

Transit Migration in Family Units: Central American Women in Contrast with Men

Migración en tránsito en unidades familiares: mujeres centroamericanas en contraste con hombres

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ABSTRACT

The purpose is to explore whether the type of migratory mobility of women and men registered by Emif Sur during the 2016-2019 period is related to specific sociodemographic conditions. Through a binomial logistic regression, the probability of traveling without the company of family members or acquaintances is modeled. For this purpose, this survey is used as it is the only one that registers the flow of returnees by Mexican authorities, as well as sociodemographic variables. The results show that having a Honduran nationality, being a woman and having children, increases the chances of displacement with a family member or acquaintance, in contrast to having Guatemalan or Salvadoran nationality, being a man, and not having children. The article provides empirical evidence on how women's type of mobility is determined primarily by their family role.

Keywords: 1. family units, 2. women, 3. family role, 4. Central America, 5. Mexico.

RESUMEN

El objetivo es explorar si el tipo de movilidad migratoria de hombres y mujeres, registrada por la Emif Sur durante el período 2016-2019, está relacionada con condiciones sociodemográficas específicas. Por medio de una regresión logística binomial se modela la probabilidad de viajar sin la compañía de familiares o conocidos. Para esta tarea, se emplea esta encuesta por ser la única que registra el flujo de migrantes devueltos por las autoridades mexicanas, así como sus variables sociodemográficas. Los resultados muestran que tener nacionalidad hondureña, ser mujer y tener hijos/as incrementa las probabilidades de desplazamiento con algún familiar o conocido, en contraste con tener nacionalidad guatemalteca o salvadoreña, ser hombre y no tener hijos/as. El artículo ofrece evidencia empírica sobre cómo el tipo de movilidad de las mujeres está determinado principalmente por su rol familiar.

Palabras clave: 1. unidades familiares, 2. mujeres, 3. rol familiar, 4. Centroamérica, 5. México.

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INTRODUCTION²

Once the armed conflicts in Central America ceased in the 1990s, a process known as migration in transit began, which refers to people crossing through Mexico with the aim of reaching the United States (Castillo, 2010). Unlike traditional transit through Mexico, at the end of 2018 and beginning of 2019 the displacement of Central Americans was overt and in collective groups of thousands of people. Such events, which received the name of “caravans”, brought to light some particularities of migration in transit that can be highlighted.

The first of these particularities is that they were characterized by large numbers of people traveling in family units (Coubès, 2021; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021; Uribe & Calva, 2021). The second consists of the great demographic diversity immersed in them (Gandini et al., 2020; Uribe & Calva, 2021). The third is that caravans represented an opportunity to move avoiding the economic cost of paying coyotes and bribes, which evidenced that there were people who wished to leave their countries but did not have the economic resources to do so (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021). The fourth refers to the fact that mass movements promised greater security during transit, since otherwise individuals would be at the mercy of criminal groups and corrupt authorities (Pradilla, 2019, as cited in Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021).

Thus it is noted that mass movement during the migration process represents a source of protection against violence during transit, a way to avoid some of the costs of migration, and the possibility for migrants to bring their families with them. However, migration in transit has usually been analyzed in relation to total flows, without necessarily taking into account what part of this set consisted of family and group units, and what the factors associated with this type of displacement could be. The analysis of family groups on the move is relevant because they generally represent people in need of international protection. In the words of Tonatiuh Guillén, “it is a refugee crisis, not a migrant crisis” (Guillén López, 2023).

It is not easy to pinpoint the moment when mobility in family units began to gain more relevance, the main causes that motivated it, and why women are the ones who mostly participate in it. This research reviews some possible conjectures. One of the possible reasons for people to move in family units³ is that traveling with minors is essential to request asylum in the United States, because family units receive better treatment from immigration authorities compared to adults traveling alone (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021).

Specifically, in caravans, women travelled in greater proportion accompanied by at least one family member (82%), due to their sociocultural and historical assignment as caregivers and being more inclined not to leave their children behind (Coubès, 2021; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021).

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³ People who travel together and who share blood ties.

Another fundamental change that contributes to the departure of women with their children is the increasingly relevant role of women as heads of household (Castro, 2010). In turn, women could choose to travel accompanied, not by themselves, as a strategy to cope with risks and sexual violence along the way (Díaz-Prieto & Kuhner, 2014). In this sense, gender conditions impose differentiated effects between men and women when it comes to traveling with or without company.

This article explores the modalities of movement of Central American men and women, alone or in the company of a family member or acquaintance, linked to certain sociodemographic conditions during the period 2016-2019. The document is divided into six sections. The first develops the conceptual framework of “Gender and migration”. The second reviews the literature on the movement of women in family units, describing how gender status and family role are factors that influence women’s decision to undertake a journey by themselves or with company. The third section reflects on the role of women as caregivers during transit. The fourth presents the methodology. The fifth shows the results. Finally, some final reflections are provided.

GENDER AND MIGRATION

The conceptual field of gender is the one that provides the greatest analytical and explanatory possibilities to understand the difference in the decision making of men and women to travel with company or by themselves. Additionally, the notion of *familiarization* of migrations is brought in, in order to raise some hypotheses about the causes of family mobilization. Both concepts are included in the context of migration in transit, understood as:

the intermediate process between leaving the country of origin and settling, of variable duration, in which people hold on to the intention of arriving in another country in an undocumented manner (regardless of whether the planned destination is reached or not) (Jasso, 2023, p. 31).

Gender perspective will be understood as:

a system of signs and symbols, representations, norms, values, and practices that transform sexual differences between human beings into social inequalities, organizing relationships between men and women in a hierarchical manner, valuing the masculine as superior to the feminine. As a sociocultural and historical construction, it includes objective and subjective aspects that precede individuals, but that they at the same time continually recreate in their daily activities (Zavala & Rozée, 2014, p. 14).

The incorporation of the gender perspective in migration studies has allowed not only to point out the greater participation of women in migratory movements, but also to understand their increasingly decisive role in the different stages of the migratory cycle (Unda & Alvarado, 2012; Pedone, 2021).

The progress in research has been gradual, and can be ordered in three stages (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). The first, named “Women and migration,” sought to remedy the androcentric bias

of research and to incorporate women as active subjects in migration. This first approach represented a step forward and, at the same time, a partial view, since it prevented the understanding of how gender and the social system define the migratory process of both women and men (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003).

The second stage, “Gender and migration,” acknowledges the dimension of gender as a system of practices that configure and are configured by migration, and focuses mainly on two aspects: 1) the gender considerations that permeate migratory patterns, and 2) how migration reconfigures gender inequalities between men and women. The weakness of this perspective is that it omits that institutions are not neutral to gender conditions (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003).

