

# Emigration and Displacement in Ciudad Juárez, México

*Rodolfo Cruz-Piñeiro and María Inés Barrios de la O*

This work presents the emigration phenomenon of Ciudad Juárez which rose sharply between 2007 to 2012 because of an increase in public insecurity and unemployment in the city. The work discusses the emigration flows to El Paso Texas, and some municipalities of Veracruz, México. Analysis focuses on migratory flows, unemployment and crime rates and includes the results of 18 semi-structured interviews (5 in Ciudad Juárez, 5 in El Paso, Texas and 8 in three municipalities of the state of Veracruz), which registered the personal experiences of the emigrants and helped us understand this emigration process. We found that there was an association of emigration with unemployment and public insecurity in Ciudad Juárez and were able to identify a difference between those who moved to El Paso from those who went back to Veracruz.

*Keywords: Mexican border, emigration, unemployment, public insecurity, Ciudad Juárez*

## Introduction

From the 1970's until the early 2000's, Ciudad Juárez distinguished itself as a multifaceted city in social, economic and demographic terms. Since it is a city located along the Northern Mexican border and proximate to the us, Ciudad Juárez stands out as a city immersed in the process of capitalism and globalisation. Like other border towns, in Juárez migration played an important role in its population dynamics and growth. During the 1980's and 1990's it emerged as a key magnet for an assortment of people and migrants arrived from the center and south of Mexico, for work or attempts to cross to the us. This migra-



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tory flow caused the rapid growth of the city's population—its official growth rates were above 4%, well above the national average.

Immigration to Ciudad Juárez was caused by the city's economic dynamism, which was based on the establishment of the maquiladora export industry; an industry that maintained a constant demand of labour, which was supplied by new-migrants. The economic and population dynamism lasted for several decades until it began to decrease during the 2000's. The demand of labour from the maquiladora industry started to slowdown as well as the flow of immigrants; these processes were accelerated by two events: first the us's 2008 economic crisis deeply impacted Ciudad Juárez's economy and, second, the implementation of a federal Mexican government strategy against organised crime produced an unprecedented wave of criminal activities, which led many to describe Ciudad Juárez as one of the most dangerous cities in the world.

This article is organised into six parts. First an analysis of the social and economic context of Ciudad Juárez – which for more than three decades was characterized by full employment and a city that attracted immigrants – is conducted. The second and third parts describe economic and social decline, where high levels of public insecurity prevailed. The fourth section shows the impact of demography, specifically of the migratory phenomenon in Ciudad Juárez within a context of economic crisis and unemployment. In the fifth part, we present what we call a “human approach” to Ciudad Juárez immigration phenomenon with testimonials of some of the 18 interviews that we conducted in the municipalities of the state of Veracruz – Xalapa, Minatitlán and Coatzacoalcos – and in El Paso, Texas. Through these testimonials we were able to get to document the experiences of the immigrants who found themselves in a very insecure city and with no work of real prospects. The final section provides some conclusions of the emigration process and displacement that took place.

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## The Maquiladora Industry, Employment and Immigration

Over the past three decades, Ciudad Juárez was characterised as a magnet for migrants along Mexico's northern border. Its importance was based on the sheer number of migrants absorbed into the city because it was considered as *the* place for enhancing living conditions and comfort.

During the 1960's the implementation of programmes aimed at strengthening and helping the city's economic development propelled Ciudad Juárez's economy. The National Border Programme (Programa Nacional Fronterizo, PRONAF) was created in 1961, with the purpose of restoring the urban services of the Mexican border cities and improving their infrastructure and image, and specially, of providing a solution to the problems that those cities were then facing and the ones that were to come.

