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Articles

Migrations, the right to the city and utopia. The case of Mexico City

Migraciones, derecho a la ciudad y utopía. El caso de Ciudad de México

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Abstract

This article introduces an analysis about *the right to the city* for migrant population in Mexico City considering three main dimensions: utopia, public policy and social rights. The article is a result of both a documentary and field initial research interviewing migrants and civil organizations defending rights of migrants, during 2021 and 2022. Conclusions point out that Mexico's City Constitution, adopted in 2017, guarantees *the right to the city*, but this right is not yet explicitly related to the public policies for migrant population neither hoist by the migrant collectivities in order to project their political participation.

Keywords: right to the city, utopia, migrations, Mexico City.

Resumen

Este artículo introduce un análisis sobre *el derecho a la ciudad* de la población migrante en Ciudad de México considerando tres dimensiones principales: la utopía, la política pública y los derechos sociales. El artículo es el resultado de una primera investigación documental y de campo —realizada durante 2021 y 2022— que incluyó entrevistas a migrantes y organizaciones civiles defensoras de derechos de personas migrantes. Las conclusiones apuntan que si bien la *Constitución Política de la Ciudad de México*, adoptada en 2017, garantiza *el derecho a la ciudad*, aún no está explícitamente relacionado con las políticas públicas para poblaciones migrantes ni es enarbolado por las colectividades migrantes para proyectar su participación política.

Palabras clave: derecho a la ciudad, utopía, migraciones, Ciudad de México.

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Introduction

In the framework of contemporary international law, migration and urban issues coincide in a relevant international instrument: *the right to the city*. This concept was originally proposed by Henry Lefebvre (1968) from Marxism and critical geography and was later enhanced by David Harvey (2014) in *Rebel Cities*. It was expanded in the social sciences, promoted by social organizations and activists, and internationally recognized in the World Charter of the Right to the City (2004) and focuses on the social and political participation of city dwellers, including migrants and refugees without distinction due to their migratory status. Therefore, this article analyzes three central dimensions of the *right to the city*—utopia, social rights and public policy (Delgadillo, 2019)—based on the case of Mexico City and its immigration policy.

Mexico City has been characterized as a progressive city in Mexico and in Latin America supporting migrant populations. It enacted the Law on Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility (2011) and joined the Network of Intercultural Cities sponsored by the Council of Europe. In addition, it participates in the Network of Solidarity Cities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and in 2017, it was declared a sanctuary city for migrants (Alejo, 2020). The Mexico City Constitution enacted also in 2017, made explicit the right to the city; Mexico City is the most advanced in the country in this regard. Specifically, the right to the city is granted by article 12:

> 1. Mexico City guarantees the right to the city, which consists of the full and equitable use and usufruct of the city, based on the principles of social justice, democracy, participation, equality, sustainability, respect for cultural diversity, nature and the environment.
> 2. The right to the city is a collective right that guarantees the full exercise of human rights, the social function of the city and its democratic management and ensures territorial justice, social inclusion and the equitable distribution of public goods with the participation of citizenship. (*Constitución Política de la Ciudad de México*, 2017)

The constitution (2017) also pioneers in recognizing various migratory groups in article 20: native people and their relatives abroad, migrants in transit, returning migrants, migrants who are destined for the city, people recognized as refugees by the Mexican State, those granted political asylum or complementary protection and those who are victims of forced internal displacement due to violence or natural or human-caused disasters. Thus, formally, Mexico City made progress in recognizing internal forced displacement and environmental causes, which are not yet considered in national immigration legislation.

Mexico City, as a large city, has historically been a pole of attraction for internal and international migration, and as in the rest of the Mexican territory, the different migratory dimensions converge: emigration, immigration, migration in transit and return/deportation. The total population of the city reported in the 2020 census was 9.2 million people, of which 105 000 people were born outside of Mexico

(representing 1.1%), while 308 000 internal immigrants came mainly from the State of Mexico (49%), Veracruz (6%), Puebla (6%), Oaxaca (4%) and Guerrero (4%). In comparison, the percentage of international immigrants is very low if the total population is considered, while internal immigration is higher (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [Inegi], 2020).

The 2020 census in Mexico City reported that the main countries of origin of people born abroad were the United States (18%), Venezuela (14.3%), Colombia (10.2%), Spain (7.7%) and Argentina (6.2%). Additionally, the countries of origin of immigrants in transit between 2019 and 2021 were Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador (Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas [UPMRIP], 2020, p. 45; 2021, p. 53; 2022a, p. 55).

The Unit for Migration Policy, Registration and Identity of Persons (UPMRIP, 2022b) published a diagnosis on human mobility in Mexico City highlighting the following: international emigration, diaspora and emigrants abroad, return migrants and returnees, foreign immigration, irregular migration and internal forced displacement. This description reflects the diversity of these populations.

In the context of the diverse international migration scene in the capital of Mexico, in 2020, the government of the capital created the "Hospitable city and human mobility" (Ciudad hospitalaria y movilidad humana) program to address the challenges faced by newcomer populations through local migration policy. The program was established as a concrete public policy to implement the intercultural law of 2011 and the constitution of 2017 as legal references with respect to migrant populations. The formal objective of this program is as follows:

> Contribute to the economic, social and cultural integration of migrants and persons subject to international protection, as well as returnees from the capital abroad and their families, who live in Mexico City, based on the exercise of their rights to identity, to work, to education, and to social cohesion, in order to mitigate their conditions of exclusion, discrimination, inequality and social disadvantage through the granting of social assistance and goods and services. (Aviso por el cual se dan a conocer las reglas de operación del programa "Ciudad hospitalaria y movilidad humana" 2020, 2020, p. 39)

In this context, the central research question in this article is: How does the right to the city overlap with international migration processes in Mexico City? The specific questions are: How has the social policy for migrants been constructed in Mexico City? How is the right to the city being adopted by defense organizations and migrants in Mexico City?