The third stage, called “Gender as a constitutive element of migration,” warns how gender permeates a variety of practices, identities, and institutions involved in migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). Hence, certain societies produce exclusive labor markets linked to a gender system; for example, jobs associated with a female role, such as domestic work and care work.

The incorporation of the gender perspective in migration studies represented a step forward and led to the convergence of the feminization of migrations with their familiarization (Varela-Huerta & Pedone, 2024). In this transition, the term transnational motherhood also emerged, which made it possible to analyze the implications of migration in the forms of organization of productive and reproductive work (Pedone, 2021).

Along with the feminization of migrations, women have positioned as the first links in family migration chains, the economic support in places of origin, and those responsible for family reunification, which placed migrant families at the center of academic and political disputes, among others (Varela-Huerta & Pedone, 2024). The concept of familiarization, still undergoing construction and discussion, is understood as those migratory projects and processes that appeal to the mobilization of the entire household group, a group mobilization ideated a strategy to deal with insecurity along the way, given the deepening of borderization processes based on control, processes that are crossed by inequalities of gender, age, nationality, among others (Pedone, 2023).

From there followed the idea of the de-territorialization of motherhood, understood as the violent and structural processes in which States cause the departure of mothers with their daughters and sons with the purpose of reaching other territories, safer or with greater opportunities (Pinillos & Ortíz, 2024). The authors point out that the increase in the number of traveling mothers, accompanied by their sons and daughters, arose from the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016, which is based on human rights and the vulnerability of certain groups, such as women and children. The question is whether migrant motherhoods are emerging as a result of and in response to a State policy.

In this same sense, Torre Cantalapiedra (2021) considers that the control and protection policies of the United States, by restricting traditional access routes, such as work visas, promote displacement in family units, because traveling with minors can represent an opportunity to access U.S. territory, at least for a time, as asylum seekers. In words of the author: “these policies largely

explain the recent changes in the composition of migration flows, in terms of the growing number of migrants who traveled together with other family members” (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021, p. 77).

In the view of feminists Varela-Huerta and Pedone (2024), there are three causal dimensions of the expulsion of migrant families: State violence, market violence, and patriarchal violence; these violences will be experienced during transit, entrapment, and establishment, which are exacerbated if one is a woman or a minor.

In this article, the gender perspective will be useful to explore those conditions that promote the departure of women and family units, to account for the reconfigurations or subsistence of family relationships during the migration process, and to reveal the power and gender structures that make women vulnerable during transit, and that could force them to travel accompanied. The development of this work specifically aims to contribute to the understanding of the differences in the trajectories of men and women.

THE MOBILIZATION OF WOMEN IN FAMILY UNITS

Usually, women have been considered as the companions of men in mobility, and the common view is that the latter decide on the mobility (Zavala & Rozée, 2014) or immobility of the latter; however, some authors report that women have not only migrated as companions, but also solo or on their own (Woo Morales, 2007) as drivers of their own mobility and that of their families. Women move in search of economic, educational, employment, family reunification opportunities, (Ortiz Piedrahita et al., 2023) and of greater family independence (Woo Morales, 2007).

One of the most emblematic cases in which women are the ones driving mobility is that of Ecuadorian women heading to Europe, a migration that they first undertake alone, and later, but not always, they are joined by their husbands and sons and daughters in the destination country (Pagnotta, 2014; Pedone, 2021). Woo Morales (2007), when studying the migratory experience of Mexican women in the United States, also identifies them as the initiators of the family migration trajectory.

It should be noted that not all women’s mobility takes place as a voluntary decision. Gender violence can force them to leave their country (Woo Morales, 2007; Willers, 2016) and, having to leave at any moment, they are at a disadvantage in the transit process, since they do not have the time to plan the journey (Willers, 2016). Those who had more planning time tend to travel in groups, accompanied by friends or other members of their community, so as to have a safer trip (Díaz-Prieto & Kuhner, 2014). Companionship during transit then functions as a strategy for women to circumvent their vulnerable condition (Da Gloria Marroni & Alonso Meneses, 2006; Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021).

The exercise of violence does not end at the place of origin, but rather haunts them during transit (Landeros-Jaime et al., 2022); women are also immersed in power and gender structures that pushes them into vulnerability (Díaz-Prieto & Kuhner, 2014); in this way, the forms of domination

through gender relations do not disappear in the migration process, but are even reinforced by their situation as undocumented foreigners (Madueño, 2010; Varela-Huerta, 2017). In turn, violence against women worsens in a context of greater migration control because detention operations could come along with rape, inducement to prostitution, and other forms of feminicidal violence (García & Oliveira, 2006). In the existing research, it remains to be seen whether the companionship of other adults (for example, a romantic partner) guarantees women a lower risk of gender violence, or whether traveling with their sons and daughters increases their vulnerability.

During transit, women implement strategies to avoid different risks (Cortés, 2018); unfortunately, these decisions do not guarantee them a journey free of risks and sexual violence (Díaz-Prieto & Kuhner, 2014). It seems that, in order to ensure their safety from sexual violence, some women resort to the strategy of establishing romantic ties with a temporary partner during the journey (Díaz-Prieto & Kuhner, 2014). In this sense, it is relevant to explore how power relations between men and women could motivate a certain type of mobility that does not necessarily correspond to the way in which women would like to transit. Or how the sociocultural assignment of care conditions women's migratory trajectories and experience. The following section reflects on the role of women as caregivers during the migration process, whether their sons and daughters come along with them or stay in the place of origin.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AS CAREGIVERS DURING TRANSIT

It is important to note that migrant women keep strong links with their family life stories (Zavala & Rozée, 2014). In the lives of women, family and their role in it is a central factor, in terms of migration or otherwise (Pessar, 2000, as cited in Zavala & Rozée, 2014). Their mobility is framed by the conditions imposed by their gender and the course of their family life. In the words of Woo:

Gender relations are evident when women make the decision to emigrate, and this expresses greater autonomy or subordination according to the woman's position in the family, her life course, and the structural conditions of her society (Woo, 2007, p. 30).

In this same sense, women's migratory trajectories are different in terms of the possibilities that men have when mobilizing, particularly when they (women) have to take care of their sons and daughters or take charge of the family unit. Hence the importance of reviewing different characteristics that condition the type of mobility, since,

if the family reasons for female migration are not analyzed, nor the other economic reasons, nor the differences between the two sexes, nor the marital status or the number of children, this absence of women in migration theories will result in a bias for both men and women (Zavala & Rosée, 2014, p. 15).

At the moment, it is unknown what the composition of the family units in mobility is, and whether such groups are mainly made up of women with their daughters and sons or otherwise. If this is the case, such a pattern could be explained by the traditional sociocultural assignment of

care work to women (Mata, 2020; Ortiz Piedrahita et al., 2023). It is important to note that this role of caregivers even extends to women in the country of origin. A documented case is seen in Bolivian migrant women who prefer to leave their children with other female members of their biological family rather than with the parents of the children (Cavagnoud, 2014). It is also true that if the woman does not have a support network that can take care of her children, she will have to leave her place of origin with the minors. Some of the reasons that women give for leaving with their children are guaranteeing them better opportunities (Castro, 2010), protecting them from violence, and avoiding their recruitment (Agencia de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados [ACNUR], 2015).

