

Original Research

Comparative review of migration integration policies through the cases of Morocco, Turkey, Mexico and South Africa

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Abstract

This study investigates the interplay between hybrid migration systems, urban governance architectures, and social-spatial inclusion outcomes across four key countries: Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa. Situated at the crossroads of transit and destination dynamics, these countries exemplify the growing complexity of migration governance in the Global South. Drawing on open-source and academic data from Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR, alongside institutional reports from UN-Habitat, IOM, and OECD, the research constructs a Composite Migration Governance Index (CMGI) comprising twenty-four indicators grouped into three analytical dimensions: (1) hybrid nature of transit and destination contexts, (2) urban governance of migration, and (3) social and spatial inclusion policies. Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates bibliometric mapping, quantitative benchmarking, and qualitative interpretation, the study evaluates how governance structures facilitate or hinder migrant inclusion in urban spaces. The findings reveal distinct but overlapping patterns: Turkey and Mexico exhibit stronger institutional coordination and policy coherence, while Morocco and South Africa encounter persistent constraints in implementation and urban integration. By linking statistical indices with governance narratives, the analysis underscores how national migration frameworks and local urban policies interact to shape inclusion outcomes. The results advance theoretical and policy debates on migration governance by demonstrating the importance of localized capacity, inter-institutional collaboration, and socially inclusive urban strategies for managing complex mobility systems in transitional contexts.

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Résumé

Cette étude examine les interactions entre les systèmes migratoires hybrides, les architectures de gouvernance urbaine et les résultats en matière d'inclusion socio-spatiale dans quatre pays clés : le Maroc, la Turquie, le Mexique et l'Afrique du Sud. Situés au carrefour des dynamiques de transit et de destination, ces pays illustrent la complexité croissante de la gouvernance des migrations dans les pays du Sud. S'appuyant sur des données ouvertes et universitaires issues de Scopus, Web of Science et JSTOR, ainsi que sur des rapports institutionnels d'ONU-Habitat, de l'OIM et de l'OCDE, cette recherche élabore un indice composite de gouvernance des migrations (CMGI) comprenant vingt-quatre indicateurs regroupés en trois dimensions analytiques : (1) la nature hybride des contextes de transit et de destination, (2) la gouvernance urbaine des migrations, et (3) les politiques d'inclusion sociale et spatiale. À l'aide d'une approche mixte intégrant la cartographie bibliométrique, l'analyse comparative quantitative et l'interprétation qualitative, l'étude évalue dans quelle mesure les structures de gou-

vernance facilitent ou entravent l'inclusion des migrants dans les espaces urbains. Les résultats révèlent des schémas distincts mais qui se recoupent : la Turquie et le Mexique font preuve d'une coordination institutionnelle et d'une cohérence politique plus fortes, tandis que le Maroc et l'Afrique du Sud se heurtent à des contraintes persistantes en matière de mise en œuvre et d'intégration urbaine. En établissant un lien entre les indicateurs statistiques et les discours sur la gouvernance, cette analyse met en évidence la manière dont les cadres nationaux en matière de migration et les politiques urbaines locales interagissent pour façonner les résultats en matière d'inclusion. Les résultats font progresser les débats théoriques et politiques sur la gouvernance des migrations en démontrant l'importance des capacités locales, de la collaboration interinstitutionnelle et des stratégies urbaines socialement inclusives pour la gestion de systèmes de mobilité complexes dans des contextes de transition.

Mots-clés : Gouvernance des migrations, Systèmes migratoires hybrides, Inclusion urbaine, Intégration des politiques, Analyse comparative

1. Introduction

International migration has become one of the most defining dynamics of contemporary urbanization, particularly in the Global South where countries increasingly serve as both transit zones and destination hubs. The shifting patterns of global mobility, intensified by economic disparities, conflict, and environmental change, have transformed cities such as Rabat, Istanbul, Mexico City, and Johannesburg into central laboratories for managing migration and fostering integration. Understanding the governance architecture that underpin these processes is crucial for designing inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable urban policies.

In this context, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa represent four strategic case studies that encapsulate the evolving role of middle-income states in global migration governance. Each operates within a hybrid migration system, simultaneously managing inflows, outflows, and transit populations, while negotiating between international commitments and domestic political constraints. Their experiences reflect broader tensions between humanitarian imperatives, urban management capacities, and socio-economic realities.

Existing scholarship has explored these themes in isolation: migration as a developmental driver (de Haas, 2005; Massey et al., 2002), as a policy challenge (Kirisci, 2014; Natter, 2019), and as a local governance concern (Caponio et al., 2021; Zapata-Barrero & Caponio, 2022). However, comparative analyses systematically link migration governance architectures to urban inclusion outcomes remain limited, particularly in non-European and Global South contexts. This study bridges that gap by developing a comparative multi-index framework that captures both structural and institutional dimensions of migration management.