Also in 1965, the Border Industrialisation Programme (Programa de Industrialización Fronteriza, PIF) whose purpose was to develop the bases for the establishment of the Maquiladora Export Industry (Industria Maquiladora de Exportación, IME). Ciudad Juárez was considered an ideal place to establish and develop this industry due to its geographical location, economic incentives to investors and the infrastructure provided to install industrial parks.<sup>1</sup> From its beginning, the maquiladora industry – re: its production processes – started to specialise on the assembly of electrical auto parts, spawning a secondary sector as the main source of the city's employment. During the 1980's and early 1990's, more than 45% of the economically active population of Ciudad Juárez was involved in this industry.

The expansion of the maquiladora industry and the specialisation of its production processes contributed to the attraction and establishment of a number of transnational maquiladora plants, fostering the growth of the manufacturing economic activity of the region. Ciudad Juárez was considered as a strategic industrial municipality, with high rates of economic growth – the highest in the state of Chihuahua – and the most urbanised city with the highest concentration of population.<sup>2</sup>

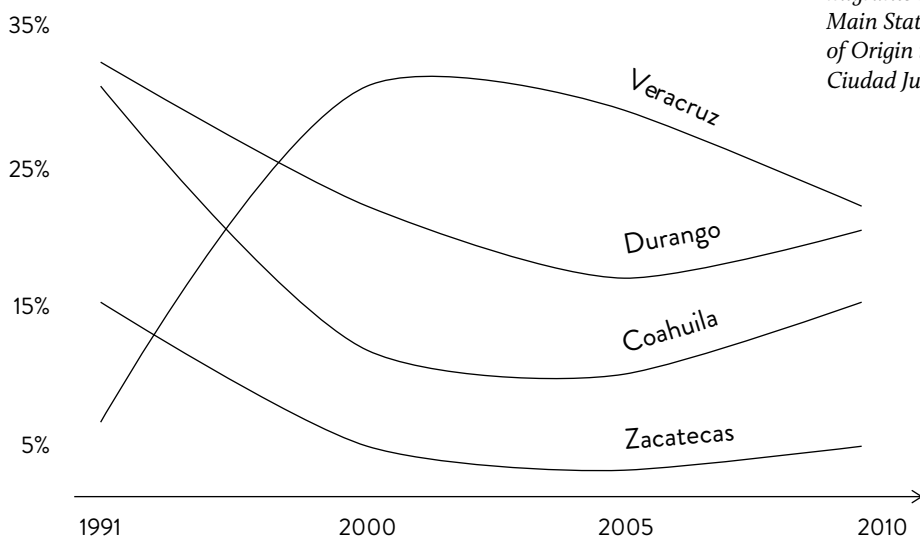
During the 1990's, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed and, together with the fact that 51.3% of the economic active population was in the economic secondary sector – of which the 84.21% came from the manufacturing industry – contributed to the further productive integration of the maquiladora industry. This boosted connections to their corporate headquarters around the world, resulting in a fragmentation of the production processes and a relocation of industrial plants in Ciudad Juárez.

Most maquiladoras needed intensive labour and a high number of employees so they attracted workers from the state of Chihuahua as well as from Southern Mexico and so since the 1970s the immigration flows to Ciudad Juárez maintained a positive trend. Over time these

flows created a regular migratory pattern that significantly influenced the social growth of Ciudad Juárez.

The first (1955) Population and Housing Census Enumeration helped estimate the behaviour of migratory flows to Ciudad Juárez and identified some patterns. Over the years some 80% of immigrants have come from the states of Coahuila, Durango and Zacatecas; most were in their productive and reproductive age and were employed by the manufacturing industry. However, by the beginning of the 2000's a new wave of immigrants arrived from Veracruz causing an overload in the manufacturing sector's labour force.

*Graph 1,  
Share of  
Recent Im-  
migrants by  
Main States  
of Origin in  
Ciudad Juárez*



*Source:  
The Combined 2000 and 2010 Mexican Population Censuses and the 1995 and 2005  
Housing and Population Census Enumeration (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y  
Geografía, INEGI)*

As Graph 1 indicates, more than 70% of recent migrants to Ciudad Juárez came from Coahuila, Durango and Zacatecas and there is an atypical flow from Veracruz. This new flow increased from 6% in 1995 to 30% in 2000 and became the main flow; this increase was of a 500% in only five years.