Given the possibility that the journey may be unsafe for their children, women may be forced to leave the minors in the country of origin, even against their own wishes. This decision can cause them suffering; for some women, children who stayed in their country of origin can be a cause of concern throughout the journey (Mata, 2020). Unfortunately, leaving children in the care of other relatives is socially condemned, so these women are considered “estranged” women (Pagnotta, 2014) or are stereotyped as “bad mothers” (Mata, 2020). In addition, some of these women face the circumstance of having children both in the country of origin and in the transit country, which translates into a chain of transnational care (transnational motherhood); for example, they must keep economic and emotional ties with the children who stay behind (Mata, 2020). These circumstances and decisions by women about whether or not to bring their children with them are often non-voluntary:

The configuration of transnational families arises from fleeing, due to structural violence or intra-family and gender violence, so, for migrant women, leaving their children or taking them with them necessarily implies a forced and non-voluntary decision (Mata, 2020, p. 202).

Women who had to leave their daughters and sons in the country of origin even mention the high emotional cost, a consequence of the blurring of their social role as caregivers (Pedone, 2021). Nowadays, a change in Central American families that contributes to the departure of women with their children is the greater number of women who have to take care of the minors on their own (Castro, 2010).

Those who have held conversations with mothers who travel with their children often notice the persistence of the role of women as caregivers, and that of men as the main provider for the nuclear family.⁴ However, little research has explored whether a change of roles occurs during transit. The

⁴ Some women, although not biological mothers, take on the role of “mothers during the journey”; they promote the solidarity and subsistence of the group in mobility. During field explorations, the authors met women over 40 years old who traveled in mixed groups (several nuclear family units or extended families, and people who joined the group). These women, without necessarily being a family member, assumed certain responsibilities within the group in exchange for having companions during the migratory journey; they prepared food to sell, or cooked for everyone. The members of the group used to call them “mother”.

apparent persistence of gender roles during the migration process suggests that the departure of women with their children is a reflection of this sociocultural assignment.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this article is to explore whether the type of mobility of Central American people, alone⁵ or in the company of a family member or acquaintance, is related to certain sociodemographic conditions, in the years of transit from 2016 to 2019. Specifically, the relationship between a solo trip and the person's biological sex, age, country of birth, marital status, whether he or she is the head of household, whether he or she is the main breadwinner, whether he or she has sons or daughters, the number of economic dependents in the household, and the year in which the person began transit through Mexico are all explored. The choice of a quantitative approach responds to the interest in providing empirical evidence of the distinction between the movements of men and women, and how the type of movement responds to certain conditions, such as having sons or daughters or being in a domestic partnership.

In order to explore the mobilizations that occurred without the company of a family member or acquaintance, the flow of people returned by Mexican authorities from the Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Sur (EMIF Sur) (Emif Survey on Migration at the Southern Border of Mexico) is used. This has been conducted since 2004 for Guatemalans, and since 2008 it includes Salvadorans and Hondurans.⁶ The institutions that carry out this survey are the El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (COLEF) (College of the Northern Border), the Unidad de Política Migratoria (Migration Policy Unit), the Registro e Identidad de Personas (UPMRIP) (Registry and Identity of Persons), the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) (National Population Council), the Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (CONAPRED) (National Council to Prevent Discrimination), the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (SRE) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS) (Ministry of Labor and Social Security), the BIENESTAR (Ministry of Welfare), and the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences).⁷

The reference unit of the EMIF Sur survey is mobilizations and not number of migrants (Corona, 1997), because the same person could have made several crossings or mobilizations. In this sense, the mobilizations of men and women who intended to cross Mexican territory to reach the United States are explored. The number of people interviewed, who passed through Mexico during the period 2016 to 2019, is 12 549: 1 919 women and 10 630 men; 3 121 are Guatemalans, 3 653

⁵ From now on, traveling without the company of a family member or acquaintance will be referred to as traveling *solo*.

⁶ In this flow, migrants born in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras who stated their intention to reach the United States were selected.

⁷ Information on the survey can be reviewed at <https://www.colef.mx/emif/index.html>

Hondurans, and 5 774 Salvadorans. The number of valid cases for each of the models is presented in Table 2.

The sample design corresponds to a two-stage stratified model whose sampling frame is based on the temporal and spatial axes (COLEF, 2017). In measuring the precision of the estimates, the standard error is calculated, which accounts for the stratified sampling scheme. For these purposes, the Survey package of the R software was used, which allows defining the sampling scheme (svydesign), the estimation of means (svymean), the chi-square test for association (svychisq), and the estimation of the parameters of the binomial logistic model (svyglm).

The use of this survey implies three main difficulties. The first is related to representativeness; if the probability of being deported is greater for people who travel alone than for those who travel in company, then the survey will be substantially representative of the mobilizations of those who travel solo. This difficulty will intensify when people declare that they travel solo as a way to keep their family invisible.

The second difficulty is that the survey does not allow the identification of the type of family company: the partner, parents, mothers, brothers, sisters, among others; it only records the number of companions, family members and acquaintances together, whether there were minors among the companions, and whether they were their sons or daughters. The third drawback is that the survey interviews people over 15 years of age, and so the results of the article are limited to these age groups. Given the difficulty in determining the type of family company, this study is limited to exploring from a complementary perspective: “the mobilizations of those who traveled without the company of a family member or acquaintance.”

The year 2020 was not accounted for due to the reduction in the sample caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; in 2021 the survey was not carried out, and in 2022 the number of cases was insufficient to guarantee a representative sample (COLEF, 2020). The study period 2016-2019 allows the observation of mobilizations without the company of family members or acquaintances in the years surrounding the first caravans in Mexico (December 2018 and January 2019).⁸ The estimates use the year of the beginning of the transit and not the year of deportation, although in a large number of cases both periods match (98%).

In the descriptive analysis of the article, the proportion of solo mobilizations over time is estimated, and the proportion of those who traveled with their children in relation to the total mobilizations of people who traveled with company is estimated. The analysis presents the statistical precisions and provides the confidence intervals associated with the estimates.

By means of a logit (binomial logistic regression), the probability of traveling without the company of relatives or acquaintances is modeled. The dependent variable is “1” if the displacement was made without the company of a relative or acquaintance, and “0” if the transit was made accompanied by relatives or acquaintances. According to the literature reviewed, women are less likely to travel solo, so a negative effect on the probability of traveling alone is expected

⁸ The wording of the question about companions during transit changes for the years prior to 2016.

for them. In addition, the family role is a prominent element in the literature on the mobility pattern, so it is expected for “having children” and “marital status” to have a significant effect on the probability of traveling solo.

