, on a double load."* | HIGH<br>*"We had a case of someone with six years of experience in plumbing... and in general they don't have their own tools; we look for a way to give them a bag with a set of personal tools..."* | HIGH<br>*"Even though most programs are subsidized, some employers have their own requirements; some fully subsidize the worker—tools, supplies, scope, and basic needs—and they even take part in workshops..."* | HIGH<br>*"Without the shelter's support, they'd need to own a tool set—saw, drills, or pliers—which can be costly; and whether each applicant has to equip themselves on their own in order to reach the program's goal..."* | HIGH<br>*"...we had to cover part of it ourselves; we've had to advise each person on an upfront investment in tools and equipment, as part of the program's objective for their own gear..."* | **CRITICAL barrier for employment.**<br>The cost of tools and equipment is a significant barrier to entry, especially for trades and technical jobs that require an upfront investment. Those who lack them face greater difficulty accessing jobs. |
| **B8. No local network** | HIGH<br>*"They arrive here alone, coming from the United States—alone, with nothing here. And even when they put in the effort, the networks often don't exist or don't work."* | MEDIUM<br>*"Social networks and connections make it possible to move forward on many of these matters, both individual and locally grounded. We have no way to get them networked, and at a certain level of their work it comes down to whether they have a network. I see it firsthand."* | HIGH<br>*"Seeing that there's regular, solid support from shelters and community or neighborhood associations—there are people who arrive without this, and that barrier is different when you're trying to start any connection."* | HIGH<br>*"We highlight that loss of contact—family ties and bonds of friendship or local networks that have broken or burned out in the country because of these same needs, this same matter of survival—which is why mediation and social support and the social network matter."* | HIGH<br>*"Family breakdown: distant from their parents, spouses, siblings, friends—which causes a great deal of uprooting."* | HIGH<br>*"People who went through family estrangement and an absence of support networks within the organization, and abandonment, as comes up in mental-health topics."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>The lack of local support networks and contacts makes adaptation, access to opportunities, and emotional well-being harder, affecting socioeconomic integration. |
| **B9. Detention and trauma** | HIGH<br>*"The vast majority of families face some detention situation, or financial strain that gives rise to trauma and a constant reminder—even when they're trying to enter the labor market."* | HIGH<br>*"If someone has worked under abusive, low pay since 2021... right now there's no employment; with the wages we have, they aren't hired, and some end up working for that very reason—because this is an environment marked by trauma."* | HIGH<br>*"I think many have lived through experiences that were very hard for them—those situations from their time in jails or shelters. Even so, sometimes with the memories and the damage entirely in psychological or emotional terms, it's complicated, although..."* | HIGH<br>*"Sometimes very simple things take a long time—just getting to the emotional trauma of this moment, that whole process of detention, of the abduction, the traumatic experience they carry—which has to be worked through; we have a lot to process and understand."* | HIGH<br>*"Sometimes it takes time for them to pick things back up, because of what has already become a debt crisis. Including that itself, with a very large economic impact that the shelter can take on—building it into the process so they can survive."* | HIGH<br>*"They go through a nightmare—devastating; emotional, long, and very bitter. Violent traumas; we take them on, and it takes a long, costly time. We've already had to handle intense cases."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>Detention and trauma experiences leave emotional and psychological aftereffects that affect confidence, stability, and the ability to integrate into work and social life. |
| **B10. No functional digital access** | HIGH<br>*"...keeping things on paper is essential, even now and even when updated. It's vital, because everything is digital now, and people here sometimes don't think about what they need—accessing a portal is vital for that group. Another issue is the whole matter of connectivity together with the necessary skills."* | MEDIUM<br>*"Getting comfortable with a computer and a phone is hard, and the phone isn't a basic one... You don't know how to use the good ones; they write updates, create things, make the most of them—the problem is they don't engage with technology."* | HIGH<br>*"When it comes to managing the connection we still have here... along with the basic navigation needed to see whether they can connect to a job search."* | HIGH<br>*"Without connectivity to reach digital platforms and job-search sites, it becomes even harder for them to find work and, as a result, to access a real job option."* | HIGH<br>*"...to connect to job opportunities too, or to digital platforms, there are several barriers, and sometimes just having good internet is something they'd need access to."* | HIGH<br>*"They first have to acquire and adopt the digital skills that give them access to those job platforms, and most of them have neither the skills nor systematic or even basic tools."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>The digital divide limits access to information, paperwork, and online job opportunities—an increasingly indispensable condition for entering the modern labor market. |

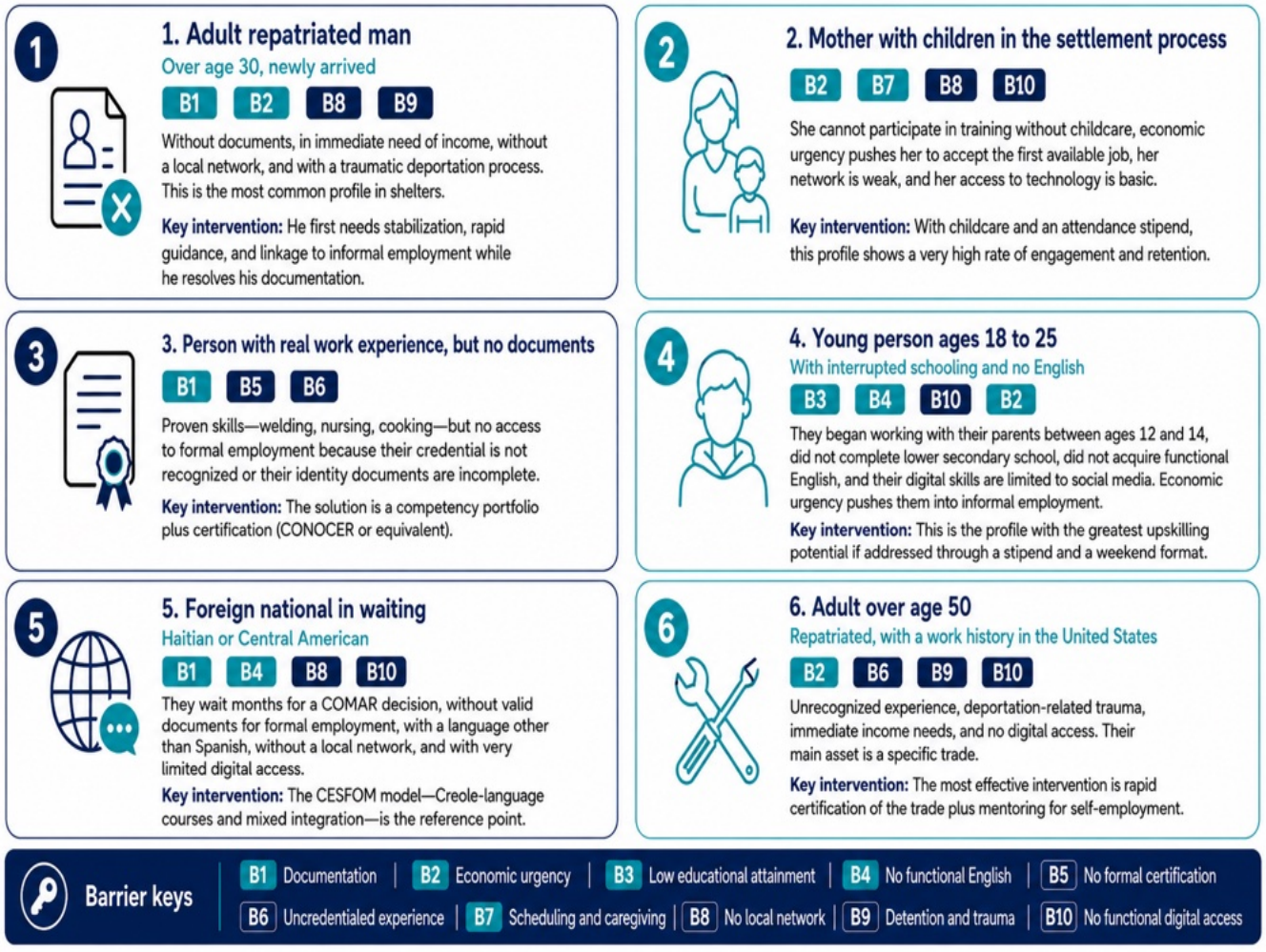
**Legend – Color coding:** ● **HIGH:** Critical barrier requiring priority attention and immediate intervention. ● **MEDIUM:** Significant barrier requiring attention and specific actions. ● **LOW:** Barrier with lower relative impact or partly mitigated.

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on data from interviews conducted with staff in charge of local shelters and programs.

## 7.7 High-marginalization profiles identified in Tijuana

Cross-referencing the barriers makes it possible to identify six recurring high-marginalization profiles, defined by the most frequent combinations of simultaneous constraints.

***Figure 106.*** *Most recurring profiles of migrants in mobility in Tijuana*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on data obtained through the surveys, interviews with people in a situation of mobility, and interviews with staff in charge of local shelters and programs.

## 7.8 Operating conditions that work in Tijuana

The interviews made it possible to document a set of locally validated operating practices that are directly relevant to the pilot's design.

- **Conditional grant or stipend.** Cash assistance or stipends of 200 to 500 pesos per session, tied to verified attendance, help reduce the opportunity cost of participation. This practice was reported by Probeco in Tijuana and by the CESFOM program; IYF also applies a similar mechanism in JuventudES CDMX, with reported retention above 90%.
- **Childcare during the workshop.** The CESFOM pilot with psychopedagogy students reduced the dropout rate among single mothers from 70–80% to around 30%, without requiring a formal daycare center.
- **Toolkit upon graduation.** Providing the basic trade toolkit enables immediate income and reinforces professional identity; its digital equivalent is a software license or a printed Microsoft/Google certificate.
- **Saturday format, three hours of intensive hands-on practice.** Saturday is the highest-attendance day at CESFOM (from 60 to 200 people), and the format of one hour of theory plus two of practice is the one that retains best.
- **Pre-training emotional support.** Many people are not in a position to make stable or fully informed decisions during the first 48 to 72 hours after deportation; the Salesian model of providing at least one week of pressure-free guidance before any training activity offers a relevant operational reference.
- **Intentional mixed groups and sensitive teaching staff.** Mixed groups of local participants and migrants in mobility can foster organic integration and reduce stigma; the empathetic attitude of the instructors is as important as their technical knowledge, since mistreatment causes immediate dropout.
- **Managed transportation, mentorship upon arrival, and social media campaigns.** A cash transportation subsidy is the simplest option; one-on-one mentorship takes advantage of the window of greatest vulnerability and openness; and social media campaigns make it possible to reach people who remain outside shelter-based services but can be reached through digital channels.
- **Certification of prior skills and engagement with the local business sector.** The credentialing of experience is the strategic gap that IYF can fill, and engagement with local chambers and businesses—currently fragile without formalization—can be consolidated.

## 7.9 IMC Ciudad Juárez: qualitative composition of the barriers

The analysis of Ciudad Juárez draws on six interviews with Casa del Migrante, Oratorios Salesianos, Centro Salesiano de Atención Integral, and Desafío Juárez. Although it shares barriers with Tijuana, Juárez presents a profile of greater accumulated severity and a more intense interaction among youth, trauma, care, certification, and place-based vulnerability.

Documentation appears as a medium barrier, lower than in Tijuana for the Mexican population but critical for the foreign population. For the Mexican population, the CURP and birth certificate can be resolved more quickly; the bottleneck concentrates among people from Venezuela, Cuba, Colombia, and other countries whose consulates respond slowly.

Economic urgency is critical and is aggravated by the maquila context. Double shifts, family fragmentation, and the pressure to generate income affect the ability to take part in training. In addition, in certain territories, organized crime competes with immediate-income offers, which increases the risk for young people.

Low educational attainment is a structural barrier in the city, not only among the migrant population. The local ecosystem already has relevant responses, such as second-chance education programs, technical training, and certification schemes; nevertheless, demand exceeds installed capacity. Limited functional English is perceived as a lower barrier for operational maquila jobs, although it may be relevant for supervisory positions or international companies.

The absence of formal certification and uncredentialed experience are critical. The certification of basic education, upper secondary, and technical skills appears as a common need for the in-mobility population and the vulnerable local population. In Juárez, this barrier is directly linked to the possibility of breaking out of cycles of poverty, informality, or recruitment by illicit economies.

Scheduling and caregiving constraints appear to be more structural than in Tijuana. They are not limited to single mothers; they relate to the maquila shift model, the fragmentation of family life, and the lack of supervision of adolescents and young people. The lack of a local network is also critical, especially for those who arrive alone or are exposed to trafficking, recruitment, or exploitation.

Detention, trauma, and violence have an especially severe profile. The trauma associated with deportation or mobility can be compounded by urban violence, organized crime, family disintegration, substance use, orphanhood, and accumulated physical or emotional harm. For this reason, the socioemotional component must be conceived as a central part of the intervention, not as a complementary service.

***Figure 107.*** *IMC barrier matrix for Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.*

| BARRIER | Fr. Francisco Bustos (Director, Casa del Migrante) | Ivonne Ruiz (Deputy Director, Casa del Migrante) | Fr. Guillermo López y Vizcarra Casteliz (Director and Spokesperson, Cáritas Mexicana, Mex. San Isidro) | Carmen and Amada (Director and Deputy Director, CCIM) | Sandra Zúñiga (Coordinator, IHL Projects, UNHCR — Col. Juárez) | Fr. Agustín Novoa (Director, Samaritanos) | BARRIER TYPE / KEY NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B1. Discrimination** | HIGH<br>*"It offers a welcome, tolerance, and a 'lend-a-hand' attitude, no?; through living together, it changes. Everyday things and opportunities... one has to feel very safe."* | LOW<br>*"Even those who arrive in unhealthy conditions can find a better way to survive or get resources; and the ones from the Americas are no longer given support, because they're already where they're supposed to be."* | MEDIUM<br>*"To assess programs like CasaPaz you have to go through CAREF. They always take in migrants who are humanitarian cases—the kind I can route into the job pool."* | MEDIUM<br>*"For young people, building self-esteem—since they're already excluded—is basic. They literally say: zero. Their rights aren't respected; they live in a hostile environment, except for those who..."* | MEDIUM<br>*"Migrant victims with humanitarian cases think they can get a visa, stamped in the passport... no one knows how to handle the issue anymore; they're seen as always 'ambitious,' because people assume they shouldn't be here, that they don't look Mexican."* | HIGH<br>*"To get into the maquila, they questioned me with biased criteria. Discrimination has to do with being from another country—for being foreign—and a kind of public shame..."* | **Medium barrier.**<br>Discrimination in CJPY shows up socially (access to services, day-to-day treatment) and at work (access to employment and professional development). It happens even unintentionally. |
| **B2. Economic urgency** | HIGH<br>*"Immediate availability based on their need. The maquila offers it fast—today. The opportunity is in the low-skilled work that gets advertised."* | HIGH<br>*"A daily setup driven by economic need... the need to eat, get vaccinated, illness, and the bare bones; those who spend should spend less—by not eating, living in meager conditions—pay less, and, if anything, bet on paying rent and keeping up installment plans..."* | HIGH<br>*"If they can make it to the survey, there's income. The days devoted here. The family. To reach the 30% who have more than 20 hours at work. With that result, you have to keep nudging them at some center that treats them humanely, with training on business topics..."* | HIGH<br>*"It's about sacrifice versus the basic realities of income. The program responds with an income... they end up ignoring priorities just to get by."* | HIGH<br>*"Young people who need to work leave the classroom anyway. The age of the youth—17 to 20, maturing at 13 to 17—means a lot of selection, and economic need is a huge factor."* | HIGH<br>*"The parents work in maquilas doing raw, unskilled tasks. The day-to-day lack of skills. How do you keep each day from being only about their need?—they also point to the lack of strategy when negotiating the employment contract with the employer, at the risk of going back to where they came from."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>It responds to the growing need for immediate income. It constrains decisions and narrows development options. It stems from a structure of exclusion that leaves them neither a place nor a choice. |
| **B3. Basic education** | MEDIUM<br>*"To stay current, everyone should update—obtaining renewals or agreement-based re-validations with an up-to-date track. Basic education, just like the Mexicans who come from the south of the country..."* | HIGH<br>*"They ask for lots of educated people. It's not 'educated'—TV carries you along; we cover them with basic content. The Government leaning more toward University..."* | HIGH<br>*"Let's unify the recognition of credentials by municipality—there are no simple programs, nor any track at UACJ as such. It would have to be formalized and recognized annually... SEDUC, ICM, the 'Vamos a Escuelas de Calidad' (Toward Quality Schools) program in the country."* | HIGH<br>*"Many young people in the education system level off at the basic stage, because it leaves them at home with homework; the homework gives too much leeway... we took them in by age... and they end up scared off by..."* | HIGH<br>*"Very young, and behind—a route toward housing that they were able to certify for me. They have 85 to 95%." "...the basics... because those who know more and learn more, without certification, can still be brought up to literacy regardless of age..."* | HIGH<br>*"It's all just the basics of education; standards need to change—with a technical track in adult schools and early-childhood resources today that they understand and seek out. The talent they bring without a birth certificate—no one asks for it. They can read but don't comprehend; they should learn to work and to read with comprehension..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>The lack of basic education and certification limits access to formal, well-paid employment. It affects the individual's personal development and their future opportunity to grow. |
| **B4. No functional support network** | LOW<br>*"In Juárez we find work close to the region..."* | LOW<br>*"To get work here on the border, you need to 'be in with the maña [organized crime]'..."* | LOW<br>*"You come in from the interior, driven by need..."* | LOW<br>*"Networks aren't really necessary; they know their own way, since they don't rely on society..."* | LOW<br>*"They don't see it as part of being a victim... the idea of working with city officials and 'En Camino'... the tool or the group meetings, and basically that's it."* | LOW<br>*"...the maña [organized crime] doesn't ask; it just takes advantage of opportunities. Building capacity happens spontaneously." "Tools—and I'm not sure about the will: really it's the podcast... not something genuinely equivalent that you learn and teach."* | **LOW barrier.**<br>They can count on support, whether from family or from their own friends in the City. |
| **B5. No formal certification** | HIGH<br>*"No one has a trade to update, which would be the ideal, of course—but clearly I don't have that. They have no documents, and in exile they have nothing physical to show..."* | HIGH<br>*"It's hard for them to get any certification or degree—any proof of knowledge, among other things—and they have no trade... but in reality the young people who are arriving do bring documents... they have notarized ones..."* | HIGH<br>*"Whether or not the credential has a certificate, it still needs official validity. Employers ask for it. Does it cover the skills? They say col1Cab, or the certifications, itemized... or is it just one among many?..."* | MEDIUM<br>*"They're young people who went through CIES / the Army, with institutional habits—justice, servitude—from back when..."* | HIGH<br>*"Most do it 'the American way.' The VIP. The cycle is already stalled. With acceptance resources tightly managed... some respond and rehire; the time goes to the intern, and they're paid with the perks set up at EEL."* | HIGH<br>*"Here, many young people are Mexicans with only basic conditions. The lack of education becomes a major obstacle to overcoming an economic situation—and, by the same token, a work environment; many bring nothing beyond knowing a trade, and companies look for more preparation than other things..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>This education barrier is interrelated with all the others. It is the cornerstone for accessing the labor market and reaching better opportunities. |

| BARRIER | Fr. Francisco Bustos (Director, Casa del Migrante) | Ivonne Ruiz (Deputy Director, Casa del Migrante) | Fr. Guillermo López y Vizcarra Casteliz (Director and Spokesperson, Cáritas Mexicana, Mex. San Isidro) | Carmen and Amada (Director and Deputy Director, CCIM) | Sandra Zúñiga (Coordinator, IHL Projects, UNHCR — Col. Juárez) | Fr. Agustín Novoa (Director, Samaritanos) | BARRIER TYPE / KEY NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B6. No formal certification** | HIGH<br>*"No one has a trade to update, which would be the ideal, of course—but clearly I don't have that. They have no documents, and in exile they have nothing physical to show..."* | HIGH<br>*"It's hard for them to get any certification or degree—any proof of knowledge, among other things—and they have no trade... but in reality the young people who are arriving do bring documents... they have notarized ones..."* | HIGH<br>*"Whether or not the credential has a certificate, it still needs official validity. Employers ask for it. Does it cover the skills? They say col1Cab, or the certifications, itemized... or is it just one among many?..."* | MEDIUM<br>*"They're young people who went through CIES / the Army, with institutional habits—justice, servitude—from back when..."* | HIGH<br>*"Most do it 'the American way.' The VIP. The cycle is already stalled. With acceptance resources tightly managed... some respond and rehire; the time goes to the intern, and they're paid with the perks set up at EEL."* | HIGH<br>*"Here, many young people are Mexicans with only basic conditions. The lack of education becomes a major obstacle to overcoming an economic situation—and, by the same token, a work environment; many bring nothing beyond knowing a trade, and companies look for more preparation than other things..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>This education barrier is interrelated with all the others. It is the cornerstone for accessing the labor market and reaching better opportunities. |
| **B7. Schedules and caregiving** | HIGH<br>*"...fees too; the women who offer them, many are paid in advance, and they can't leave their kids—mostly single women without a partner... some with custody issues—and they end up without service or housing, and they ask about scheduling..."* | HIGH<br>*"...how many are available depends on the day, which is everything—childcare comes up, and sometimes one of them has the caregiving and can't move ahead. They're at an age to be working already... there's delay, someone is always absent; they know someone will look after the kids..."* | HIGH<br>*"For lack of selective childcare services (the young man, and now there are kids; young people with a committed job—the hustle justifies it), they can look after the children. (Now?... there used to be more commitment, more reliability with the home being cared for...)"* | HIGH<br>*"There were some who managed on their own, with Noé still... The community always has, sort of, no one to shepherd it... and more recently caregiving across the different ages, but waiting on one another so that someone looks after them..."* | HIGH<br>*"The young people here have caregiving duties tied to their jobs; they help me. Even so, there are others who also can't... they end up at Cáritas, or there's the scheduling, but I wasn't going to take them to work... it's also that the vocational school I saw either isn't an option or doesn't exist..."* | HIGH<br>*"The mothers with little kids—they can too, but it's like the owner doesn't show up... (with kids you can't work). We'd support that despite the obstacles... we have small loans available... although that course really always fails through..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>The lack of balance between work and caregiving responsibilities significantly affects people's participation in the labor market. |
| **B8. No local network** | HIGH<br>*"Families arrive who don't know anyone—around 30%, something given. 70% without any acquaintance, without a local reference, without local lodging—and they get here hoping for a lot, with connections, and they have no one..."* | HIGH<br>*"Most arrive without relying on anyone... the first thing, every time, is to connect and lean on one another. As migrants they cut corners; they're men; really, day to day they look for others—one doesn't have any—but amid so many other needs..."* | MEDIUM<br>*"The shelters anchor the partner programs... the statistics and policies on labor inequity are taken very much into account in terms of empowering, as is a stable home. Truly, this barrier..."* | HIGH<br>*"There are verbal arrangements, or some support from the city government, depending on the case. It activates things, but it still doesn't fully help them keep going... they come from another reality, from contexts of humanitarian disasters, and they're left to fend for themselves and stay current..."* | HIGH<br>*"Also, they come from other places or from our network. The social context is different—you have to find your footing, and time passes; they can't bear it, and they have to organize with peers and family for a while, but they aren't given the network they need..."* | HIGH<br>*"Those who come here haven't fallen into organized crime. They arrive and settle, with no network of contacts... to work, and here they're outsiders. It's about memories—our goal is to live here without the kids being affected..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>The support network is decisive for access to opportunities, information, and resources that facilitate integration. |
| **B9. Detention and trauma** | HIGH<br>*"So we find people who became that migrant after severe traumatic situations. It still lingers in the victims... it's a degenerative situation."* | HIGH<br>*"...healed with dignity—or very poorly—vulnerable upon return at the end and in terms of access; all of this isn't visible on the outside, but everything they've lived through is very hard proof for them, in the trauma they carry..."* | HIGH<br>*"Many arrive in the catastrophe of their environment, faced with the abuses and the guilt they've endured; even when there's reluctance to revisit the memories, it brings us things to work on and to understand..."* | HIGH<br>*"We have people affected by the mental trauma of the war in their cases. Some carry heightened, structural risk, and a share of people have stress yet to resolve—but the emotions of the shock take a toll..."* | HIGH<br>*"...the conditions in which they arrive; young people leave very affected; we can study it together with health services... it's not easy to break, nor to confront that sexual exhaustion/abuse..."* | HIGH<br>*"In our services we had 73 users with mental or emotional conditions because of all the distress they brought with them. We provide psychological and psychiatric treatments, but truly proper management and diagnosis involve a process that takes time—and that's where we get results..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>Mental health is a cross-cutting condition that affects job performance, retention in employment, and people's overall well-being. |
| **B10. No functional digital access** | MEDIUM<br>*"If we can give them some digital tools—the apps and the card that we don't yet understand, so that we'll come to understand—and from that source..."* | LOW<br>*"...it's important, but I think sometimes yes—the needs—and I'd buy it to set things up; then we lend it to them when it comes to debt and looking for work..."* | HIGH<br>*"Today's young people fall short because they don't handle online payment, so then setting up the purchasing falls apart... apps... and if they use the ones with the most features..."* | LOW<br>*"They need it, and we can provide the institutional tools they require here; that's where support kicks in..."* | HIGH<br>*"...the work of providing information on procedures and a contact number in digital form. With appointments and other things over WhatsApp, like... but without access or money, they can't buy it; being able to pay the forms—but their updates..."* | HIGH<br>*"...young people not having it on their phone. It costs us data and information. It's also important to have a connection on digital networks. The lack of digital connection is frustrating—and it's easy to get one, and a very necessary one..."* | **CRITICAL barrier.**<br>The digital divide limits access to information, paperwork, jobs, and support networks, hindering integration and self-sufficiency. |

**Color coding:** **HIGH barrier:** priority and urgent. **MEDIUM barrier:** relevant, but less critical. **LOW barrier:** manageable in some cases.