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Immigration to Ciudad Juárez plays an important role in its demographic dynamics. Of the total of 67 Chihuahua municipalities, Ciudad Juárez retains the largest population of immigrants. Table 1 shows that from 1990 to 1995 of the total number of immigrants arriving to Chihuahua, 68.83% headed to Ciudad Juárez. From 1995 to 2000 the largest migratory flow to Chihuahua took place and 77.10% of that flow arrived to Juárez, in other words 106,922 people arrived at this city.

Immigrants in Juárez by prior Residence (1995-2010)		
<i>Period</i>	<i>Number of immigrants</i>	<i>% of internal state immigration</i>
1990-1995	80,016	68.83%
1995-2000	106,922	77.10%
2000-2005	46,275	68.40%
2005-2010	31,721	54.40%

*Table 1,  
Source: Made  
from the 2000  
and 2010  
Mexican Pop-  
ulation Census,  
and 1995 and  
2005 Housing  
and Popula-  
tion Census  
Enumeration  
(INEGI).*

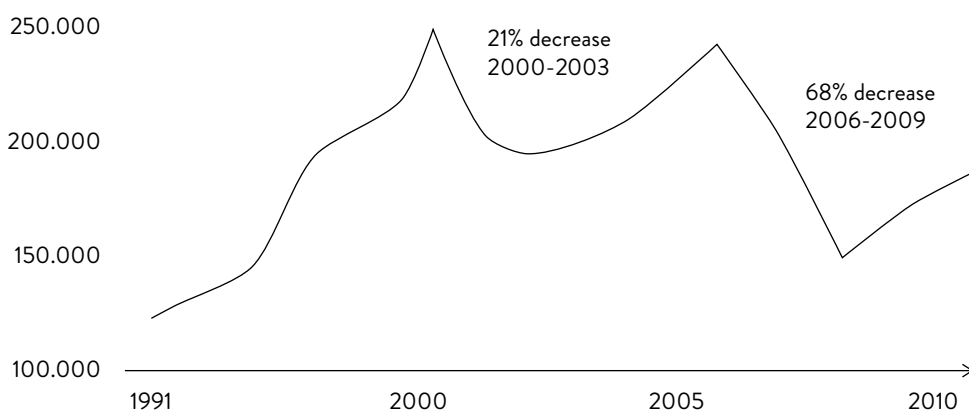
The oversupply of labour and the dizzying social growth of the population of Ciudad Juárez were characteristics that defined the city for many decades. Ciudad Juárez was known as a city of full employment and one of the most important immigration attraction poles along Mexico's northern border. This scenario helps measure the impacts of the 2000's economic crisis and the wave of violence and public insecurity experienced in Ciudad Juárez, which, in fact, exploded the emigration phenomenon.

### **Economic Decline and Unemployment**

The growth of the maquiladora plants from 1990 to 2000 resulted in an increase of 204% in the creation of direct jobs (127,149). However after 2000, structural and short-term factors caused the decline of the manufacturing activity in the context of an international economic crisis. The main factor that contributed to this decline was the that most of the plants were foreign capital, mostly US, and their dynamism depended on the US economy. Ciudad Juárez experienced two major economic crises, of US origin, in 2003 and 2009.

In 2000, a speculative boom in the real estate sector prevailed in the US, causing an enormous monetary liquidity, which along with poor government's supervision of mortgage credits resulted in a negative impact on US consumption and a decrease in interest rates. The US economic crisis rapidly and quickly impacted Ciudad Juárez—particularly its employment sector. There was sharp decrease and, in some cases, the total withdrawal of foreign investment from the manufacturing industry. Employment is one of the most sensitive indicators to economic fluctuations, and Ciudad Juárez was no exception. Graph 2 shows the impact of the 2001 crisis, when employment fell 21.94%.

