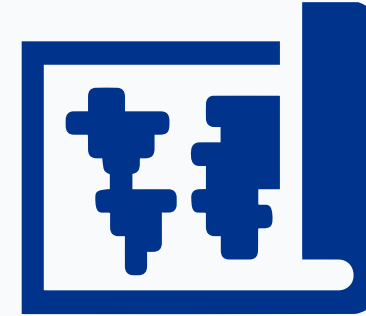


HIGHLIGHTS



1,835 migrants identified living in Central Tapachula.



34% of migrantes live in the city's southern zone.

Main nationalities detected



Honduras



Haiti



Cuba



Others:
Africa



Xenophobic attitudes against migrants.



High levels of insecurity In the Northwest of Tapachula's historic centre.



Crimes associated with human trafficking for sexual exploitation Central American female migrants make up the majority of the victims.



Closure of shelters due to COVID-19 has resulted in an increase in demand for rented rooms for lodging.

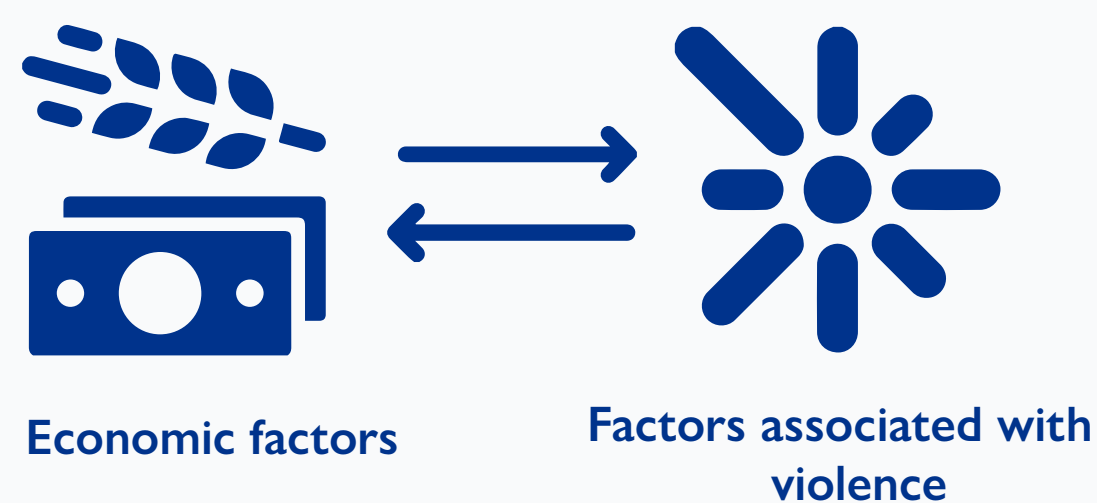
SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

The World Migration Report 2020 (International Organization for Migration, 2020) points out that **Mexico has become a destination for an increasing number of international migrants**. A proportion of these migrants remain inside Mexico after failing to reach the United States of America as planned. The report also signals an increase in the quantity of extra-regional migrants who travel through Central America and Mexico as they make their way towards the United States of America.

Mexico's southern border is a region with a strong routine cross-border mobility process, which indicates that the Central American population in Tapachula is not a new phenomenon. Since the beginning of 2019, the arrival of migrants from **Africa, Haiti, Cuba and, to a lesser extent, from Asia** has increased exponentially.

There is a correlation between economic factors and factors associated with violence making it difficult at the present time to distinguish between economic migration and forced migration, which is why migration flows appear to be consistent with these combined factors or mixed migration flows.

Currently, a high number of migrants have had to remain in the municipality of Tapachula, principally in its urban areas, awaiting the National Institute of Migration's (INM) resolution of their migratory status, or awaiting the resolution from the Mexican Commission of Aid for Refugees (COMAR) of their application for refugee status within the country. These matters have been the reason for the temporary settlement of the migrant population in different areas of Tapachula, with its central zone standing out as an area that has a marked presence of a migrant population