The study is guided by three overarching questions:

1. How do hybrid migration systems shape governance responses in transit and destination contexts?
2. To what extent do urban governance structures influence migrant inclusion and social cohesion at the city level?
3. What lessons can be drawn from comparative benchmarking of governance and inclusion indicators across the four case countries?

Methodologically, the research integrates quantitative index modeling with qualitative policy interpretation, providing a multidimensional understanding of how migration governance translates into lived urban realities. Through the construction of a Composite Migration Governance Index (CMGI), the study assesses performance across twenty-four indicators spanning governance coordination, policy inclusiveness, institutional capacity, and socio-spatial equity.

The following sections detail the Theoretical Framework (Section 2), present the study areas (Section 3), methodological design (Section 4), and synthesize cross-dimensional insights and policy implications (Section 5). Together, they illuminate how governance architectures mediate between global migration pressures and local realities, offering a foundation for more inclusive and context-sensitive urban migration policies.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this research draws on three interconnected concepts: (1) the duality of transit and destination countries, (2) urban migration governance, and (3) social and spatial inclusion policies in urban contexts. Together, these frameworks help unpack how different national and urban systems conceptualize and operationalize the integration of migrants within rapidly changing socio-political environments.

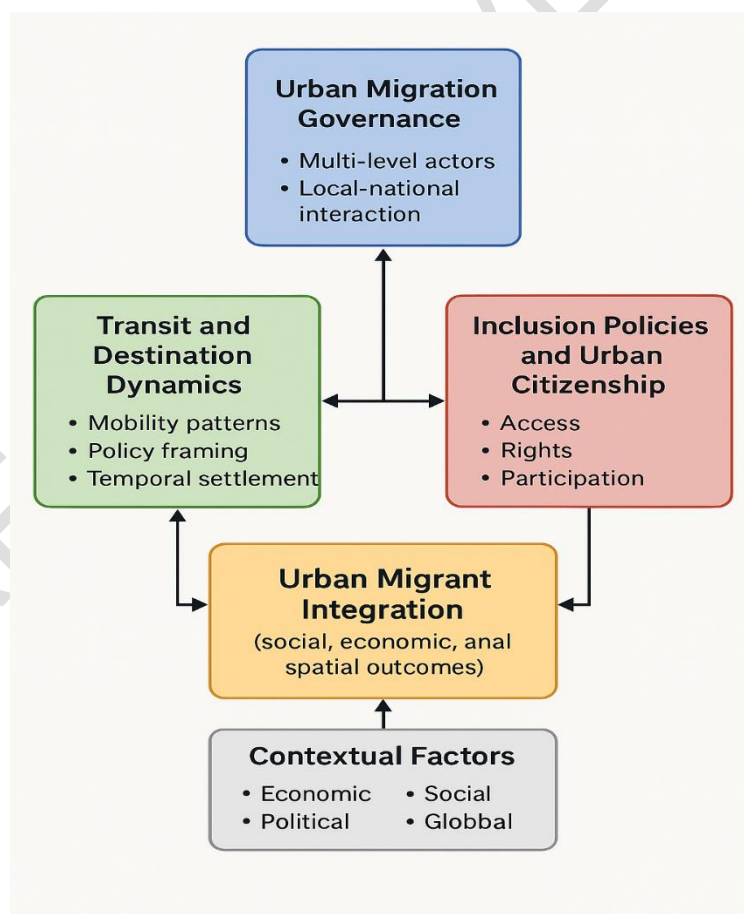


Figure 1. Three interconnected concepts' theoretical framework

2.1. Transit and Destination Countries: Beyond Linear Migration Models

Traditional migration theories often framed mobility as a linear process, origin, transit, and destination, reflecting a Eurocentric understanding of migration flows (Bakewell, 2021). However, contemporary scholarship challenges this rigidity, emphasizing the fluid and multi-directional nature of migration in the Global South (Triandafyllidou, 2022).

Countries such as Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa simultaneously function as transit hubs and de facto destinations, where many migrants settle temporarily or permanently (Collyer & De Haas, 2023; Schapendonk, 2020). These “hybrid spaces” of migration reveal overlapping governance systems that manage mobility, humanitarian obligations, and socio-economic inclusion (Pécoud, 2022).

In this context, transit is not merely a passage, but a prolonged condition of uncertainty, where migrants navigate between aspirations of onward movement and constraints of settlement (Sørensen, 2023). The theoretical distinction between countries of transit and countries of destination becomes blurred, requiring analytical models that account for temporal and policy fluidity in migration pathways (Zapata-Barrero & Caponio, 2022).