*Graph 2,  
Number of  
Workers in the  
Manufacturing  
Industry  
(1990-2012)*



In 2008 another economic crisis hit the international markets, stemming from the US housing crunch. The so-called subprime crisis made an impact in the financial markets and the global economic activity and it affected the developed countries and especially the underdeveloped ones.<sup>3</sup>The 2008 crisis quickly struck Mexico's economy, and even more sharply and faster the local economy of Ciudad Juárez. The impact could be observed in the behaviour of predominant economic variables, such as the declining exports due to the decrease in aggregate consumption, falling foreign direct investment as well as the reduction of possibility of international credits.<sup>4</sup>

As a result the direct employment generated by the manufacturing industry in Ciudad Juárez was drastically destabilised. From 2006 to

*Source:  
Made from  
data of the  
Manufacturing  
industry,  
maquiladora  
and export  
services (IM-  
MEX-INEGI).*

2009 the number of jobs fell 68.82% from 239,165 to 164,612 and the number of workers with social security declined 18.12 % from 2006 to 2009.

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## Public Insecurity: A failed National Goal

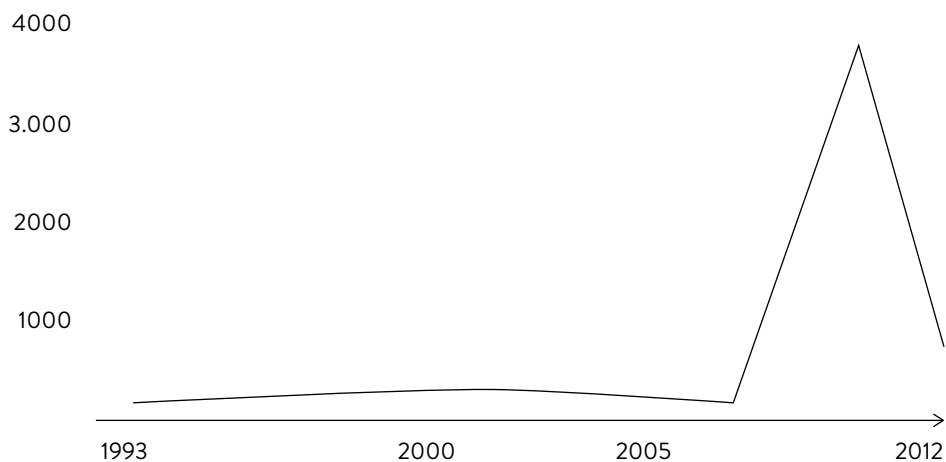
Violence, public insecurity, social crises and drug trafficking are the result of cyclical processes. Ciudad Juárez is a strategic point for drug and gun trafficking between Mexico and the US. During 2000, violence prevailed in this city as a result from public insecurity characterised by an unprecedented increase of the criminal indices, a situation that got even worse because of the lack of effective justice. Although this situation also happened in other Mexican cities, Payan mentions that it is necessary to consider Ciudad Juárez as a unique and revealing case.<sup>5</sup>

In 2007, the Mexican federal government presented the National Development Plan, which among other goals included the National Security Strategy to subdue drug trafficking and organised crime.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the year the Mexican federal government started implementing the National Security Strategy by deploying the army and police to the Southern state of Michoacán and also to some Northern states. On 28 March 2008 *Operativo Conjunto Chihuahua* was carried out involving 8,000 military personnel and federal policemen sent to ten logistic camps and 46 checkpoints in Chihuahua, most of which were located in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this military operation, violence in Ciudad Juárez continued to rise during the following two years. The presence of the military and policemen resulted in a declared war against organised crime. Not only were there civilian casualties, there was also police abuse and the violation of human rights.<sup>8</sup> The wave of public insecurity was expressed in social violence, which is measured by its impact on citizenship as well as by the number of homicides, assaults and rapes, which directly affected public trust and spaces.<sup>9</sup> During 2008, crime rates increased both in the state of Chihuahua and in Ciudad Juárez. Public insecurity produced a stigma of contempt towards public spaces and the citizens' apathy. Behind crime statistics the need of justice prevailed.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1990's and into the 2000's, homicide rates steadily rose. However, since 2008 there was a substantial increase, exactly when the national strategy against crime was implemented. Graph 3 shows