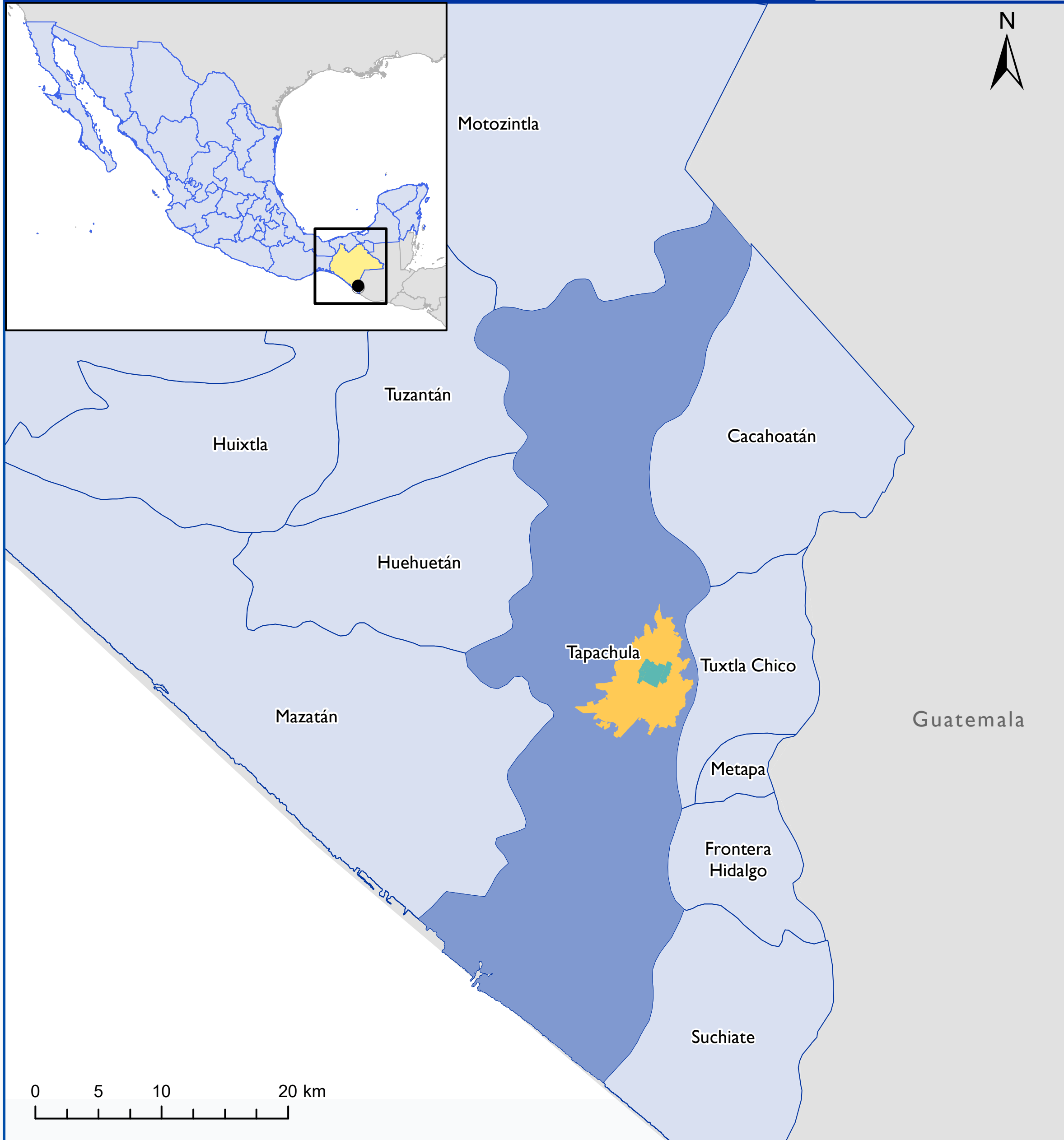


Miguel Hidalgo Central Park, Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021 / Itzel V



SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

Map I. Location of Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico, February 2021.



- Municipalities
- Municipality of Tapachula
- Tapachula
- Tapachula Central Zone

Source: ESRI and UN World Map

This map is for illustrative purposes only. The borders and names that feature on this map, as well as the denominations used, do not imply the official approval or acceptance on behalf of the International Organization for Migration.



METHODOLOGY

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a methodology used to follow and monitor a population's displacement and mobility. It is designed to collect, process and provide critical information for decision makers and response workers during emergencies, as well as to contribute to a better understanding of migration flows and displacement dynamics.

The DTM is made up of four standard components, and for the purposes of this study we will use the "Mobility Tracking" component, whose purpose is to quantify the presence of populations, the reasons for and duration of their displacement, as well as their needs within a defined area, with a frequency that captures mobility dynamics.

Round one of the baseline for mobility monitoring was carried out during the month of February 2021 and this initial approach to Central Tapachula entailed the following steps:



Selection of area of study: Tapachula's central zone was defined as the area of study due to the marked presence of a migrant population living and working in this part of the city. Previous DTM studies have determined the existence of numerous groups of migrant populations. Additionally, the safety conditions there allow for field work to be carried out.



Planning and use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for the mapping of neighbourhoods and key informants: A map was created of the colonies that make up the centre of Tapachula, as well as the businesses found there. The objective was to interview the business owners, since they are constantly observing their environment and interacting with the population. Such actors functioned as key informants.

Analysis of the information with the support of GIS and secondary sources: The information obtained from the surveys and the covering of selected avenues was processed by GIS in order to create the cartography presented in the following sections. Additionally, institutional documents were consulted to complement the obtained results on the existing socio-migratory dynamics in Tapachula.

The first map covers the zoning in the city centre's interior. Taken into consideration were the density of places offering lodging, the presence of businesses that functioned as key actors, urban design, security levels and the estimated number of migrants. In this way, three zones were identified with an unusual migratory dynamic:

1. North-Eastern Zone
2. North-Western Zone
3. Southern Zone

Field work and field survey: For survey work with the key informants in the central neighbourhood, five avenues were selected to cover in a North to South direction (see Map 2). The selected streets were:

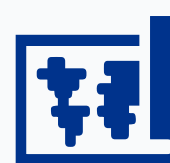
1. Eighth Avenue North/South
2. Second Avenue North/South
3. Third Avenue North/South
4. Seventh Avenue North/South
5. Thirteenth Avenue North/South



The gathering of information consisted of one or two surveys per block



The aim was to get to know the areas where migrants stay, and estimate their number, their nationalities, the kind of places they stay and if they have any needs they seek to fulfil with the support of local people.



Participative cartography techniques were used to orient key informants in their identification of the areas where the migrant population potentially stay.



A total of 53 surveys were completed upon analysing the field work, 51 with business owners and 2 with non-governmental organizations.

Among the identified **methodological limitations**, the following stand out:

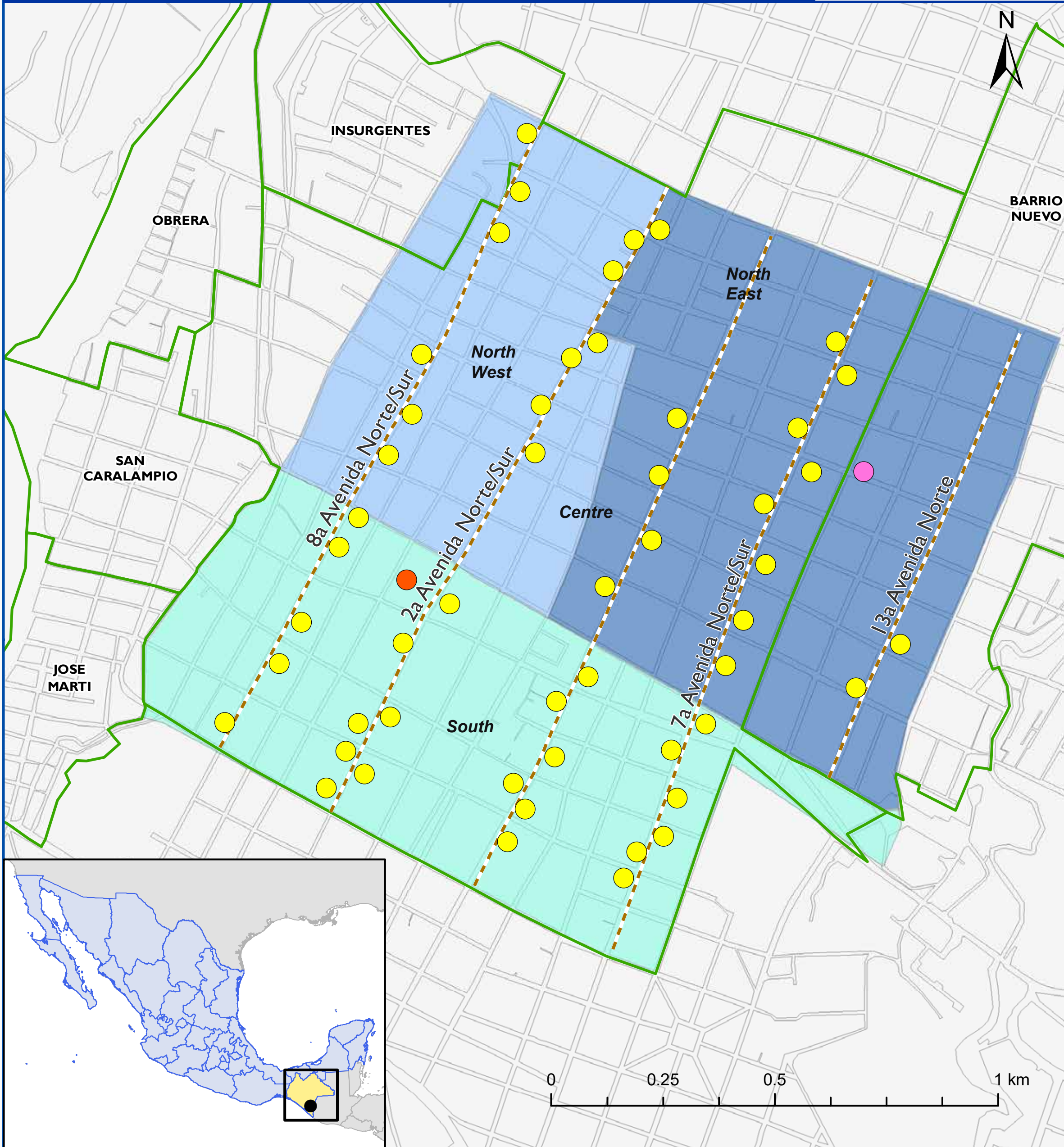
The key informants lack detailed information about migrants: The relationship between the migrants and the host community is not good, and as a result, key informants did not have detailed information about the migrant population.

High dynamism in the mobility of migrants inside Tapachula: This results in constant changes in the patterns of migrant settlement, as well as in the identification of vulnerable conditions in these populations or other existing needs.

High levels of insecurity in Tapachula's city centre: This situation made it impossible to carry out the field work or field observation necessary in identifying areas of high-density migrant population.



Map 2. Zoning of the centre of Tapachula Chiapas, Mexico, February 2021.



Symbols

- Field Observation
- Central Neighbourhoods

- Zoning**
- North East
 - North West
 - South

- Key Informants contacted**
- Businesses
 - Futbol Más
 - Territorio Joven

Source: ESRI y UN World Map

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DISTRIBUTION OF THE MIGRANT POPULATION IN CENTRAL TAPACHULA



Transport business offering travel to different countries in Central America, Tapachula, Mexico © IOM 2021/Itzel V.

The information collected via the surveys allowed the identification of the area with the largest migrant population, as well as their nationalities. It is worth mentioning that this being the first approach to the zone of analysis, **the results obtained are only estimations of the local population and it is not yet possible to determine the number of migrants by sex, age, or nationality.** However, these results allowed us to quantitatively and qualitatively profile the migrant presence in central Tapachula. (see map 3).

The surveys indicated an important presence of **people from Cuba and Haiti, followed by people from Central America, the majority of whom were from Honduras.** The group with the smallest presence in this sector of the city were those from Africa, however, **this migrant group's stronger presence in the north of the city** indicates a process of mobility in other sectors of Tapachula.

Main nationalities of migrants detected in Central Tapachula, 2021.