This article was prepared through a bibliographic and news review of the right to city and contemporary migration processes, as well as an analysis of the legislation and official documents that frame government actions. Moreover, in 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted with six organizations publicly recognized as defenders of migrant rights, two of which are shelters of religious affiliation. Additionally, 12 migrants who were referred by these organizations were interviewed.

The purpose of the interviews was to document the defense organizations' and migrants' knowledge and use of the program "Ciudad hospitalaria y movilidad humana" (Hospitable city and human mobility).

The organizations chosen for interviews are publicly recognized for their work and were asked to interview the migrants they serve (see Table 1). The selection criterion for the interviewees was that the people were based in the city and preferably had used public programs in the city. Six people from Honduras, two from El Salvador, two from Guatemala and two from Venezuela were interviewed. Of these, three were irregular migrants, two asylum seekers, two refugees and five permanent residents in Mexico (see Table 2).

Table 1. Interviews with organizations and shelters for migrants

Interview code	Organization/shelter profile	Year of creation	Interview date
Org_1	Organization for the defense of migrant rights, political advocacy profile and training	2006	13/7/2021
Org_2	Shelter for migrants, religious affiliation	2011	14/7/2021
Org_3	Organization for the defense of the rights of LGBTQ+ migrants	2019	29/7/2021
Org_4	Shelter for migrants, religious affiliation	2012	15/7/2021 and 23/7/2021
Org_5	Organization supporting refugees and asylum seekers	2015	15/9/2021
Org_6	Organization supporting returned and deported migrants	2015	21/9/2021

Note: this table does not include the names of the organizations to protect their activist and humanitarian work

The interviewees are representative of the main nationalities and profiles of international migrants in Mexico who face greater difficulties because they do not have family and community networks, which tend to sustain the migratory dynamics between Mexico and the United States, nor do they have Mexican or American nationality. The interviews focused on the recent Latin American migrants' experiences in the city and their perceptions of lived space, a central concept of the right to the city. Additionally, public officials were interviewed at the beginning of 2020, as a starting point, and at the end of the fieldwork in January 2022, which allowed the official narratives to be contrasted.

Table 2. Interviews with migrants in Mexico City

Interview code	Name and country of origin	Interview date	Immigration status
Persona_1	Ramón, Salvadoran	5/8/2021	Undocumented
Persona_2	Elías (LGBTQ+), Honduran	16/8/2021	Refugee claimant
Persona_3	David (LGBTQ+), Salvadoran	16/8/2021	Refugee
Persona_4	Jaime (LGBTQ+), Honduran	16/8/2021	Refugee
Persona_5	Sofia, Honduran	30/8/2021	Refugee claimant
Persona_6	Ibeth, Honduran	26/8/2021	Undocumented
Persona_7	Lionel, Honduran	14/7/2021	Undocumented, in transit
Persona_8	Francisco, Guatemalan	25/10/2021	Permanent resident
Persona_9	Marcos, Honduran	26/10/2021	Permanent resident
Persona_10	Pedro, Guatemalan	28/10/2021	Permanent resident
Persona_11	Gabriela, Venezuelan	1/11/2021	Permanent resident
Persona_12	Yoselin, Venezuelan	5/11/2021	Permanent resident

Note: this table does not include the real names of the people interviewed to protect their identity

To present and discuss the topic, this article is structured in five sections. The first is dedicated to the utopian dimension, which takes up the classic postulates of Lefebvre and Harvey and includes a review of relevant contemporary studies. The second addresses the legal dimension of the right to the city in Mexico City. The third focuses on social policy for migrants and the assessments made by the civil and religious organizations interviewed. The fourth section includes the dimension of social rights based on migrants' experiences. The fifth section discusses the migration processes in the capital from the perspective of the right to the city. Finally, the conclusions are presented.

The utopian dimension

At the beginning of its formulation, the right to the city had a utopian dimension, in the works of both Henry Lefebvre, who defines it as "the right not to be excluded from centrality and its movement" (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 155), and David Harvey, who expresses that it is "a right to change and reinvent the city according to our wishes […] the reinvention of the city inevitably depends on the exercise of a collective power over the urbanization process" (Harvey, 2014, p. 20).

Importantly, the social movements in the main cities of Latin America have raised this right and contextualized it in Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, incorporated into national legislation and promoted in the main international social forums. As García

Chueca (2019, p. 403) points out, although the right to the city is a European concept, it is raised in the Global South, and from there, it returned to Europe to rethink urban processes. In Latin America, the concept has its own trajectory and tensions (Schiavo et al., 2017). The strong urban movements achieved legal codification of the concept: in the case of Ecuador, with article 31 of the 2008 constitution; in Brazil, with the statute of the city and Brazilian federal law 10.257 approved in 2001; and in Colombia, with law 388 of 1997 on the recovery of urban capital gains.

In Henry Lefebvre's original utopian proposals, the relevance of the right to the city is to denounce urbanism and its commodification as a disguise of the state that models the city as a political space. He writes:

> (…) In terms of the urban, 'inhabiting' can only be constituted and served by demolishing the state order and the strategy that organizes space in an oppressive and homogenizing way globally, consequently absorbing the subordinate levels, the urban and the habitation. (Lefebvre, 1970, p. 185)

The right to the city, Lefebvre emphasizes, "is presented as a complaint, as a demand" (Lefebvre, 2017, p. 138). Similarly, David Harvey (2014), argues as central proposal to reclaim the city for the anti-capitalist struggle.

In Henry Lefebvre's proposal, a central concept is "inhabiting", which refers to experiences in the city, in contrast to the habitat (*l'habiter/ l'habitat*). In his proposal, the conceptual triad regarding the production and reproduction of social space in the city is also important:

1) *Spatial practice*. This includes social production and reproduction in particular locations. Between the perceived space is the daily reality and the urban reality.

2) *Representations of space*. These are generated by those who conceptualize the city based on the relations of production and the order that these relations impose because urbanists, planners and technocrats design the city and conceptualize it.

3) Representational or representation spaces. A space lived through symbols, images and representations of the space of those who inhabit the city and use it. In particular, artists, writers and philosophers who describe it; but also reflect their aspirations, use their imagination and change the city and appropriate it (Lefebvre, 1984, pp. 33-39).