2.2. Urban Governance of Migration

Urban migration governance provides a complementary lens, emphasizing the role of cities as key sites of migration management and integration (Caponio, Scholten & Zapata-Barrero, 2021). While national governments design migration laws, cities often mediate their implementation, adapting national frameworks to local realities.

Recent research in comparative urban studies highlights how local authorities and urban actors, municipalities, NGOs, community groups, develop governance innovations to accommodate migrants (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2022 ; Oomen et al., 2023). This “local turn” in migration governance recognizes that urban responses are increasingly autonomous, particularly where national systems are restrictive or fragmented (Zapata-Barrero, 2024).

In the four countries analyzed, urban governance reveals the interplay between formal policies and informal mechanisms. For example, Moroccan cities such as Rabat and Tangier have experimented with localized integration programs, while Cape Town and Johannesburg have introduced inclusive service-delivery mechanisms to counter xenophobic exclusion (Crush & Tawodzera, 2023). Similarly, Istanbul and Izmir have emerged as urban laboratories for refugee inclusion (İçduygu & Üstübeci, 2023), while Mexico City’s “Ciudad Hospitalaria” policy demonstrates how local frameworks can compensate for federal policy gaps (Calderón et al., 2022).

2.3. Inclusion Policies and Urban Citizenship

The third pillar of this framework concerns social and spatial inclusion, which frames integration not merely as policy compliance but as a process of belonging and participation (Ager & Strang, 2021). Scholars argue that urban inclusion involves access to four key domains: legal status, housing, employment, and public services, as well as symbolic dimensions like recognition and civic participation (Scholten & Penninx, 2022).

This framework aligns with the “right to the city” perspective (Lefebvre, 1968; revisited by Purcell, 2023), which emphasizes that migrants, irrespective of legal status, contribute to and therefore have claims on the urban space they inhabit. In contexts like Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa, the degree of inclusion often reflects the interplay between national migration regimes and local power structures (Sandercock, 2022).

Integrating this approach with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 10 and SDG 11) and the Global Compact for Migration (2018), this research situates urban inclusion as both a normative and pragmatic goal: cities that embrace inclusive practices are more resilient, cohesive, and equitable (UN-Habitat, 2023; OECD, 2023).

2.4. Inclusion Policies and Urban Citizenship

Bringing these perspectives together, this study conceptualizes urban migrant integration as a multi-scalar process operating across governance levels and social spaces. By comparing Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa, it seeks to:

1. Reveal how migration policies are interpreted and localized within urban governance frameworks.
2. Identify how hybrid migration contexts (transit/destination overlap) shape the inclusion trajectories of migrants.
3. Evaluate the extent to which urban inclusion practices align with global migration governance norms.

This integrated framework provides a foundation for analyzing policy convergence, contextual variation, and the transnational dynamics shaping migrant integration in the Global South. Building on this theoretical framework, the following section contextualizes these analytical dimensions in the empirical realities of the four countries studied, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico and South Africa. Each of these cases illustrates the dual nature of being both a destination and transit country, offering a unique perspective on the interplay between migration governance, inclusion policies, and urban dynamics. The analysis of their respective socio-economic and political contexts allows us to observe how theoretical concepts related to hybrid migration systems, urban governance and social inclusion are concretely translated on the ground. This contextualization anchors the theoretical framework in the reality of territories while facilitating a comparative reading of the responses provided by different urban systems to similar migration challenges within the Global South.

3. Study areas

The choice of the four countries, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico and South Africa, is based on their strategic role in the migration dynamics of the Global South. Each represents a unique context while sharing common characteristics: rapid urbanization, a pivotal geographical position between several regions and a dual status of transit and destination country. These cases thus offer a diversity of experiences in migration governance and urban inclusion, allowing us to examine how different political and socio-economic systems translate the theoretical principles presented above. Their comparison helps to identify the convergences and local specificities of integration policies, while shedding light on the interactions between mobility, urbanization and governance in the context of the Global South.

3.1. Morocco

Morocco's geographical position, which links Africa, Europe and the Mediterranean, makes it a key transit and destination hub, especially for sub-Saharan migrants aiming to reach Europe (Bensaâd 2018; de Haas 2014). Spain's proximity across the Strait of Gibraltar and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla has intensified migration flows. Political and economic stability has transformed Morocco from a transit point to a destination for many, with key cities like Tangier, Rabat, and Casablanca emerging as important hubs due to their economic opportunities and strategic coastal positions (Carling & Hernández-Carretero 2011). As shown in Figure 2, Morocco, and in particular its cities of Tangier, Rabat and Casablanca, is both an important destination and a transit hub for migrants from various African countries. These cities are particularly attractive to migrants from countries facing severe economic and political difficulties, such as Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