The independent variables are being in a domestic partnership, having children, and sex. The dichotomous variable of “in a domestic partnership” has a value of 1 if the person’s marital status was married or living in civil union, 0 for the rest of the cases. The control variables in the model are age, country of birth, being the head of household, being the main breadwinner, the number of dependents in the household, and the year in which the person began mobilizing through Mexico.

Rao-Scott tests were performed between each of the independent variables and the dependent variable (Lumley, 2010). The continuous variable of age did not meet the assumption of linearity; therefore, the decision was made to transform age into a categorical variable as follows: 15 to 29 years, 30 to 39 years, and 40 and older. However, the ANOVA test showed that it did not improve the fit of the model, and even the Rao-Scott test showed that there was no significant association between the age group and the proportion of solo mobilizations.

When incorporating the “transit year” there were two possibilities, including the variable as continuous or categorical. The latter option was chosen in order to make year-to-year comparisons with respect to the reference period of 2016. In this sense, it is expected that the mobilizations that took place in the context of the caravans (2018 and 2019) will have an impact on reducing the probability of traveling solo.

In each of the models, deviance analysis tests were carried out by incorporating an additional variable. The parsimony principle was chosen in the selection of the final model. In the interpretation of the results, the marginal effects of the variables included in the model are presented, that is, the marginal effect of each variable with respect to the reference categories. Table 2 shows the different models, adjusted prior to the final selection. In the final model, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was estimated by means of the usual cut-off of five units (Sheather, 2009), which showed that there was no obvious multicollinearity problem.

RESULTS

Caravans are not necessarily a new phenomenon, but are inserted in the broader phenomenon of migration in transit. From this particular point of view, caravans correspond to a movement to make the already existing phenomenon visible (Coubès, 2021). The question that emerges is whether the participation of family units in the transit to the United States became evident with the caravans or arose from them. Previously, it was suggested that, when a safer environment was perceived during the caravans, people saw the opportunity to bring their relatives with them.

Some authors explain that in the years prior to 2014, the family units that participated in these mobilities were insignificant (Coubès, 2021; Uribe & Calva, 2021). Transit migration prior to this year was mainly made up of young men, and only recently has there been greater participation by families (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2021; Uribe & Calva, 2021). Thus, the main transformation of

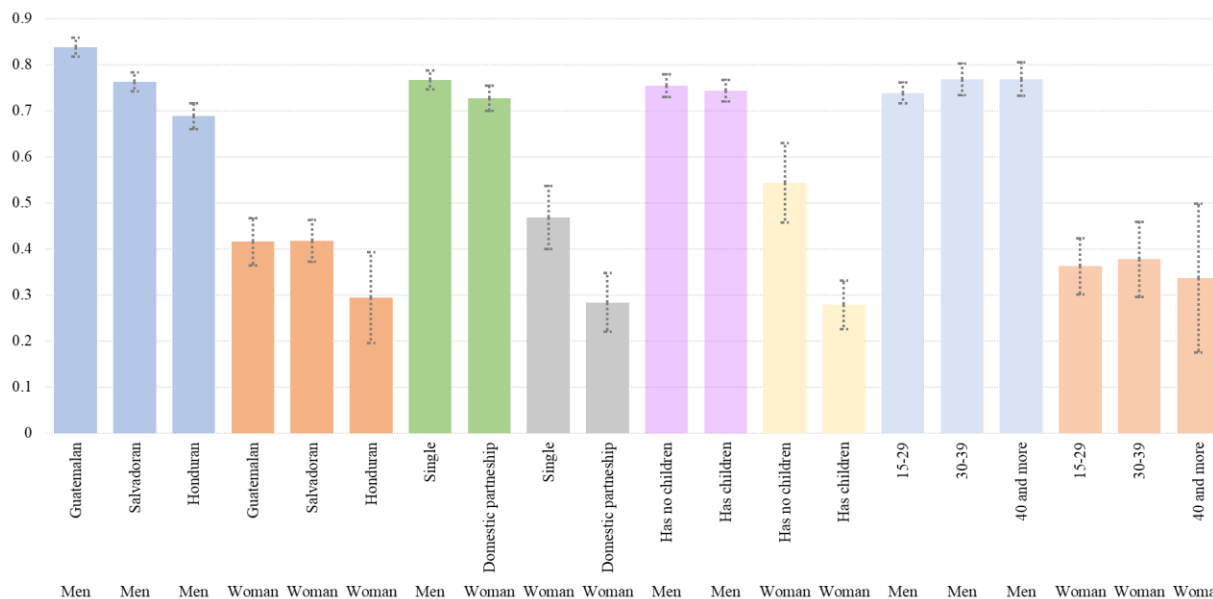
migration flows is manifested in the increase of families, and girls, boys, and adolescents on their own, who try to enter the United States without documents or who turn themselves in at ports of entry, requesting asylum (París Pombo et al., 2021).

The greater participation of families in transit is reflected in the relative decrease in people who travel through Mexico without the company of a family member or acquaintance. The breakdown by sex indicates that women travel solo to a lesser extent than men, a trait that is particularly accentuated among the mobilizations of Honduran women and, in turn, among those women who were in a domestic partnership and had children (see Graph 1).

While for men the proportion of solo mobilizations does not show a statistically significant change due to the fact of being in a domestic partnership or having children, in the case of women these family conditions represent an increase in the mobilizations they make in the company of family members or acquaintances. It remains to be seen what effect these family components have on the mobilizations of men and women once other variables are controlled for, such as the year of transit, the country of birth, whether there are dependents in the household, whether one is the head of the household, and being the main breadwinner.

In relation to the country of birth, it can be observed that Guatemalan men have a greater propensity to travel solo, followed by Salvadorans, and lastly Hondurans (see Graph 1). In the case of women, Guatemalan and Salvadoran women show a similar propensity to travel without the company of a family member or acquaintance, while Honduran women record the lowest proportion of traveling solo; however, due to the overall low representation of Honduran women in the survey, the difference is not statistically significant. According to the literature reviewed, there is little evidence about how the country of birth impacts on promoting one type of displacement over another. What there is actual evidence of is that a mobilization of the nuclear family could imply a non-return travel plan; in this sense, the people whose intention to stay in Mexico is lower are precisely the women who travel with sons and daughters and, in addition, those who have family networks in the United States (Coubès, 2021). People born in El Salvador have larger networks in the U.S., which may be driving their mobility in family units, whether nuclear or extended families.