Thus, from these conceptual proposals, the experiences lived by people in the city are central. Because the practices of inhabiting, living the urban space, using it and changing it collectively, as well as the political participation in urban processes are revealed as fundamental for the exercise of the right to the city.

Based on these classic proposals, four relevant lines of research can be identified in contemporary studies on migration and the right to the city. The first focuses on the urban strategies of migrants as a political exercise and as builder of the city (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2018; Molinero Gerbeau & Avallone, 2020; Pérez & Palma, 2021; Rodrigo, 2021). In this regard, the theoretical frame of the autonomy of migration and migrant subjectivity proposed by Sandro Mezzadra (2005) stands out. The second focuses on migration, gender and cities and emphasizes the strategies of women, as well as LGBTQ+ communities (Caggiano, 2019; Gil Araujo & Rosas, 2019; Sassen, 2003, Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018).

The third line of research focuses on the local policies of cities toward migrant populations, which include specific models such as sanctuaries, solidarity or intercultural cities (Darling & Bauder, 2019; Filomeno, 2017; García Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019; Nicolao, 2020). The fourth line of studies highlights the expansion of the right to the city and the concept of citizenship in migratory processes in urban areas, that is, migrant citizenship in cities (Finlay, 2019; Suárez Navaz, 2005; Trimikliniotis et al., 2015). Thus, while the first two aspects refer to subjectivity and specific political strategies while the third emphasizes public policy and the exercise of social rights, the fourth takes up the classic utopian dimension.

In the case of Mexico City, however, studies of migration and the right to the city have been carried out separately. There is a long history of research on urban studies and the development of popular movements that made progress in advancing the political and legal instruments of the right to the city until their inclusion in the 2017 constitution (Bautista González, 2015; Ramírez Zaragoza, 2017; Rodríguez Cortés, 2017; Sánchez-Mejorada F., 2016; Ziccardi, 2016). In his book *Entrada libre. Crónicas de una sociedad que se organiza* (Monsiváis, 1987), Carlos Monsiváis, important chronicler of Mexico City, considers several events in the 1980s that resulted in a great political force around the urban processes of the capital, among highlighting the earthquakes of 1985. However, these investigations show that migrant political subjectivity was not present, even though there were internal migrants in these struggles demanding basic services at the city periphery and internal immigration was highly relevant to urbanization and total population growth, because during the period from 1950 to 1980, the number of inhabitants increased from 1.5 to 6.8 million (Corona Cuapio et al., 1999, p. 15).

Studies on international migration in Mexico City have historically focused on certain nationalities or periods (Palma Mora, 2005; Pardo Hernández, 2000). In more recent years, research on local policy on migration has been highlighted based on the interculturality law of 2011 and the rights of migrants (Calderón Chelius, 2019; Filomeno, 2019; Marzorati & Marconi, 2018).

Some studies of migration and urban processes have focused on the binationality between Mexico and the United States or the transnational perspective. For example, Antonio Alejo (2019) proposes binationality and paradiplomacy in the political participation of emigrants from Mexico City[1] living in Chicago. From the transnational perspective, Federico Besserer (2016) analyzes various spaces in the capital of Mexico that are connected through migratory processes (streets, neighborhoods and colonies), characterizes the city as a "transnational city" and emphasizes the framework through which transnational migrant subjects construct daily life.

Based on the most recent migration flows in transit through Mexico City and bound for the United States, Laurent Faret et al. (2021) highlight the Central American populations as being in a "transitory" condition, as they are currently living in the

[1] People born in Mexico City.

capital even though they did not initially intend to settle there. They originally intended to go to the northern border of Mexico or the United States and can still maintain that objective. Moreover, as Faret (2017) points out, they use urban resources in the metropolitan area of the Mexican capital and develop transit strategies. Jessica Nájera Aguirre (2022) characterizes the precarious situation of recent immigrants to Mexico City coming from Central America, the Caribbean and South America, needing crucial access to the job market.

According to this extensive review of previous studies, there is a need to deepen the research on recent migration and urban processes, the regulations in Mexico City on the right to the city and, in particular, the Hospitable city and human mobility program. In addition, it is useful to highlight direct experiences in the Mexican capital through interviews designed to capture stories about the city as a lived space, following Lefebvre's original proposals and urban spaces for the construction of migrant citizenship.

The legal dimension of the right to the city in Mexico City

According to the legal framework established in the constitution (2017), the Mexican capital is proposed to be a city with an intercultural, multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural nature (Art. 2), a guarantor city (Art. 5), a city of freedom and rights (Art. 6), a democratic city (Art. 7), an educational and knowledge city (Art. 8), a city of solidarity (Art. 9), a productive city (Art. 10), an inclusive city (Art. 11), a habitable city (Art. 13), a safe city (Art. 14) and a global city (Art. 20).[2]

In this framework, the right to the city (Art. 12) is proposed as an axis for articulating aspirations and a normative reference that tries to take up the classic utopian approaches of Henry Lefebvre, discussions in international forums, urban movements of the capital and their struggles and historical references. The constitution begins by recognizing Mexico City as the product of migration. The preamble establishes that "Mexico City is an intercultural and hospitable city. It recognizes the heritage of great migrations, the daily arrival of neighboring populations and the permanent arrival of people from the entire nation and from all continents" and states that "the city belongs to its inhabitants".

Article 12 specifies that the right to the city is a collective right based on social justice, democracy, participation and respect for cultural diversity. However, the constitution itself, in article 22, distinguishes different populations and establishes who the native or original people are and who inhabits the city. This article categorizes original people, inhabitants, neighbors and passers-by. The differences established are the following:

[2] Before 2017, the then Federal District (DF, Spanish acronym of Distrito Federal) did not have a constitution and was historically subject to the national government. Therefore, the new constitution of 2017 created a new federal entity: Mexico City. With this instrument, Mexico City is officially designated as such, replacing the extinct DF.

a. Original, people born in the territory, as well as their sons and daughters.
b. Inhabitants, people who reside in the city.
c. Neighbors, people who have resided for more than six months. This quality will not be lost in the cases established by law.
d. Passers-by, to people who do not meet the above characteristics and transit through the territory.