Honduras



Haiti

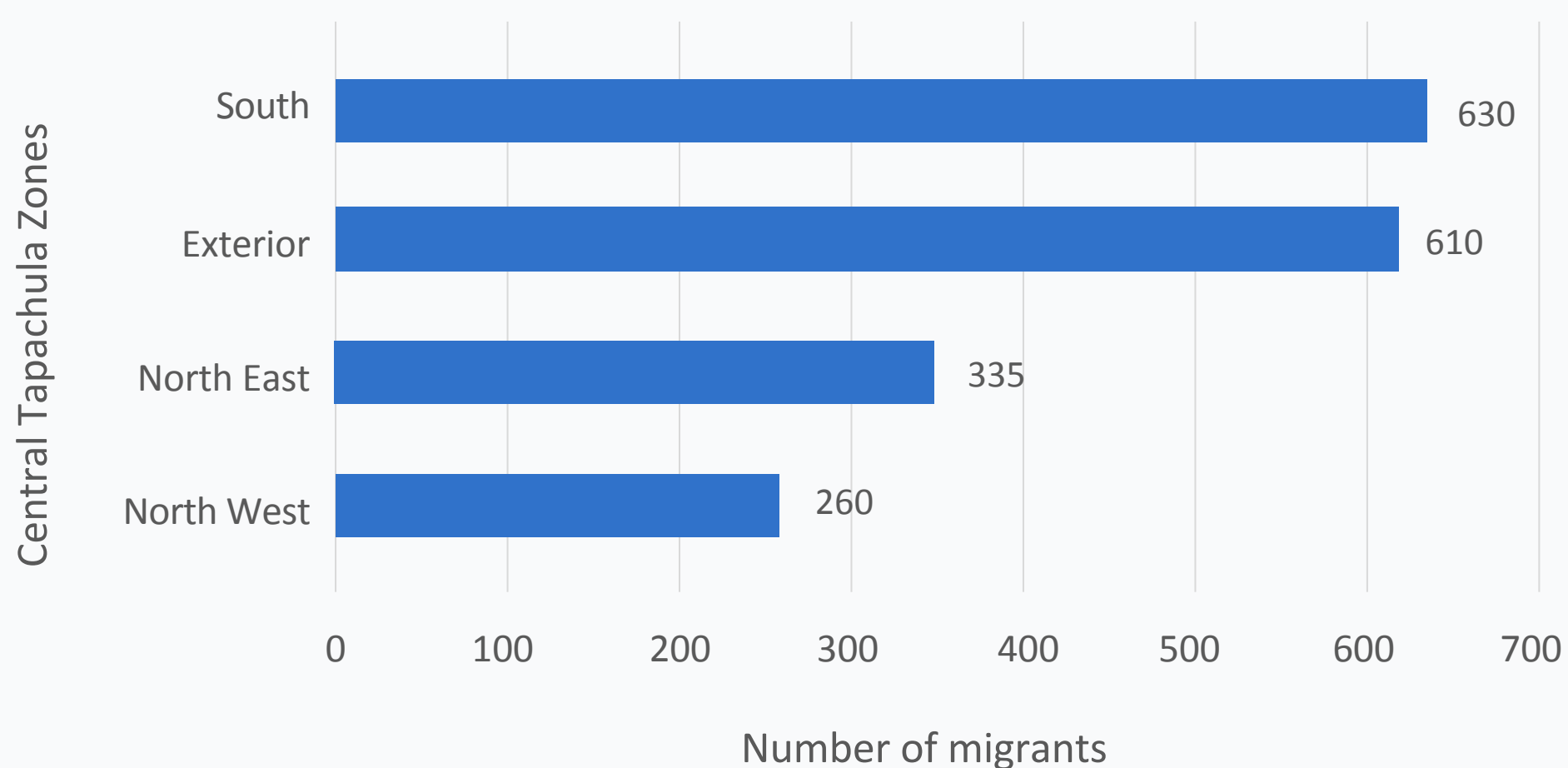


Cuba



Others:
Africa

Graph 1: Number of migrants by zone within central Tapachula, 2021.

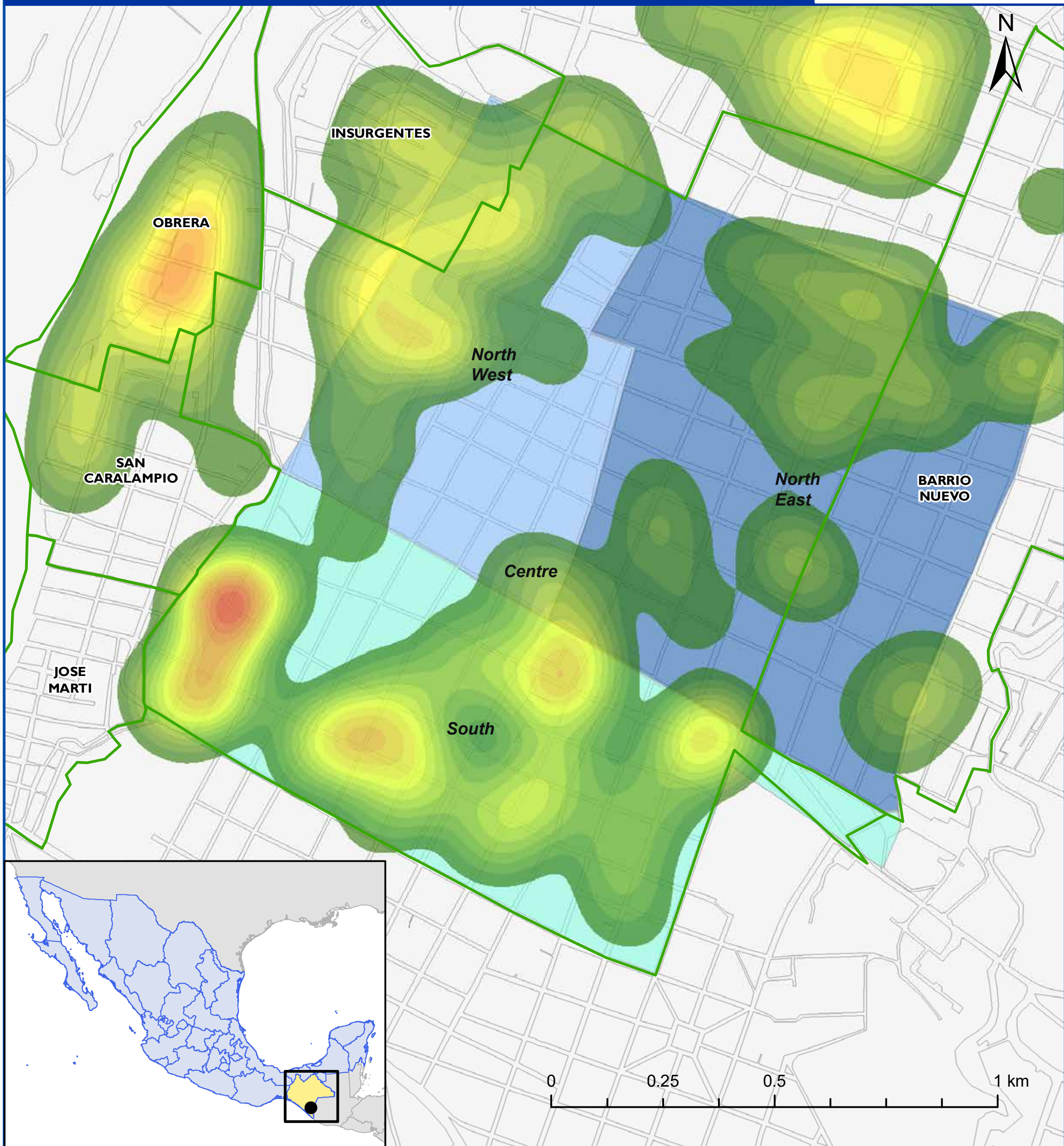


Source: Key Informants consulted (Tapachula, Mexico, 2021)



DISTRIBUTION OF THE MIGRANT POPULATION IN CENTRAL TAPACHULA

Map 3. Distribution of migrant population in central Tapachula, Chiapas, México, February 2021.