Graph 1. Proportion of Solo Mobilizations of People Returned by Mexican Authorities by Sex According to Country of Birth, Whether they Were in a Domestic Partnership, Whether they Had Sons or Daughters, and Age Group, 2016-2019



Source: Own elaboration based on data from EMIF Sur regarding those returned by Mexican immigration authorities, 2016-2019 (COLEF et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

The relationship between the proportion of solo mobilizations is not significantly associated with age, according to the Rao-Scott test⁹ (p-value = 0.5299). The 95% confidence intervals for the age groups 15-29 years, 30-39 years, and 40 years and older overlap, showing that there is no significant difference in the proportion of solo mobilizations according to age group (see Graph 1). For the rest of the variables, the null hypothesis of the Rao-Scott test is rejected; these variables are sex, nationality, being in a domestic partnership, having economic dependents in the household, the number of dependents, being the head of the household, being the main breadwinner, having children, and the year of transit.¹⁰ This shows that these variables are significantly associated with the proportion of those who travel alone.

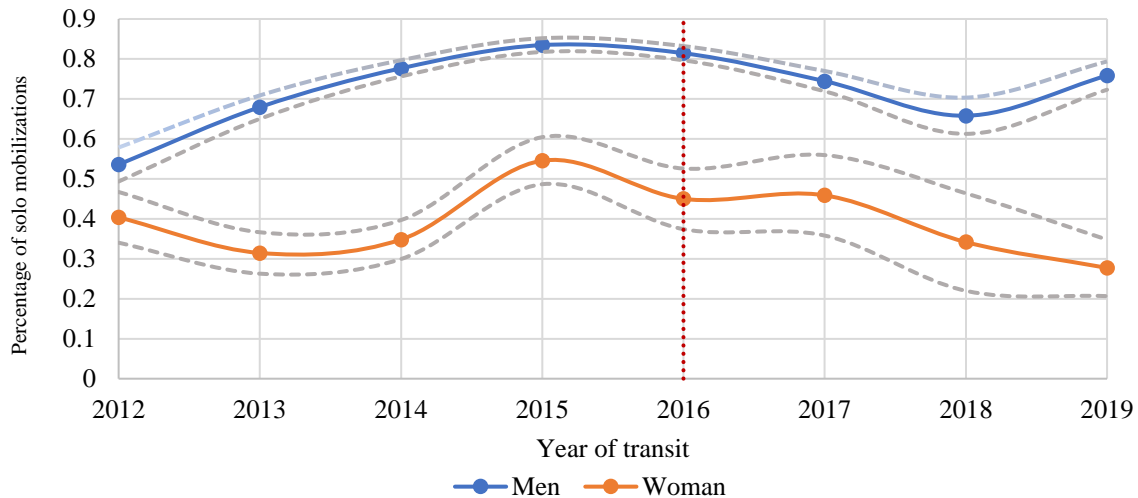
It has been reiterated that women are those who travel in company, so the proportion of their mobilizations without family or acquaintances is lower compared to the mobility of men (statistically significant differences) (see Graph 2). Taking 2016 as a reference and starting point, there is a downward trend in the proportion of mobilizations by women who traveled without the company of

⁹ The null hypothesis in the Rao-Scott test is that there is no significant association between the dependent variable and the independent variables (Lumley, 2010).

¹⁰ Sex (p-value = 2.2e-16), nationality (p-value = 2.725e-10), being in a domestic partnership (p-value = 7.79e-06), having dependents in the household (p-value = 2.695e-06), number of dependents (p-value = 4.167e-08), being head of household (p-value = 0.01979), being the main breadwinner (p-value = 0.006651), having children (p-value = 5.059e-08), year of transit (p-value = 1.911e-08).

a family member or acquaintance. Solo mobilizations by men also show a downward trend, but with an uptick in 2019. Throughout the period analyzed (2012-2019), the proportion of mobilizations by men returned by Mexican authorities remains above 50%. This fact could indicate that men continue to seek to travel solo, so as to make their mobilizations invisible.

Graph 2. Proportion of Solo Mobilizations of People Returned by Mexican Authorities According to the Sex of the Person and the Year in Which They Began Transiting Through Mexico, 2012-2019



* People who stated having the intention to reach the United States.

Note: The years to the left of the dotted line represent the proportion of those who traveled alone (mobilizations without the company of family members, acquaintances, and strangers), and the right side represents the proportion of mobilizations that occurred without the company of family members or acquaintances (they could have been accompanied by strangers). The entire time trend includes mobilizations without the company of a family member.

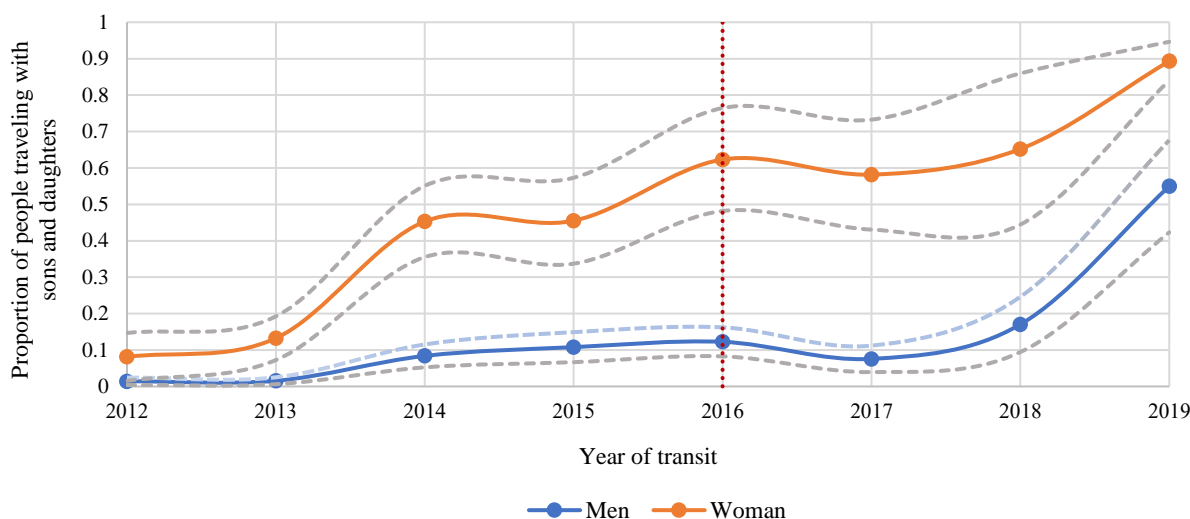
Source: Own elaboration based on data from EMIF Sur regarding those returned by Mexican immigration authorities, 2012-2019 (COLEF et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013c, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

The EMIF Sur survey does not make it possible to confirm who the migrants' companions were, whether it was a romantic partner, their parents, their siblings, or acquaintances. Despite this disadvantage, it is possible to calculate the proportion of men and women who traveled with at least one son or daughter, compared to those who traveled with company. Graph 3 makes it is easy to see that, out of those who declared that they traveled with company, women are the ones who mainly do so with their sons and daughters. The differences between men and women are statistically significant for each of the years in the period 2013-2019. From 2016, of the women who traveled with company, the vast majority traveled with at least one of their sons and daughters (over 50%), a trend that intensified in 2019 (over 86%).