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on data from interviews with staff in charge of local shelters and programs.

Functional digital access is also critical. Heavy use of social media is not equivalent to workplace digital competency. Many young people cannot handle office software, spreadsheets, forms, email, or learning tools. Access to equipment, licenses, and basic digital training can be a high-return programmatic investment.

## 7.10 Recommended operating platforms in Ciudad Juárez

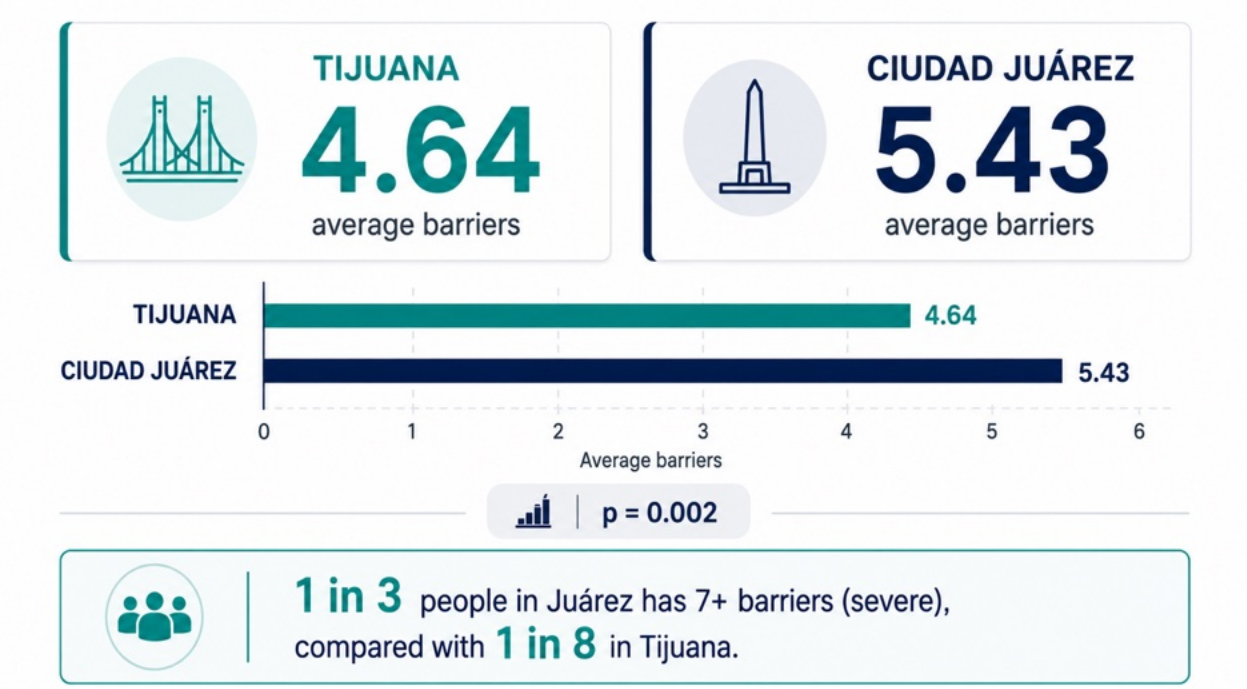
The institutional mapping of Juárez identifies four platforms with installed capacity and, for each one, a gap that the pilot could help fill.

- **Casa del Migrante Scalabrini.** An entry point for foreign nationals who decide to stay and for displaced families, with 36 years of track record and infrastructure for health fairs, documentation, emotional support, and follow-up. Gap: it lacks its own technical training and certifications; it needs workshop instructors and links with companies.
- **Desafío Juárez (operated within Salesian oratories).** One of the strongest platforms identified in the ecosystem: a nine-month program (three of life skills and six of technical training), eight centers, 80% retention, a recognized certificate, and partnerships with Cenaltec, Celebrity, and ISAC. Gap: it has no structured socioemotional module or digital certifications, nor a systematic link with maquiladoras for placement.
- **CESAI — Centro Salesiano de Atención Integral (Salesian Comprehensive Care Center).** A rare judicial youth-reintegration model identified in the mapping with a legal, psychological, and social tripod; seven years of operation, a reintegration roundtable coordinated by civil society, and links with the Juvenile Court and the DIF. Gap: no permanent psychologist since the 15-psychologist program closed for lack of funding, precisely where the mental health component is most needed.
- **Oratorios Salesianos (four centers plus Lupita).** A network with place-based presence in high-vulnerability neighborhoods—including the southeast, which local actors describe as facing a humanitarian emergency—with infrastructure for sports, workshops, lower secondary, and telebachillerato (distance high school). Gap: the 15-to-17 age group, between lower secondary and Desafío, lacks a program; a trades or basic-skills module for that age group could reduce the risk of recruitment by organized crime.

## 7.11 Quantitative construction of the index and comparative findings

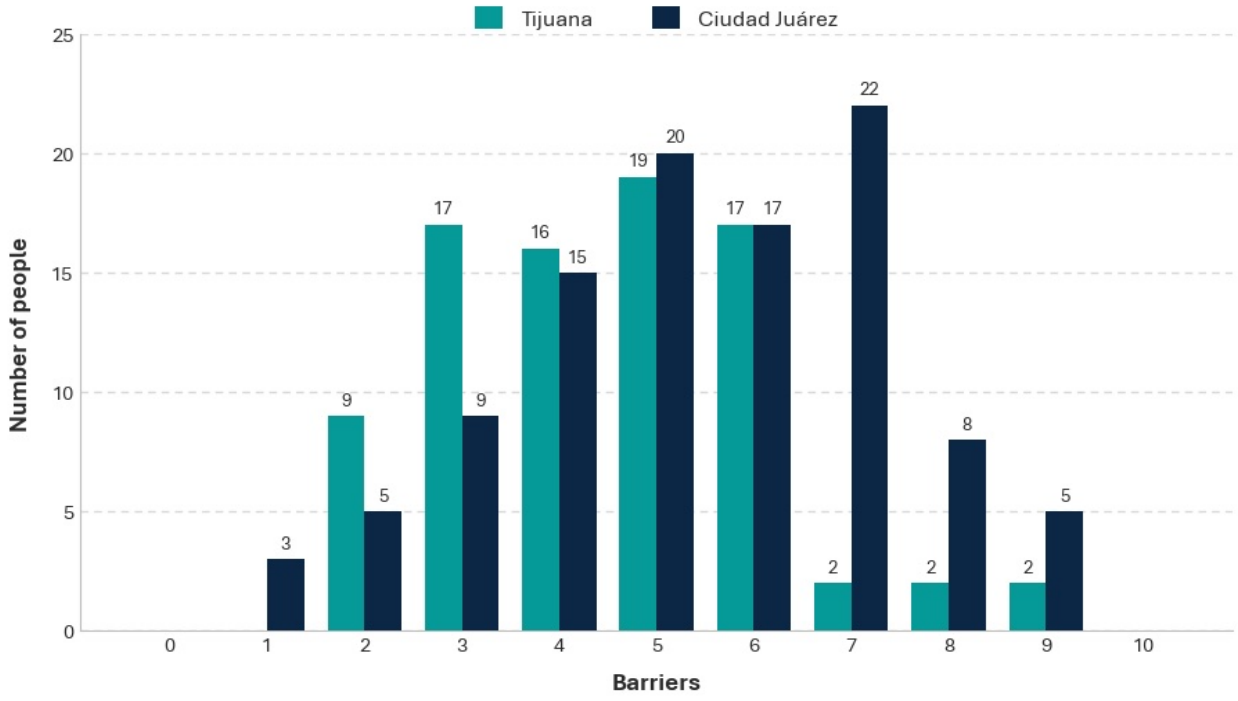
The quantitative operationalization of the IMC sums, for each person, the ten structural barriers identified in the index. The scale from 0 to 10 does not measure an isolated deprivation but rather an accumulation of constraints. The comparative analysis between Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez shows that **Juárez concentrates more severe marginalization.** The average number of barriers is 5.43 in Ciudad Juárez compared with 4.64 in Tijuana, a statistically significant difference (p = 0.002). In operational terms, one in three people in Ciudad Juárez falls into the severe range, with seven or more barriers, compared with one in eight in Tijuana.

***Figure 108.*** *Central finding: average number of barriers by city*



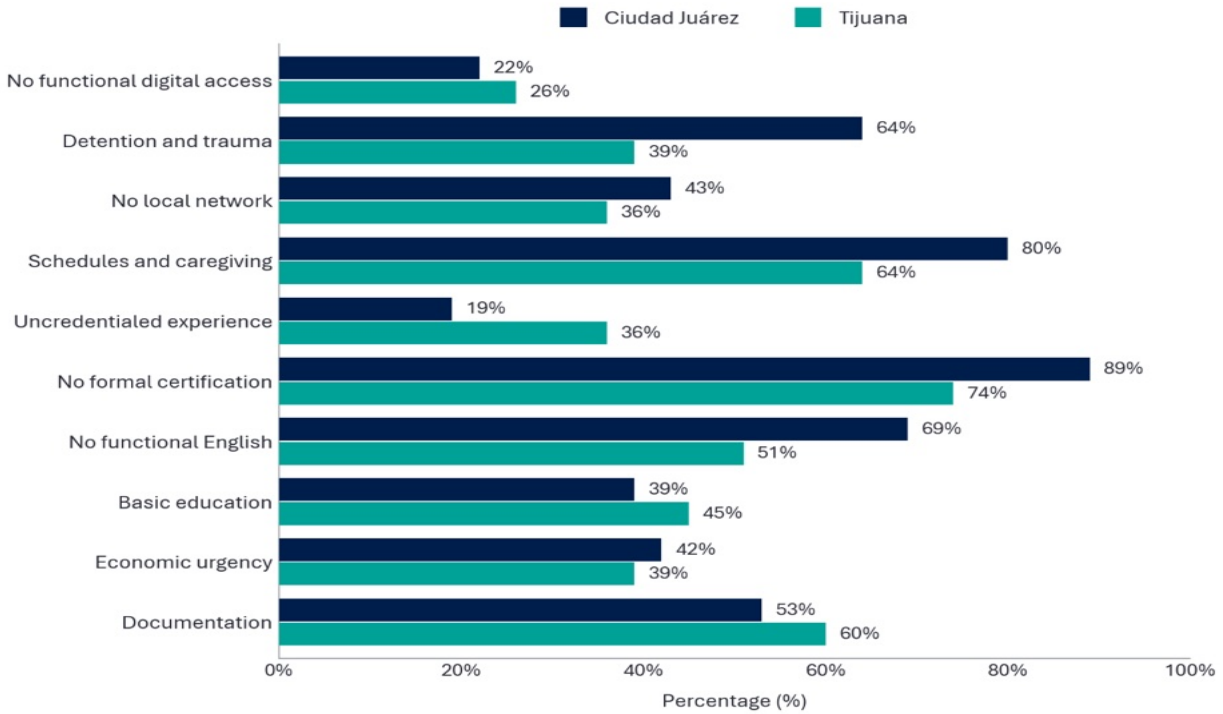

Barrier-level prevalence reveals a common floor of high constraints in both sites. The absence of formal certification, caregiving burdens, and limited functional English affect a substantial share of people in both cities.

*Figure 109. Score distribution (number of people)*




The comparative values between Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez are shown in Figure 110.

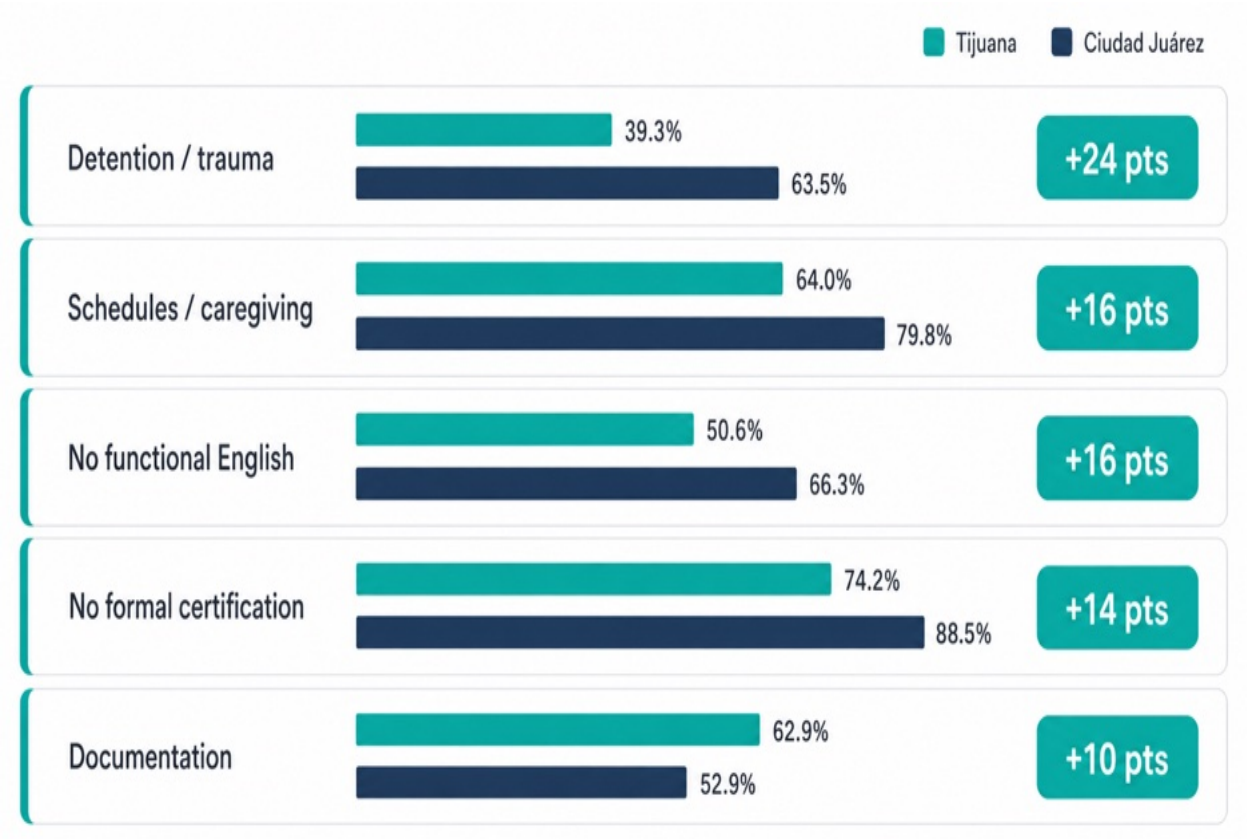
*Figure 110. Prevalence of each of the ten barriers by city.*




**Source:** *Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed survey sample.*

Four barriers statistically distinguish Ciudad Juárez from Tijuana, all higher in the former: detention or trauma (63.5% vs. 39.3%, a 24-point difference), scheduling and care (79.8% vs. 64%, +16 points), lack of functional English (66.3% vs. 50.6%, +16 points), and absence of formal certification (88.5% vs. 74.2%, +14 points). The only barrier significantly higher in Tijuana is documentation (62.9% vs. 52.9%, +10 points).

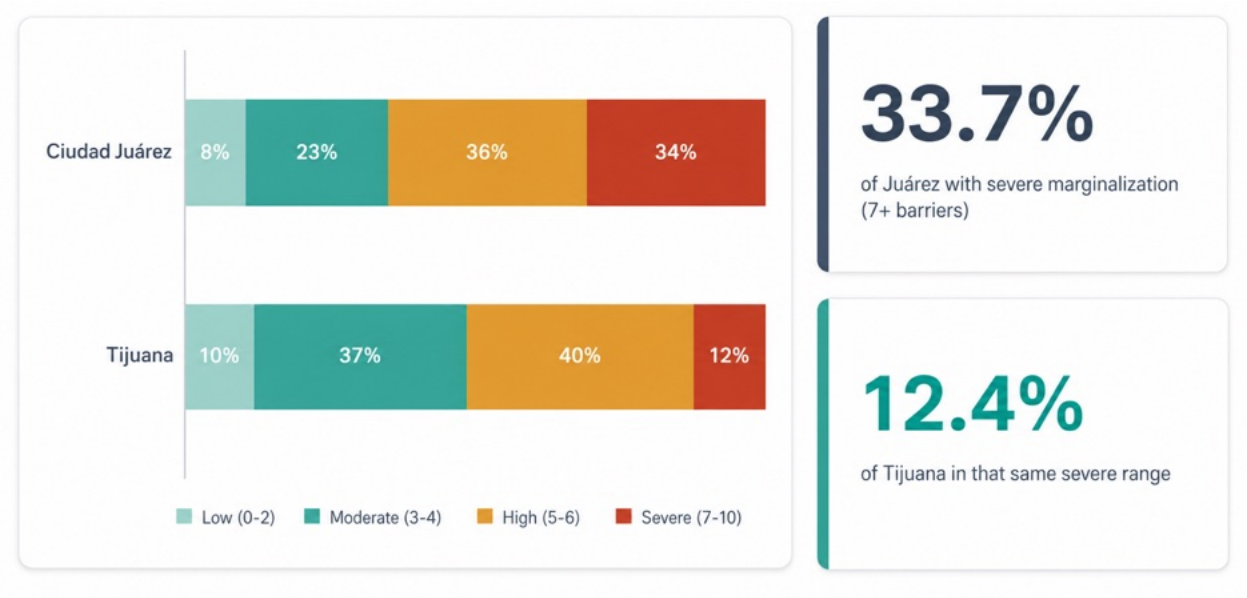
***Figure 111***. *Statistically significant differences between cities.*




**Source:** *Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed survey sample.*

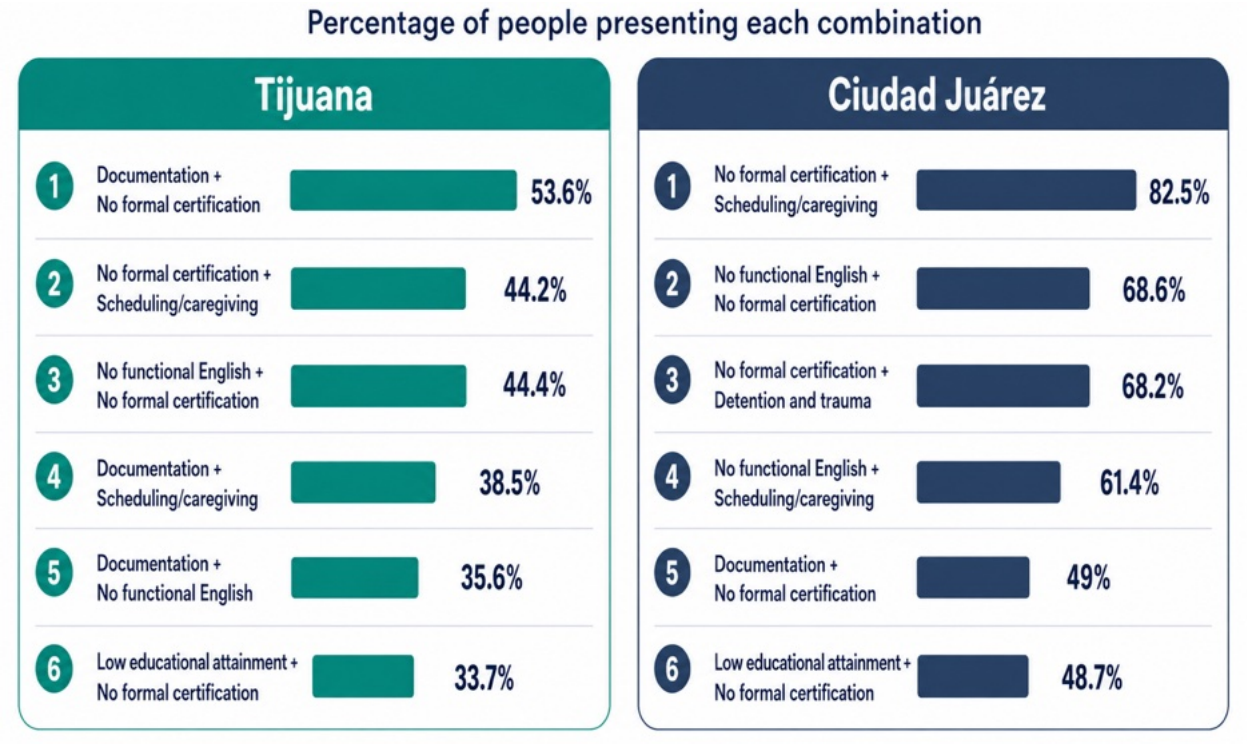
Accumulated severity is where Ciudad Juárez differs most sharply. In Tijuana, the distribution by range is 10% low, 37% moderate, 40% high, and 12% severe. In Ciudad Juárez, the distribution is 8% low, 23% moderate, 36% high, and 34% severe. The severe category is nearly three times larger in Ciudad Juárez: 33.7% vs. 12.4% in Tijuana.