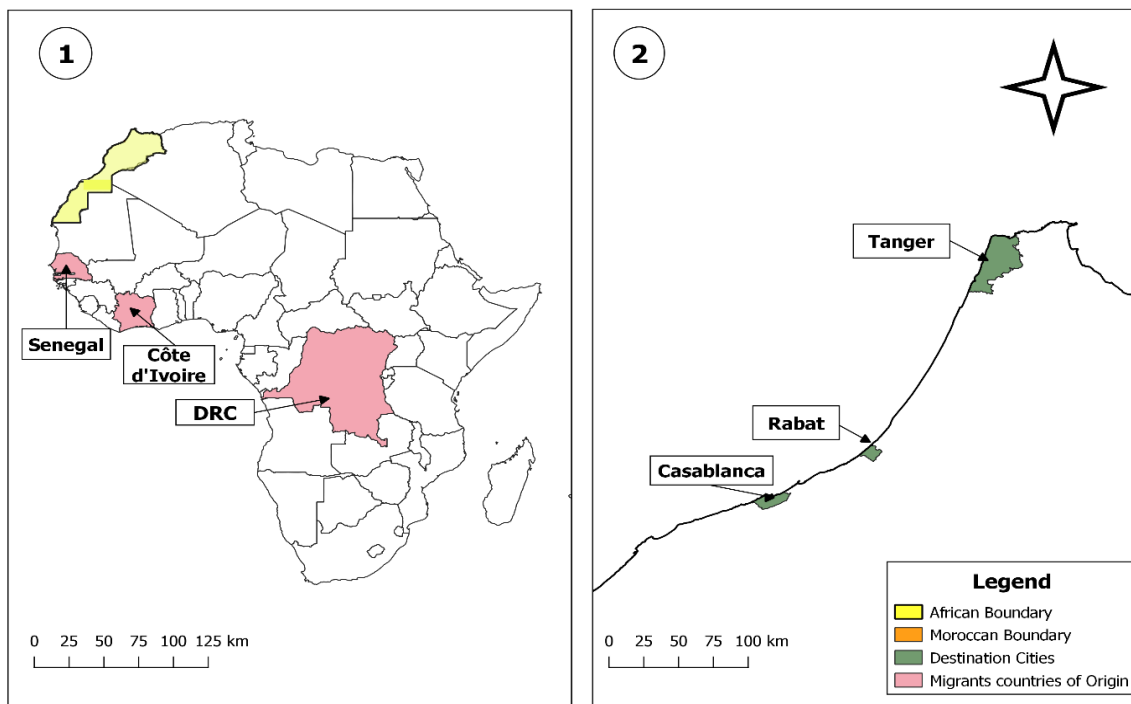


Figure 2. Countries of origin and destination cities of migrants in Morocco. Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange (Source: accessed on the 31 March 2025)

Rapid urbanization, fueled by both rural-urban migration and international migration, has had a significant impact on Morocco's urban landscape. The large cities studied attract internal and international migrants, creating challenges in housing, infrastructure and public services (World Bank, 2018). The Moroccan government has responded with policies aimed at integrating migrants, including regularization campaigns that grant legal status and access to social services (Cherti & Collyer 2015; de Haas 2014). However, social tensions persist due to competition for resources and cultural differences, which affect integration efforts (Cherti and Grant, 2013).

Indeed, the integration of migrants is hampered by socio-economic disparities, limited access to housing and services, and social tensions. Regularization campaigns have improved legal

status, but rapid urban growth in cities has strained infrastructure, public services, and migrants' access to stable employment and social protection (Natter 2019). Social cohesion efforts are complicated by competition for resources and cultural differences, highlighting the need for policies that promote economic inclusion and reduce inequality (Berriane et al., 2015; Cherti and Grant, 2013).

3.2. Turkey

Turkey, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, is a key transit country and destination for migrants, especially those fleeing conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Hosting more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees, Turkey has become a main gateway to Europe, a role highlighted by the 2016 EU-Turkey deal (Kirisci 2014; UNHCR 2021). Urban centres such as Istanbul, Ankara and Gaziantep (as shown in Figure 2) attract migrants because of their economic opportunities, proximity to conflict zones and humanitarian support (Orhan & Gündoğar 2015). As shown in Figure 3, Turkey's role as the main destination and transit country for migrants from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. These migration patterns are mainly due to conflict and economic hardship in the countries of origin. Turkey's Temporary Protection Regulation ensures access to healthcare, education, and employment, reinforcing its role as a key destination for refugees from neighboring regions (Erdoğan 2020).