The mobilizations of men also show a significant change between 2017 and 2018, and, furthermore, between 2018 and 2019. While in 2018, of the men who traveled with company, 17% did so with at least one of their sons and daughters, the proportion increases to 55%, that is, a

change of 0.38 (statistically significant difference). This sets a precedent for the year 2019, which also recorded the highest number of apprehensions of people in family units and with migrant caravans. One hypothesis is that, mainly for men, bringing their sons and daughters with them derived from the perception of safer transit in particular years, such as 2019. It should be noted that the sample of women who stated traveling with their children is small,¹¹ and so the confidence intervals are wide. To deal with this problem, the variable “has children” was incorporated into the statistical models, which has a more acceptable response level.

Graph 3. Proportion of Mobilizations of People Returned by Mexican Authorities who Traveled With at Least One Son or Daughter, Compared to the Total of Those who Stated Having Traveled With Company, 2012-2019*



* People who stated having the intention to reach the United States.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from EMIF Sur regarding those returned by Mexican immigration authorities, 2012-2019 (COLEF et al., 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013c, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

The results presented so far seem to confirm the increase of mobilizations in the company of family and acquaintances in 2019, even if the people did not travel in the caravans. This is consistent with what has been reported by other research (Coubès, 2021; París Pombo et al., 2021).

As for the relationship between solo travel and certain demographic and family conditions, the model shown in Table 1 was selected. In this model, single men, who had no children, who were born in Guatemala, and who traveled through Mexico in 2016, were taken as a reference. The negative coefficients of the statistical model reflect a decrease in the probability of traveling solo, that is, the covariates that reduce the probability of traveling solo are being a woman, being in a domestic partnership, and being a woman and having children (the two conditions together) (see Table 1 and Graph 4). The exponential of the intercept coefficient $-\exp(2.05) = 7.79-$ reflects that

¹¹ 641 cases out of a total of 1,895, between 2016 and 2019.

solo mobilization by men is almost 8 times more common than travel with company. In other words, solo mobilization is predominant in 2016 for men who were born in Guatemala, who had no children, and who were single. Figure 4 displays the marginal effects of a covariate once the rest of the variables are kept at the reference values.

Table 1. Logit Model for the Probability of Solo Mobilization

	Model 10	Model 10 (OR)
Intercept	2.05* [1.81; 2.30]	7.79* [7.55; 8.04]
Woman (ref:Man)	-1.04* [-1.41; -0.66]	0.35 [-0.02; 0.73]
Salvadoran (ref:Guatemalan)	-0.46* [-0.65; -0.27]	0.63* [0.44; 0.82]
OtherDomesticPartnership (ref:Single)	-0.36* [-0.58; -0.14]	0.70* [0.48; 0.92]
Has children	0.18 [-0.03; 0.38]	1.19* [0.99; 1.40]
Interaction_sex_children	-0.39* [-0.58; -0.19]	0.68* [0.48; 0.88]
Year of transit 2017 (ref:2016)	-0.72* [-0.93; -0.50]	0.49* [0.27; 0.70]
Year of transit 2018 (ref:2016)	-0.47* [-0.69; -0.24]	0.63* [0.40; 0.85]
Year of transit 2019 (ref:2016)	-1.09* [-1.54; -0.64]	0.34 [-0.12; 0.79]
Deviance	13585.48	13585.48
No. obs.	12232	12232

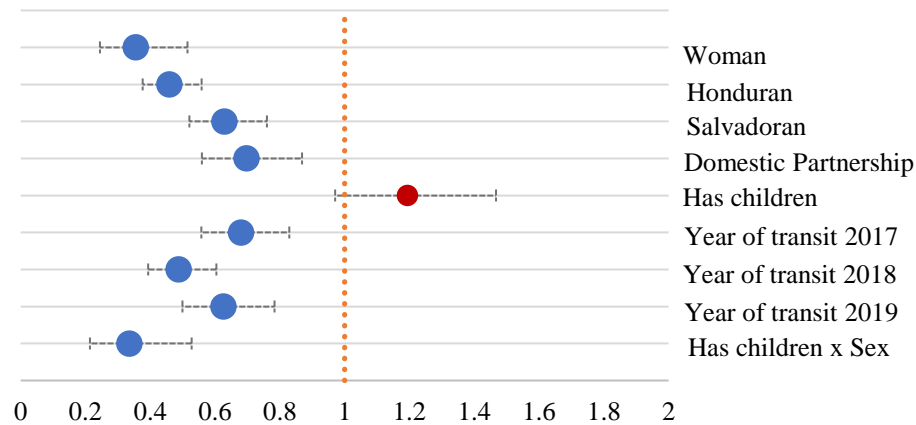
*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Confidence interval in parentheses.

Right column, exponentiated coefficients.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from EMIF Sur regarding those returned by Mexican immigration authorities, 2016-2019 (COLEF et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

Graph 4. Average Marginal Effects on the Probability of Traveling Solo



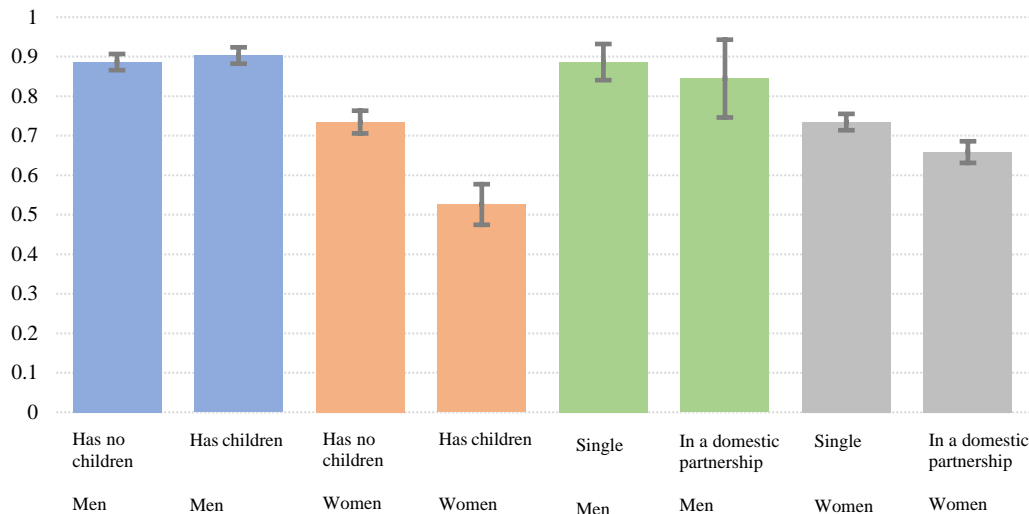
Source: Own elaboration based on data from EMIF Sur regarding those returned by Mexican immigration authorities, 2016-2019 (COLEF et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

Among single migrants without children, who were born in Guatemala, and who transited in 2016, the odds of the probability of traveling solo are 64% lower among women than the odds of men. In other words, out of every 100 mobilizations by men without the company of a family member, only 35 of the women did so under this same modality (traveling alone) $-\exp(-1.04) = 0.35-$. This comparison is made between those who did not have children; if the mobilizations of men and women who had children are now compared, out of 100 solo mobilizations by men, only 11 mobilizations by women occur without the company of a family member or acquaintance.¹² In general terms, the probability of traveling solo is higher for men than for women, a difference that is accentuated if they have children (see Graph 5).