*Figure 112. Accumulated severity by marginalization range in each city.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed survey sample.

*Figure 113. Most frequent combinations of barriers in a single person, by city*



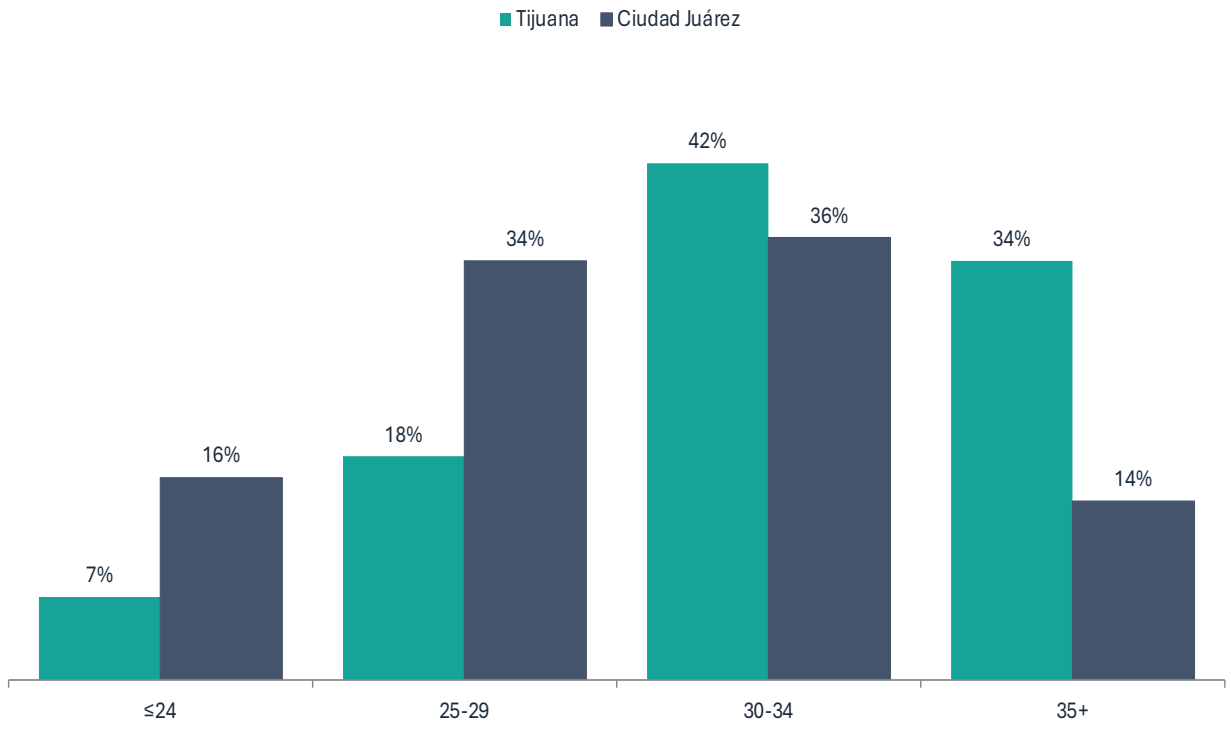

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the analyzed survey sample and qualitative interviews with local organizations.

The “composite” nature of the index can be seen in that barriers do not arrive alone but in clusters. The pairs of barriers that most often coincide in the same person differ by city. As shown in Figure 113:

- In Tijuana, the most prominent pairs are documentation with absence of certification (50.6%), certification with scheduling and care (44.9%), English with certification (43.8%), documentation with scheduling and care (38.2%), documentation with English (37.1%), and educational attainment with certification (33.7%).
- In Ciudad Juárez the clusters are denser: certification with scheduling and care (68.3%), English with certification (65.4%), certification with detention and trauma (58.7%), English with scheduling and care (51.9%), documentation with certification (49%), and educational attainment with certification (45.2%). In Juárez, trauma is interwoven with the lack of certification and with care burdens.

The age profile adds a notable paradox: **Juárez is younger and, at the same time, more marginalized**. The average age is 32.8 years in Tijuana and 29.7 in Juárez; half the Juárez group is under 30, so severe marginalization concentrates in the young population.

***Figure 114.*** *Age profile by city.*




**Source:** Authors’ own elaboration based on the analyzed sample from the survey.

The distribution by age group (Tijuana / Juárez) is: 24 or younger, 7% / 16%; 25 to 29, 18% / 34%; 30 to 34, 42% / 36%; and 35 or older, 34% / 14%. While Tijuana has a somewhat older

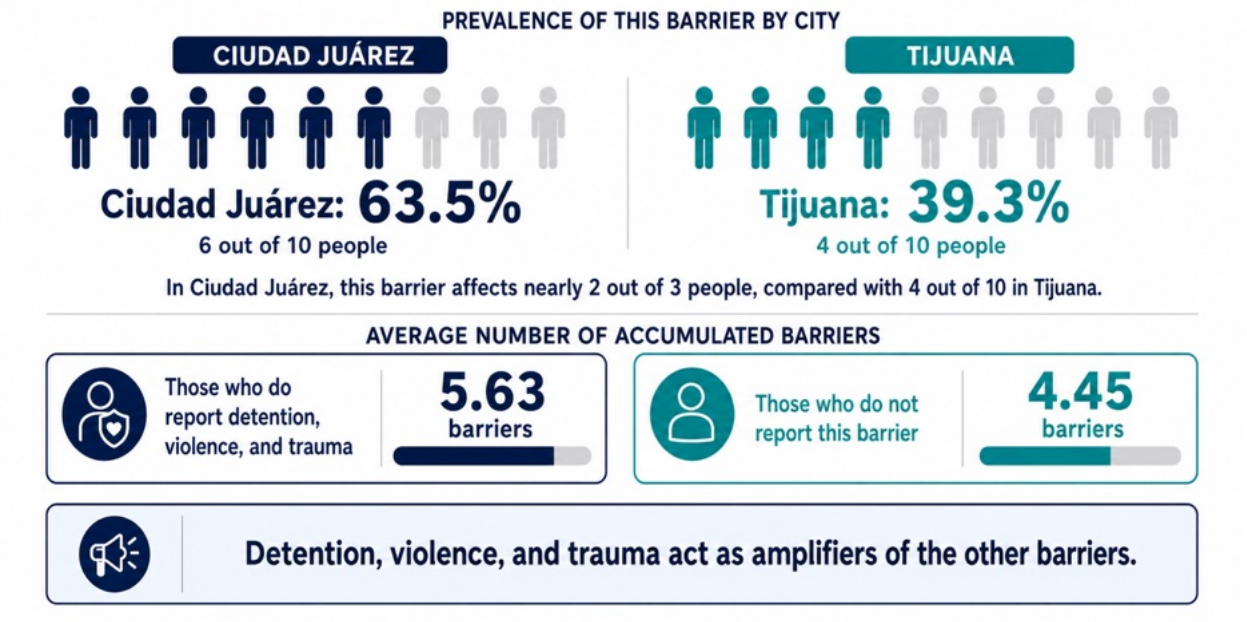
population (75% aged 30 or older) and more prior work experience, Juárez combines youth and severity, which makes early intervention key.

## 7.12 Detention and trauma as an amplifier of barriers

Detention, violence, and trauma operate as amplifiers of the other barriers. Those who report this barrier accumulate, on average, more constraints than those who do not: 5.63 barriers vs. 4.45. In Ciudad Juárez, this barrier reaches 63.5% of people, nearly two out of three, compared with 39.3% in Tijuana.

Recent evidence on migrant and refugee mental health shows that detention, violence, family separation, insecure legal status, and poor living conditions can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and other mental health conditions. A 2025 study of recently detained immigrants in the United States also found a high prevalence of mental illness and PTSD after release, with significantly higher rates among those detained for six months or longer (WHO, 2025, APA, 2025, Lancet Regional Health–Americas, 2025).

***Figure 115.*** *The amplifier.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on data from interviews with staff in charge of local shelters and programs.

This reorders the program's design, since psychosocial stabilization and labor-market entry must be offered in parallel rather than in sequence. This supports an integrated model in

which psychosocial and employability support are offered in parallel, rather than a strictly sequential model in which stabilization must be completed before training begins. In Juárez, where around 64% report this barrier, support is not a complement but the gateway, and Scalabrinian organizations could provide an important layer of support, referral capacity, and place-based trust.

## 7.13 Programmatic implications for the pilot's design

The barrier analysis confirms that effective reintegration is indeed possible, but it requires comprehensive, segmented, and longer-duration models than traditional immediate-care responses. When housing, support, training, employer linkages, and humane treatment are present, people can remain, work, build networks, and progressively rebuild their life plan. The problem is not that reintegration is unviable, but that the available models tend to be too short, fragmented, or disjointed to sustain it.

From a WFD perspective, the pilot must start from a comprehensive employability assessment that combines labor profile, skills, barriers, and accumulated severity. Pathway assignment should not depend solely on participants' sector of experience, but also on the level of documentation, certification, trauma, local network, care, English level, digital readiness, and economic urgency.

The model should integrate five minimum macro components:

1. **Initial stabilization and navigation.** Documentation assessment, guidance, support, referral to services, clear information, and trust-building.
2. **Employability profiling.** Identification of experience, transferable skills, barriers, English level, digital access, and time horizon for remaining.
3. **Modular and flexible training.** Short, hands-on courses compatible with work schedules and connected to local demand.
4. **Recognition and certification of competencies.** Portfolios, practical assessment, records, microcredentials, and low-cost certifications linked to employers.
5. **Supported job placement.** Intermediation with companies, interview preparation, post-placement follow-up, and supports to sustain the transition.

The IMC can operate as a segmentation tool within the pilot. People with low or moderate marginalization could be channeled into light pathways of guidance, certification, or

placement. People with high marginalization would require intensive support and retention mechanisms. People with severe marginalization would need an integrated pathway of stabilization, protection, documentation, and employability, before or simultaneously with any training process.

In summary, the identified barriers do not invalidate the labor potential of returning migrants and migrants in mobility; rather, they show the conditions that must be resolved for that potential to be activated. The pilot's design must recognize that employability is not built through training alone, but through enabling conditions, support, certification, protection, and real connections to job opportunities.



# Chapter VIII. Place-based ecosystem, competency gaps, and partners for the pilot

This chapter grounds the analysis in the two cities proposed for the pilot's initial implementation: Tijuana, Baja California, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Building on the evidence presented in earlier chapters, both cities bring together strategic conditions for testing a labor-market reintegration model aimed at returnees and migrants in mobility: the presence of a target population, local care infrastructure, potentially compatible labor demand, actors with place-based legitimacy, and clear gaps in the connection among migration assistance, certification of competencies, and labor-market entry.

The chapter's purpose is to identify what capacities exist in each city, what gaps persist in the reintegration chain, and what kinds of partnerships would be needed to operate a viable pilot. The discussion is organized at four levels: first, the power map and the institutional ecosystem; second, the reintegration chain and its functional gaps; third, the gap analysis between the population's competencies and sector demand; and fourth, the actual certification, training, and placement available in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez.

This analysis starts from a central premise: an employability pilot for returnees and migrants in mobility cannot depend solely on the existence of courses or job openings. It requires a place-based architecture capable of coordinating recruitment, stabilization, assessment, documentation, training, certification, labor-market intermediation, and follow-up. For this reason, the strategic value of Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez lies not only in their border condition, but in the possibility of building a model that connects migration care with effective pathways to productive inclusion.

## 8.1 Stakeholder Ecosystem and Power Map (Power Mapping)

The institutional analysis characterizes the ecosystem of stakeholders involved in the reintegration of returnees and migrants in mobility. The goal is not merely to identify visible institutions, but to understand their relative position in terms of influence, willingness to collaborate, function within the care chain, and real capacity to shape a place-based pilot.

### 8.1.1 Stakeholder ecosystem

The reintegration ecosystem is made up of stakeholders of diverse kinds: the federal government, state and municipal governments, international organizations, civil-society

organizations, shelter networks, training centers, certifying institutions, employers, business chambers, and community actors with a local presence.

***Figure 116.*** *Stakeholder ecosystem in reintegration.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 116 shows that support for returnees and migrants in mobility does not depend on a single actor, but on a fragmented institutional web. The federal government appears as a relevant actor in reception and initial care, particularly through instruments such as “México te Abraza” (Mexico Embraces You). International organizations contribute technical frameworks, assistance, protection, and institutional legitimacy. Civil-society organizations and shelters, for their part, concentrate day-to-day contact with the population, local access, and operational trust.

The map also shows, however, that an actor's formal visibility does not always equal implementation capacity. Some actors with a strong institutional presence may have a low capacity for direct follow-up, while local organizations with less formal influence may prove critical for the recruitment, stabilization, and retention of participants. For this reason, the analysis prioritizes each actor's functional role within the system over its administrative hierarchy.

### 8.1.2 Power and interest matrix

The power matrix places actors along two axes: level of influence and willingness to collaborate. The intersection of the two axes distinguishes four types of actors: priority strategic partners, advocacy actors, operational partners, and monitoring actors.

***Figure 117.*** *Power matrix: level of influence versus willingness to collaborate.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

High-influence, high-willingness actors constitute priority strategic partners. These are the actors with whom it is worth building early agreements, because they can facilitate access, legitimacy, institutional coordination, or critical resources. High-influence, low-willingness actors call for an advocacy strategy: they will not necessarily operate the pilot, but their position can enable or block processes. Low-influence, high-willingness actors are operational partners: they can implement activities, facilitate recruitment, or sustain day-to-day support. Finally, low-influence, low-willingness actors should be kept under monitoring, without concentrating the initial engagement efforts on them.

This reading helps avoid an overly broad or scattered partnership strategy. In a pilot with limited resources, coordination must concentrate on actors that contribute critical functions: access to the target population, stabilization, training, certification, employability, engagement with employers, and follow-up.

## 8.2 The reintegration chain and its functional gaps

The reintegration chain is made up of seven links: reception, temporary shelter, documentation, psychosocial support, training and certification, job placement, and follow-up. This sequence makes it possible to identify which parts of the process have installed capacities and where the most significant gaps are located.

***Figure 118.*** *Reintegration chain and the location of capacity gaps.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 118 shows that the ecosystem concentrates the greatest density of actors in the reception, temporary-shelter, and immediate-support links. At these points there are shelters, social organizations, public institutions, and humanitarian actors with accumulated experience. Institutional density declines, however, in the links closest to the pilot's objective: relevant training, certification, formal job placement, and post-placement follow-up.

This finding is central to the design. The **gap** lies not only in initial care, but in the **transition between migration care and workforce development**. Many people receive shelter, basic guidance, or documentation support, but they do not necessarily access an integrated pathway that translates their experience into recognizable competencies, connects them with sectors that have demand, and provides follow-up during labor-market entry.

From this perspective, the pilot's added value would not be duplicating humanitarian services, but **covering the least-developed stretch of the chain:** labor profiling, recognition of competencies, modular training, certification, intermediation with employers, and post-placement follow-up, together with the development of socioemotional skills for employability and the strengthening of emotional support. The pilot should operate as a bridge between the protection ecosystem and the employment ecosystem.

## 8.3 Anchor actors by territory

The place-based analysis identifies nodes with the potential to anchor the pilot in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. These nodes combine access to the target population, local infrastructure, community legitimacy, and a capacity to coordinate.

Figure 119 distinguishes two types of nodes. The first corresponds to actors with a high concentration of services—mainly shelters, care organizations, reception spaces that already work with returnees and migrants in mobility. These actors are essential for recruitment, initial trust, stabilization, and needs assessment. The second corresponds to actors that are strategic because of their capacity to coordinate local pathways: training centers, certifying institutions, business chambers, employers, community networks, and bodies with experience in intermediation.

In Tijuana, the ecosystem shows greater prior coordination, particularly because of the existence of networks such as the Migrant Workers' Resource Center (CRTM), the work of CESFOM (the Scalabrini Training Center for Migrants), and the presence of actors linked to training, employers, and regularization. In Ciudad Juárez, the ecosystem has actors with very strong place-based legitimacy—particularly Salesian and Scalabrinian networks—but it needs to strengthen coordination among training, certification, employers, and follow-up.

The place-based reading suggests that the pilot should have a common architecture but differentiated anchoring. In Tijuana, the strategy can rely on an already-coordinated hub. In Ciudad Juárez, it will be necessary to strengthen a coordinating function that connects actors that today operate with greater dispersion.

*Figure 119. Anchor actors by territory for the pilot.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

## 8.4. Validating the competency model and gap analysis

Once the two priority cities had been identified, the analysis examined in greater depth the gap between the population's skills supply and the competency demand of potential sectors. This exercise answers a question that is key for the pilot's design: how close are returnees and people in mobility to the competencies required by sectors with potential for labor-market entry? Drawing on the earlier skills and job-vacancy analysis, only five sectors were selected for the gap analysis.

Validating the competency model starts from comparing two sides of the same labor market. On the demand side, the competency models of the U.S. Department of Labor (CareerOneStop) were used for five priority sectors: Hospitality, Tourism & Food/Beverage; Health Information and Long-term Care, Supports & Services; Transportation, Distribution & Logistics; Advanced Manufacturing; and Retail Industry. Tiers 1 through 3—cross-cutting

competencies—were used because they constitute the common language across the five sectors and the level comparable to the survey data.

On the supply side, the analysis uses survey data from migrants and returnees in Tijuana (n=89) and Ciudad Juárez (n=104), for a total of 193 cases. Respondents self-assessed their proficiency on a four-level scale—Never, Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced—across six cross-cutting competencies, as well as English and digital skills. Willingness to certify prior experience was analyzed separately as an enabling condition, not as a competency included in the GAP index.

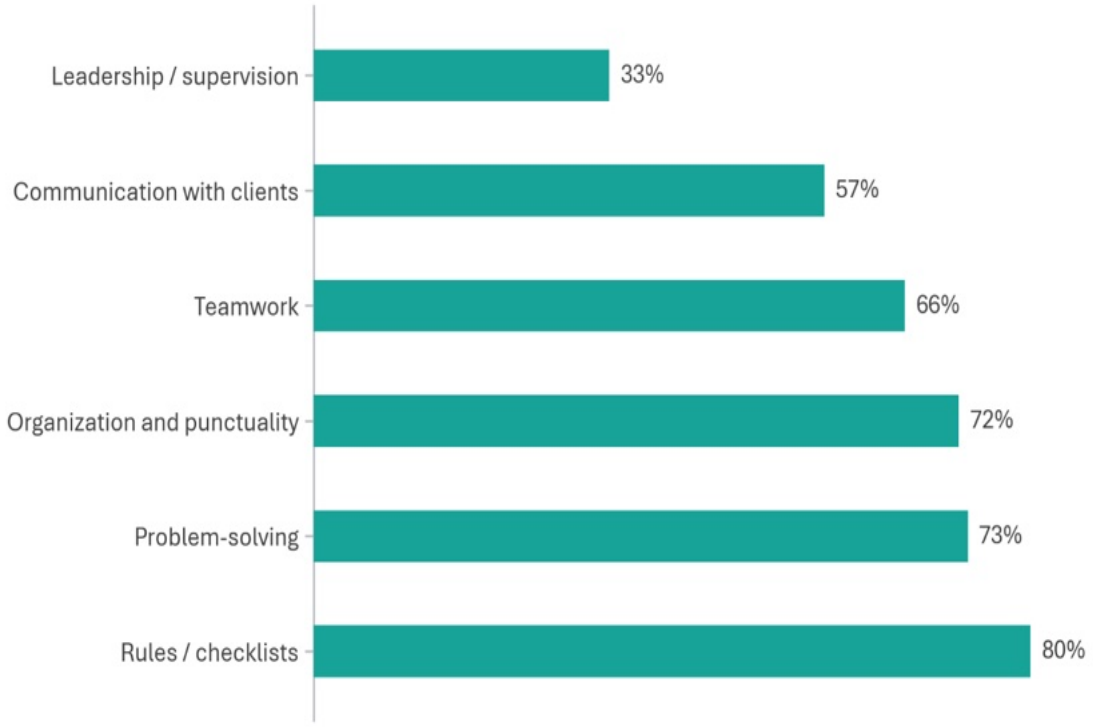
The GAP calculation followed an explicit logic. For each competency, the "functional" level was defined as intermediate or advanced proficiency. On the demand side, each sector was assigned a qualitative demand intensity—High, Medium, or Low—for each cross-cutting competency, derived from the relative prominence and functional relevance of that competency in the USDOL/CareerOneStop competency models. The sectoral GAP was then calculated as a weighted mismatch measure: GAP = 100 − the weighted average of functional supply. A lower GAP therefore indicates a stronger initial fit between the population's self-reported competencies and the cross-cutting requirements of a given sector. The index should be read as a directional measure of relative fit, not as a statistically estimated measure of technical skill deficits.

## 8.5. Cross-cutting competency profile of the population

The competency self-assessment draws a consistent profile: the population is strong at execution and weaker at communicating, serving clients, or exercising leadership. Figure 120 confirms that a solid operational base exists. Respondents report skills that are relevant for environments where operational discipline, adherence to procedures, practical problem solving, and the organization of work matter. These competencies are particularly valuable for logistics, manufacturing, maintenance, support services, health and care, and certain operational profiles in hospitality.

The main gap appears in relational and progression competencies. Communication with clients limits access to services, hospitality, retail, contact-center, and remote-support pathways. Leadership or supervision, in turn, acts as a ceiling on growth trajectories toward positions of greater responsibility. For this reason, the pilot should incorporate an explicit power-skills component: workplace communication, client interaction, conflict management, collaborative work, basic leadership, professional punctuality, and adaptation to the formal work environment.

***Figure 120**. Cross-cutting profile of the population in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez*



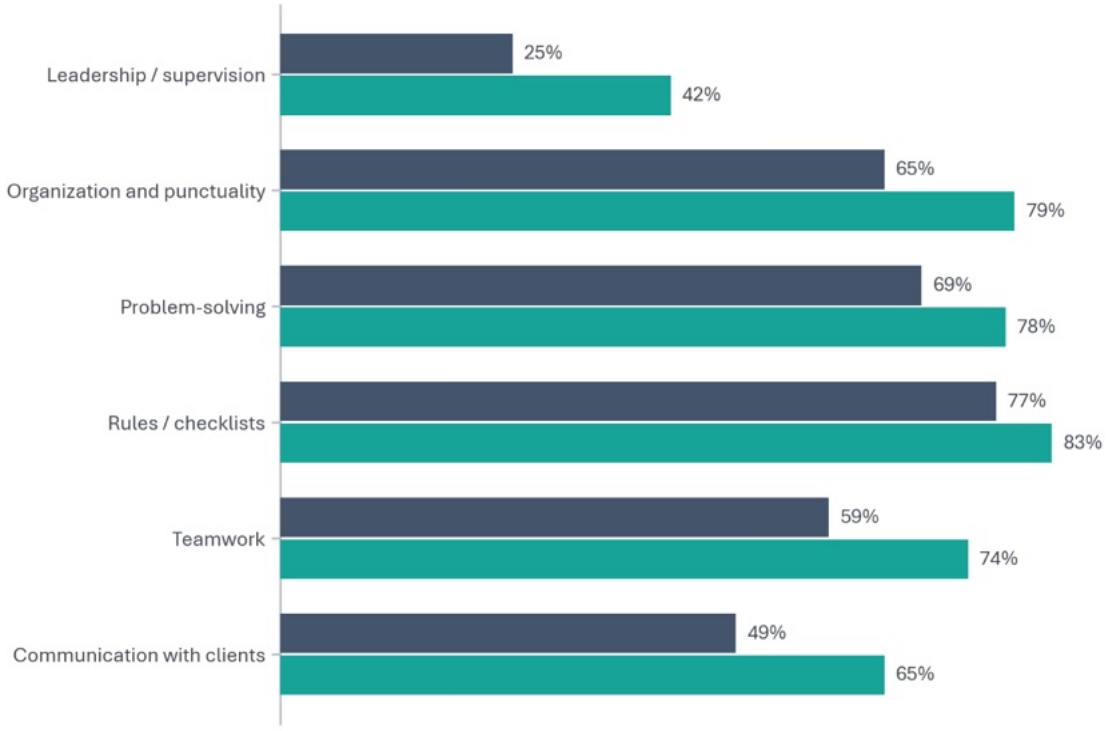

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

Disaggregating by city nuances the average. Tijuana rates itself stronger in almost all competencies, with relevant differences in communication, teamwork, organization, and leadership. This pattern is consistent with an older profile and greater prior work experience in Tijuana, compared with a younger population that has accumulated more barriers in Ciudad Juárez.