Symbol

Central Neighbourhoods

Zoning

North East

North West

South

Concentration of migrant population

More than 100

50

5 a 10

Source: ESRI y UN World Map.

This map is for illustrative purposes only. The borders and names that feature on this map, as well as the denominations used, do not imply the official approval or acceptance on behalf of the International Organization for Migration.

LAND USE IN CENTRAL TAPACHULA

In the southern sector the land use is traditional housing **where rented rooms tend to be where most migrants stay**. In quantitative terms, the aforementioned zone was indicated as the most densely populated by migrants after receiving an estimation from 630 foreign residents. Interestingly, the interviewees were able to easily point out where migrant people were staying. One place that local people mentioned on many occasions **was the “malecón” (waterfront) zone, between the San Caralampio, Obrera and Insurgentes neighbourhoods**, where there is a marked migrant presence. During the field visit, multiple houses were spotted with signs reading “Room for rent per day, week or month”, and migrants were seen constantly entering and leaving these residences.

In the North-Eastern sector, comprised of the centre and Barrio Nuevo, **land use is traditional housing just like in the southern sector**. In this sector, the places most often pointed out by key informants as migrant lodgings were rooms and tenement buildings; however, a hotel was also mentioned which is mainly used by the Haitian migrant population. According to the field observations and the key informants, **a lesser migrant presence around the 300-person mark was quantified**. There were **significantly less** signs advertising places to stay as well as business owners willing to be surveyed, except for in the north of this sector, which hosts a considerable number of migrants.

In the North-Western sector, land use is of the **“Urban Centre” type, where the majority of buildings have a mixed use, both commercial and residential**. This was corroborated after covering the Eighth and the Second avenue North where the ground floors are businesses and the upper floors are rooms, hotels, houses or tenement buildings. This is where it was possible to directly observe migrants from **Cuba, Haiti and Honduras** in public spaces. The low number of migrants estimated is directly related to the difficulty in accessing and polling key informants, who refused because they **did not want to neglect their businesses**. Nevertheless, those who did agree to answer mentioned that the “malecón” (waterfront) zone had a strong migrant presence, just like in the north of the analysed zone.

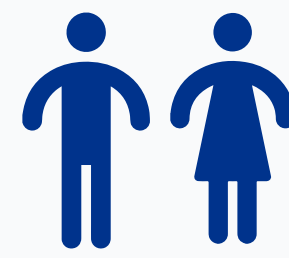


Miguel Hidalgo Central Park, Tapachula, Mexico © IOM 2021/Itzel V.

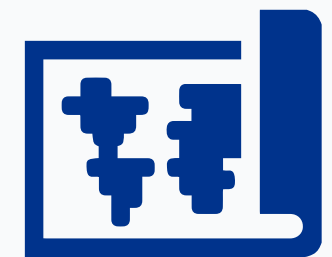
Southern Sector



Residential land use



630 foreign residents

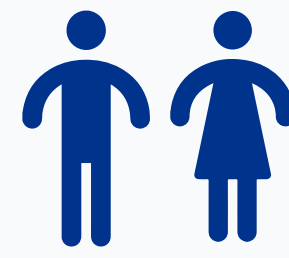


Important Zone: “El Malecón”