the number of homicides in Ciudad Juárez from 1990 to 2012, with its peak in 2010. During the five-year period, 2005-2010 homicides increased 1,700% from 223 homicides annually to 3,794. Ciudad Juárez was the Mexican city with the highest homicide rate and its people had to cope with a culture of violence.



Graph 3, Number of Homicides in Ciudad Juárez (1990-2012), Source: Vital Statistics (INEGI).

Homicide Rate for every 100,000 People in Ciudad Juárez (2007-2012)			
Year	Population by mid-year	Homicides	Rate per 100,000
2007	1,321,475	192	15
2008	1,325,562	1580	119
2009	1,329,662	2385	179
2010	1,332,333	3794	285
2011	1,336,454	2279	171
2012	1,340,588	750	56

Table 2, Source: Vital Statistics and the 2010 Population Census (INEGI).



In Mexico, the average homicide rate over the past two decades was between 16 and 19 homicides per 100,000 people; Ciudad Juárez was no exception until 2008, when the rate jumped. Table 2 shows the homicide rates in Ciudad Juárez from 2007 until 2012. From 2007 to 2008 the rate increased nearly 800% from 15 homicides per 100,000 people to 119. The peak was during 2010, where the rate was 285 homicides per 100,000 people. In other words, during 2010, 10.4 homicides were committed daily. This indicator presented Ciudad Juárez as the most violent city in the world, according to the Mexican Citizen Council for public security and criminal justice. Valenzuela points out that Ciudad Juárez was the leader of horror and death, a result of the so-called war against organised crime.<sup>11</sup>

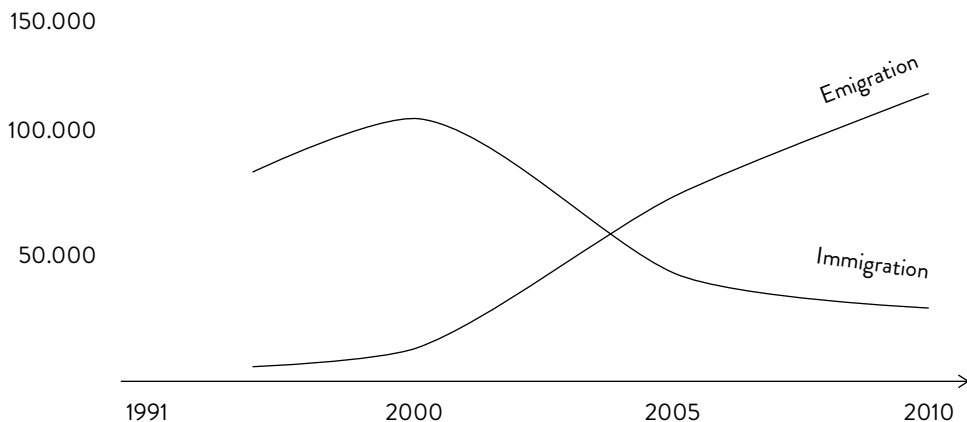
### Emigration of Ciudad Juárez

Emigration and internal displacement in Mexico are phenomena caused by a variety of factors at various levels, related to family, labour and health, among others. However, in recent years one of the most relevant causes of displacement is violence; a result of the drug cartel wars and the way the Mexican government has managed them.<sup>12</sup> Violence and public insecurity are factors that encourage and accelerate emigration. Rubio notes that people who live in cities with high criminal rates tend to move 4.5 times more than people who live in cities with average rates.<sup>13</sup> For many years, the economy, demographic changes, urbanisation and natural phenomena motivated the emigration in Mexico. Recently however, emigration is largely due to violence because, as it is the case in Colombia, this violence affects the social security context as well as the personal physical security of people, forcing them to leave their communities in fear of their lives.<sup>14</sup>