In communication with clients, Tijuana reports 65% functional proficiency versus 49% in Ciudad Juárez. In teamwork, the difference is 74% versus 59%. In following rules and checklists, Tijuana reaches 83% versus 77% in Juárez. Problem solving is the most even competency between the two cities, at 78% in Tijuana and 69% in Juárez. In organization and punctuality, Tijuana records 79% versus 65%; and in leadership, 42% versus 25%.

The programmatic reading is clear. Tijuana starts from a base closer to services, customer-service, and formal-employability pathways. Ciudad Juárez retains relevant operational strengths, but it requires a stronger initial investment in cross-cutting skills, communication, teamwork, basic leadership, and socioemotional stabilization.

***Figure 121.** Comparison of functional proficiency by competency between Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

## 8.6. English, certification, training barriers, and digital competence

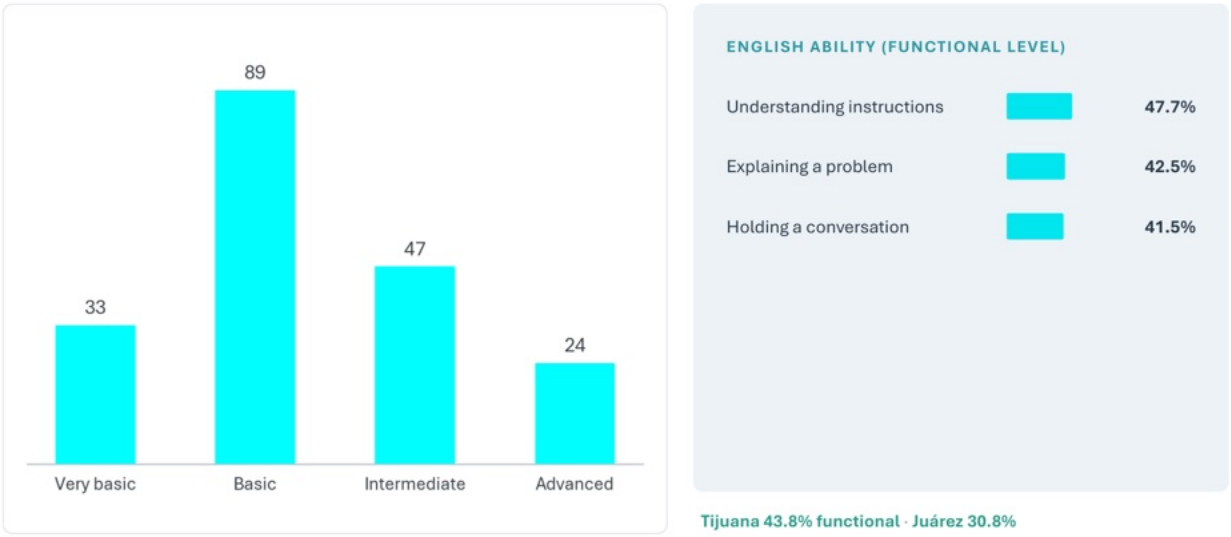
The competency analysis is rounded out by four variables that are critical for employability: English, certification, barriers to training, and digital competence. These variables affect not only access to certain sectors; they also determine the format, duration, and supports needed for the pilot to be viable.

### 8.6.1 English as an enabler of or constraint on pathways

Command of English is one of the variables that most conditions access to certain occupational pathways. Some 63.5% of the population is at a basic level or below, and only 12.5% report an advanced level. By specific function, 47.7% say they can understand instructions, 42.5% can explain a problem, and 41.5% can hold a conversation, confirming that fluent conversation is the weakest dimension.

The gap across cities is sizable: the functional level reaches 43.8% in Tijuana versus 30.8% in Ciudad Juárez. This suggests that Tijuana can more quickly activate pathways that require basic or intermediate interaction in English, such as hospitality, customer service, tourism services, contact centers, or certain administrative services. In Ciudad Juárez, English should be incorporated as a gradual, functional component, not as an entry filter.

*Figure 122. English ability by functional level*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

### 8.6.2 Uncertified human capital

One of the most relevant findings for the pilot's design is the distance between what the population can do and what it can formally accredit. In the place-based subsample for Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, 58% of respondents report lower secondary education or less as their highest educational attainment, and 83.4% have not completed any formal certification or course. As a result, only around 17% have experience backed by some kind of certification or formal training.

Against this backdrop, willingness to validate prior experience is high in the two priority pilot territories: 86% would be willing to do so if the mechanism existed, including 46.6% who answered affirmatively and 39.4% who made their decision conditional. Openness is greater in Tijuana, at 92.1%, than in Ciudad Juárez, at 80.8%. This finding defines one of the main levers for intervention. The pilot should not start from the premise that the population lacks skills, but from the recognition that much of its skill set is not formally accredited. Recognition of prior learning, competency portfolios, practical assessments, and short certifications can turn accumulated experience into verifiable employability assets. .

*Figure 123. Uncertified human capital*

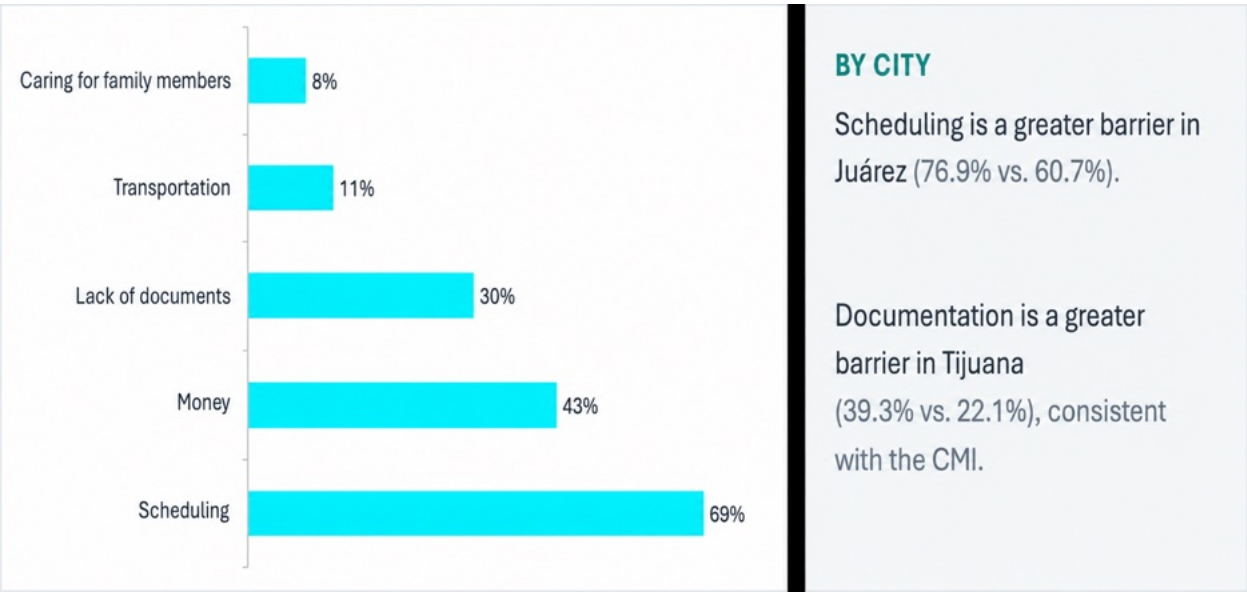



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

### 8.6.3 Barriers to accessing training

The barriers to enrolling in a training program confirm that the main constraint is not a lack of willingness, but the practical ability to sustain the process. Some 69% identify scheduling as an obstacle, followed by money at 43%; lack of documents at 30%; transportation at 11%; and caring for family members at 8%.

*Figure 124. Barriers to accessing training*



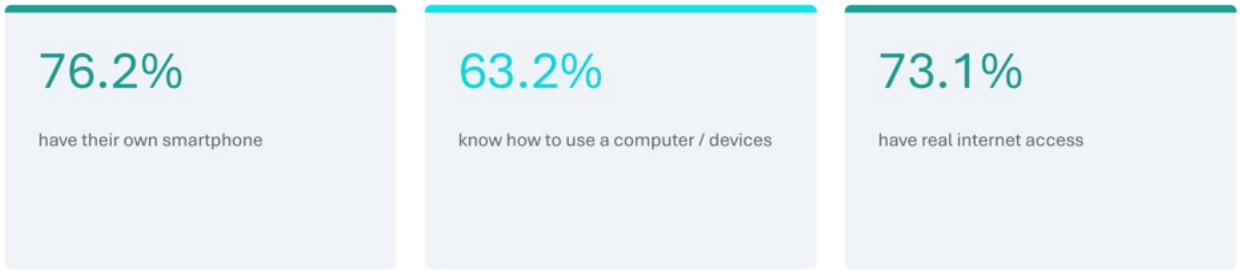

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

The nuance across cities is relevant. Scheduling weighs more heavily in Ciudad Juárez, at 76.9%, versus 60.7% in Tijuana. Lack of documents weighs more heavily in Tijuana, at 39.3%, versus 22.1% in Juárez. This difference is consistent with the barrier analysis: Tijuana requires a stronger documentation-management pathway, while Juárez demands greater scheduling flexibility, especially given the labor, family, and place-based structure associated with the maquila industry and youth vulnerability.

### 8.6.4 Digital competence

Basic connectivity exists, but it does not equal workplace digital competence. Some 76.2% have their own smartphone and 73.1% have real internet access; however, only 63.2% know how to use a computer or devices with ease. This means that more than a third of the population—36.8%—cannot handle devices fluently.

***Figure 125.*** *Digital competence*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

For the pilot's design, this difference is critical. Training, certification, or job-placement processes cannot be designed exclusively online. A significant share of the population requires in-person digital literacy, access to equipment, and support in using platforms, email, forms, job searches, résumés, and basic office tools. In this context, digitalization should be a pathway to inclusion, not a filter for exclusion.

## 8.7. Psychosocial dimension, economic urgency, and informality

The pilot's viability does not depend on skills alone. It is also conditioned by the emotional, material, and family circumstances in which the population finds itself.

### 8.7.1 Psychosocial dimension of return

Return concentrates material and emotional difficulties simultaneously. When asked about the hardest part of returning to Mexico, 52% mention obtaining papers, 50% the way they were expelled, 48% housing or a place to stay, 40% finding a job, 34% leaving their family in

the United States, and 25% defining a plan for their lives. Material precarity thus coexists with the emotional weight of how the return happened.

The strongest psychosocial signal appears in Ciudad Juárez: 62.5% of respondents in that city identify “the way I was removed” as one of the hardest parts of returning, compared with 34.8% in Tijuana. This should not be read as a clinical measure of trauma, but as a strong indicator of removal-related distress and potentially traumatic return experiences. For the pilot, the implication is clear: psychosocial support should be treated as a condition for employability, not as a complementary service.

***Figure 126**. The hardest part of returning to Mexico*

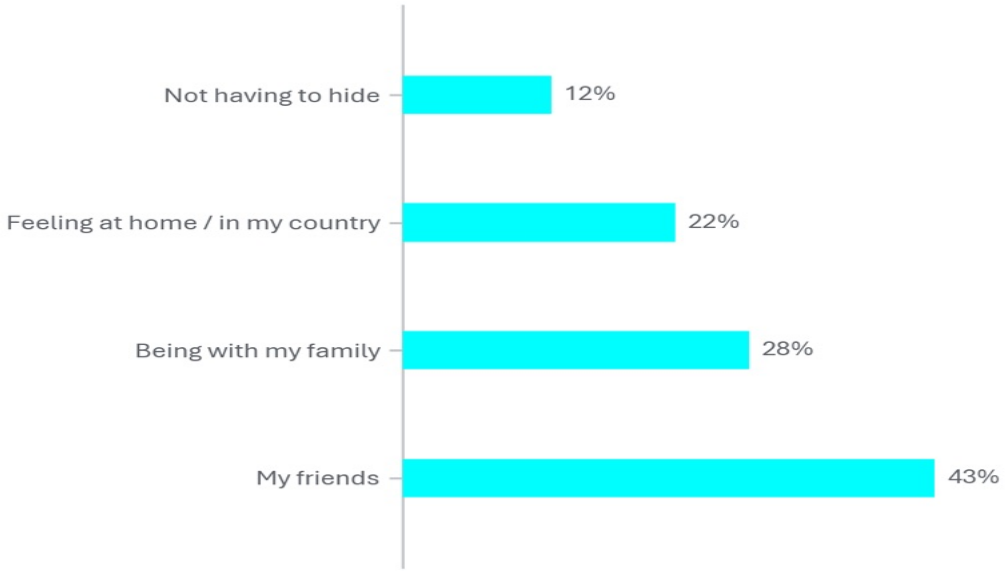



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

### 8.7.2 Protective factors and trusted assets

Alongside the difficulties, there are also protective factors. When asked about the best part of having returned, 43% mention their friends, 28% being with their family, 22% feeling at home or in their own country, and 12% no longer having to hide. This last response signals the relief after years of living in the shadows and constitutes an emotional starting point for rebuilding agency. Spontaneously, the shelters—the Casa del Migrante, the Salesian centers—appear again and again as the best part of return, which makes them the trusted asset on which the pilot can be built.

*Figure 127. The best part of having returned*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

### 8.7.3 Economic urgency and informality

There is a population with accumulated experience that needs income immediately, and formal pathways compete against that urgency. Some 69.4% prefer higher income even if the job is informal; 57.5% lived in the United States for five years or more—experience and deep roots—and 29.5% returned three months ago or less, that is, they are in the stabilization stage.

The design implication is direct: the formal offering must show a quick, tangible benefit in order to compete with immediate informal employment. This may include attendance stipends, accelerated certification, recognition of prior experience, fast placement, transportation support, work tools, or bridge-employment pathways. Without these elements, training risks losing participants to short-term survival strategies.

*Figure 128. Economic urgency*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the survey data (Tijuana–Ciudad Juárez zoom).

## 8.8. Gap analysis: skills supply versus sector demand

The gap analysis compares, competency by competency, the skills that returnees and migrants in mobility bring against the competencies each sector requires. On the supply side, it uses the skills self-assessed by the 193 survey respondents—communication, teamwork, following rules, problem solving, organization, and leadership—together with English and digital skills. On the demand side, it uses the USDOL competency models for the five priority sectors as a reference framework.

*Figure 129. Sectors analyzed vs. competency pyramids*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

Because these models identify the cross-cutting competencies required across sectors but do not provide survey-equivalent measures, the analysis translated their relative relevance into demand-intensity levels for each competency. The resulting gap reflects the weighted

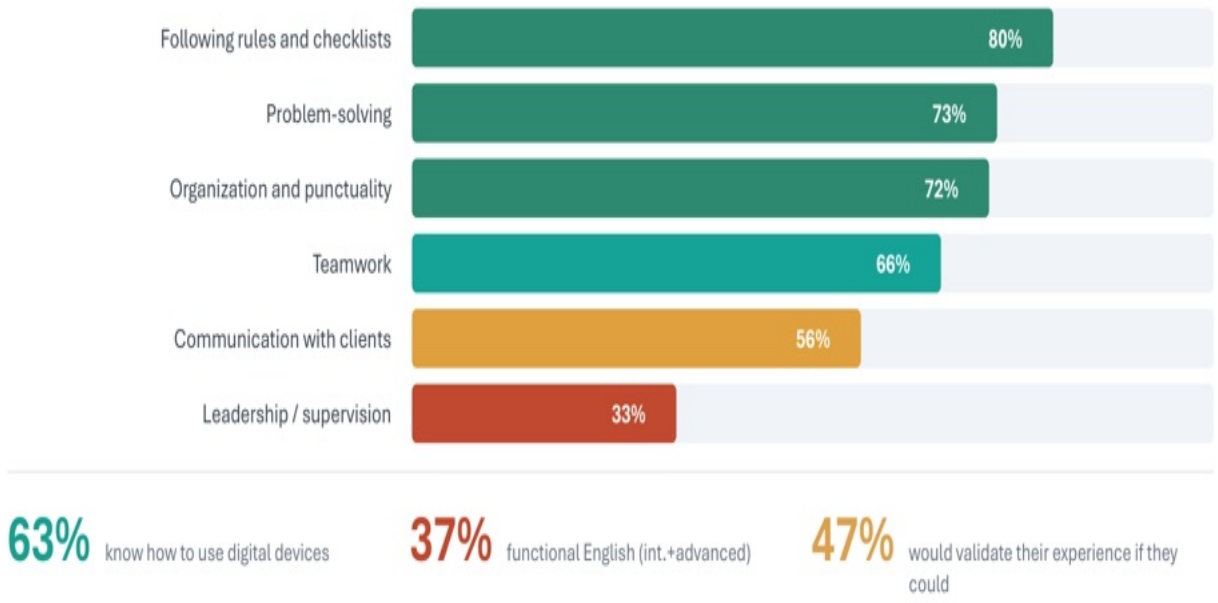
shortfall between the population's functional competency levels and the intensity with which each sector demands those competencies.

The reference framework is organized into levels, or Tiers. Tier 1 corresponds to personal effectiveness (responsibility, punctuality, adaptability, ethics, and initiative); Tier 2 to academic competencies (communication, reading, mathematics, basic computing, and English); Tier 3 to workplace competencies (teamwork, customer service, problem solving, organization, and checklists); and Tiers 4 through 8 to the sector-specific technical and occupational domain, which is not comparable to the survey. The analysis focuses on Tiers 1 through 3, as these are the common language across the five sectors and what the population actually reports.

### 8.8.1 Skills supply

The supply-side data confirm the operational profile described above: the population is stronger in execution-related competencies and weaker in communication and leadership. Functional proficiency reaches 80% for following rules and checklists, 73% for problem solving, 72% for organization and punctuality, 66% for teamwork, 56% for communication with clients, and 33% for leadership or supervision. Added to this, 63% know how to use digital devices, 37% have functional English, and 47% would validate their experience if they could.

***Figure 130.*** *Gap in skills supply.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration, data derived from cross-referencing self-reported skills (survey) against the USDOL competency pyramids.

This profile confirms a base of operational employability. The population has relevant strengths for sectors that demand adherence to procedures, organization, practical problem solving, and work to standards. The gaps concentrate in the competencies that enable client interaction, occupational progression, and access to higher-value sectors.

### 8.8.2 Sector demand

Each sector requires the same cross-cutting competencies with different levels of intensity. In client-facing sectors, communication and English weigh more heavily. In operational sectors, the priority is procedures, organization, and problem solving. The sector-demand table summarizes the relative intensity of each competency for five pathways: Hospitality, Tourism, Food and Beverage; Health and Care; Transportation and Logistics; Advanced Manufacturing; and Customer Service and Retail.

This reading helps avoid a frequent design error: assuming that all labor pathways require the same competencies. In reality, each sector combines technical, relational, linguistic, and organizational skills differently.

***Figure 131.*** *Demand intensity derived qualitatively from the USDOL models.*



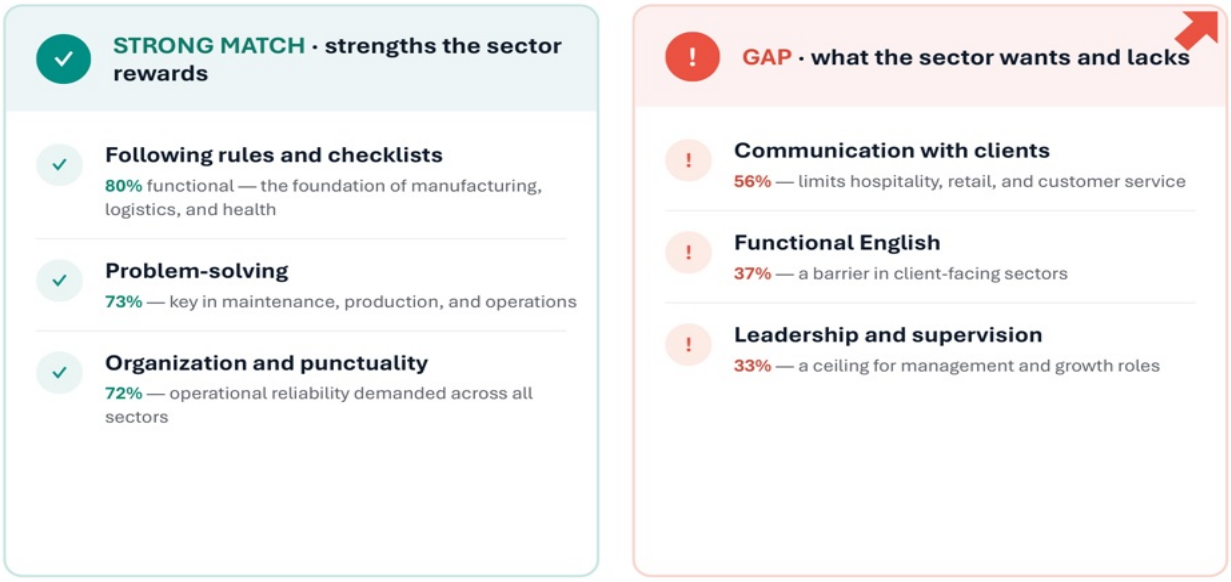

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration, data derived from cross-referencing self-reported skills (survey) against the USDOL competency pyramids.

### 8.8.3 The crossover: operational fit, relational gap

Overlaying the two sides identifies three competencies in high demand across all sectors that coincide with the population's strengths, and three others—also in demand—that constitute its weak points. The matches are following rules and checklists (80% functional, the basis of manufacturing, logistics, and health), problem solving (73%, key in maintenance, production, and operations), and organization and punctuality (72%, the operational reliability demanded across all sectors).

The gaps are communication with clients (56%, which limits hospitality, retail, and customer service), functional English (37%, a barrier in client-facing sectors), and leadership or supervision (33%, a ceiling on management and growth roles).