North East Sector



Residential land use

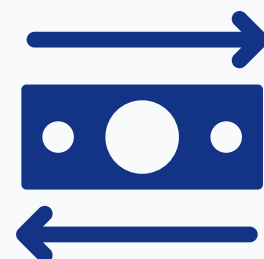


≈ 300 foreign residents

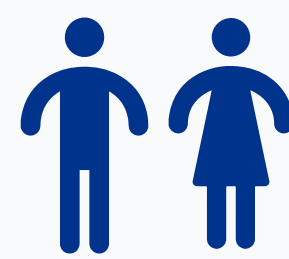


Reduced places of lodging

West Sector



Urban centre: commercial and residential



260 foreign residents

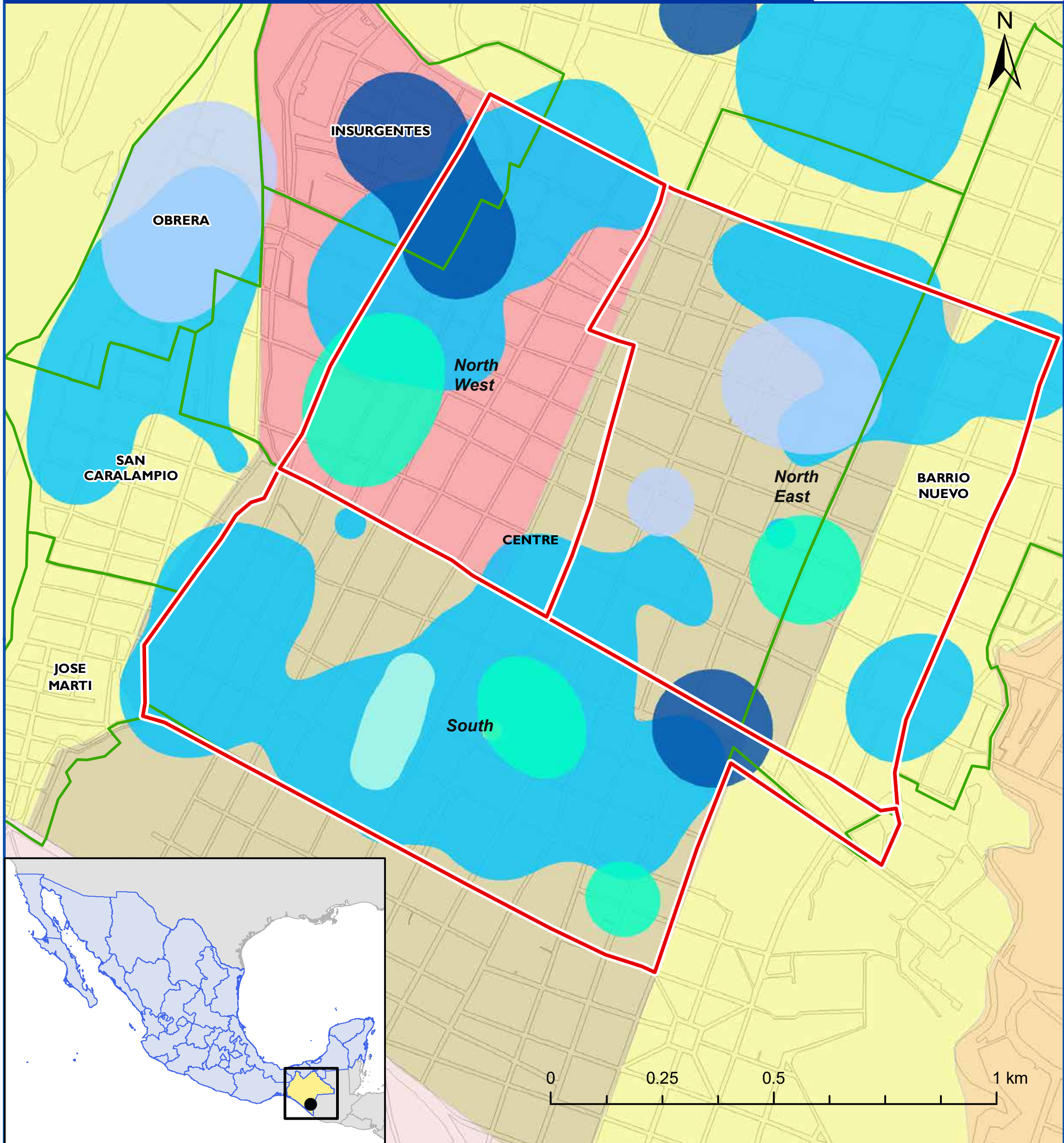


Difficult to access informants to survey



LAND USE IN CENTRAL TAPACHULA

Map 4. Land use and lodgings in the centre of Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico, February 2021.



Central neighbourhoods	Use of land	Ecological Residential	Lodgings
Zoning	Urban Centre	Traditional Residential	Houses
	Residential	Urban Subcentre	Hotels
			Tenements
			Rooms
			Apartments

Fuente: ESRI y UN World Map
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SAFETY CONDITIONS IN THE FIELD

According to the results of the National Survey of Urban Public Security, carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) in December 2020, **79 percent of the resident population of Tapachula considers it to be an unsafe city**, giving the city one of the highest insecurity perception rates in the country. In the case of Tapachula's city centre, it has been identified as a zone with a recurrence of diverse crimes.

According to the Tapachula Plan of Action (Emerging and Sustainable Cities Program, 2018), **two kinds of recurrent crimes exist in the centre of the city. The first is violent and non-violent robbery**; nearly one quarter of the city's residents stated that falling victim to this crime in this sector was very likely. It is worth mentioning that the streets between Eighth Avenue and Second Avenue North were pointed out as those that people perceive as very unsafe.

The second criminal act is human trafficking with intent of sexual exploitation, the victims in their majority being Central American women in vulnerable situations due to their irregular status as migrants and their fear of approaching authorities to report a crime. According to the Office for the Protection of Human Rights in Tapachula there are around 1,200 bars and pubs in the city that employ 1,500 waitresses or dancers who are victims of sexual exploitation. These women and children are between 10 and 35 years old.



79 percent of Tapachula's resident population considers it to be a dangerous city.



A quarter of the city's inhabitants mentioned that falling victim to violent or non-violent crime in this sector was very likely.



Human trafficking with intent of sexual exploitation, the majority of victims are Central American women.

On this subject, local newspapers such as "Chiapas Paralelo" and "El Heraldo de Chiapas" make repeated mention of **the human trafficking networks that exist in Tapachula**. One essential factor is the speed at which they move women, since, as stated by the then Municipal Secretary of Health, Fausto Gálvez, **it is very difficult to know the actual number of victims of sexual exploitation since they cannot be contacted for any longer than a week because of how quickly the trafficking networks move them on (Chiapas Paralelo, 2014)**.

The combination of these factors and the fieldwork **allowed identifying the Northwestern Zone and surrounding neighborhoods as a high-risk area (map 5) for field personnel participating in the collection of information** for this document, so it is urged to remain working in the Northeastern and Southern Zone of downtown Tapachula no later than 5:00 p.m. or before sunset.