Additionally, the constitution establishes the limitations to the exercise of citizenship in article 24, Section 5: "Mexican citizens, by birth or naturalization, have the right to access any public office in the city, including those of election". Considered altogether, these articles translate into relevant obstacles to the organization and political participation of those born outside of Mexico, especially for those who are in transit through the country and the capital city, because the condition of *passers-by* can be applied to limit the exercise of rights.

Despite the fact that the 2017 Mexico City constitution has been the most progressive in the country in addressing migration issues and incorporating the right to the city, these population distinctions are reflected in the social policy for migrant populations and their segmented social rights, as will be shown below.

Social policy for migrants

In its social policy for migrant populations, Mexico City has tried to reflect a utopian-legal dimension of being an *intercultural and hospitable city*. In 2006, the government of the capital created the first official institution for migrants, which was the Center for Attention to Migrants and their Families in the then Ministry of Rural Development and Equity for Communities (Sederec, Spanish acronym of Secretaría de Desarrollo Rural y Equidad para las Comunidades), which operated until 2018. During that period, programs such as "Hospitalidad y atención a migrantes y sus familias" (Hospitality and care for migrants and their families) and "Migrante, bienvenido a la Ciudad de México" (Migrant, welcome to Mexico City) were implemented. Among the public services offered were a migrant card for sending remittances, a migrant line for toll-free 1-800 calls from the United States and all of Mexico, procedures to obtain dual citizenship, and certified copies of civil registry records as well as driver's licenses (Ortega Ramírez, 2012, p. 153).

Under a left-wing government in Mexico City, an intercultural approach was proposed in the programs for migrants, with the aim of achieving differentiation from the national migration policy led by the National Action Party during the period 2006-2012, which was characterized by the party's democratic, Christian and conservative doctrine. With the entry into force of the Law of Interculturality, Attention to Migrants and Human Mobility in the Federal District (2011), the Sederec programs for migrants were formalized by adopting interculturality and the concept of *guests*.

According to this law, migrants are recognized as "guests" to prevent contradictions with national immigration legislation. The "guest", according to this law, is

> (...) Any person from different states or nations who arrives in the Federal District in order to transit in this state, regardless of their immigration status, and who enjoys the framework of constitutional and local rights and guarantees, as well as access to the set of programs and services granted by the Government of the Federal District. This definition includes international migrants, economic migrants, transmigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and their families living in Mexico City. (Ley de Interculturalidad, Atención a Migrantes y Movilidad Humana en el Distrito Federal, 2011, Art. 2)

In addition, the law defines a migrant person as "an original or resident person of the Federal District who leaves the federal entity with the purpose of residing in another federal entity or abroad". This is limiting since it is applicable only to migrants born in Mexico City. However, Article 3 of the same ordinance specifies: "The following are subjects of this Law: I. People from communities of different national origin; II. Guests; III. Migrants; and IV. Relatives of the migrant".

In 2018, with the start of Claudia Sheinbaum's government of the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (Morena) and her alignment with the national government of the same party headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the Sederec disappeared to create a new Secretariat of Peoples and Indigenous Neighborhoods and Resident Indigenous Communities, and migrant issues passed to the Ministry of Inclusion and Social Welfare (Sibiso, Spanish acronym of Secretaría de Inclusión y Bienestar Social). In the latter, a coordination of migrants was created, and the program called Hospitable city and human mobility was started in 2020, targeting the different migrant populations in the capital. The program was intended to reflect in public policy the utopian-legal dimension of being a "hospitable" and "intercultural" city for migrants established by intercultural law (2011) and the constitution (2017).

The Hospitable city and human mobility program is implemented for migrants who request services from the Sibiso. First, they are interviewed to identify their needs. Next, they are directed to Sibiso services or other entities. For example, there is unemployment insurance for the general population in Mexico City, which migrants can request regardless of their immigration status before the Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion.[3]

The Sibiso offers financial support for immigration and civil registration procedures, translation of official documents, job training, job certifications, referral to psychotherapy and, where appropriate, psychiatric care. For returnees and internally displaced persons, there is economic support to return to their place of origin, while for those originating from the capital and living abroad, mostly in the United States, the financial aid is for family reunions, passport and U.S. visa payments, and productive projects for the coinvestment of remittances for relatives of migrants residing in the city (Aviso por el cual se dan a conocer las reglas de operación del programa "Ciudad hospitalaria y movilidad humana" 2020, 2020).

[3] See www.segurodedesempleo.cdmx.gob.mx

To analyze the operation of the city hospital program, interviews were conducted first with important organizations for the defense and protection of migrants in the Mexican capital. These organizations cover various profiles and are relatively new since they were created between 2006 and 2019. As mentioned above, two of them are shelters for migrants of religious affiliation; only one is directed and integrated exclusively by migrants who returned or were deported from the United States (see Table 1).

Regarding the populations that the organizations serve and that reveal the migratory complexity of the city, one of the organizations mentioned: "The population that we serve includes people in return, people in transit, applicants in refugee status, stateless individuals (although no one of such status has come), women, families, LGBTQ+ population" (Interview Org_4).