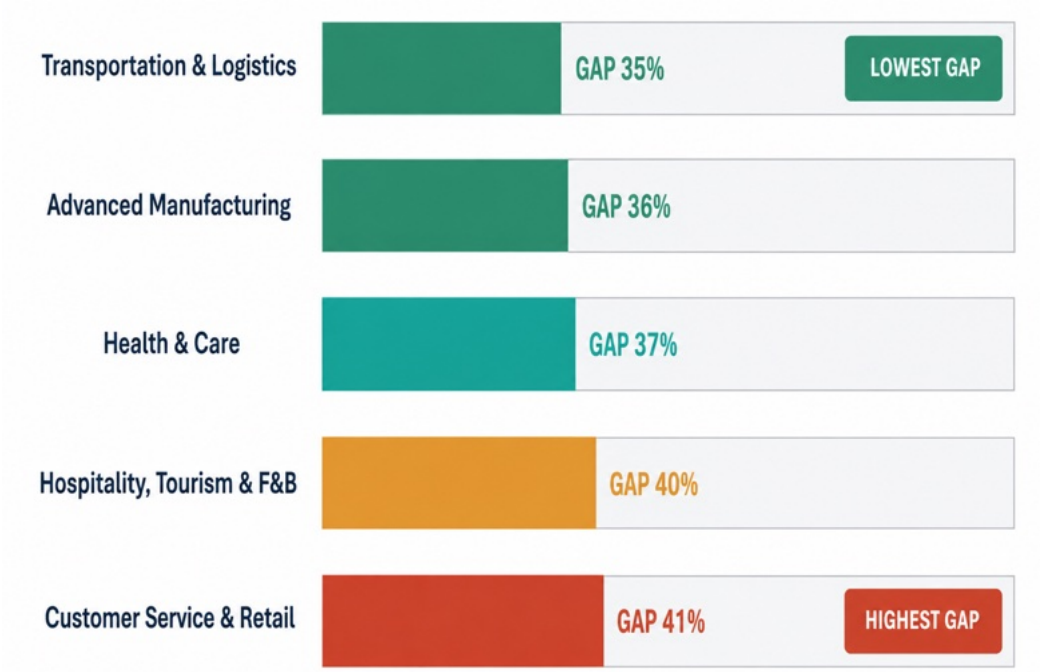
*Figure 132. General gaps identified across the sectors analyzed.*




## 8.9. Gap by sector and city

Ordered by level of fit, operational sectors show a smaller gap and client-facing sectors show a larger gap.

*Figure 133. Gap (GAP) by sector*



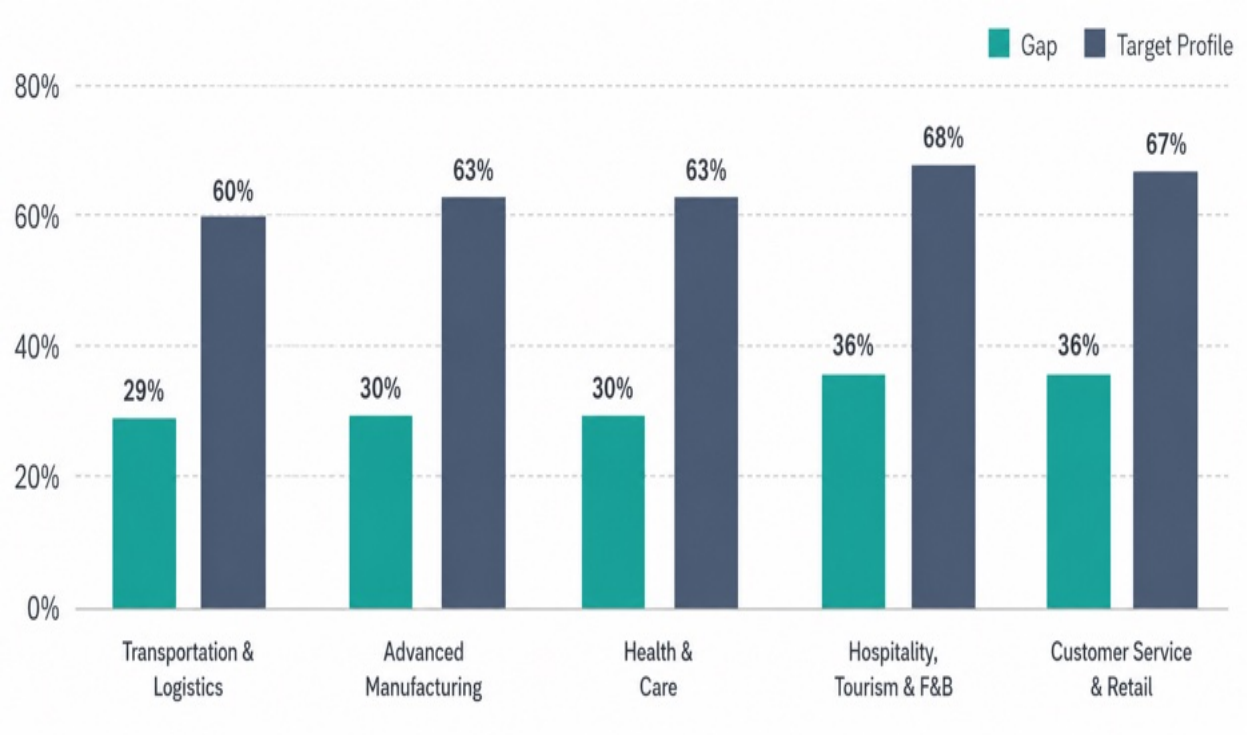

**Source for both figures:** Authors' own elaboration; data derived from cross-referencing self-reported skills (survey) against the USDOL competency pyramids.

Transportation and Logistics records the lowest GAP, at 35%; followed by Advanced Manufacturing, at 36%; and Health and Care, at 37%. At the upper end are Hospitality, Tourism, Food and Beverage, at 40%; and Customer Service and Retail, at 41%. The reading is consistent with the cross-cutting profile: logistics and manufacturing fit better because they demand competencies in which the population shows strengths—procedures, problem solving, and organization—and require less English. By contrast, retail and hospitality show larger gaps because of the demand for communication, service, and English.

### 8.9.1 Gap by city

Disaggregating by city shows that Tijuana starts with a smaller gap than Ciudad Juárez across all five sectors, given its greater cross-cutting proficiency.

*Figure 134. Gap by sector and city.*

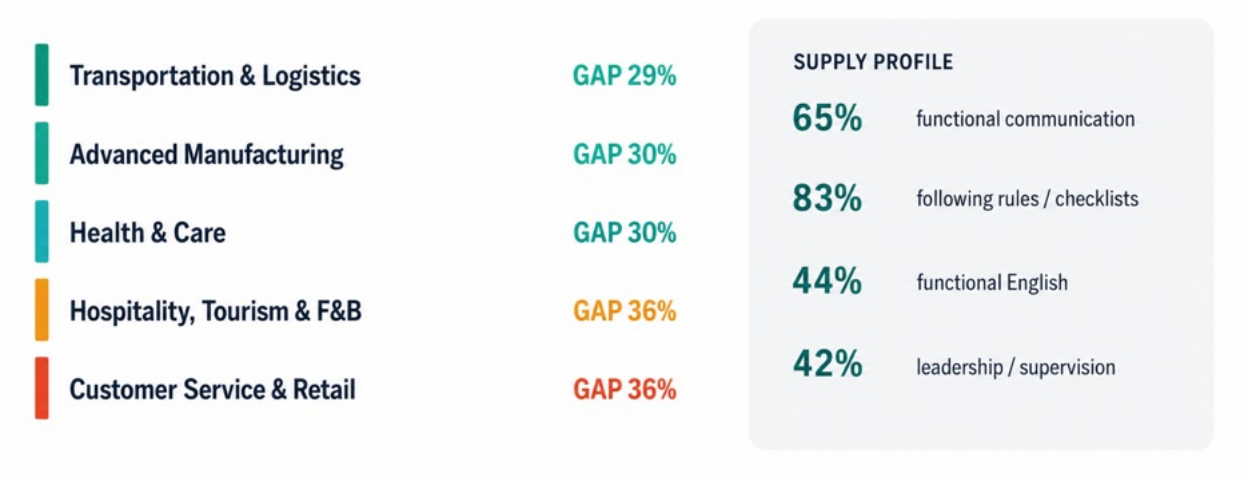



**Source:** Authors' own elaboration; data derived from cross-referencing self-reported skills (survey) against the USDOL competency pyramids.

The executive reading for Tijuana is that the city shows a lower and more even gap across sectors. Its above-average cross-cutting proficiency could support pathways in all five sectors, while the main challenges remain communication, English, and leadership for client-facing roles. Its supply profile records 65% functional communication, 83% in following rules, 44% functional English, and 42% in leadership. See Figure 135.

Ciudad Juárez keeps the same sector hierarchy, but with a higher starting gap. With lower cross-cutting proficiency, the gap rises by 10 to 13 points relative to Tijuana, which makes the **initial investment in power skills and functional English especially important in this city.** Its supply profile shows 49% functional communication, 77% in following rules, 31% functional English, and 25% in leadership. See Figure 136.

*Figure 135. Gap by sector and cross-cutting skills, Tijuana, BC*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration; data derived from cross-referencing self-reported skills (survey) against the USDOL competency pyramids.

*Figure 136. Gap by sector and cross-cutting skills, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration; data derived from cross-referencing self-reported skills (survey) against the USDOL competency pyramids.

## 8.10 Place-based supply of certification and training

The gap analysis should be read together with the actual certification and training available in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez. The goal is not only to identify what the population needs, but to distinguish what can be resolved with already-existing capacities and what the pilot must contribute. The support program clearly could not cover the entire need, so its contributions must be targeted and decisive, adding to the established ecosystem.

The evidence shows three shortfalls that technical training does not resolve:

1. **Cross-cutting skills, or power skills.** The population shows a solid operational base, but weaker levels of client communication, leadership, functional English, and workplace interaction. These gaps limit access to client-facing roles, progression pathways, and more stable formal employment.

2. **Stabilization and emotional support on arrival.** Return and mobility often combine economic urgency, documentation barriers, family disruption, and removal-related distress. Stabilization should therefore be understood as a precondition for participation, retention, and placement.

3. **Social reintegration and agency.** Rebuilding networks, trust, and a sense of belonging is necessary to sustain any labor pathway. Respondents identify friends, family, feeling at home, and no longer having to hide as positive anchors of return, while shelters, churches, and community organizations emerge as trusted entry points for the pilot.

On the ground there is a robust certification infrastructure, identified and verified in both cities for people in mobility: 38 technical programs from CECATI (Mexico's federal industrial job-training centers) across 6 campuses, 18 CONOCER (Mexico's national labor-competency certification system) standards free for migrants, 15 additional certifying and support institutions, and 16 partners coordinated within the CRTM network in Tijuana. The main shortfall is therefore not the total absence of technical training or employer-engagement mechanisms, but the limited coordination, access, relevance, stabilization, and follow-up needed to turn that offering into a coherent reintegration pathway.

Figure 137 shows that a relevant institutional base of technical and certification offerings exists. The quality, relevance, and delivery conditions of these offerings should be validated during pilot design, once curricula, requirements, schedules, and implementation conditions can be reviewed. The problem is one of coordination, access, and relevance: people do not necessarily reach that offering, they do not always meet documentation requirements, they lack the time or resources to sustain it, and in many cases they require a prior layer of guidance, stabilization, and support.

*Figure 137. Certification supply in numbers*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

### 8.10.1 CECATI offerings and technical-vocational training

The composition of the offering is mostly technical-vocational and trades-based. Ciudad Juárez has more CECATI campuses, with 17 mapped programs across four campuses, weighted toward manufacturing and automotive. Tijuana has fewer campuses but a larger mapped program offering, with 21 programs across two campuses. A relevant fact for the design is that 28 of the 38 programs are in person, which makes sense given that roughly 37% of the population does not use computers or digital devices with ease.

The catalog covers areas relevant to the target population across various sectors, and aligns especially with technical-operational, services, maintenance, logistics, care, and basic digital-employability pathways.

*Figure 138. Composition of CECATI offerings by sector in both cities.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

### 8.10.2 CONOCER and recognition of prior experience

CONOCER's “México reconoce tu experiencia” (Mexico Recognizes Your Experience) program is especially aligned with the population's profile. It allows competencies to be certified regardless of formal educational attainment, responding directly to the gap between practical experience and a lack of credentials. During pilot design, the program's content, assessment conditions, and local implementation mechanisms should be reviewed to identify whether specific partnerships with CONOCER representatives could strengthen alignment with the pilot's target population.

In the territory, relevant CONOCER standards were mapped across both cities in areas such as food and beverage, logistics, forklifts, maintenance, contact center, English, ICT, welding, industrial sewing machines, manufacturing supervision, freight transport, customer service, translation, air conditioning, and office software. Because some standards are available in both cities, city-level entries should not be read as unique, additive counts.

Free certification for migrants, the option of using repatriation records, and the short duration of the assessments make CONOCER a tool compatible with the population's economic urgency and limited availability of time. Given that 86% of survey respondents would be willing to validate their experience if the mechanism existed, this pathway can

simultaneously address two critical barriers: the absence of formal certification and uncredentialed work experience.

***Table 1.*** Relevant programs offered by CONOCER:

| Tijuana | Ciudad Juárez |
|---|---|
| 1. Real estate sales advising<br>2. Table service (waitstaff).<br>3. General freight truck driving (cross-border logistics and transport).<br>4. Basic computing / ICT use<br>5. Logistics and distribution (warehousing)<br>6. Operation of horizontal and high-reach forklifts.<br>7. Food preparation.<br>8. Customer service provision<br>9. Text translation services (English–Spanish / Spanish–English)<br>10. Front-desk and guest services in lodging establishments.<br>11. Shielded metal arc welding. | 1. Real estate sales advising.<br>2. Driving of general freight transport vehicles.<br>3. Installation of commercial / residential air-conditioning and refrigeration systems<br>4. Maintenance of electromechanical systems.<br>5. Overhead (traveling) crane operation.<br>6. Operation of industrial sewing machines (textile and automotive/upholstery sectors).<br>7. Operation of horizontal forklifts.<br>8. Food preparation (commercial kitchens and restaurants).<br>9. Customer service provision.<br>10. Customer service provision in telephone contact centers (call centers).<br>11. Text translation services (English–Spanish / Spanish–English).<br>12. Shielded metal arc welding<br>13. Supervision of work in the manufacturing sector.<br>14. Use of office software and internet tools. |

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on information from CONOCER's official websites.

## 8.10.3 ICAT and ICATECH: relevant programs offered by city

***Table 2.*** Relevant programs offered by ICAT (Tijuana) and ICATECH (Ciudad Juárez)

| Tijuana | Ciudad Juárez |
|---|---|
| 1. Basic administration.<br>2. Customer service.<br>3. Leadership on the production floor.<br>4. Basic programming.<br>5. Industrial welding.<br>6. Use of digital tools for warehouses. | 1. Basic administration.<br>2. Eyelash application.<br>3. Nail application and design.<br>4. Barbering.<br>5. Italian cooking.<br>6. Haircutting (basic and advanced).<br>7. Cake decorating.<br>8. Canva design for entrepreneurs.<br>9. Food preserving and canning.<br>10. Workplace organization management.<br>11. Basic digital skills.<br>12. Preventive maintenance and installation of mini-split units (air conditioning).<br>13. Social makeup.<br>14. Relaxation massage.<br>15. Traditional baking.<br>16. Fine pastry.<br>17. Prehospital care techniques. |

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on information from the official websites of ICAT and ICATECH.

### 8.10.4 CESFOM offerings, a potential local partner in Tijuana

In the case of CESFOM, a relevant fact is that most of the courses it offers do not yet have official recognition. Its current offering is:

1. Basic computing.
2. Office software.
3. Basic Excel.
4. Intermediate Excel.
5. Spanish.
6. English.
7. Air conditioning.
8. Barbering.
9. Electricity.
10. Mechanics.
11. Welding.
12. Acrylic nails.

## 8.11 The crossover: the technical side covered, the human side uncovered

Comparing each of the population's needs against the offering on the ground yields a clear diagnosis: the offering covers the technical side and leaves out the human side.

Technical certification in the trades is covered by CECATI, ICAT, ICATECH, CESFOM, and CONOCER; recognition of prior experience, by the “México reconoce tu experiencia” program; and engagement with employers, by the CRTM, INDEX (the export-manufacturing industry association), CANACO (the chamber of commerce), CANACAR (the freight-trucking chamber), and the SNE (the National Employment Service), with especially solid coverage in Tijuana.

By contrast, three needs remain as gaps: cross-cutting skills, or power skills, with almost no certified offering; emotional support and mental health, absent from the training offering; and social reintegration and agency, present only in a very basic way at the shelter layer.

A cross-cutting condition runs through the entire offering: virtually everything formal requires documentation. CECATI requires the CURP (the national population ID) and proof of address; CONOCER additionally requires a repatriation record; and the humanitarian card is accepted via the CRTM, CECATI, and ICAT. The documentation barrier (B1) therefore conditions access to almost the entire offering. The way out is that the CRTM ecosystem—together with CECATI and ICAT—already accepts humanitarian cards, issues institutional

referral letters, and supports the CURP and RFC (federal taxpayer ID) application process. In this logic, the shelter does not only provide support: it can be the key that unlocks documentation access to the entire offering.

***Figure 139.*** *The crossover of gaps and supply.*




**Source**: Authors' own elaboration based on the information generated in this study.

## 8.12 Tijuana: an ecosystem with a coordinating hub

Tijuana has a singular asset: the Migrant Workers' Resource Center (CRTM), driven by the Solidarity Center and SUCOMM and based on the Shared Action Protocol of the International Labour Organization (ILO). This hub connects links that normally operate in isolation: shelters, training, employers, government, and international organizations.

Figure 140 shows that the CRTM coordinates an institutional sequence of high value for the pilot. Shelters and organizations such as the Casa del Migrante, CESFOM, and Juventud 2000 provide access to the population. CECATI, ICAT BC, and CONOCER provide training and certification. INDEX, CANACO, CANACAR, and COPARMEX (Mexico's employers' confederation) can facilitate the link with employers. The STPS (the Ministry of Labor), the SNE, and the National Migration Institute (INM) provide institutional pathways for regularization, employment, and documentation. Bodies such as UNHCR, IOM, ILO, and the UN provide legitimacy, technical support, and protection frameworks.

*Figure 140. The CRTM pipeline in Tijuana*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on the information shared on the CRTM website.

The implication is that in Tijuana the coordinating function already partly exists. The pilot would not have to build an employability network from scratch; it could connect to an ecosystem with existing actors and procedures. The main added value would be incorporating a systematic layer of power skills, psychosocial support, skills profiling, employability-oriented certification, and post-placement follow-up.

CESFOM stands out as a particularly relevant partner because of its training capacity, its link with the migrant population, and its experience with projects such as “Puentes Digitales” (Digital Bridges). This project combines free training, the donation of computer equipment, and socioeconomic and risk profiling. The most valuable element is not only the equipment delivery, but its methodology for screening, support, and follow-up, aligned with the pilot's needs.

## 8.13 Ciudad Juárez: an ecosystem with strong place-based legitimacy and a need for coordination

Ciudad Juárez presents a different ecosystem. It has actors with strong place-based legitimacy, especially Salesian and Scalabrinian networks, but it lacks a documented hub equivalent to the CRTM. Certification and training offerings exist, but they appear more dispersed. Engagement with employers, particularly in the maquila industry, can be channeled through INDEX and direct partnerships, though it requires greater systematization.

The Salesians contribute a network of oratories, a presence in highly vulnerable neighborhoods, experience with young people, life-skills programs, technical training, and second-chance education models. The Scalabrinians contribute access to the migrant population, support, lodging, accompaniment, and place-based trust. CONALEP (Mexico's technical upper-secondary system), CENALTEC (a high-tech training center), CECATI, and other centers can contribute technical training or certification.

The challenge in Ciudad Juárez is not a total absence of actors, but a lack of operational coordination among protection, training, certification, and employers. Moreover, the city presents a greater accumulated severity of barriers, a larger presence of young people with multiple constraints, and a greater weight of removal-related distress, scheduling constraints, and caregiving responsibilities. For this reason, the model in Juárez should begin with a more intensive entry point: stabilization, socioemotional support, compatible schedules, mentoring, short certification, and technical-operational pathways.

## 8.14 Strategic role of the pilot's partners

The division of functions among partners must respond directly to the gaps identified in the study. The technical offering available in the territory—certification, sector training, and engagement with employers—covers an important part of the employability pathway, but on its own it does not resolve the dimensions that condition retention and sustained labor-market entry: power skills, emotional support, the rebuilding of networks, institutional trust, and social reintegration. These dimensions coincide with the natural capacities of the Salesian and Scalabrinian networks, whose place-based experience, community legitimacy, and direct work with the migrant population and young people make them strategic partners for the pilot.

In this sense, the model requires a functional distribution of roles. Shelters and migrant-care organizations should operate as entry points, spaces of trust, points of initial stabilization, and documentation-referral mechanisms. Training and certification institutions—such as CECATI, ICAT, CONOCER, CONALEP, CENALTEC, or others depending on the city—should contribute the technical layer: short training, competency assessment, recognition of prior experience, and certification. Business chambers, employers, and labor-market intermediation services, for their part, should take on the absorption role: opening up job openings, validating profiles, providing feedback on the competencies required, hiring, and post-placement follow-up.

In Tijuana, CESFOM can operate as a training partner and an entry point into certification processes, given its experience with the migrant population, its link with the Casa del

Migrante, and its place within the ecosystem of the Migrant Workers' Resource Center (CRTM). The Scalabrinian network provides access to the population, place-based trust, stabilization, and support; while the Salesian network can strengthen the youth, community, and social-integration dimension. This combination makes it possible to draw on an already-coordinated infrastructure, where the pilot would not have to build the shelter–training–certification–employment pathway from scratch, but rather strengthen it with power skills, psychosocial support, and follow-up.

In Ciudad Juárez, the starting point is different. The Salesian network can provide access to the migrant population, lodging, support, and psychosocial accompaniment; in addition to a local presence, work with young people, life skills, sports, socialization, risk prevention, and community-based training pathways. At this site, training and certification centers should be integrated as the technical layer, and employers or business chambers as the placement layer. The main need is to build a coordinating function that systematically connects shelters, training, certification, employers, and follow-up.

In both cities, **IYF** could occupy a **high-value coordinating function.** Its role would not be to replace local actors, but to order the intervention model, strengthen the power-skills curriculum, integrate the recognition of prior experience with certification pathways, support outcome measurement, and ensure that operations run under the logic of an evaluable pilot. This function is especially relevant for keeping services from operating as isolated components and for turning the existing ecosystem into a verifiable labor-market reintegration pathway.

The case of CESFOM illustrates how a local partner can close several gaps at once. As an extension of the Casa del Migrante in Tijuana, CESFOM operates the “Puentes Digitales” (Digital Bridges) project, which trains people in mobility free of charge and delivers computer equipment to migrant youth in lower and upper secondary school. This project directly addresses two critical barriers identified by the study: the digital divide and educational lag. However, its greatest value for the pilot lies not only in the training or the equipment delivery, but in the profiling and support methodology it already uses.

“Puentes Digitales” incorporates interviews with tutors and applicants, as well as a rubric that assesses housing, economic, educational, and support-network conditions. This capacity for screening, risk classification, and follow-up is highly transferable to the pilot model, because it makes it possible to identify differentiated needs, channel support, and sustain processes beyond the initial intervention. The case shows four usable strengths: socioeconomic profiling with explicit criteria, screening and referral through the shelter

network, follow-up after the support delivered, and a focus on the young population, in line with IYF's programmatic mandate.