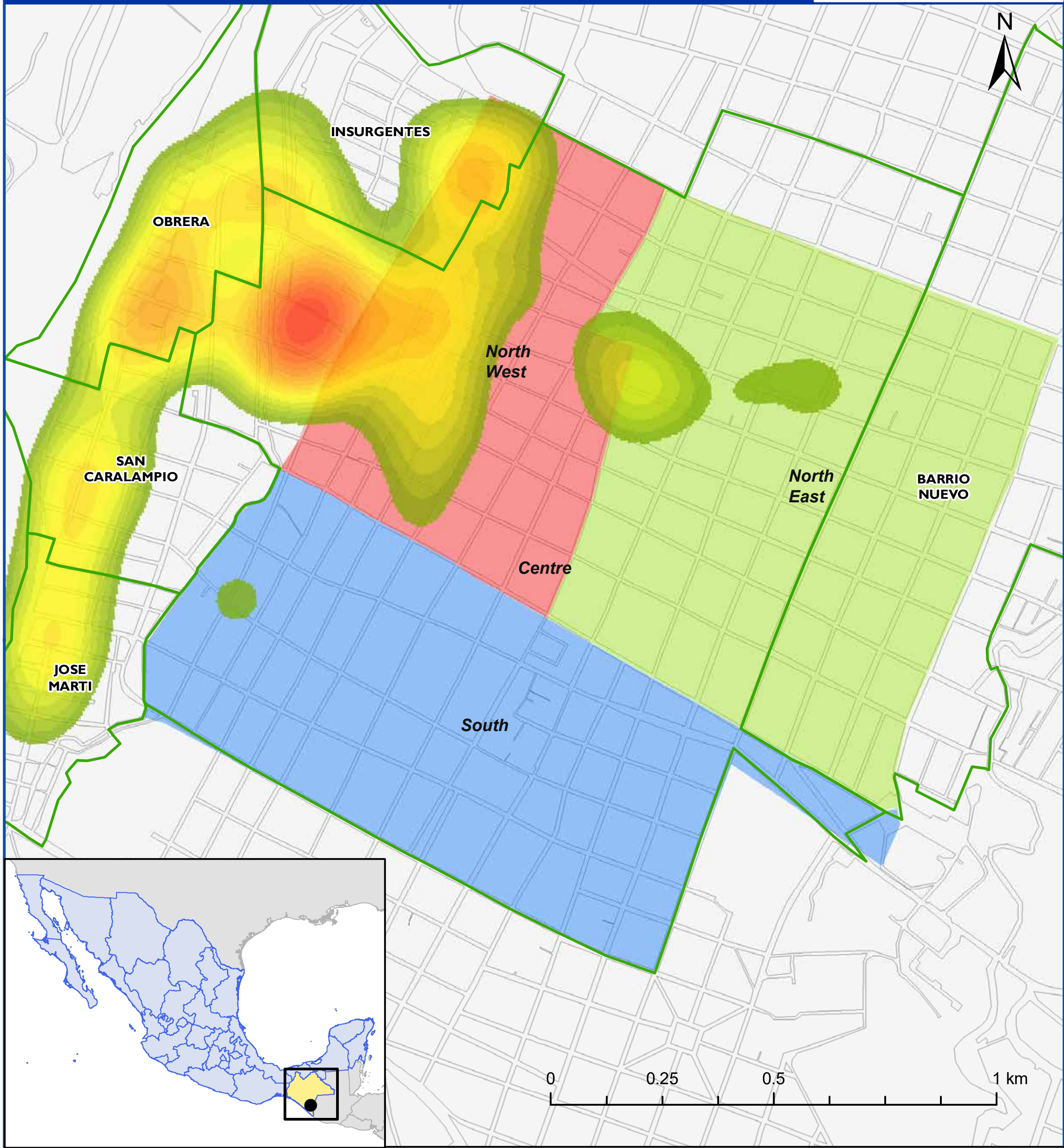


Hotel "Colomba", Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021



SAFETY CONDITIONS IN THE FIELD

Map 5. Safety Conditions in the field, Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico, February 2021.



Symbol

- Centre Neighbourhood

Safety Zoning

- Inconvenient
- Acceptable
- Adequate

Sitios de percepción ciudadana de inseguridad

- High
- Medium
- Low

Fuente: ESRI y UN World Map
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INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT POPULATION

The geographic situation that positions **Tapachula as the entry point into Mexico for regional and extra-regional migrants** means that permanent links exist between the local and migrant populations.

Although the relationship between nationals and foreigners in Tapachula stretches back for decades, integration between these two groups is practically non-existent today. **Based on interviews with business owners in the centre as well as those carried out within the organization “Futbol Más” (Football More) and “Territorio Joven” (Young Territory)**, information was obtained relating to the existing social dynamics between people in this area.

Firstly, it is important to note how **those originating from Tapachula reject the presence of migrants in the city**, because of their perception that **they are taking the jobs that could be done by local people**, which aggravates the city’s situation of poverty and unemployment. For the same reasons, they protested **against the financial help received by migrants from federal programs** such as “Emergencia Social” (Social Emergency), since they believe that **this money could be spent on improving local people’s quality of life**.

It was mentioned that **the possibility of the arrival of migrant caravans heightens general discontent towards those migrants already in Tapachula**, because they do not want more migrants coming to the city. Various key informants mentioned that they have no intention of creating any links with the migrant population, **since this would make them feel especially exposed to illness given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**.



Barbershop business “Barbershop”, Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021/Itzel V.



Hotel “Hospedaje Latino” Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021

Among the limited links that exist between locals and migrants, those within **the labour sector** are particularly noticeable, since it is **young and adult men** who move around the city in order to reach their places of work. They are often employed as construction workers on public building sites. It is striking that within the migrant groups from Haiti, there are some who have learned to speak Spanish in order to enter working life in the city. Furthermore, these people function as an information channel between other Haitian nationals and others whose native language is Spanish. **As for the women and children who travel in groups, they try to remain in their places of lodging so as not to expose themselves to dangers such as deportation or human trafficking networks**.

Something that came to the key informants’ attention was **the fluctuation in the arrivals of the migrant population due to the COVID-19 pandemic**. Sanitation measures reduced how many people could stay in the migrant shelters, allowing them to fill only between 30 to 50 percent of their capacity, forcing many migrants to find elsewhere to stay. There is speculation that this situation has resulted in the movement of migrant groups to new sectors of the city, especially to the south.



INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT POPULATION



Barbershop business "Alta Peluquería", Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021

Another labour phenomenon that has been detected in the city is the **establishment of businesses in the North-Western sector of the city centre**. These establishments are hairdressers run and attended by people from Cuba and a Haitian restaurant. These businesses are located on the Eighth Avenue North between the Ninth Poniente and the Eleventh Poniente. Similarly, a place selling Salvadorian "pupusas" (stuffed cornbread) was identified on Sexta Avenida, between Central and Primera Poniente. **The presence of such businesses, managed by migrants, suggests a process of permanent settlement in the city, and at the same time, the basis for the arrival of more migrants.**

It is worth pointing out that during the process of interviewing key informants, **some of those who provided information on the Cuban population demonstrated an accepting attitude towards them**, but not towards other migrants of different nationalities. Despite this rejection of migrants, the local population has established a direct economic link with them, **since there has been an increase in the number of homes that rent one or more rooms out to migrants**. Even houses and tenements have undergone remodelling and expansion in order to increase the available spaces for the city's new inhabitants. **Internet service has been requested in these new spaces due to the fact that more and more people travel with a smartphone and need to communicate with their families in their country of origin.**



Rooms for rent, Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021/Itzel V.