Initially, the interviews revealed differences in the work of the secretariats. Some organizations had previously worked with the Sederec and contrasted their work with the Sibiso. The Sederec had directly called for organizations to access resources and provide their services to migrant populations and had even financed the set up and start of operations of one of the main migrant shelters in the capital. The Sibiso presented important changes because the resources migrants sought were to be channeled directly to the beneficiaries and not to intermediaries, such as organizations.[4]

Among the organizations consulted, two out of six considered that the Sibiso did not effectively solve important issues for migrant populations and that, in comparison, the Sederec had a better performance. In one of the interviews, they mentioned,

> (…) Even since the Sibiso appeared, I remember that they invited us to a meeting for training to introduce projects. Previously, with the Sederec, for example, we had five years of support as a project. The Sederec was one of the mainstays supporting us so that the shelter existed because with that first project they gave us, it was possible to buy a computer, that is, to set up the office, a pantry was bought (…). (Interview Org_2)

Three organizations considered the Sibiso's services to be adequate, although they pointed out some problems. For example, one of the organizations mentioned:

> We have been in dialog with the Sibiso about a specific project for youth, and one of the things they told us is that they did not have training funds, they are to train internal staff, so it is one of the several limitations... The secretariat does not know its own functions, its own capacities, and it has reduced the number of personnel, at least in the last year (…). (Interview Org_1)

This testimony is relevant because it differs from the content of the official documents of the hospitable city program, which mention training that can be directed to migrants and that can be financed within the framework of the program. The organizations also pointed out that sometimes there are bureaucratic limitations, such as budgetary cycles during which people can no longer access direct financial support. In particular, in the case of LGBTQ+ populations, their documents do not recognize their identity but rather their legal names, as mentioned below:

> All their documents have the legal name of the people, and for us, it is important that *they* can access a document where the social name of the

[4] At the national level, the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador has also adopted this policy.

> people is recognized, with the name of how they *identify* themselves. The aim is to break down these problems when applying for support or enrolling in a program because this discrimination based on identity continues to exist. (Interview Org_3)

The needs of LGBTQ+ migrant populations have recently become visible, especially because shelters for migrants of religious affiliation in Mexico tended to serve populations differentiated by sex; that is, they accepted only men or women. Therefore, in recent years, the importance of creating organizations that provide services to this community has become more evident, and shelters became more flexible to serve diverse populations and family groups.

Despite the problems mentioned, most organizations identify the Sibiso as the most important office of the Mexico City government serving migrant populations.[5] They mentioned the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City in second place in importance. One organization even mentioned that the Sibiso donated a small car, which has been very useful for its humanitarian work (Interview Org_2). Other institutions of the capital government the organizations referred to in the interviews as collaborators were the National Institute of Women, the Integral Development System for the Family, the Secretariat of Women, the Secretariat of Culture and the community centers called Pilares (Spanish acronym of Puntos de Innovación, Libertad, Arte, Educación y Saberes [Points of Innovation, Freedom, Art, Education and Knowledge]) of Mexico City.

In the contact work and the process of interviews with the organizations, it was found that the organizations know each other and academic specialists on migration issues, are linked, and share important spaces of influence in the context of migration policy. In addition, because of their location in the capital, their sphere of influence is not only local but also national since they coexist and interact with organizations in other territorial spaces of Mexico, especially along the northern and southern borders. They are also related to national and international organizations for the defense of human rights and migrants, particularly those from the United States. However, the interviews revealed a high specialization of the organizations in migration issues without direct links with urban problems, urban movements or experiences of struggle regarding the right to the city.

Social rights and migrant experiences in Mexico City

In the interviews with migrants, different experiences and problems with the exercise of social rights were reflected between those who arrived more recently in the city (at least six months) and those who had lived in it for up to nine years. Differences were also observed between those who were requesting refuge, those who had already been recognized as refugees, those who had a permanent resident card in Mexico and those who did not have immigration documentation.

[5] The interviews highlighted that one of the interviewed organizations did not know nor identified the Sibiso, although it is a relatively recent organization established in December 2019 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among those who identified as migrants in transit, although they had access to some government programs, the objective of continuing their journey north prevailed. For example, Lionel (not his real name) is of Honduran origin and migrated to Mexico City four times between 2016 and 2021; in that period, he also worked temporarily in a government employment program for migrants in Chiapas.[6] In his testimony, he stressed the small salary difference between his country of origin and Mexico, which caused him to remain alert to any opportunity that would allow him to go to the United States. He mentioned it this way:

> I come from Honduras, and the mission is, like everyone else, to get to the United States, me too; but if I get an opportunity, well I take advantage of it... The economy is almost the same as our country, we earn the same and then not with that. (Interview Person_7)

For his part, Ramón, who is 17 years old, is originally from El Salvador and has been a beneficiary of training in urban gardens in Mexico City. This interviewee commented that he learned to use natural insecticides and contrasted his previous learning about how to plant, cultivate and harvest corn and beans. He said that he does not intend to stay in the city but to go to New York to reconnect with his mother who has lived there for 14 years (Interview Person_1).

The option to continue migrating north may remain open, even for those who have started their refugee application process. This is the case for Elías, from Honduras, who is an applicant and said:

> Well, the truth is that it is very difficult to adapt to the city, which is very large and a bit dangerous, but to find a place to stay, one adapts a bit (…). What I had in mind is to stay, but if there is an opportunity to go to the border to cross, then I welcome it. (Interview Person_2)

This testimony reflects the difficulties involved in the process of adapting to a megalopolis, such as Mexico City, the assessment that it can be a dangerous city and the interest in the possibility of going to the northern Mexican border and crossing in the future.

Regarding the dangers of the capital, another of the people interviewed, David, from El Salvador, agreed by saying:

> (…) A little dangerous because I recently went out looking for a job and they assaulted me; they took away my phone and other things (...). Yes, I feel safer here than in my country, because it has not been so easily to live there with everything I have experienced, and arriving here I feel a little more freedom, as part of the LGBTQ+ community (…). (Interview Person_3)

Thus, David, who was interviewed in a LGBTQ+ community shelter, positively valued Mexico City with respect to his country of origin, saying that he did feel slightly more free and secure compared to his previous experiences; however, he already had a robbery experience. Among the people interviewed, two women reported experiences of direct violence. One of them is Ibeth, from Honduras, who reported violence in

[6] The interviewee did not give the name of the program where he worked. He said, "I saw that program, and I don't know what it was related to directly; all I know is that it gives work to migrants, and people help each other there".

her migratory path in the United States (where she previously lived) and in Mexico. She said that her own migrant mother was murdered in Piedras Negras and that she has a relative who disappeared in Acapulco. In her story, she emphasized how criminal organizations make money with vulnerable migrants: "(...) You see how they do business with immigrants (...), the immigrant is a source of money; if it is not one, it is for another (…)" (Interview Person_6). This is consistent with investigations into criminal violence in Mexico and profit on migration routes, the operation of so-called *gore capitalism*, and the crossroads between biopolitics and necropolitics in the context of migration (Valencia, 2010; Estévez, 2022).