## 8.15 Implications for the pilot's design

The analysis of ecosystem, competencies, and certification confirms that Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez require the same base model, but with differentiated entry points.

In Tijuana, the pilot can rely on a more coordinated ecosystem. The priority should be connecting the existing infrastructure with a structured employability pathway: assessment, documentation, power skills, functional English, certification, engagement with employers, and follow-up. Tijuana offers better conditions for quickly testing certification and placement components, drawing on the CRTM, CESFOM, the shelter network, and business ties.

In Ciudad Juárez, the pilot should begin with a more robust layer of stabilization and support. The population presents a larger gap in cross-cutting skills, lower functional English, greater scheduling constraints, and stronger signs of removal-related distress. The initial pathway should prioritize logistics, manufacturing, maintenance, basic certification, and work-readiness skills, together with psychosocial support and compatible schedules. Juárez offers a strategic opportunity to validate the model in a higher-severity context, where the protection-and-employability component must operate in an integrated way.

Taken together, the chapter shows that the question is no longer whether place-based supply exists, but how to coordinate it. There are certifications, technical programs, humanitarian actors, community networks, and potential employers. What is missing is an intervention architecture that turns those scattered resources into a coherent pathway for returnees and migrants in mobility. The pilot must fulfill precisely that function: structuring the ecosystem around a verifiable labor-market reintegration trajectory, with components of stabilization, skills, certification, placement, and follow-up.

# Chapter 9. Criteria for the Design of the Pilot Model

This chapter translates the study's findings into design criteria for a pilot model to support the social and labor-market integration or reintegration of returning migrants and migrants in mobility. Unlike the previous chapters, which focused on characterization, barriers, labor demand, and place-based ecosystems, this chapter proposes a concrete programmatic architecture: target population, intervention premises, components, city-specific pathways, strategic partners, operational phases, preliminary costs, indicators, and risks.

The model is designed to operate initially in Tijuana, Baja California, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Both cities share their status as part of the northern border and their relevance to human mobility, but they start from different points. Tijuana has a more coordinated ecosystem, a population with a longer work history, and relatively stronger cross-cutting skills. Ciudad Juárez, by contrast, has a younger population, greater accumulated severity of barriers, a heavier burden of return-related trauma, and an ecosystem that needs to strengthen the coordinating function among shelters, certification, training, and employers.

From a workforce development perspective, the model rests on a core premise: the labor-market integration or reintegration of returning migrants and migrants in mobility cannot be addressed through training or placement alone. It requires an integrated pathway that combines psychosocial stabilization, documentation guidance, skills profiling, recognition of prior learning, modular training, certification, engagement with employers, follow-up, and the rebuilding of community networks.

## 9.1 The model's thesis: leverage what exists and add the missing layer

The model's central thesis can be stated directly: the pilot should not rebuild what already exists in the territory **but rather coordinate the available assets and add the human and programmatic layer that is currently missing**.

**What already exists and is leveraged.** On the ground, there are technical training and certification assets, including CECATI (Mexico's federal industrial job-training centers), ICAT (state job-training institutes), and CONALEP (National College of Technical Professional Education), as well as mechanisms for recognizing prior experience through CONOCER (Mexico's national labor-competency certification system), the latter at no cost to the person. There is infrastructure for support —shelters that offer housing and safe space and would only require collaboration agreements— and infrastructure for carrying out training and psychosocial support activities, such as CESFOM (the Scalabrini Training

Center for Migrants) in Tijuana and the Salesian Oratories in Ciudad Juárez. There are also favorable conditions for building employer partnerships. In Tijuana, the coordination among shelter, certification, and employment already has an operational reference point in the Migrant Workers' Resource Center (CRTM). However, these components do not always work as an integrated labor-market reintegration pathway.

The pilot's value added lies in **connecting these scattered components** through a **common intervention architecture**. The model does not seek to replace shelters, duplicate CECATI's offerings, replace CONOCER, or compete with public employment services. Its function is to **create the operational bridge** between migration-related care and productive inclusion.

The assessment shows that the main gaps are not concentrated solely in a lack of technical courses. The most critical gaps lie in initial stabilization, documentation, the translation of prior experience into recognizable competencies, cross-cutting skills, emotional support, employment guidance, engagement with employers, and follow-up. In other words, the territory has valuable pieces, but it lacks a pathway that organizes them around the person.

## 9.2 Premises for the design

The design of the pilot model is built on a set of premises drawn directly from the evidence gathered throughout the study.

i. **Migration-related mobility is dynamic, heterogeneous, geographically shifting, and increasingly complex**. In recent years, migration flows have been volatile and have generated particularly intense challenges along the country's northern and southern borders. The northern border functions simultaneously as a space of arrival, transit, waiting, return, and temporary or prolonged settlement, while the southern border operates as a gateway for people of various nationalities seeking to move toward northern Mexico or the United States. For this reason, the model must be flexible enough to serve people with different time horizons for remaining: those who plan to stay, those who are undecided, those waiting to resolve their immigration status, and those who might move again.

ii. Forced return is not merely a change of residence but **an abrupt rupture of a person's life project.** Many people lose their job, housing, networks, economic stability, sense of belonging, and, in some cases, family proximity. This produces migratory grief, uncertainty, anxiety, disorientation, and stress. Added to this, with increasing intensity, are experiences of violence, immigration detention, family

separation, exposure to criminal networks, or the risk of recruitment by illicit economies on Mexican soil. Therefore, employability cannot be addressed in isolation from this arrival condition.

iii. The **reintegration must begin with reception, support, and stabilization.** The first 48 or 72 hours after return are usually insufficient for a person to process what has happened, identify real options, and make informed decisions. In this critical window, the model must organize immediate needs without pressuring premature decisions about employment, mobility, return to the place of origin, or remaining in the border city.

iv. **Returning and in-mobility migrants do not start from scratch**. Most have accumulated work experience across various sectors. The programmatic task is not to assume an absence of skills, but to identify, translate, strengthen, and certify capabilities that already exist. They have largely migrated in order to work and support their families; for this reason, they are a population with high resilience, a strong willingness to work, and capabilities developed in demanding contexts.

v. **The lack of formal certification wastes human capital**. The absence of identity documents, work records, certificates, or mechanisms for recognizing prior learning limits access to higher-quality jobs and pushes many people toward informal, precarious, or low-paying occupations. For this reason, the recognition of prior experience must be a central lever of the model.

vi. **Global Digital Services should not be the general gateway**. The study began by considering this sector as a possible strategic pathway, given the potential value of bilingualism, experience in the United States, and the growth of remote services. However, the evidence shows significant gaps in functional English, digital literacy, access to equipment, educational attainment, and prior experience in digital environments. This does not rule out the digital pathway for certain profiles, but it does prevent it from becoming the pilot's sole or universal axis.

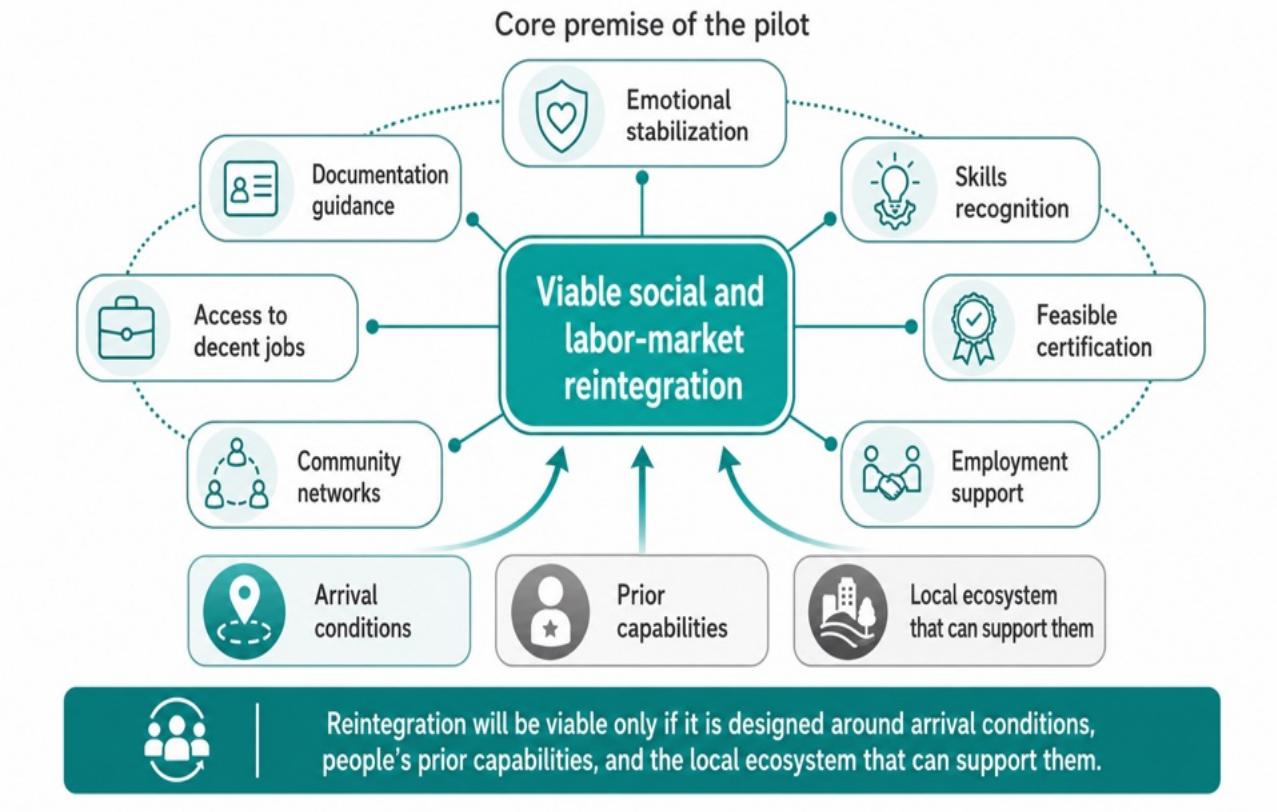
vii. **Local networks are strategic assets**. Shelters, churches, community centers, social organizations, and training spaces have legitimacy, local trust, installed infrastructure, and place-based knowledge. Among the migrant population, trust is not an incidental component; it is a condition for access, retention, and follow-up. Many of these organizations have more than three decades of experience, know the profiles, risks, and trajectories of migrants, and have developed practical responses even in high-pressure, resource-limited contexts. In several locations, the strongest locally embedded networks are tied to religious organizations —mainly Catholic and,

secondarily, other Christian groups— that have served as spaces for first reception, protection, referral, support, and the rebuilding of networks.

viii. **Reintegration requires community**. Many people remain for months or years in border cities while resolving documentation, employment, housing, or family ties. During that period they need income, networks, belonging, and spaces for shared community life. For this reason, the model must incorporate a dimension of community engagement that brings migrants, returnees, and local young people together in shared activities, avoiding segregated cohorts and reducing stigma.

ix. **The model must assume an operating environment under pressure.** The reduction of international funding and the closure or weakening of support previously directed to shelters and civil society organizations have diminished institutional response capacity. The organizations that remain active now face more diverse, more vulnerable, and higher-need mobility flows with fewer operational resources. The pilot should therefore be designed as a coordination and strengthening mechanism, not as an additional burden on already stretched local actors.

***Figure 141.*** *Core premise of the pilot: components that make social and labor-market reintegration viable*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration based on information shared on the CRTM website.

Figure 141 summarizes this premise: returning and in-mobility migrants require more than training; the process must begin with a component of reception, support, and psychosocial stabilization that allows the person to regain a minimum of emotional security and decision-making capacity. This is accompanied by documentation guidance, community networks, skills recognition, feasible certification, employment support, and access to decent jobs. These components rest on three foundations: **arrival reality, prior capabilities, and the local ecosystem**.

## 9.3 Priority target population

The pilot should primarily serve returning Mexican nationals and foreign nationals in mobility who have decided to remain in Mexico, at least temporarily, and who need support to stabilize, certify their skills, train, or connect with job opportunities.

Within this broad population, three profiles are proposed for prioritization:

1. **Returning young people aged 18 to 35**, including Mexican returnees and migrants of other nationalities in mobility, with prior work experience and a need for social, training-related, or labor-market integration or reintegration.

2. **People in mobility intending to remain in Mexico temporarily or for an extended period**, particularly those connected to shelters, support organizations, or community networks.

3. **Vulnerable local young people**, when their participation contributes to community integration, the reduction of stigma, and the building of support networks for the migrant population.

Including local young people does not shift the program's migration focus. Rather, it responds to a logic of community-based reintegration. A model that includes only returnees may reinforce segregation; by contrast, a **mixed model** can foster belonging, shared community life, networks, and peer support. This decision must be managed with clear eligibility criteria, differentiated slots, and traceability of results by profile.

## 9.4 Objective of the Pilot Model

The objective of the pilot model is to test a mechanism to facilitate the social and labor-market integration or reintegration of returning migrants and migrants in mobility through an

**integrated pathway** that combines stabilization, profiling, skills recognition, modular training, certification, psychosocial support, job placement, and follow-up.

The model seeks to produce three programmatic outcomes:

i. **Initial stabilization**, understood as access to guidance, basic documentation, psychosocial support, a support network, and the minimum conditions for making decisions.

ii. **Employability activation**, understood as the identification of skills, the strengthening of cross-cutting competencies, short-term training, certification, or recognition of prior experience.

iii. **Sustainable labor-market entry or trajectory**, understood as connection to formal employment, bridge employment, a stable return, continued training, or a verifiable pathway of occupational improvement.

This definition avoids measuring success solely as immediate job placement. Among returning or in-mobility populations, stabilizing, documenting, certifying, and sustaining a pathway are also critical intermediate outcomes.

## 9.5 The model's architecture: a pipeline that connects people to existing assets

The model's operation can be understood as a pipeline that adds the missing layer — support, power skills, profiling, and a basic documentation package— and connects participants to the technical training, certification, and employment assets that already exist in the territory.

The pipeline is organized into four linked stages.

i. The first stage is **arrival, reception, and support**. It is operated mainly by the shelter or local partner. It includes psychosocial stabilization, risk identification, informed consent, family contact where applicable, an initial documentation assessment, and activation of the basic documentation key: CURP (national population registry number), RFC (taxpayer ID), INE (voter ID card), repatriation letter, or equivalent documentation depending on the profile.

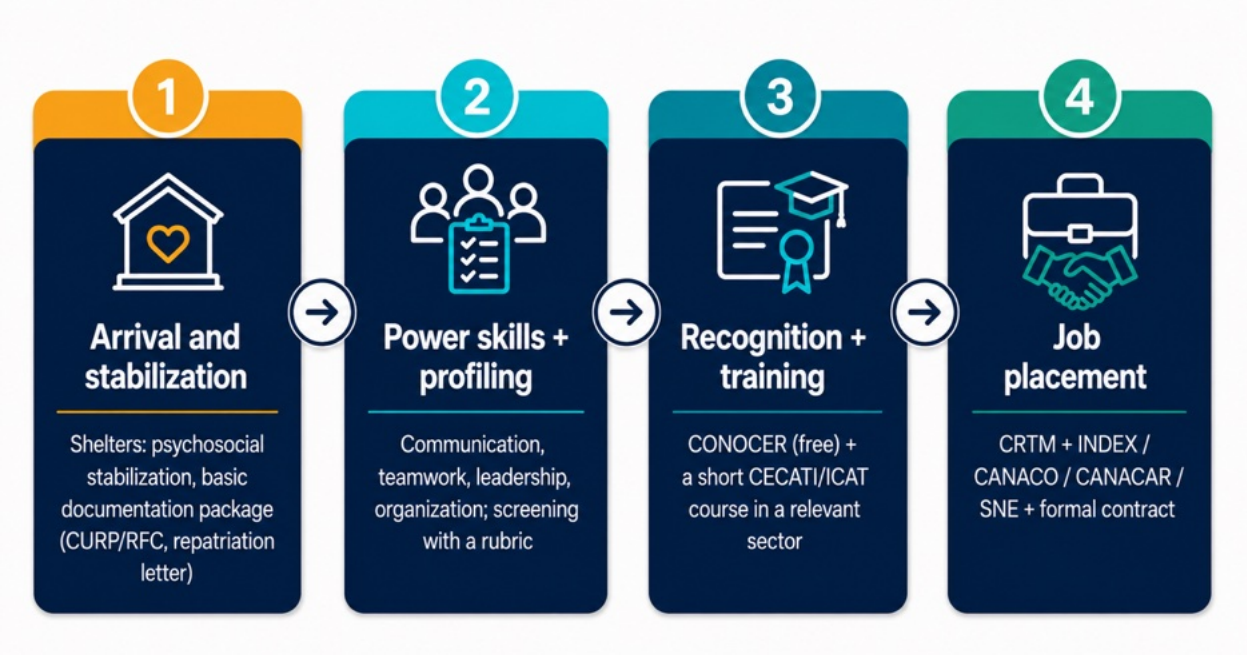
ii. The second stage is **power skills and profiling**. Here, prior skills, English level, digital literacy, work experience, barriers, interests, schedule availability, psychosocial

needs, and time horizon for remaining are identified. A cross-cutting skills curriculum is also delivered, based on communication, teamwork, problem-solving, organization, basic leadership, employment orientation, self-care, and decision-making.

iii. The third stage is **recognition and training**. It combines CONOCER's free or low-cost certification, where applicable, with short courses from CECATI, ICAT, ICATECH (a state job-training institute), CESFOM, or other partners. This phase should not train everyone from scratch; it must distinguish among those who need recognition of prior experience, those who need brief upskilling, and those who need occupational reskilling.

iv. The fourth stage is **job placement and follow-up**. It consists of connecting the person with employers, chambers, labor pools, the CRTM, INDEX (the export manufacturing industry association), CANACO (National Chamber of Commerce), CANACAR (National Chamber of Freight Transport), COPARMEX (Mexican Employers' Confederation), the National Employment Service, or other stakeholders. It includes interview preparation, support during the application process, verification of working conditions, post-placement follow-up, and support to sustain retention.

***Figure 142.*** *Care and labor-market-entry pathway. Operational sequence for supporting migrants from arrival to job placement.*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

The distribution of responsibilities must be clear. Local partners operate recruitment, reception, and trusted support. The International Youth Foundation (IYF) can contribute methodological design, curriculum, power skills, monitoring, results measurement, institutional coordination, and strengthening of the model. Certifying and training institutions provide technical training and assessment. Employers and chambers provide job openings, feedback on profiles, and hiring opportunities.

Connection to formal employment —through the CRTM, INDEX, CANACO, CANACAR, the National Employment Service, or other local partners— should run in parallel starting in Phase 2. This requires city-specific employer engagement: in Tijuana, the pathway can be channeled through the Migrant Workers' Resource Center; in Ciudad Juárez, the pilot should test a coordinating function that links shelters, certifiers, training providers, and employers.

## 9.6 The main lever: recognition of prior experience and feasible certification

Among all the existing assets, the recognition of prior experience is one of the model's most powerful levers. It directly addresses two barriers identified in the study: the absence of formal certification and uncredentialed work experience.

CONOCER's program México reconoce tu experiencia ("Mexico Recognizes Your Experience") makes it possible to certify labor competencies acquired abroad or in practice, regardless of academic level. This feature makes it particularly relevant for returning migrants with extensive work histories but without formal documentation or credentials. Certification can serve as a bridge between accumulated experience and formal employability.

The pathway for activating this lever consists of four steps:

1. **Detection of prior experience,** through an interview, rubric, or occupational profiling carried out by the local partner.
2. **Translation of experience into competencies,** identifying which skills can be linked to CONOCER standards or other certifications.
3. **Assessment or supplementary training,** through CONOCER, CECATI, ICAT, or another provider depending on the profile.
4. **Engagement with employers,** using certification as a verifiable signal of performance.

**This lever helps avoid two common mistakes: training people from scratch when they already know how to do the work, or referring people to entry-level jobs when their experience exceeds what they can demonstrate on paper.**

## 9.7 Components of the model

The pilot model must integrate ten minimum components:

1. **Identification and recruitment.** Locating participants through shelters, organizations, community networks, digital campaigns, institutional referrals, and service points.

2. **Reception and stabilization.** Initial support, basic guidance, listening, risk identification, and trust-building.

3. **Documentation navigation.** Assessment of available documents, referral, and support for obtaining the CURP, RFC, INE, repatriation letter, regularization, or equivalent documents.

4. **Comprehensive profiling.** Data collection on work experience, skills, barriers, emotional health, availability, educational attainment, English, digital skills, and time horizon for remaining.

5. **Power skills and life skills.** Adaptation of Passport to Success or an equivalent curriculum, with an emphasis on communication, teamwork, basic leadership, conflict resolution, organization, customer service, agency, and decision-making.

6. **Digital literacy and functional English.** Differentiated modules by level, preventing digital skills or English from operating as exclusion filters.

7. **Recognition of prior learning.** Competency portfolio, practical assessment, preparation for certification, and alignment with available standards.

8. **Short-term training or reskilling.** Modular courses by sector, prioritizing logistics, manufacturing, maintenance, hospitality, care, services, and customer service.

9. **Job placement.** Labor-market intermediation with employers, interview preparation, job-search support, verification of conditions, and connection to job openings.

10. **Follow-up and learning.** Post-placement follow-up, measurement of retention, documentation of lessons learned, adaptive adjustment of the model, and actual costing per participant.

## 9.8 Same architecture, different emphasis by city

The evidence indicates that the pilot should operate with the same general architecture at both sites, but with differentiated entry points and emphases.

### 9.8.1 Tijuana: entry through certification, services, and existing coordination

Tijuana shows high marginalization, though less severe than Ciudad Juárez, and particular pressure around documentation. Its population shows a longer work history and stronger skills in communication, teamwork, organization, and leadership. This makes it possible to activate pathways more quickly in services, customer service, logistics, certification of experience, and job placement.

In Tijuana, the pilot should build on the presence of the CRTM, CESFOM, the Casa del Migrante (Migrant House), and other actors in the local ecosystem. Detection and profiling already have operational foundations; engagement with employers has a reference point in the CRTM; and the certification offering can connect with CONOCER, CECATI, and ICAT. The pilot's value added would be to formalize sector pathways, incorporate power skills, strengthen psychosocial support, and ensure post-placement follow-up.

The priority pathway in Tijuana can begin with logistics, services, hospitality, food and beverage, customer service, maintenance, and certification of prior skills. Functional English and communication with clients should be strengthened as bridge competencies to expand opportunities toward higher-value sectors.

### 9.8.2 Ciudad Juárez: entry through support, youth, and the technical-operational pathway

Ciudad Juárez shows more severe marginalization, a younger population, a heavier burden of return-related trauma, scheduling and caregiving constraints, and wider gaps in cross-cutting skills. For this reason, the model's entry point should be psychosocial stabilization and intensive support.

On the training side, Ciudad Juárez should prioritize technical-operational pathways compatible with its labor market: manufacturing, logistics, maintenance, support services, and short certifications tied to the maquiladora industry (maquila) and local employers. The

customer-service, retail, or hospitality pathway can be developed later, but it requires a prior phase of strengthening in communication, functional English, teamwork, and basic leadership.