It is important to clarify that the interaction between the variable “having children” and the variable “sex” turns out to be significant, and shows that “having children” has a differentiated effect between men and women. While for men the predicted probabilities of traveling solo increase when they have children, for women the effect is the opposite: having children reduces the probability of traveling without company (see Graph 5). Although we do not know the family life cycle of migrant women, and whether their companions were their children or partners, it is very likely that their mobilizations are framed within their family role (Pessar, 2000, cited in Zavala & Rozée, 2014), as mothers and caregivers.

¹² Odds ratio between men and women who have children = $\{\exp(2.05)*\exp(-1.04)*\exp(0.18)*\exp(-1.09)/\exp(2.05)*\exp(0.18)\} = \exp(-1.04)*\exp(-1.09) = 0.11926$.

Graph 5. Predicted Probabilities of Mobilizing Without Family and Acquaintances for men and Women, According to Whether they have Children or were Single or in a Domestic Partnership



Note: Probabilities calculated using Guatemalan nationality and year of transit 2016 as a reference.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from EMIF Sur regarding those returned by Mexican immigration authorities, 2016-2019 (COLEF et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

Once the year of transit through Mexico is accounted for, the variable “having children” was no longer statistically significant (a change in the coefficient from 0.23* to 0.18 between model 9 and 10, see Table 2). This result represents that, for men’s mobilizations, once the year of transit is accounted for, having or not having children no longer implies a significant change in the probabilities of traveling solo. That is, the fact that men traveled with family or acquaintances is more closely related to the year in which their mobilization began than to them having sons or daughters (the probability of traveling solo decreased in 2018 and 2019). In fact, it is not known if those returned by Mexican authorities were part of group mobilizations such as caravans; in any case, it seems that social perception in these years seemed to promise safer transit.

In contrast, for women, having sons and daughters has a negative effect on the probability of traveling solo, which does not change substantially if the year of transit is taken into account. In model 10, which includes the year of transit, the odds of solo mobilization for women who have sons and daughters is 0.40¹³ times the odds for those who do not have sons and daughters, keeping the rest of the variables constant. In other words, having sons and daughters decreases the odds of traveling solo by 60%. In model 9, which does not account for the year of transit, having sons and daughters decreases the odds of traveling solo by 59% (see Table 2).¹⁴

¹³ $\text{Exp}(0.18-1.09) = 0.4025$.

¹⁴ In model 9 it is $\text{exp}(0.23-1.11) = 0.4147$; in model 10, $\text{exp}(0.18-1.09) = 0.4025$.

Table 2. Logit Statistical Models for the Probability of Traveling Solo

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Intercept	1.09* [1.00; 1.18]	1.56* [1.41; 1.70]	1.79* [1.61; 1.97]	1.79* [1.52; 2.07]	1.81* [1.63; 2.00]	1.77* [1.59; 1.95]	1.79* [1.61; 1.98]	1.80* [1.62; 1.99]	1.67* [1.48; 1.85]	2.05* [1.81; 2.30]
Woman (ref:Man)	-1.64* [-1.87; -1.42]	-1.73* [-1.96; -1.50]	-1.69* [-1.93; -1.45]	-1.69* [-1.93; -1.45]	-1.69* [-1.93; -1.45]	-1.66* [-1.91; -1.42]	-1.70* [-1.94; -1.46]	-1.69* [-1.93; -1.45]	-1.01* [-1.37; -0.65]	-1.04* [-1.41; -0.66]
Honduran (ref:Guatemalan)		-0.76* [-0.95; -0.56]	-0.79* [-0.99; -0.59]	-0.80* [-1.09; -0.50]	-0.86* [-1.10; -0.62]	-0.80* [-1.00; -0.60]	-0.79* [-0.99; -0.59]	-0.79* [-0.99; -0.59]	-0.78* [-0.98; -0.58]	-0.78* [-0.98; 0.58]
Salvadoran (ref:Guatemalan)		-0.31* [-0.48; -0.13]	-0.37* [-0.54; -0.20]	-0.37* [-0.55; -0.20]	-0.39* [-0.57; -0.21]	-0.37* [-0.54; -0.20]	-0.37* [-0.54; -0.20]	-0.37* [-0.54; -0.19]	-0.38* [-0.55; -0.20]	-0.46* [-0.65; -0.27]
OtherDomesticPartnership (ref:Single)			-0.41* [-0.58; -0.25]	-0.41* [-0.58; -0.25]	-0.41* [-0.58; -0.25]	-0.46* [-0.69; -0.24]	-0.41* [-0.59; -0.22]	-0.37* [-0.60; -0.15]	-0.43* [-0.66; -0.21]	-0.36* [-0.58; -0.14]
Dependents in the household				0 [-0.25; 0.24]						
Number of dependents in the household					-0.04 [-0.13; 0.06]					
Head of household						0.09 [-0.12; 0.30]				
Main breadwinner							-0.01 [-0.19; 0.17]			
Has children								-0.07 [-0.28; 0.15]	0.23* [0.02; 0.44]	0.18 [-0.03; 0.38]
Interaction_sex_children									-1.11* [-1.56; -0.66]	-1.09* [-1.54; -0.64]
Year of transit 2017 (ref:2016)										-0.39* [-0.58; -0.19]
Year of transit 2018 (ref:2016)										-0.72* [-0.93; -0.50]
Year of transit 2019 (ref:2016)										-0.47* [-0.69; -0.24]
Deviance	14575.99	14304.83	13881.37	13855.21	13854.41	13878.68	13878.29	13879.86	13757.68	13585.48
p-value (deviance)	1.02E-48	4.74E-14	1.17E-06	0.9683555	0.4337372	0.3991351	0.8814919	0.5410478	8.74E-06	5.65E-09
No. obs.	12477	12477	12232	12209	12209	12232	12229	12232	12232	12232

Source: Own elaboration based on data from EMIF Sur regarding those returned by Mexican immigration authorities, 2016-2019 (COLEF et al., 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

In turn, being in a domestic partnership has a negative effect on the probability of traveling solo. When holding the rest of the variables constant, the probability of traveling solo is 30% lower for those in domestic partnerships, compared to those who are single. However, “having children” had an effect in the opposite direction for men and women, the interaction between being in a domestic partnership and sex turned out to be non-significant. In other words, once the country of birth, the year of transit, and having children are accounted for, being in a domestic partnership does not have a differentiated effect between men and women on the probability of traveling solo.