The case of Sofia also revealed particularly difficult situations. She is originally from Honduras and was following refugee application procedures, migrating with her adolescent son and baby. Her greatest difficulty was to get the birth certificate of her baby. The baby was born while she was living on the street in Mexico City, but she didn't get a birth record. She also stated that she has relatives in the United States, while in Mexico, she does not have support networks. She relates the situation as follows:

> The truth is that we have no family, nothing, or someone who supports us, only shelters, but only seasonally. Well, the only solution would be to go to the United States, where we have cousins who could help us, and they tell us that if we can get there, then we are saved, but we only need to see if we can (....). Well, yes, we are in that situation, and I don't know; there is also the girl [the baby] who is not recognized; it is another case that we are facing. But the truth is, there is no progress (...). (Interview Person_5)

The case of Sofía illustrates the fact that migrant shelters, operated by civil or religious organizations, as well as the Sibiso, offer only temporary accommodations, which can lead migrants to find themselves on the streets. This case also shows that the health and civil registration services for babies of migrants are limited. Specifically, on the right to health services, David, from El Salvador, highlighted his practical difficulties in accessing services, although, legally, they are universal in nature and should not present obstacles. He described the case as follows:

> Once I went to the clinic in La Condesa, and I told him, —I feel very bad, I feel dizzy, —No, we cannot treat you because here, we help people with HIV disease, and there is a health center close by. And I left, and the girl told me, —No, I can't help you because what delegation are you from? —Delegation Cuauhtémoc. —Ok, you have to go to Cuauhtémoc. And I told her, —but right now I'm feeling bad. I suffer from hypertension, and I feel that my heart is going to burst (…). (Interview Person_3)

The right to health services for migrants, displaced persons and refugees presents limitations in practice when migrants are not accompanied by defense organizations, and even when they are treated in health services, medicines and treatments are not made available, but only rest is recommended.

Other issues that are gaining relevance with the increasing number of international migrants in Mexico are discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Despite the fact that Mexico City is very diverse and has advanced legislation in this regard, the migrants refer to this distinction. For those of the LGBTQ+ community, although they probably feel a little freer than in their country of birth, Elías, a native of Honduras, mentioned that there is *gayphobia* added to xenophobia. He put it like this:

> (…) The truth is that in quotes here Mexico City is open, in quotes, there is still a lot of discrimination, and for us migrants there is still xenophobia. For us, we are recognized by our hair or sometimes the different features—because you dress differently, because your hair is braided, because your skin is different and aside that you are from the LGBTQ+ community (…) there is gayphobia and also that you have to endure xenophobia (…). (Interview Person_2)

It is assumed that Mexico City could be a more inclusive space, as established in the legislation. However, for migrants, there are obvious problems of discrimination due to skin color and socioeconomic status, differences between nationals (Mexican people) and foreigners, and gender identity, which can cause them to suffer homophobia or transphobia. Even people who already have documentation as refugees recognize that Mexican society is not truly hospitable and inclusive. For example, Jaime, from Honduras, who is already recognized as a refugee, stated the following:

> I am already a refugee. The problem here in Mexico—I would like to stay because I love Mexico—the problem for us refugees is that there is no work, unfortunately. I have been here since December, almost seven months, and I have not had a job. The door is closed to us when we tell people, look, I come to look for work, I am a refugee, here is my permanent card that I am a resident, I have CURP, I have the papers you need, and I can ask them at Migration. But when I go to organizations, people say no, no, no, I do not hire a migrant. No, I am not a migrant, I am a refugee, I want to stay here in Mexico, I want to find a job, I want to be able to rent and be what I could not to be in my country—a free person and wanting to work, to get ahead, to fight. I love Mexico, but if I am given a better opportunity, I would look in another place, maybe Canada or the United States (...) I think the United States is prepared to receive refugees, and Mexico lacks a lot; there is no space for refugees. (Interview Person_4)

Thus, although Mexico City's social policy is broad, for migrants and refugees, there are limitations in the real exercise of social and economic rights, access to the labor market and health services, and inclusion in general. This implies that the social policy of the city must advance to promote the inclusion and integration of migrants, displaced people and refugees. Thus, it could be an option as a migration destination and not only a forced destination (because the United States and Canada are reducing their acceptance of refugees, but they are still the desired and imagined destinations).

Additionally, the interviews revealed that as individuals living in the city, especially people who already had their immigration document of permanent residence, their evaluations and experiences were more positive. For them, the services of the city hospital program offered by the Sibiso have had a positive impact on their migration trajectory. For example, the case of Francisco, originally from Guatemala, is illustrative. Currently, he has permanent residence and is 22 years old, but he arrived

in Mexico City at the age of 17 with his family. When he turned 18, he requested his documents independently and was supported by the Sibiso to continue his studies. He relates that he has finished high school and has held informal jobs; for example, he was a waiter's assistant. At the time of the interview, he had a more formal job as an interior design assistant. His plans were expressed as follows: "It would be to study here and continue studying, and depending on, well, what I learn in my studies, if there is the opportunity to study or exchange" (Interview Person_8).

Another illustrative case is that of Pedro, who arrived in Mexico City in 2012 and who, with the financial support of the Sibiso, was able to regularize his immigration documentation. He is now a permanent resident of Mexico. He said:

> I appreciate the opportunities that Mexico City gives to be able to work, live well, and have the options that we cannot have in our countries. Because the truth is, it is a very blessed country, and it has many job opportunities (…). At first, I worked as a freight loader, then washing dishes, and finally, I started working in sales in a shopping center in Plaza las Estrellas, but it was all a process. (Interview Person_10)

He mentioned that at the time of the interview, he had his own candle sales business and planned to set up another store.