In Ciudad Juárez, the 2008 economic crisis and the scenario of public insecurity affected many of its dynamics including demographics. Even though, in the past decades, Ciudad Juárez experienced a positive and sustainable social growth, it saw a decline in population growth as violence rose, a decrease in immigration and an exponential increase in emigration, and certainly a significant rise in mortality.

Few studies have been conducted about the phenomenon of emigration in Ciudad Juárez; most have focused on immigration instead. Graph 4 shows the immigration and emigration flows of Ciudad Juárez

during the past 15 years. Beginning the 2000's there is a noticeable decline in immigration and a rapid increase in emigration.



*Graph 4, Immigration and Emigration in Ciudad Juárez (1995-2010), Source: The 2000 and 2010 Mexican Population Censuses, and the 1995 and 2005 Housing and Population Census Enumeration (INEGI).*

Between 2005 and 2010 Ciudad Juárez, a city that once attracted people, became one of high levels of emigration. Based on the net migratory rate we see the increase of emigration. In Ciudad Juárez this rate stayed positive; but from 2000-2005 it showed negative numbers as shown in Table 3.

Net Migration Rate in Ciudad Juárez (1995-2010)			
<i>Period</i>	<i>Immigration</i>	<i>Emigration</i>	<i>NMR</i>
1995	80016	3457	76559
2000	106922	14159	92763
2005	46272	70421	-24149
2010	31721	114324	-82603

*Table 3, Source: The 2000 and 2010 Mexican Population Censuses, and the 1995 and 2005 Housing and Population Census Enumeration (INEGI).*

During this period (2000-2005) emigration was higher than immigration, resulting in a negative net migration rate of 24,149 people. During those years, the emigration was so intense that more than 100,000 people left the city, and as a result, the net migration rate was of 82,603 people.

### The Human Approach to Displacement

To understand the nature of the displacement and emigration of people from Ciudad Juárez, we interviewed 18 migrants; the interviews were conducted in El Paso, Texas and in some municipalities of the state of Veracruz. These cities were chosen because of their relation and connection from a geographic and population level, to Ciudad Juárez. Despite the political and administrative boundaries that exist between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, there are ties that bind these two border cities together and there are established dynamics in economic, cultural and human activities—people on both sides of the border are in constant contact.

Yet, people from Veracruz who live in Ciudad Juárez, or “juarochos” as they are popularly known, have retained their presence. Since 1995 they were the main immigrant group, since Veracruz was going through an economic crisis and were specifically recruited by the manufacturing industry. The recruiters identified Veracruz as a potential supply of labour, which was urgently needed by the maquiladoras. The socio-demographic profile of the 18 people we interviewed is presented in Table 4.

Table 4,  
Socio-demographic  
Profile of the  
interviewed  
People

Source: Data  
Collected from  
Field Work  
(November  
2014 – February  
2015).

	Number of Interviews			
	18	5	5	8
	Ciudad Juárez	El Paso Texas	Veracruz	
Gender				
Male	4	2	2	
Female	1	3	6	
Age				
25-39- year-old	3	2	5	
40-54 year-old	2	1	3	
55 and more	-	2	-	

Continues

Marital status			
Married/ <i>de facto</i> union	5	3	3
Single	-	1	1
Divorced	-	1	4
Educational attainment			
Primary	2	2	2
Junior high school	2	-	2
High school	1	1	3
Bachelors	-	2	1
<b>Head of household</b> <i>Head of household</i>	4	4	6
Spouse	1	-	1
Son/Daughter	-	1	1
Migration legal status			
Resident	N/A	1	N/A
Citizen	N/A	1	N/A
Tourist	N/A	1	N/A
Political Asylum	N/A	2	N/A