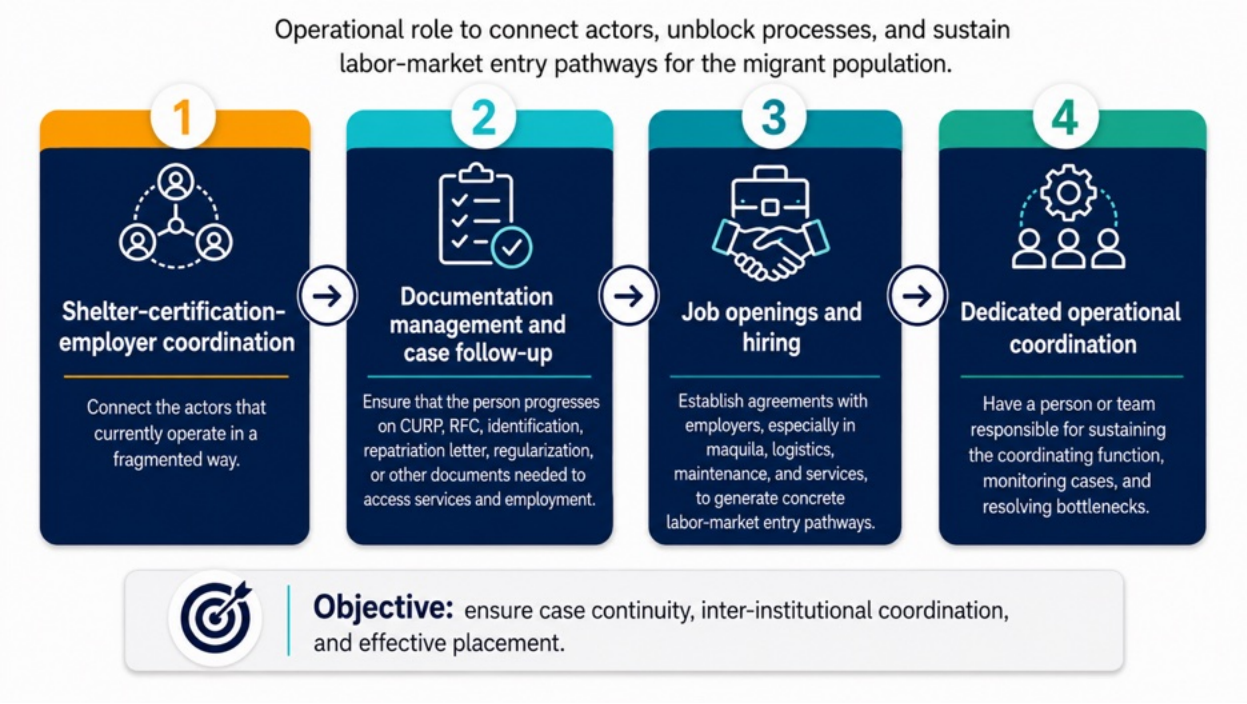
Ciudad Juárez's main structural challenge is the absence of a coordinating hub equivalent to the CRTM. There are actors with legitimacy —the Salesians, the Scalabrinians, the Casa del Migrante, oratories, training centers, and a potential link with INDEX— but a function is missing that coordinates shelter, certification, employers, and follow-up.

## 9.9 The new piece: the Ciudad Juárez coordinating hub

The most important structural difference between the two sites is that Ciudad Juárez lacks a hub that coordinates shelter, certification, and employment, as the CRTM does in Tijuana. The pilot can use this gap as an opportunity: to create or test a local coordinating function.

The Ciudad Juárez coordinating hub would have four main functions:

***Figure 143.*** *Functions of the Ciudad Juárez coordinating hub*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

1. **Shelter–certification–employer coordination.** Connecting the actors that currently operate in a scattered way.

2. **Documentation management and case follow-up.** Ensuring that the person makes progress on the CURP, RFC, identification, repatriation letter, regularization, or documents needed to access services and employment.

3. **Brokering of job openings and hiring.** Establishing agreements with employers, especially in maquila, logistics, maintenance, and services, to generate concrete labor-market-entry pathways.

4. **Dedicated operational coordination.** Having a person or team responsible for sustaining the coordinating function, monitoring cases, and resolving bottlenecks.

This coordinating hub does not necessarily have to be set up as a new organization. It can operate as a function housed within a local partner, through an agreement, or as an operational working group coordinated by IYF and local partners. What matters is that there be clear responsibility for the transition among care, certification, and employment.

## 9.10 Sector clusters of the pilot

Based on the intersection of participants' skills, regional labor demand, competency gaps, and available certification and training options, the pilot should prioritize four initial sector clusters and keep one additional sector as a selective or medium-term pathway:

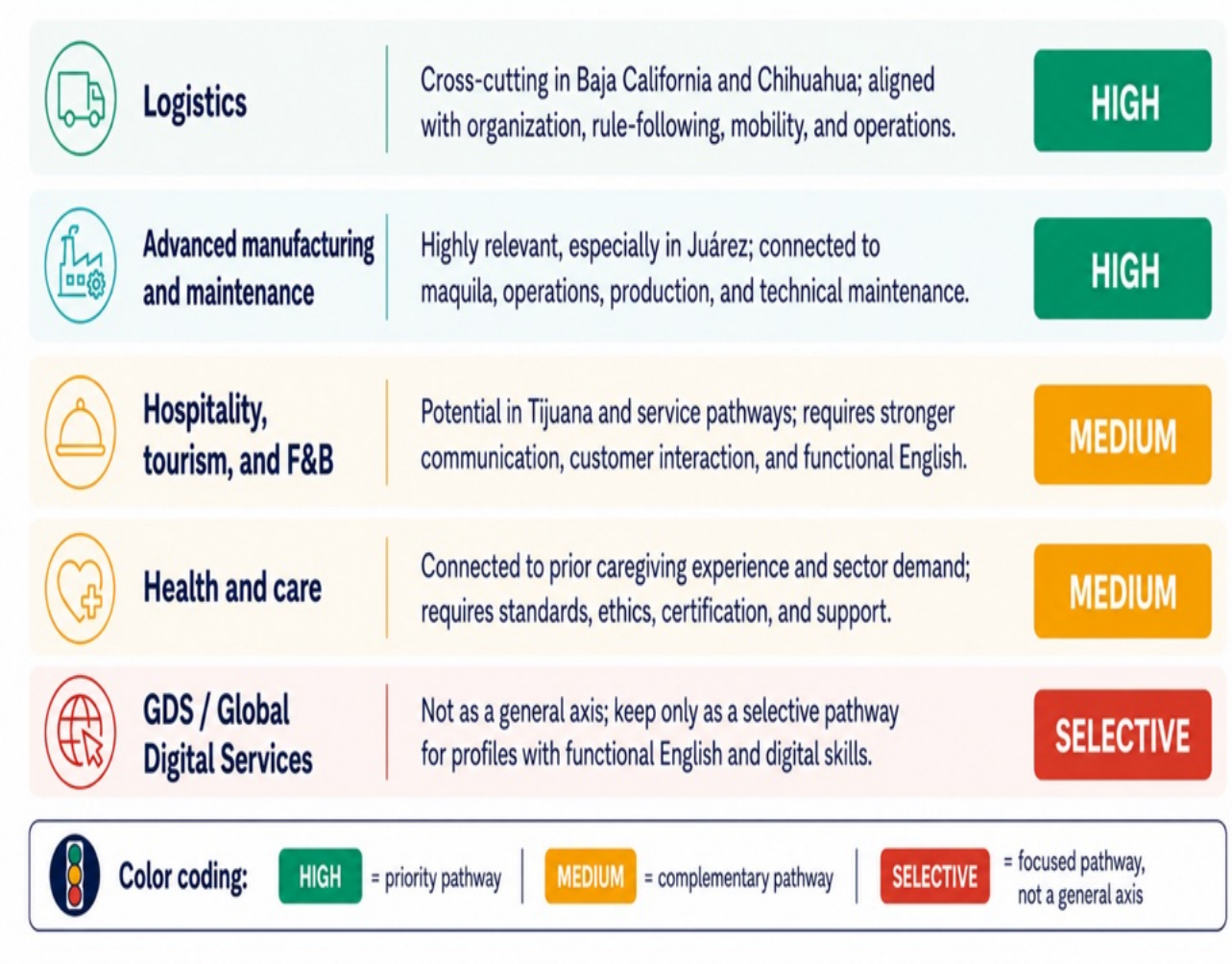
- **Logistics.** It shows high compatibility with the observed profile. It is a cross-cutting pathway in Baja California and Chihuahua, aligned with skills in organization, rule-following, mobility, meeting deadlines, and operations. It can connect with certifications in warehousing, forklift operation, trucking, distribution, or logistics support.

- **Manufacturing and maintenance.** It shows high sector relevance, especially in Ciudad Juárez. It is tied to maquila, operations, production, basic maintenance, welding, machine tools, electrical work, refrigeration, and technical support. It requires short certification and direct engagement with employers.

- **Hospitality, tourism, food and beverage.** It shows medium compatibility. It has potential in Tijuana and in services pathways, but it requires strengthening communication, customer service, interaction with people, functional English, and service skills.

- **Health and care.** It shows medium relevance. It can connect with prior caregiving experience, family responsibilities, and demand for care services. It requires particular attention to standards, ethics, certification, references, and support.
- **Global Digital Services.** It should not operate as the pilot's general axis. The evidence shows that English, educational attainment, digital literacy, and access to equipment limit its viability as a universal pathway. However, it can be kept as a selective pathway for profiles with functional English, digital proficiency, customer-service experience, higher educational attainment, or potential for accelerated training.

***Figure 144.*** *Sector clusters of the pilot. Prioritization based on the intersection of population profile, labor demand, competency gaps, and certification offering*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

The strategic decision is not to discard the digital component forever, but to position it correctly: not as a general gateway, but as a specialized pathway for subgroups closer to the required profile.

## 9.11 Operational architecture: four phases

The model is structured as a progressive four-phase pathway that supports the person from arrival to labor-market stabilization or an integration trajectory. Each phase has its own objectives, responsible parties, deliverables, and indicators.

***Figure 145.*** *Operational architecture*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

Note 1: Components to be supported or coordinated through IYF and local partners along the pathway: psychosocial support, adapted PTS, counseling based on the Modelo JuventudES, and job-placement support (assessment of training or certification needs plus partnerships for job search and placement).

Note 2: Job placement should run in parallel starting in Phase 2, not wait until the end.

## 9.12 Pilot partners by phase

Operating the pilot requires a clear distribution of functions.

In **Tijuana**, the Casa del Migrante, CESFOM, and actors connected to the CRTM can operate detection, profiling, initial training, and connection to certification. The CRTM can facilitate engagement with employers and coordination among shelters, training, government, and the private sector. CECATI, ICAT, and CONOCER can provide certification and technical training.

In **Ciudad Juárez**, the Casa del Migrante, the Scalabrinians, and the Salesians can provide access to the population, support, place-based trust, community engagement, and accompaniment. The Salesian oratories can operate as spaces for youth integration. CECATI, CENALTEC (Center for High Technology Training), CONALEP, CONOCER, and other centers can provide training and certification. INDEX and local employers can provide demand and labor-market-entry opportunities.

In both cities, IYF can contribute model design, curriculum adaptation, Passport to Success, profiling tools, monitoring standards, partner strengthening, resource mobilization, adaptive learning, and strategic coordination.

## 9.13 Rollout pathway

The pilot's rollout should follow a logic of incremental learning. The recommendation is to begin with a first cohort per city (25 people), measure results, adjust components, and scale only after validating operational assumptions.

The pathway can be organized into four stages:

**Stage 1. Preparation.** Months 0 to 2. Includes signing agreements, defining roles, creating the Juárez coordinating hub, designing the power skills curriculum, adapting instruments, defining indicators, selecting sectors, and initial agreements with certifiers and employers.

**Stage 2. Pilot cohort.** Months 3 to 8. An initial cohort of 25 people per city goes through the four phases of the model: reception and stabilization, profiling and power skills, recognition or training, and employer engagement and follow-up.

**Stage 3. Evaluation and costing.** Month 9. Results are measured against the indicator funnel, lessons are documented, the actual cost per participant is estimated, and adjustments are identified.

**Stage 4. Scaling.** From month 10 onward. The model is adjusted, a second wave is prepared, the funding case is refined, and conditions for replication or expansion are defined.

This sequence allows the pilot to function as a learning mechanism, not only as service delivery. Its purpose is to validate design hypotheses: whether the population stays, whether certification is viable, whether employers hire, whether the stipend reduces dropout, whether psychosocial support improves retention, and whether the cost per beneficiary is sustainable.

## 9.14 Preliminary cost and sensitivity to scale

The model's costing should be understood as a **preliminary estimate subject to validation** with IYF and local partners. The cost structure includes three major components: variable costs per person, semester fixed costs, and support for shelters or events.

For an initial cohort of 50 participants—25 in Tijuana and 25 in Ciudad Juárez—the variable cost per person is estimated at approximately US$633, specifically for stipends. The semester fixed cost for both cities is estimated at approximately US$48,897, associated with coordinators, psychology services, counseling, and curriculum adaptation. Additionally, approximately US$28,763 is estimated for shelter support, infrastructure use, outreach, events, or partnership-related activities.

Under these assumptions, the total cost per person comes to approximately 38,000 pesos for an initial cohort of 50 participants. This figure must be validated with IYF, since it will depend on actual salaries, administrative costs, internal rules for stipends, partner agreements, and hiring arrangements. In other words, it is only an indicative estimate.

Tables 3 and 4 show that the unit cost decreases as the cohort size increases. This occurs because the variable cost remains relatively constant, while the fixed cost is spread across more participants. Under the preliminary assumptions, a cohort of 25 people per city would have an approximate cost of US$2,186 per participant[3]. Under a simple fixed-cost assumption, a cohort of 50 people per city would reduce the estimated unit cost to approximately US$1,668 per participant, while a cohort of 75 people per city would reduce it to approximately US$1,246. If additional staffing, shelter support, or partner payments increase with scale, the table should be recalculated and the scaling assumptions should be stated explicitly.

[3] Note: USD amounts are indicative and were converted from Mexican pesos using an exchange rate of MXN 17.3833 per US$1.

*Table 3.* Indicative cost estimate for the pilot

| Item | Approx. amount (USD) | Details |
|---|---|---|
| **Variable cost per person** | **≈ US$633** | Stipends and training. |
| **Semester fixed cost (both cities)** | **≈ US$48,897** | 2 coordinators, 2 hourly psychology services, 2 hourly counseling services, and PTS. |
| **Support for shelters and events** | **≈ USD$28,763** | Support for infrastructure use plus payments for events or partnership-related activities. |
| **Total cost per person** | **≈ USD$2,186** | For an initial cohort of 50 participants (25 per city). |

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

*Table 4.* Indicative scaling-cost estimate for the pilot

| Cohort size (per city) | Approx. unit cost per beneficiary (USD) |
|---|---|
| **Cohort of 25 people** | USD$2,186 |
| **Cohort of 50 people** | USD$1,668 |
| **Cohort of 75 people** | USD$1,246 |

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

Nevertheless, scale should not grow before operational capacity is validated. Increasing the number of participants reduces unit cost, but it may require more hours of psychology, counseling, follow-up, coordination, and management with employers. The pilot must find the balance between efficiency and quality of support.

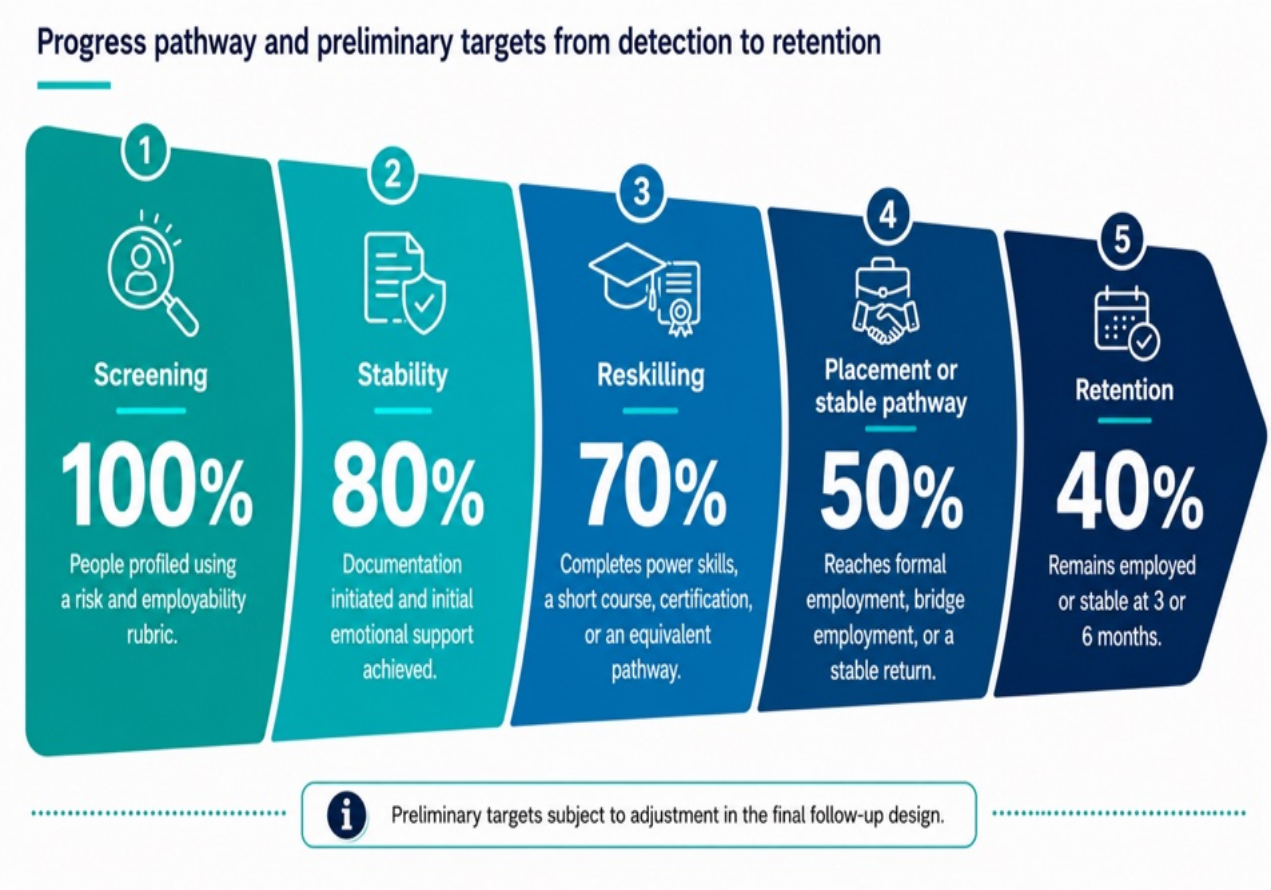
## 9.15 Results funnel and indicators

The model defines success across two interconnected levels. The first is stabilization: ensuring that participants receive documentation support, guidance, psychosocial accompaniment, and connection to a local support network. The second is pathway advancement: moving toward formal employment, bridge employment, a stable return, continued training, certification, or another verifiable integration trajectory. These two levels should not be understood as strictly sequential. Rather, stabilization and labor-market activation must advance in parallel, recognizing that job placement is more likely to be sustained when minimum conditions of stability, trust, documentation, and support are also being addressed.

The results funnel comprises five stages:

1. **Detection.** Target: 100% of individuals profiled using a risk and employability rubric.
2. **Stability.** Preliminary target: 80% with documentation initiated and initial emotional support achieved.
3. **Reskilling.** Preliminary target: 70% complete power skills, a short course, certification, or an equivalent pathway.
4. **Placement or stable trajectory.** Preliminary target: 50% reach formal employment, bridge employment, or a stable return.
5. **Retention.** Preliminary target: 40% remain employed or stable at three or six months, depending on the final follow-up design.

***Figure 146.*** *Results funnel of the pilot*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

The targets should be calibrated with the first cohort. At this stage, they should not be read as firm commitments, but as performance hypotheses subject to validation.

### Indicators by phase

Measurement is organized by phase, so that each block of the model has its own indicators and calibratable targets. The table below summarizes what could be measured in each phase and the reference targets. This section would also need to be reviewed and validated with IYF's Evaluation and Monitoring area, in order to establish who would track the systematization of information and how.

*Table 5.* Indicators and targets by phase

| Phase and dimension | Indicators and targets (to be calibrated) |
|---|---|
| **Phases 1 and 2 · Reception, stabilization, support, and documentation (measures stabilization)** | 80% with documentation key initiated (INE, CURP, RFC).<br>80% receive initial psychosocial support and, where needed, referral to specialized services.<br>≤ 30 days to activate documentation. |
| **Phase 3 · Reskilling (measures employability)** | 70% certified through CONOCER or a short course.<br>70% complete the power skills curriculum.<br>50% connected to a formal job opening. |
| **Phase 4 · Engagement (measures retention and well-being three months after the close of Phase 3)** | 50% in formal employment or a stable return.<br>40% remain employed or stable at three months.<br>Percentage of participants receiving at least one post-placement or post-pathway follow-up contact within three months. |

**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

Additionally, the pilot should measure implementation indicators: recruitment rate, dropout rate by phase, reasons for dropout, cost per participant, cost per person placed, cost per person stabilized, average time through the pathway, quality of partnerships, and fulfillment of roles by each actor. During the pilot, the first cohort can be used to establish feasible benchmarks for each indicator.

## 9.16 Risks and mitigations

The design identifies a set of risks with varying degrees of control by the pilot. Four of them are mitigable through measures built into the model itself; two are of medium level, with mitigation options to consider; and one is critical, insofar as it depends on the willingness of local private-sector partners and on labor-market conditions, and therefore lies beyond the direct reach of the intervention.

*Figure 147. Pilot risks and mitigation strategies*




**Source:** Authors' own elaboration.

## 9.17 Closing of the model

The proposed model recognizes that the social and labor-market reintegration of returning or in-mobility migrants is neither a linear nor a purely labor-related process. It is a complex transition that combines stabilization, documentation, the rebuilding of agency, skills recognition, training, certification, engagement with employers, and follow-up.

The proposal responds to the accumulated evidence. Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez do not require an identical intervention, but they do require a common architecture. Tijuana can accelerate certification and placement pathways by drawing on a more coordinated ecosystem. Ciudad Juárez needs to begin with a more intensive layer of psychosocial support, youth integration, flexible scheduling, and place-based coordination. In both cities, the pilot should leverage what exists, add the missing layer, and generate evidence on which conditions make it possible to turn migration and work experience into sustainable productive inclusion.

The pilot's value lies not only in serving an initial cohort, but in testing a replicable model: an evidence-based labor-market reintegration pathway that is place-based, trauma-informed, competency-oriented, connected with certification, and measurable in its results.



# Chapter 10. Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter provides concise answers to the five research questions, now as a closing synthesis rather than as the report's main organizing structure.

## 10.1 Concise Answers to the Research Questions

The research was guided by five main questions. Taken together, the findings support an integrated conclusion: **a support ecosystem for returning and in-mobility individuals does exist, but it operates in a fragmented way, with an emphasis on initial care and limited capacity to sustain labor-market reintegration processes.**

The findings show that the problem is not the absence of networks, courses, job openings, or individual capabilities. The central problem is the disconnection among these elements. The population does not start from zero, but its skills tend to be poorly documented, poorly certified, or poorly translated into the Mexican labor market. At the same time, existing institutional and social care concentrates more on reception, temporary accommodation, and immediate support than on a complete workforce development pathway. For this reason, a program led by the IYF would have greater value if it functioned as a place-based coordinator: identifying profiles, stabilizing, recognizing experience, strengthening transferable skills, connecting people with certifications and employers, and providing post-placement follow-up.