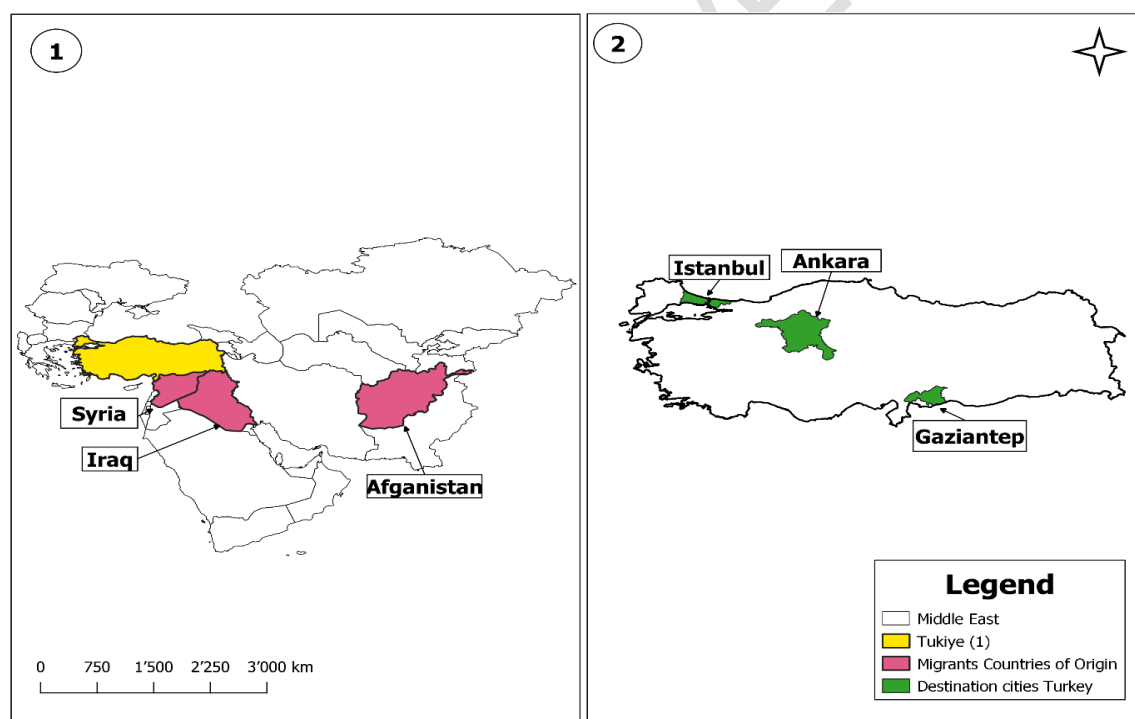


Figure 3. Countries of origin and destination cities of migrants in Turkey. Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange (accessed on the 31 March 2025)

The Syrian civil war has reshaped Turkey's urban landscape, with millions of refugees settling in key cities and putting pressure on infrastructure, housing and public services. While refugees have contributed to the economy by addressing labor shortages, their influx has created competition for jobs and resources, leading to social tensions. Policies have been implemented to support integration, but the scale of the crisis continues to pose challenges (Icduygu & Nimer 2020).

The integration of Turkey's large refugee population into urban areas remains a significant challenge, especially in cities with a high concentration of refugees. Overcrowded housing, overburdened public services, discrimination and xenophobia hamper social cohesion. The Turkish government and international organizations are working to address these issues through programs that expand housing, improve services, and promote integration, but sustained efforts are needed to address ongoing needs (Briant Carant, 2019; Erdoğan 2020).

3.3. Mexico

As a gateway between Latin America and the United States, Mexico is a crucial transit country and increasingly a destination country for Central American migrants, particularly from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala (Figure 4). While poverty, violence, and insecurity in the Northern Triangle are driving migration, stricter U.S. policies have led many migrants to settle in Mexican cities such as Tijuana, Mexico City, and Tapachula, which are key points along migration routes due to their economic opportunities and services (García 2019; Smith 2020). Tijuana is an essential border city for those wishing to cross into the United States, Mexico City provides a central hub with considerable resources, and Tapachula is often the first important stop for migrants from Guatemala (Casillas, 2007; Gandini et al., 2015).