However, some structural challenges of the city, such as access to housing, were also revealed among this population. The housing issue is key in the framework analysis of the right to the city, and in this topic, the interviews revealed the problems migrants face regarding rent due to the high costs of housing. It is even more difficult and almost impossible to purchase a room or house, as immigrants can begin looking for their first formal jobs only once they obtain immigration documents (temporary residence, claimant for refugee status or refugee status).

In this regard, one of the interviewees, who is of Venezuelan origin and has lived in Mexico City since 2017, mentioned:

> The rents are too high for what it is, so that is why it has been difficult for me to locate myself in a place that is really to my liking because it seems to me that it is somewhat overrated (...). The salaries are low, and then one knows that starting from scratch again will cost much more. (Interview Person_12)

Thus, a structural problem of the urbanization of Mexico City is reflected regarding where to live. Given the costs that migrants can assume, they tend to establish themselves in marginal or peripheral spaces.

In this section, the different difficulties and experiences of migrants in terms of their social rights, the urban environment of Mexico City and the practical limitations of the exercise of the right to the city were reported. Although the capital city attracts migrants given the large labor market it is expected to have, in practice, even with the program of Hospitable city and human mobility for migrants, displaced persons and refugees, important challenges persist such as discrimination, racism, xenophobia, access to health services, potential employers' ignorance about immigration documentation, insecurity, violence, access to affordable housing and the recognition of populations of diverse gender identities. As Jaime, from Honduras, said, his experience reflects how much progress must still be made in Mexico City to open spaces for migrants, displaced people and refugees.

Migration processes and the right to the city in Mexico City

How does the right to the city coincide with contemporary migratory dynamics in Mexico City? The review of research on the subject revealed the complexity of the right to the city, its trajectory from the perspective of utopia and its relation with urban struggles. Moreover, the interviews with organizations and migrants revealed the specific problems they face despite the existence of the hospitable city program.

Although the study first approached experiences, challenges and expectations in the context of the lived space, the bibliographic review revealed a long trajectory of urban struggles. In its constitution of 2017, Mexico City included the right to the city but did not note the political subjectivities regarding internal migrants. In parallel, the trajectory of the capital's migration policy is revealed from 2011 with the adoption of the intercultural city model and the development of the concept of *guest* applicable to migrant populations. These set a relevant precedent for the 2017 constitution, in which the capital is presented as an intercultural and global city that recognizes its extensive migratory history, turning it into a utopian-legal reference and looking forward into the future.

Of the four main lines of contemporary research identified on the right to the city and migratory processes, the first line of research considers migrants at the center as builders of the city. According to the testimonies of the interviewees, those who have resided longest in the city are the migrants recognized themselves as such.

The second topic of research highlights the importance of gender. In the fieldwork, four interviewees were women, and three young people belonged to the LGBTQ+ community. Gender is relevant in studies on the city and migratory processes because experiences and challenges differ by gender. The women interviewed emphasized the central role they play in their family and their concerns for their children and relatives in their migration process, in contrast with single migrant men, who presented more independent migratory trajectories. Young people from the LGBTQ+ community revealed problems of discrimination against them, as well as the importance of having spaces, such as migrant shelters, for the care of their community. This is a recent issue because in previous years, there was no specialized care, and migrant shelters of Catholic affiliation in Mexico were selective regarding the gender and age of the population served. Step by step, they have had to become more flexible because the profile of migrants and people on the move is increasingly diverse.

The third line of research concerns local migration policies. This aspect has been studied the most in Mexico City since the creation of the Sederec in 2006, when, for the first time, a policy for international migrant populations was formulated. However, this article shows that recently, the problems faced by new migrant populations and the contradictions with respect to the legal framework that is supposed to support the migration policy of Mexico City have become more evident, even with a specific public policy such as the Hospitable City program, whose stated purpose is to support the economic, social and cultural integration of migrant populations. Interviews with organizations and migrants revealed the specific challenges of social policy and the segmentation of the exercise of social rights.

The fourth aspect concerns the expansion of the right to the city by migrant populations, with an emphasis on how migrant citizenship is exercised in cities. In this research, the interviews with the migrants and with the defense organizations did not

reveal how migrant movements reconfigure or articulate the migratory and urban processes that uphold the right to the city; however, it is likely that their influence may grow in the future.

It is important to follow the construction of collective migratory enclaves more closely. Previous investigations that have done this in Mexico City include the study of Federico Besserer (2016) in the spaces of migrants' transnational urban indigenous communities, streets and neighborhoods by conducting field work in concrete urban spaces to document *spatial practice*, in the words of Lefebvre.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that since the end of 2018, the social policy for migrants in the city has faced significant challenges linked to the migrant caravans organized from Honduras to transit through Mexico and reach the United States. In November 2018, 15 000 migrants were concentrated in the Mexican capital when the first caravans arrived. In a very short period of only three weeks, a reception strategy had to be quickly put together by the capital Human Rights Commission (Calderón Chelius, 2019, pp. 45-46).[7] In this context, an emergency humanitarian protocol was created to attend to migrants in the city, with the anticipation that more caravans would arrive (Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal, 2019).

Despite the existence of this protocol, in December 2021, there was a confrontation with a migrant caravan that left Tapachula, Chiapas, in southern Mexico. This group included approximately 500 people from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Haiti. As they approached the capital, at the entrance to the Puebla-Mexico highway, riot police detachments from Mexico City were deployed. In the conflict, women, minors and men, as well as policemen, suffered injuries due to the decision of the capital authorities to take them to a shelter in Iztapalapa, while the migrant caravan insisted on heading toward the Basilica of Guadalupe (Olivares, 2021).

However, officially, the authorities of Mexico City indicated December 12, 2021, as the first day of clashes and stated that agreements were being reached with the organizers of the caravan (Secretaría de Gobierno, 2021). The academic migratory affairs program of the Ibero-American University documented the violence and human rights violations committed against members of this caravan and the negotiation process that culminated in the transfer of the majority of those involved to the northern border by buses, with the result that these migrants did not stay in the capital (*La caravana migrante en la Ciudad de México. 12-22 diciembre 2021*, 2022). In this context, the hospitality of the city for migrants was forgotten, and the right to the city was denied.