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Of the 18 respondents, 8 were male and 10 female. Respondents were in a range of 25 to 58 years old, although the majority were between 25 to 39 year old; 6 people were in the range of 40 to 54 and only 2 were older than 55. 14 interviewees were heads of households and 55% of the total respondents had completed primary and secondary school. Because of the complexity of the border, the interviews conducted to people in El Paso, Texas, included asking their legal status. Five respondents of El Paso, Texas were residents, one was a US citizen, one had a tourist visa and two were political asylum seekers. Here we present some testimonials of the respondents that indicate the level of public insecurity and economic vulnerability which led them to leave Ciudad Juárez.

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*'I wasn't going to risk that anything could happen to my family.'*

Esteban, a 58 year-old surgeon, married and with two children. He was born in Ciudad Juárez, and remembered when it was a quiet town. He used to enjoy living in Juárez with his family. Esteban had a private practice for more than 25 years and lived a cross-border life between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso. When his children were born, in 2010, in El Paso, and because he was a US citizen, his family dynamics changed. In August of 2010, Esteban was kidnapped; when he was leaving his office a group of organised criminals approached him and at gunpoint he was abducted. Two days later the kidnappers contacted his family and asked for ransom, which was paid and he was released. At that moment he and his family moved to El Paso. When we interviewed him he said they did not intend to go back until things change in Juárez; they felt safe in El Paso.

*'Violence ended my life in Juárez.'*

42 year-old Carla was divorced and had two sons; they had lived in El Paso, Texas since 2009. Carla arrived to Juárez when she was a teenager; she started working in maquiladora industry, as a production operator. After marrying and becoming a mother, she started to get interested in helping solve some of Juárez social problems and fought for the protection of human rights. In 2008 when violence and criminal rates increased, Carla began to receive calls from criminals, threatening to kill her if she kept publicly demanding protection for vulnerable groups. In 2009 Carla was kidnapped and, after her release, she and her children asked the US government for political asylum. After a lengthy procedure asylum was granted (2011). Carla remained hopeful that the social environment in Juárez will change so she could return.

*'We only came here searching for life.'*

Samuel was 39, married and with three children, who was living in Valle de Juárez when he applied to the US for political asylum. When the Mexican army was posted in his town, public insecurity and violation of human rights rose and he considered his life was in danger. Samuel owned a small business and organised criminal groups began

to harass him; several members of his family were killed and his business was set on fire. In 2011, Samuel and his children asked for asylum, which was later granted. Samuel mentioned his only option to stay alive was moving to El Paso, Texas.

As these examples highlight, a key factor that caused the displacement to El Paso was the perception of insecurity in Juárez. Despite the proximity of these two cities, the differences in terms of security context are enormous. While in Ciudad Juárez, 3794 homicides were registered in 2010; El Paso, Texas was considered the second safest city in the US – according to CQ Press – with only 3 malicious killings that same year.<sup>15</sup>

The cases of Esteban, Carla and Samuel could be considered forced displacements because the reasons of their displacements are included in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees prepared by the UN High Commissioner.<sup>16</sup> This document includes people who have fled from home because their lives, safety and or freedom have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violence of human rights or other circumstances that seriously disturb public order.

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*‘There is no doubt the economic situation was  
what most affected us.’*

Miguel, 24 years old and single. He moved from Juárez in 2010 and was living in Minatitlán, Veracruz when we interviewed him. Miguel came to Ciudad Juárez in 2001 along with his parents; some of his relatives already lived there. When he got to Juárez, Miguel began high school and his parents were hired by one of the maquilas. When he turned 18 he also worked at the maquilas. However, in 2009 when the economic crisis started affecting the maquiladora industry, his contract was changed to part time with no food or transportation benefits. He quit as his parents went through the same situation. This drove them to go back to Minatitlan. In this case, despite the fact that this family was aware of the city’s violence, Miguel mentioned that it was not the reason they moved. He added ‘violence is something you get used to and it becomes part of your everyday life, however, being unemployed is something that takes out your hopes and confidence to keep on living.’