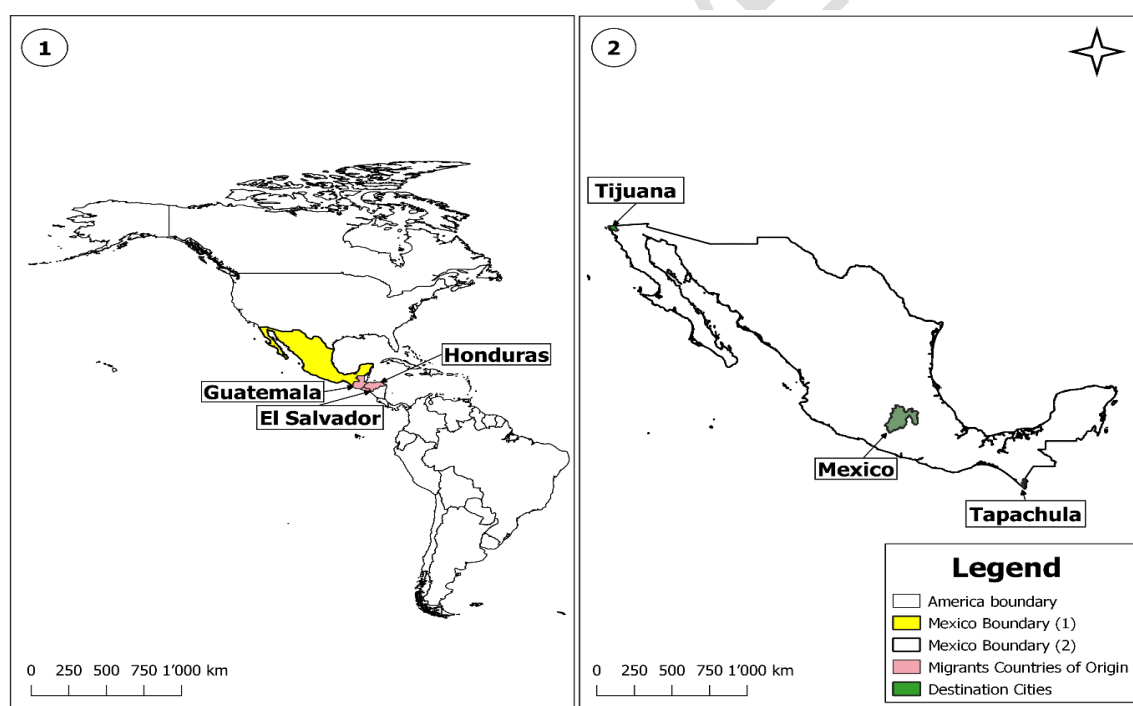


Figure 4. Countries of origin and destination cities of migrants in Mexico. Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange (accessed on the 31 March 2025)

Rapid urban growth in cities such as Mexico City, Tijuana, and Tapachula has been driven by internal and international migration, leading to challenges in infrastructure, housing, and public services. Central American migrants often face legal and social barriers, making it difficult to integrate into urban society. Local governments need to strike a balance between migrant accommodation and sustainable urban development (Anguiano, 2019; Martínez 2018).

Migrants in Mexico's urban areas face issues related to legal status, housing shortages, and employment opportunities. Undocumented migrants are particularly vulnerable to marginalization, as they cannot access formal employment or essential services. The pressure on urban governance and social cohesion is pronounced in border cities, where competition for resources intensifies social tensions. Coordinated policy efforts are needed to regularize the status of migrants, improve access to housing, and promote social integration (Serrano 2017; Esbach 2020).

3.4. South Africa

As a major destination for migrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Somalia, South Africa attracts those fleeing conflict, economic hardship and political instability (as shown in Figure 4). Its strong economy and established migrant communities make it attractive, although high inequality and unemployment complicate integration (Crush 2011). As shown in Figure 5, key cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria serve as migrant centres due to their economic opportunities and historical migration links, offering jobs and social networks despite the challenges of the formal labour market (Landau, 2006; Peberdy, 2016).