When it comes to migrant integration into common spaces, **the North-Western sector stands out thanks to the fact that not only does a sizeable proportion of the migrant population live there, but they also work in nearby businesses**. These include bars, restaurants and pubs that offer access to paid employment. However, there is a latent risk in many of these places, where the sexual exploitation of women is a constant, and trafficking rings have a strong presence. The migrant population is especially vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking, or, in some cases, to being an object of illegal migrant smuggling.

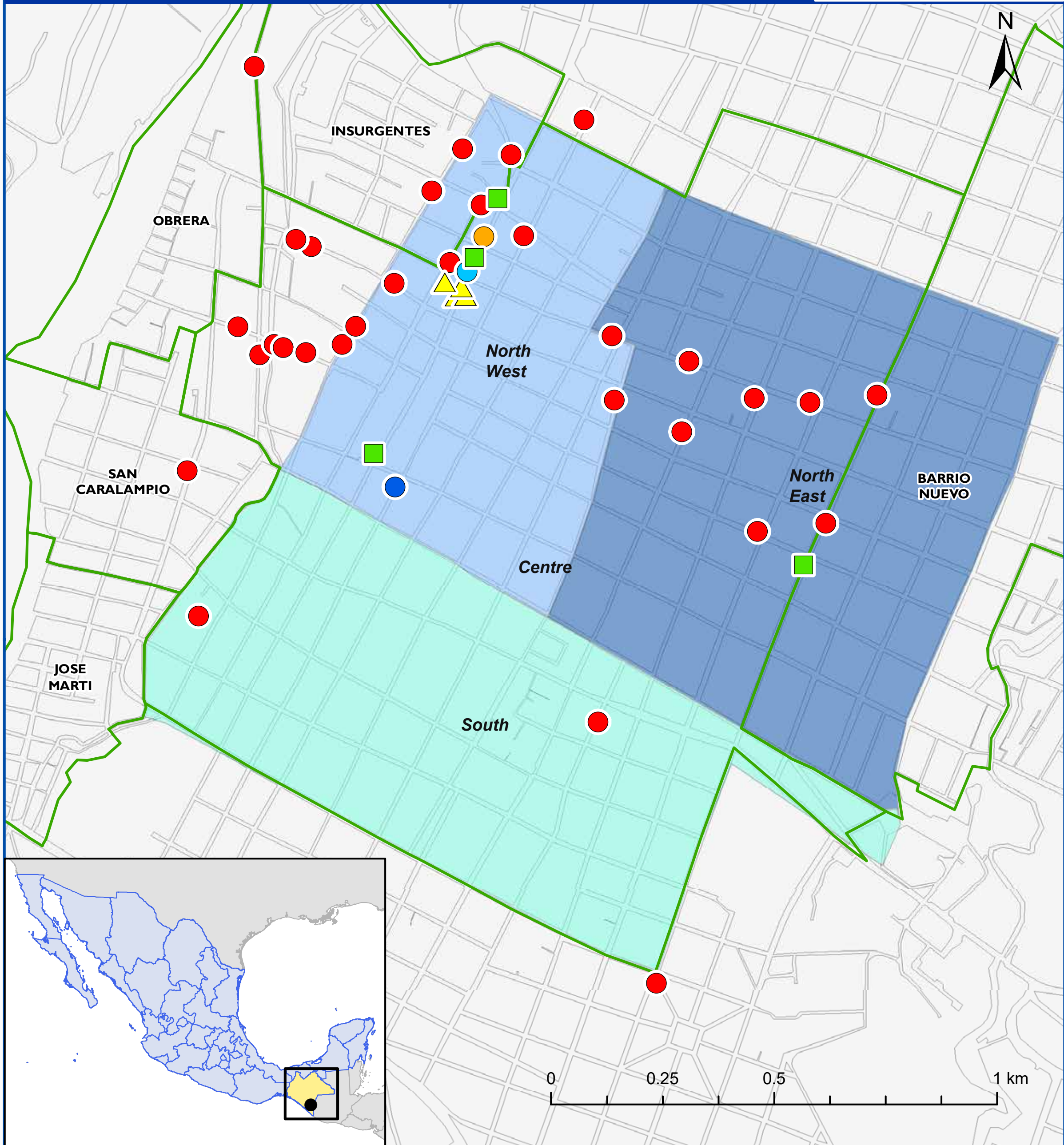


Hotel "Tacana Central", Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021



INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT POPULATION

Map 6. Employment of migrant population in central Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico, February 2021.



Symbol		Sitios de empleo	
Centre Neighbourhood	Sitios de llegada permanente	Salvadorian Kitchen	
Zoning	Hotel	Haitian Kitchen	
North East		Honduran Kitchen	
North West		Restaurant bar	
South		Hairdresser	

Fuente: ESRI y UN World Map
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CONCLUSIONS



Provided the high density of the population in Tapachula's central zone, it is easy to find key informants and the population of interest (migrants) in order to periodically monitor flow.



The migrant groups with the largest presence in Tapachula's centre are from the Caribbean and Central America, so communication with the local community is not a problem. The extra-regional migrant groups can be found in North Tapachula and are mostly from Africa. No information was obtained about an Asian population.



The neighbourhoods to the centre's west are home to many migrants but due to the high levels of insecurity it is not possible to work in the area, which is why all information regarding this area came from interviews with key informants.



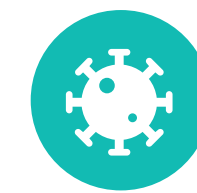
Human trafficking and sexual exploitation are one of the most prominent crimes in the city centre. Migrants, particularly women from Central America, are this crime's principal victims according to the Office for the Protection of Human Rights.



The residential land use in the centre of Tapachula provides many spaces where the migrant population can find lodging. Additionally, it offers a variety of places that can fit the budget of any migrant individual or group.



The local population has found a source of income in their properties, which at the same time provides migrants with a more varied choice of lodgings. In this way, links are being created that benefits both sides.



Finally, the generalized feeling of rejection of migrants has gained strength in the context of the pandemic, due to fear of contracting the virus from the city's newcomers.

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San Agustin Parish, Tapachula, Mexico. © IOM 2021

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