**Question 1. Do support networks exist—through the Mexican government, civil-society organizations, or other institutional actors—to facilitate the guidance, referral, training, or job placement of young people returning to Mexico?**

Support networks do exist, but their reach is uneven and their capacity for sustained labor-market reintegration remains limited. The identified ecosystem includes the federal government, state and municipal governments, international organizations, civil-society organizations, shelter networks, training centers, certifying institutions, employers, business chambers, and community actors. However, the reintegration chain shows a concentration of capacity in the first links—reception, temporary accommodation, initial documentation, and emotional support—while the links of relevant training, certification, formal job placement, and post-placement follow-up are thinner and more fragmented.

The evidence on México te Abraza ("Mexico Embraces You") reinforces this conclusion. The program operates as a mechanism for reception, immediate care, and referral, but not as a consolidated model of sustained job placement. The data reviewed indicate that 43% of

repatriated individuals enter Migrant Care Centers and 57% do not; among those who enter, roughly 11% are connected to a job, which is equivalent to about 5% of all those who arrive. The most recent public figure documented in the research indicated that only 4% of the people served had obtained employment through that mechanism. This confirms that an institutional first-response network exists, but with low labor-market reach given the volume and complexity of needs.

At the place-based level, Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez have relevant actors, though with differing capacity to coordinate. Tijuana has a more organized base, particularly because of the presence of the Migrant Workers' Resource Center (CRTM), the Scalabrini Training Center for Migrants (CESFOM), migrant shelters, CECATI (Mexico's federal industrial job-training centers), ICAT, CONOCER (Mexico's national labor-competency certification system), the National Employment Service (SNE), business networks, and international actors. Ciudad Juárez has strong place-based legitimacy among Salesian, Scalabrinian, and community networks, as well as platforms such as Desafío Juárez, Casa del Migrante, CESAI, Salesian oratories, and CENALTEC, but coordination with employers and certification appears more dispersed. In short, **the ecosystem exists, but the pilot would need to organize and connect its capacities around a common employability pathway.**

**Question 2. How can the skills, occupational trajectories, and sectors of work experience of young people in mobility be characterized, particularly those who have been returned from the United States to Mexico, whether Mexican or of other nationalities?**

The surveyed population is predominantly Mexican, young adult, and with relevant migration experience in the United States. Eighty-two percent were born in Mexico and 18% abroad, which confirms that the study primarily captured the returning Mexican population, but also foreign nationals in mobility, transit, waiting, or potential settlement in Mexico. Forty-four percent of respondents are between 30 and 35 years old, a group that combines youth, accumulated work experience, and possible family or economic responsibilities. The evidence revealed long migration trajectories, with potential accumulation of work experience, cultural adaptation, and occupational learning.

It is, moreover, a population in an early phase of stabilization. Fifty-six percent had been in Mexico for less than three months at the time of data collection, and 75% indicated that they planned to stay in the country for at least the following twelve months. This intention should not, however, be read as permanent rootedness: nearly 20% expressed an intention to return to the United States and around 14% remained undecided. Mexico therefore operates

as a space for return, waiting, the reorganization of options, or temporary integration, not necessarily as the final destination for everyone.

In educational terms, low and medium educational profiles predominate: 57% of the sample falls in the low educational level and 39% in the medium level, with a strong concentration in incomplete lower secondary and upper secondary. This limits immediate access to jobs that require school certificates, but it does not imply an absence of capabilities. In fact, prior work experience is distributed across traditional sectors and sectors with potential for formal labor-market entry. The sectors traditionally associated with return migration concentrate 35% of the reported experience, while the sectors of interest for employability pathways—hospitality, manufacturing, maintenance, health, logistics, and contact center—account for 53%. The remaining 12% corresponds to other sectors. This distribution confirms that there is a usable labor base for designing segmented pathways, not a homogeneous population exclusively associated with low-transferability occupations.

The work experience observed is mostly operational, but not exclusively basic. That is, nearly one in three people performed technical functions or roles of intermediate responsibility. This is programmatically relevant because it avoids reducing the returning population to a labor pool for entry-level positions: there is a segment with accumulated experience that could move into trajectories of occupational advancement if practical assessment, certification, short refresher training, and engagement with employers are incorporated.

**Question 3. To what extent do young returning or in-mobility people have skills, experience, or capabilities transferable to sectors with employability potential, particularly the Global Digital Services sector and other strategic sectors identified during the research?**

The evidence shows that returning or in-mobility individuals do have transferable skills, but the degree to which these are activated varies by sector, city, educational attainment, English command, digital readiness, documentation, and personal stability. In the analysis focused on Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, the population shows clear strengths in operational competencies, but the gaps appear in relational and progression competencies: only 57% report functional communication with clients and 33% leadership or supervision.

This pattern explains why technical-operational pathways have better initial compatibility. When the supply of skills is cross-referenced with sector competency models, the sectors with the smallest gap are Transportation and Logistics, with a gap of 35%; Advanced

Manufacturing, with 36%; Health and Care, with 37%; and Hospitality, Tourism, Food and Beverage, with a gap of 40%.

The place-based comparison is also clear. Tijuana starts with a smaller gap than Ciudad Juárez in the sectors analyzed. This means that Ciudad Juárez requires greater initial investment in cross-cutting skills, stabilization, communication, teamwork, basic leadership, and functional English.

Regarding Global Digital Services, the evidence calls for a cautious stance. Youth does not automatically equate to readiness for GDS. Sixty-three percent of the general sample report basic or very basic English; in the Tijuana–Juárez analysis, 63.5% fall at the basic level or lower and only 12.5% at the advanced level. Although 47.7% can understand instructions, 42.5% explain a problem, and 41.5% hold a conversation, functional English is higher in Tijuana—43.8%—than in Ciudad Juárez—30.8%. Added to this, 76.2% have a smartphone and 73.1% have actual internet access, but only 63.2% can use a computer or devices comfortably. For this reason, GDS should not be proposed as a broad initial pathway for the program. It should instead be treated as a selective or second-stage route for participants with stronger English, digital readiness, customer-service experience, and sufficient stability to sustain training or employment in that sector.

Certification emerges as a key lever for converting skills into employability. In the general sample, 79.4% hold no certification. However, 76% report practical learning that could be certified. In Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, 83.4% have not completed any certification or formal course, but 86% would be willing to validate their experience if the mechanism existed.

**Question 4. What documentation, institutional, educational, labor-market, psychosocial, place-based, or information barriers do young people face upon returning to or remaining in Mexico?**

The barriers are multiple, simultaneous, and cumulative. In the full analytical sample, which includes the 11 data-collection sites covered by the study, the main barriers to enrolling in training were schedules—37.8%—and financial resources—19.7%; together, they account for nearly six out of ten mentions. Documentation also appears as a relevant barrier, at 11.8%. These results provide the broader picture of the constraints faced by returnees and migrants in mobility across the full fieldwork universe.

When the analysis narrows to the two priority pilot territories—Tijuana, Baja California, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua—the same constraints become more operationally visible. In this place-based subsample, 69% identify schedules as an obstacle to training, 43% mention financial constraints, 30% missing documentation, 11% transportation, and 8%

family caregiving. Schedules weigh more heavily in Ciudad Juárez, while lack of documents weighs more heavily in Tijuana. This place-based difference is fundamental: Tijuana requires a more robust documentation pathway, while Ciudad Juárez requires greater schedule flexibility and retention support, especially given the labor, family, and place-based structure associated with the maquila industry and youth vulnerability.

The Composite Marginalization Index (CMI; IMC in Spanish) confirms that the barriers do not operate in isolation. In Tijuana, people face an average of 4.64 barriers; in Ciudad Juárez, 5.43, a statistically significant difference. The severity is greater in Juárez: one in three people present seven or more barriers, compared with one in eight in Tijuana.

The barriers that most distinguish Ciudad Juárez are detention or trauma, scheduling and caregiving, lack of functional English, and absence of formal certification. The detention-or-trauma barrier reaches 63.5% in Ciudad Juárez compared with 39.3% in Tijuana. This evidence confirms that the pilot cannot be only a training intervention: it must combine stabilization, protection, documentation, recognition of prior experience, transferable skills, and placement.

**Question 5. If a support program grounded in workforce development, and aligned with IYF's vision were to be designed, what features should it have, where could it operate, which population should it prioritize, and which strategic partners would be necessary to increase its chances of success?**

The program should be designed as a **modular, flexible, and place-based pilot**, **aimed not only at returning individuals, but at young people in a situation of mobility with varying degrees of visibility, stability, and proximity to employment.** Its added value would lie not in creating a new parallel offering, but in **coordinating what already exists** and **closing the gaps the ecosystem does not resolve**: labor profiling, recognition of competencies, modular training, power skills, certification, labor-market intermediation with employers, psychosocial support, and post-placement follow-up.

The place-based evidence confirms that **Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez require the same base model**, but with **differentiated entry points**. Tijuana should be the priority site to start, because it combines sustained mobility, care infrastructure, a more coordinated ecosystem, compatible labor demand, and actors with the capacity to connect documentation, training, certification, and employment. In addition, Tijuana presents smaller competency gaps: 65% functional communication, 83% in following rules and checklists, 44% functional English, and 42% leadership or supervision. This makes it possible to test certification, job placement, and follow-up components more quickly.

If a single initial site must be selected, the recommendation is to begin in Tijuana and incorporate Ciudad Juárez in a second phase. Tijuana offers a more favorable starting point because it combines an accessible target population, a more articulated support ecosystem, stronger prior coordination among local actors, and a clearer pathway to connect documentation, certification, training, and job placement. Ciudad Juárez should remain a strategic second site or phase 1B, particularly to validate the model in a higher-severity context. Its population is younger—the average age is 29.7 years compared with 32.8 in Tijuana—and it presents a greater accumulation of barriers, especially trauma, scheduling and caregiving constraints, lack of certification, and lack of functional English. For this reason, implementation in Juárez should begin once the core model has been tested and adjusted in Tijuana, with a more robust layer of stabilization, protection, compatible schedules, retention support, work-readiness skills, and technical-operational pathways tied to logistics, manufacturing, maintenance, and basic employability.

The model should operate with a phased pathway. The available local offerings confirm that the pilot should coordinate rather than rebuild. In both cities, various technical certification programs were identified. That is, the infrastructure for this phase of the process already exists.

The strategic partners should include, in Tijuana, Casa del Migrante, CESFOM, the Salesians, CRTM, CECATI, ICAT BC, CONOCER, SNE, STPS, INM, INDEX, CANACO, CANACAR, COPARMEX, and international organizations such as IOM, ILO, UNHCR, and the UN. In Ciudad Juárez, priority should go to the Salesian Oratories, CESAI, Desafío Juárez, CENALTEC, ICATECH, CONOCER, INDEX, the state and municipal governments, and actors specialized in mental health, protection, and youth work. The critical condition for success will be assigning clear roles: who recruits, who stabilizes, who documents, who trains, who certifies, who connects with employers, and who follows up.

The opportunity lies in building a youth-focused labor-market reintegration model, grounded in evidence, that recognizes prior experience, reduces immediate barriers, strengthens transferable skills, activates relevant certifications, and connects participants with realistic pathways to employment and, when relevant, stable integration in Mexico. The pilot must test whether a well-coordinated place-based architecture can turn initial migration care into verifiable trajectories of productive inclusion.

## 10.2 General Conclusions

The research generated a set of lessons that go beyond the evidence needed to design a workforce development program for returning migrants. The following are the main conclusions set out in that regard to structure decision-making:

- **Migration is not disappearing: it is being reconfigured**. The evidence does not confirm a "massive wave" of visible returns at the northern border, but it does confirm a profound transformation of the phenomenon. The drop in irregular crossings and overland returns does not imply a lesser need for care, but rather lower visibility, greater geographic dispersion, and trajectories that are harder to capture. Return today is no longer explained only by people detained at the border, but increasingly by detentions inside the United States, ICE flights to southern Mexico, people with years or decades of residence outside the country, and foreign nationals trapped in waiting, transit, or documentation limbo.

- **Migration is less voluminous at certain points, but more complex case by case.** The decline in visible flows at shelters and border points coexists with higher levels of individual vulnerability: trauma from detention or deportation, family separation, the abrupt loss of one's life plan, lack of documents, economic urgency, unstable housing, risk of exploitation, and exposure to organized-crime dynamics. The central conclusion is that the challenge is not to deliver "more of the same," but to respond to more fragmented, more invisible profiles with a greater density of barriers.

- **The program must be designed for mobility, not only for return**. The category of "returning person" is insufficient to capture the diversity observed. Mexico operates simultaneously as a country of return, transit, waiting, expulsion, temporary integration, and eventual settlement. For this reason, the model must serve at least four profiles: returning Mexican nationals, foreign nationals in mobility, people with the intention to remain temporarily or indefinitely, and vulnerable local youth whose inclusion can foster community integration and reduce stigma.

- **The northern border remains strategic, even though the visible flow has decreased**. The place-based recommendation is based not only on the volume of people, but on the possibility of operating a complete pathway. Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez combine the presence of a population in mobility, labor demand, trusted stakeholders, community infrastructure, and entry sectors with potential. The border makes it possible to test the model where return, transit, waiting, employment, and place-based response capacity converge.

- **Labor-market reintegration must also be read as a protection strategy against illicit economies.** The research shows that the vulnerability of returnees and people in mobility situations is not limited to a lack of employment or documents: in high-insecurity areas, economic urgency, the absence of a local network, trauma, the lack of housing, and the immediate need for income can increase exposure to kidnapping, extortion, exploitation, trafficking, or recruitment by criminal networks. This risk is particularly relevant for young people, recently returned individuals, foreign nationals waiting, unsupervised adolescents, women with caregiving burdens, and people who quickly leave the institutional circuit. For this reason, programs serving this population should also function as preventive protection mechanisms that prepares the person not only for labor-market reintegration, but also for social reintegration.

- **The target population does not start from zero: it brings labor capital, but this is poorly recognized.** The research confirms that many returning or in-mobility individuals have work experience, resilience, operational discipline, adaptability, and transferable skills. The problem is not the absence of capabilities, but their poor translation into the language of the Mexican labor market. Accumulated experience tends not to be documented, certified, or connected to formal employment pathways.

- **Certification and the recognition of prior experience are the main value lever.** The lack of formal certification wastes human capital and pushes people with real experience toward informal, precarious jobs, or jobs below their capabilities.

- **Employability cannot be separated from stabilization.** Forced return is not only an administrative or labor-market event; it is a rupture of one's life plan. No training or placement pathway will be sustainable if the person does not have a minimum of emotional security, documentation, housing, a support network, guidance, and material conditions to sustain the process. Psychosocial stabilization, documentation management, and labor-market entry must operate in parallel, not in sequence.

- **Segmentation is essential: not everyone needs the same pathway**. The study shows that the population is not divided between "employable" and "not employable," but rather among different levels of proximity to employment. Some people require only documentation, guidance, and connection to job openings; others need certification or short upskilling; others require intensive stabilization

before any labor-market process. The model must operate with differentiated pathways, not with a one-size-fits-all intervention.

- **The pilot must coordinate what exists and add the missing layer.** The programmatic thesis is clear: not to rebuild, but to connect. The ecosystem already has shelters, certifying bodies, training centers, potential employers, and public services. What is missing is the human and methodological layer: case management, power skills, profiling, documentation support, recognition of prior experience, active intermediation, follow-up, and adaptive learning. Trusted local partners are an entry condition, not ancillary actors; without local trust, there will be no retention, follow-up, or sustainable results.

- **Success must be measured at two levels: stability and labor-market entry**. Immediate job placement cannot be the only indicator of success. In this population, starting documentation, recovering agency, stabilizing emotionally, certifying experience, completing a short pathway, or sustaining a training trajectory are also critical results. The evaluation logic must measure progress from detection, stability, and reskilling through to placement, retention, or stable return.





# References


Alkire, S., & Foster, J. (2011). Counting and multidimensional poverty measurement. *Journal of Public Economics, 95*(7–8), 476–487. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.11.006

CareerOneStop. (n.d.). *Competency Model Clearinghouse*. U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/

Consejo Nacional de Normalización y Certificación de Competencias Laborales. (n.d.). *CONOCER México: Certificación por competencias* [CONOCER Mexico: Competency-based certification]. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://conocer.gob.mx/

Consejo Nacional de Normalización y Certificación de Competencias Laborales. (2024). *RENEC: Registro Nacional de Estándares de Competencia* [RENEC: National Registry of Competency Standards]. https://conocer.gob.mx/renec-registro-nacional-estandares-competencia/

Dirección General de Centros de Formación para el Trabajo. (n.d.). *DGCFT*. Secretaría de Educación Pública. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.dgcft.sems.gob.mx/

Dirección General de Centros de Formación para el Trabajo. (n.d.). *Especialidades y cursos* [Specializations and courses]. Secretaría de Educación Pública. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.dgcft.sems.gob.mx/buscador_cecati/index/14

European Commission. (n.d.-a). *ESCO: European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations*. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/skills-jobs/european-skillscompetences-qualifications-and-occupations-esco_en

European Commission. (n.d.-b). *Skills & competences*. ESCO. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/classification/skill_main

European Commission. (n.d.-c). *What is ESCO?* ESCO. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/about-esco/what-esco

Filges, T., Montgomery, E., Kastrup, M., & Jørgensen, A. M. K. (2024). The impact of detention on the health of asylum seekers: An updated systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews, 20*(3), e1420. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1420

Harvard Kennedy School. (n.d.). *HKS Case Program*. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.hks.harvard.edu/more/about/leadership-administration/academic-deans-office/slate/case-program

Human Rights First. (2026, April 14). *ICE Flight Monitor: March 2026 report*. https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/ice-flight-monitor-march-2026-report/

Human Rights Watch. (2026, May 27). *"Casting us aside to die": Cuban and other third-country nationals deported from the US to Mexico*. https://www.hrw.org/report/2026/05/27/casting-us-aside-to-die/cuban-and-other-third-country-nationals-deported-from-the

Instituto de Capacitación para el Trabajo del Estado de Chihuahua. (n.d.). *Cursos* [Courses]. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.icatech.edu.mx/cursos/

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. (1997). *La migración en México: Indicadores estadísticos* [Migration in Mexico: Statistical indicators]. INEGI. https://www.inegi.org.mx/app/biblioteca/ficha.html?upc=702825491512

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. (n.d.). *Migración* [Migration]. INEGI. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.inegi.org.mx/temas/migracion/

International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Recognition of Prior Learning*. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.ilo.org/recognition-prior-learning

International Labour Organization. (2012). *International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08): Volume 1: Structure, group definitions and correspondence tables*. International Labour Office. https://webapps.ilo.org/ilostat-files/ISCO/newdocs-08-2021/ISCO-08/ISCO-08%20EN%20Vol%201.pdf

International Labour Organization. (2018). *Guide on measuring decent jobs for youth: Monitoring, evaluation and learning in labour market programmes*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/node/723711

International Labour Organization. (2020). *How to facilitate the recognition of skills of migrant workers: Guide for employment services providers* (2nd ed.). International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/publications/how-facilitate-recognition-skills-migrant-workers-guide-employment-services

International Labour Organization. (2023). *The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) companion guide*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/publications/international-standard-classification-occupations-isco-08-companion-guide

International Labour Organization & World Bank. (2024). *Active labour market programs improve employment and earnings of young people*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/publications/active-labour-market-programs-improve-employment-and-earnings-young-people

International Organization for Migration. (2019a). *Glossary on migration* (International Migration Law No. 34). International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/books/international-migration-law-ndeg34-glossary-migration

International Organization for Migration. (2019b). *IOM handbook on protection and assistance for migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse*. International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-handbook-migrants-vulnerable-violence-exploitation-and-abuse

International Organization for Migration. (2019c). *Reintegration handbook: Practical guidance on the design, implementation and monitoring of reintegration assistance*. International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/books/reintegration-handbook-practical-guidance-design-implementation-and-monitoring-reintegration

International Organization for Migration. (2024). *World migration report 2024*. International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024

International Youth Foundation. (n.d.-a). *Bridging the skills gap: IYF's systems change approach to workforce development*. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://archive.iyfglobal.org/bridging-the-skills-gap

International Youth Foundation. (n.d.-b). *Our tools & approaches*. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://iyfglobal.org/our-tools-approaches/

Migration Data Portal. (2024, September 10). *Return migration*. https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/return-migration

Nardo, M., Saisana, M., Saltelli, A., Tarantola, S., Hoffmann, A., & Giovannini, E. (2008). *Handbook on constructing composite indicators: Methodology and user guide*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264043466-en

National Center for O*NET Development. (n.d.-a). *O*NET database*. O*NET Resource Center. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.onetcenter.org/database.html

National Center for O*NET Development. (n.d.-b). *O*NET OnLine*. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.onetonline.org/

OECD & European Commission. (2023). *Indicators of immigrant integration 2023: Settling in*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/1d5020a6-en

Office of Homeland Security Statistics. (n.d.-a). *DHS repatriations*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://ohss.dhs.gov/khsm/dhs-repatriations

Office of Homeland Security Statistics. (n.d.-b). *Glossary*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://ohss.dhs.gov/glossary

Office of Homeland Security Statistics. (n.d.-c). *Immigration enforcement and legal processes monthly tables*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/immigration-enforcement/monthly-tables

Office of Homeland Security Statistics. (2024). *Table 39. Noncitizen removals, returns, and expulsions: Fiscal years 1892 to 2022*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/yearbook/2022/table39

Pew Research Center. (2026, February 2). *Migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border are at their lowest level in more than 50 years*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/02/02/migrant-encounters-at-the-us-mexico-border-are-at-their-lowest-level-in-more-than-50-years/

Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas. (2026a). *Boletín estadístico mensual* [Monthly statistical bulletin]. Secretaría de Gobernación. https://portales.segob.gob.mx/es/PoliticaMigratoria/Boletines_Estadisticos

Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas. (2026b). *Cuadros del Boletín Estadístico 2026: III. Personas en situación migratoria irregular en México* [Tables from the 2026 Statistical Bulletin: III. People in an irregular migration situation in Mexico]. Secretaría de Gobernación. https://portales.segob.gob.mx/es/PoliticaMigratoria/CuadrosBOLETIN?Anual=2026&Secc=3

Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas. (2026c). *Cuadros del Boletín Estadístico 2026: V. Devolución de mexicanas y mexicanos desde Estados Unidos* [Tables from the 2026 Statistical Bulletin: V. Return of Mexican nationals from the United States]. Secretaría de Gobernación. https://portales.segob.gob.mx/es/PoliticaMigratoria/CuadrosBOLETIN?Anual=2026&Secc=5

U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (n.d.). *Southwest land border encounters*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved June 11, 2026, from https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2026, May 22). *Enforcement and Removal Operations statistics*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. https://www.ice.gov/statistics

Verhülsdonk, I., Shahab, M., & Molendijk, M. L. (2021). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among refugees and migrants in immigration detention: Systematic review with meta-analysis. *BJPsych Open, 7*(6), e204. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2021.1026

Washington Office on Latin America. (2026, May 29). *U.S.-Mexico border update: Billions more for DHS, deportations into Mexico, Big Bend border wall, April migration*. https://www.wola.org/2026/05/u-s-mexico-border-update-billions-more-for-dhs-deportations-into-mexico-big-bend-border-wall-april-migration/

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.