It is interesting to note that, while for men having children does not represent a change in the probability of mobilizing solo, “being in a domestic partnership” does have a negative effect on the probability of traveling without company (see Table 1). Based on these results, it is pertinent to ask the following questions: if traveling with company, do men mobilize first with their partner? Regardless of their marital status, do women travel primarily with their children? The data provided by EMIF Sur does not make it possible to answer these questions; additional sources of information are necessary for future research.

In relation to the country of birth, the odds ratios for traveling solo are 54% lower for Hondurans compared to Guatemalans, and 37% lower for Salvadoran compared to Guatemalans. In turn, if the odds ratios for Salvadoran and Honduran people are calculated, it is founded that the odds of traveling alone are 37% higher for Salvadoran compared to Honduran people (see Table 1). From this source, it is observed that Honduran men and women are more likely to mobilize in the company of family or acquaintances, followed by people from El Salvador, and finally Guatemalan people.¹⁵ Whether they are part of the migrant caravans or not, there is a tendency for Hondurans to travel in the company of relatives or acquaintances compared to Salvadorans and Guatemalans.

The negative coefficients for the years in which the transit began reflect a decrease in the probability of mobilizing without the company of a relative or acquaintance (see Table 1). The year taken as a reference is 2016, and from this year onwards it can be observed that the probability of traveling solo is lower for the three subsequent years (2017, 2018, and 2019). This result reflects the increase in mobility in the company of relatives or acquaintances. The most significant reduction in the probability of traveling solo occurred in 2018, and a smaller decrease in 2019.

Control variables included being “head of household”, being the “main breadwinner”, whether there were “dependents in the household” and the “number of economic dependents”; however, all of these variables turned out to have a non-significant effect on the probability of traveling solo (see Table 2). The ANOVA statistical test showed that the incorporation of such variables did not improve the fit of the model, so they were excluded from the final model. This result is associated with the fact that family composition on the journey depends mainly on the life course, gender, and nationality, and not on the socioeconomic level (Coubès, 2021).

¹⁵ In the case of the caravan that arrived in Tijuana in 2018, the proportion of those traveling with their children was similar for Hondurans and Salvadorans; Guatemalans traveled with their children to a lesser extent (Coubès, 2021).

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Travel without the company of a family member or acquaintance remains the predominant type of mobility; however, as other authors have evidenced, mobilizations in family units are acquiring an unusual relevance, and migration policies seem to be contributing in this regard. As mobility restrictions increase, the tendency to travel with the entire family unit is more likely, since the possibilities of making visits to the country of origin, returning to bring other family members, or seeking family reunification become scarce. In addition, violence can be another factor that forces entire families to leave and seek asylum in Mexico or the United States.

Research on migration to the U.S. has focused primarily on individual characteristics and the volume of people moving; in this sense, home and family have been taken into account to a lesser extent (Sandoval-Forero et al., 2013). This article continues to take individual mobilizations as its starting point, rather than families on the move; however, it places them in certain types of mobility, with or without family, and attempts to weigh the importance of the family role for migrant women.

The study of mobility in family units is also relevant due to the stagnation of families in certain spaces of prolonged transit. What new challenges does Mexico face with a greater presence of children and adolescents in its territory? How will Mexico guarantee access to their rights to health and education? Giorguli and Zúñiga (2019) refer to children returned to Mexico from the United States as transients who find themselves in the middle of the dichotomy between the semi-permanent immigrant and the permanent emigrant, a term that could be adjusted to children in transit through Mexico. Children heading to the United States, like Mexican-American minor returnees, will face vulnerability and difficulty in accessing their rights while in Mexico, because they are non-existent for State institutions (Giorguli & Zúñiga, 2019).

The family dimension represents an axis of differentiation in terms of the purposes of the migration project and its possible reorientation; for example, women who travel with their sons and daughters are the least likely to consider staying in Mexican territory (Coubès, 2021). Hence the need to know not only the volumes but also the composition of these mobilizations, or even the composition of family units: are the companions mainly extended family or nuclear family? Are the majority of family units made up of women with their sons and daughters without the company of their spouse? To what extent has family violence in the place of origin caused an increase in women fleeing with their sons and daughters? How has the female leadership of Central American families impacted women's movements?

In general terms, the results of the article reinforce the conjecture that women tend to travel in the company of family members or acquaintances, while men's mobilizations are mostly carried out solo. Additionally, it was empirically shown that for women "having children" represents an increase in the probability of traveling with a companion. In contrast, this family situation does not impact in the same way on the mobilization of men.

This fact can be explained in part by the sociocultural attribution of women as caregivers, which conditions their mobility and type of mobility, but also allows the free mobility of their spouses. Men have other possibilities in their trajectories, such as leaving their sons and daughters in the

care of other relatives without being socially judged. However, it is important to note that for men who had usually mobilized solo, in the years of the first caravans, whether they belonged to them or not, these represented an opportunity to bring their relatives with them.

In this particular investigation, it was found that Honduran people showed a greater tendency to travel in the company of family and acquaintances. Although there is no obvious explanation for this, it could be due to a radical decision not to go back. Regarding the years of transit, the hypothesis is consolidated that traveling in family groups was less common prior to 2014 and then there was a significant increase in 2019, yet not as intense as in 2018; however, solo travel continues to rank first, mainly among the male population.

A weakness of the research is that there could be a tendency to state not having traveled with the family, or that there is a greater probability of deporting people who travel alone. It is therefore necessary to resort to additional information resources or qualitative approaches that allow to delve deeper into the reasons for carrying out a certain type of mobility. A potential complementary source is the records on refugee status applications from the Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a los Refugiados (COMAR) (Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance), records that have been used to show the rise in applications in 2019, derived from a greater desire to settle in Mexico or to achieve free transit to the United States (Torre Cantalapiedra, 2020). If the COMAR records of requesting family units were public, the average number of people per case could be estimated, as well as which nationalities have the highest averages (highest number of family members per application).

In relation to women, it is difficult to determine to what extent power relations during transit may be influencing the type of mobilization they undertake; what stands out is that being in a domestic partnership and having sons or daughters has a greater weight on their mobilizations. This result matches with other studies that showed that a central factor in women's mobility is their family role. It is important to clarify that the results of this article are representative of the people who were returned and not of those who managed to establish themselves in the United States, or of those who stay or wish to establish themselves in Mexico.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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