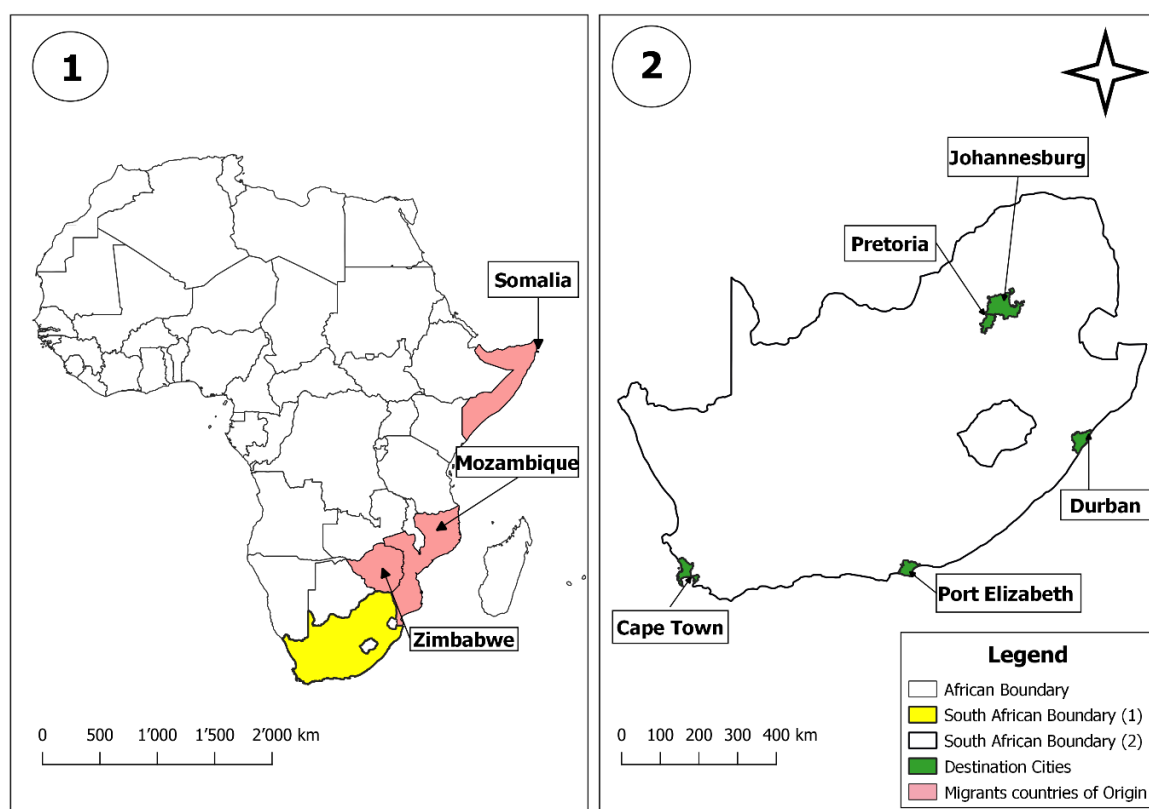


Figure 5. Countries of origin and destination cities of migrants in South Africa. Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange (accessed on the 31 March 2025)

Migration has fueled urban growth in South Africa's major cities, particularly in Johannesburg and Cape Town, straining infrastructure, housing and services. Legal and economic barriers often push migrants to informal settlements on the outskirts of major cities, such as Hillbrow, Alexandra and Diepsloot in Johannesburg, or Khayelitsha, Philippi and Delft on the

outskirts of Cape Town (Turok & Visagie, 2021). These areas, often far from economic centres, are characterised by high population density, limited access to drinking water, sanitation and electricity, as well as increased land tenure insecurity. Many migrants, particularly from Zimbabwe, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, reside there in precarious conditions, often in temporary shelters or overcrowded housing (Crush & Ramachandran, 2022).

These informal settlements nevertheless play a key socio-economic role, constituting spaces for survival, mutual aid and community solidarity, while reflecting the persistent socio-spatial segmentation inherited from apartheid (Harrison & Todes, 2020). Social tensions and xenophobia further exacerbate integration challenges, as migrants are frequently perceived as competitors in the labour market and as undue recipients of public resources (Landau & Freemantle, 2016). The integration of migrants is hampered by xenophobia, discrimination and limited access to essential services, especially for those from neighbouring countries. Employment and housing remain significant barriers, which increase socio-economic vulnerability. High inequality and unemployment intensify these challenges, requiring more equitable urban planning and inclusion policies, aimed at linking informal settlements to urban infrastructure and strengthening social cohesion (Crush & Tawodzera 2014; Peberdy, 2016).

In short, a comparative examination of these four national contexts highlights the diversity of migration trajectories and institutional responses to the challenges of urban integration. These case studies illustrate how policies, governance structures, and socio-economic dynamics shape migrant experiences differently in different contexts. With this contextual understanding, the following section presents the methodology adopted to analyze, compare and interpret these realities through an approach combining literature review, data analysis and in-depth case studies.

4. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research is based on a comparative and mixed approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods in order to grasp the complexity of migration dynamics and urban integration processes in the four countries studied. This approach makes it possible to articulate the analysis of public policies, governance structures and the lived experiences of migrants at different levels, national, urban and community. The study is based on the triangulation of several data sources, including an in-depth literature review, the analysis of statistical data from international and national organizations, as well as urban case studies illustrating the specific realities of Morocco, Turkey, Mexico and South Africa. This methodological combination aims to strengthen the validity of the results and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the convergences and divergences between the models of migration integration in the Global South.

4.1. Processes of international migration into Ugandan cities

Among the abundance of migration theories, this research is part of an integrative posture, mobilizing three complementary theoretical approaches:

1. The theory of migration systems (Mabogunje, 1970; Fawcett, 1989): which emphasizes the interconnections between countries of origin, transit and destination, allowing migration flows to be understood as open and dynamic systems.