*'Veracruz without borders the only opportunity to return.'*

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Luis Flores, 43, former businessman, married with two children. He and his family lived in Juárez for 11 years; in 2010 they went back to Xalapa, Veracruz. Luis had landed a job three days after he arrived to Juárez. After gaining some experience he opened an import company, which provided him enough income to enjoy a better life than if he had stayed in Xalapa. However, in 2007 the economy faltered and he was forced to close his business and sell his possessions to pay debts. Despite being unemployed, Luis did not want to leave Juárez, he hoped things might get better. As time went by and the situation did not improve, he got to know a programme run by the government of Veracruz – Veracruz without Borders – with the purpose of “rescuing” people from Veracruz from the narco-violence that was unfolding. The programme offered those who wanted to go back charter plane tickets and support to reintegrate to Veracruz. It was then that Luis and his family decided to return. They were not direct victims of organised crime and did not feel at risk and still they chose to go back and try their luck again.

*'If we are going to die of hunger, we better go back to our land.'*

Elisa, 28, lived in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz. She and her husband decided to go back to Veracruz in 2010 after having spent 11 years in Juárez. Elisa moved to Ciudad Juárez in 1999; her cousins encouraged her to move to Northern Mexico. As soon as she arrived, she began working in a maquiladora plant, where she met her (former) husband, got married and had a child. She mentioned that public insecurity made them change their lifestyle—they stopped going out at night; changed the routes they took to go to work, and even had to reinforce the security of their house by installing more fences. However, this was never the reason for them to leave Ciudad Juárez. What most affected them was the economic crisis. Elisa and her husband lost their jobs, sold their property and returned to Veracruz, where they have faced challenges to assimilate to the social environment and finding employment.

Based on these testimonials, we identify reasons why some people decided to leave Ciudad Juárez. Those who moved to El Paso cited security reasons, since some of were victims of organised crime and their choice was move to survive. In these cases, we may be talking of forced displacement, the UN High Commission on Refugees defines a displaced person as one who has abandoned his home because his

life is in danger, either because of situations of violence, religious or natural disasters, and cannot return while the cause of the departure has not disappeared.<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, those respondents who decided to return to Veracruz did so, mostly, for economic reasons. As they lost their jobs and the economy did not seem to be improving, they found themselves in an uncertain situation and decided to return to their place of origin—a city they knew.

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## Conclusions

Ciudad Juárez has gone through a series of recent events that have negatively impacted its social and economic context. Over the past 15 years, emigration grew exponentially. From 1995 to 2010, the displacement of people went from 3,475 to 114,324, representing an increase of more than 3,000%. We found that unemployment and public insecurity were the main factors that changed the dynamics of the migratory process, generating new trends, meaning a decrease of immigration and an increase of emigration. Unemployment has explained most of the increase in emigration, but public insecurity, measured by the number of homicides, was also a cause.

Based on the results of the interviews that we conducted we could identify new trends of the migration flows in Ciudad Juárez, such as forced displacements, which were not part of the traditional migratory dynamics of the city. In this context, it is important to emphasize the factors that are contributing to the displacement of people. One of the new factors driving the movement of people in Mexico is the increase in violence and public insecurity. In this sense, the Mexican government has an obligation to recognise that there is a problem of violence and recognise people affected as forced displaced. Finally, in the context of Ciudad Juarez, creating a security policy to ensure the life of the people it is necessary, but a policy of economic and social development that prevents people fleeing the city for fear too, is necessary to livelihoods and also by economic factors such as the lack of employment.



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*Emigration  
and Dis-  
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