Likewise, at the end of the writing of this report, in December 2021, there was a significant flow of people from Haiti in Mexico City, and the press documented that they were settling in working-class districts of the capital, where access to housing can be cheaper (Muñoz Ramírez, 2021). Regarding the Haitian population, the deputy director in charge of the hospitable city program stated in an interview in January 2022 that "they are in transit" (Interview Sibiso_2022). In accordance with the constitution of Mexico City, populations can be "passers-by" in the capital, which makes it convenient for public policies for migrants if people do not declare their intention to settle in the city. The hospitality of the city, then, is limited regarding this profile of migrants.

[7] One of the strategies was to establish a temporary refuge in Jesús Martínez Palillo stadium in Iztacalco.

The idea that the Haitian population in Mexico City is in transit is refuted by the academic program of the Ibero-American University, which accompanied the migrant caravan that arrived in the capital in December 2021 and followed up on the surveys made by the Ministry of the Interior of members of this caravan. Its report stated that Haitians represent the largest group of the people who want to regularize in Mexico, followed by Hondurans, and that a third of the people who wanted to stay in Mexico were women and another third were minors (*La caravana migrante en la Ciudad de México. 12-22 diciembre 2021*, 2022, p. 21).

The condition "in transit" does not define a clear period; people can be considered in transit indefinitely if they do not want to stay or settle permanently. This situation is not exclusive to Mexico City because throughout the Mexican territory, migrations are being contained and are stuck indefinitely. The desired/imagined destination may be the northern border, the United States or Canada, but because of the migratory containment operations carried out by the National Guard, migrants cannot advance, and their time "in transit" is prolonged. This also occurs in other geopolitical spaces of international migration, such as the Greek island of Lesbos, where migrants and refugees who claim to enter the European Union are crowded together and face a situation of prolonged waiting, immigration containment and the status of "in transit".

As different studies have referred to Mexico as a "buffer country" and a "vertical border" (González, 2011; Varela, 2019) because of its location at the convergence of the migratory corridors that connect Mesoamerica and North America, it stops migratory flows. Although it is easier for local authorities to refer to migrants as "in transit", they are rather "in containment" and "waiting indefinitely". In Mexico City, this dynamic of containment contradicts the discursive and aspirational aim of being a hospitable city for migrants, refugees and displaced people, the sanctuary model of interculturality and the right to the city in the context of collective rights and social and immigration policy.

Conclusions

The following three dimensions are highlighted in this article: utopia, social rights and public policy. The analysis of these dimensions contributes to the investigation of migratory processes in urban contexts and the operationalization of the right to the city. The utopia, as proposed by Henry Lefebvre, is directed to change and reinvent the city and also the urban processes through the exercise of collective power, inhabit and use urban spaces, and deploy social reproduction and an urban revolution. In this regard, how is the right to the city being adopted by defense organizations and migrants in Mexico City?

Migrants and civil organizations deploy their strategies in the city and seek to make their way through the complexities of the capital. However, in the study period, a collective migrant expression upholding the right to the city was not observed. The

utopia dimension sets the right to the city as a collective axis for the exercise of practical citizenship and the participatory construction of the city by the people who inhabit it, regardless of their immigration status. The right to the city can be a cornerstone for the exercise of rights at the local level and the rethinking of citizenship(s) of the city, the urban territory, and local and transnational migration processes, although the field work showed that this was not yet explicitly stated by the people interviewed (migrants, defenders/activists or officials).

The right to the city could be fundamental for migrant populations in the capital in the future, given the legal references established in the constitution, although it is not yet an explicit collective demand. Projecting the right to the city in the context of migratory processes implies questioning how the local exercise of rights and the local construction of migrant citizenship in cities are reconsidered, especially for those who face bureaucratic obstacles to migratory regularization defined by the national government and who are classified as "migrants in transit", passers-by, temporary, on the move and without a settlement project. For these people, Mexico could be an unplanned or unwanted destination, as they yearn for and plan to reach other migratory destinations further north and search for opportunities to continue their journey.

Mexico City has historically attracted internal immigrants who demanded the right to the city from its peripheries and its belts of misery, and the possibilities remain open regarding how its immigrants, including those who are classified "in transit", will reinvent their utopian/aspirational project. However, as highlighted in the article, legally, the capital's constitution establishes limits to migrants' political exercise of citizenship and the legal figure of the "passer-by".

The utopian dimension and the legal dimension of the right to the city can be linked with the ongoing migratory processes. Then, the questions become whether transient migrants will reinvent the capital city, how they will exercise their right to change urbanization processes, how they will exercise their collective power and influence the spaces of representation, and whether they will be able to expand their rights from the grassroots level through their struggles as migrants and successfully achieve their collective demands to guarantee and enforce their right to the city. Therefore, the right to the city will imply the political and collective efforts of migrants, their processes of organization and resistance around their own definition of urban social justice. The rights to be, stay and belong comprise the exercise of migrant citizenship in the city.

In this sense, it is relevant to monitor the processes of migrant collective action in Mexico City regarding the right to the city and its utopian and legal dimensions in the demand for inclusion. The study findings show that although the constitution of 2017 recognizes the *right to the city*, this right has not yet been explicitly linked to the public policies for migrants and mobile populations implemented by the capital's government; neither hoist by the organizations that defend the rights of migrants in the city or by the migrant groups themselves as a way to strengthen their political participation.

Therefore, this first investigation analyzing the right to the city and international migration processes in Mexico City proposes the following future areas of research:

1. The visibility of migratory processes in historical urban struggles in the city.
2. The rethinking and exercise of migrant citizenship(s) in the city.
3. The use of urban resources and appropriation of residential and public spaces.
4. Migrants' political organization and collective action in defense of their own rights.
5. Anti-capitalist and anti-racist urban migrant struggles.
6. Local migration policies that guarantee and expand the exercise of social and political rights.

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