2. The multi-level approach to migration governance (Scholten & Penninx, 2022; Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018): which analyses how migration policies are formulated at the national level but implemented and adapted in urban spaces.
3. The approach to social and spatial inclusion inspired by the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968; Purcell, 2023): who considers the city as a space of cohabitation, reclamation and participation, where migrants become actors in urban transformation.

By combining these perspectives, the research adopts a systemic and contextualized posture, which allows us to analyze migration not as an isolated phenomenon, but as a process intertwined with urban governance and the production of spaces of inclusion or exclusion. This theoretical positioning guides the selection of variables, indicators and analytical tools used in this study.

4.2. Processes of international migration into Ugandan cities

The data collection was structured around three complementary components: (1) a systematic review of the scientific and grey literature on urban migration and integration policies, (2) the selection and analysis of four national case studies, and (3) the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data from secondary and primary sources. The literature review identified the main conceptual and empirical trends related to migration governance, urbanization and social inclusion in the Global South. The case studies, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico and South Africa, were selected on the basis of purposive sampling, based on their dual role as transit and destination countries, as well as on the availability and quality of data. Secondary data were extracted from official reports, statistical databases (IOM, UNHCR, World Bank, UN-Habitat, OECD) and recent academic publications, while primary data were enriched by semi-structured interviews with institutional actors, local NGOs and experts. The analysis is based on a methodological triangulation aimed at cross-referencing descriptive, analytical and interpretive results, in order to guarantee the internal validity and comparative robustness of the conclusions.

4.2.1. Data collection from academic databases and open source

4.2.1.1. Academic Databases

The bibliographic review drew on three major academic databases, Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR, to capture interdisciplinary and regionally relevant research on urban migration, governance, and social inclusion. A tailored search strategy was developed to ensure comprehensive yet focused retrieval of peer-reviewed publications and policy-relevant studies. The search string combined conceptual and geographical keywords as follows: ("urban migration" OR "international migration" OR "migrant integration" OR "transit migration") AND ("urban governance" OR "city governance" OR "migration policy" OR "urban planning") AND ("social inclusion" OR "spatial inclusion" OR "urban inequality" OR "housing access") AND ("Morocco" OR "Turkey" OR "Mexico" OR "South Africa"). This combination was iteratively refined to balance breadth and precision, ensuring inclusion of studies relevant to the comparative framework across the four countries.

Given that search algorithms behave differently across platforms, Zotero was used to standardize metadata extraction and reference management. Specifically, Zotero's integration with

Mozilla Firefox facilitated consistent access to JSTOR and Scopus databases, while Google Chrome was used to streamline retrieval from Web of Science. This dual-browser approach minimized discrepancies in search results, particularly between peer-reviewed and grey literature sources.

All retrieved articles were exported in CSV format from Zotero, including full metadata (authors, title, year, journal, abstract, DOI). The exported datasets were cleaned in Microsoft Excel, following the structured five-step data quality framework proposed by Rahm and Do (2000):

1. Data analysis to assess completeness and redundancy;
2. Definition of transformation workflows and mapping rules;
3. Verification of consistency across databases;
4. Execution of data transformation; and
5. Backflow of cleaned data into the final dataset.

Each record was reviewed line by line to remove duplicates, unify country references (e.g., “Republic of South Africa” standardized as “South Africa”), and ensure consistent thematic coding by category: governance, migration policy, urban inclusion, and transit/destination dynamics.

To deepen analytical insights, a bibliometric and co-occurrence analysis was conducted using VOSviewer (version 1.6.x), a widely recognized tool for visualizing bibliometric networks. Although Google Scholar was excluded (as it is unsupported by VOSviewer), the combined corpus from Scopus, Web of Science, and JSTOR was sufficient to ensure conceptual coverage and diversity of publication sources. A total of 667 documents were initially retrieved from Web of Science (93), Scopus (72) and JSTOR (502).

After rigorous screening and removal of incomplete or irrelevant entries, 567 documents were retained for final analysis. Metadata fields (titles, abstracts, keywords, funding agencies) were then imported into VOSviewer to generate co-occurrence networks and thematic clusters.

Two types of bibliometric analyses were performed for each database:

1. Co-occurrence analysis of key terms within abstracts, identifying dominant conceptual linkages and recurring themes;
2. Cluster analysis, grouping related studies into thematic areas such as migration governance, urban policy, social cohesion, and spatial inclusion.

Each node in the network represents a keyword or phrase, with node size corresponding to its frequency of occurrence and link strength indicating the degree of co-occurrence across studies. Color-coded clusters visually distinguish research domains (e.g., governance structures, integration policies, informal settlements, and urban resilience).

Figure 3 (see below) illustrates the bibliometric workflow and VOSviewer’s data processing sequence adapted from Konou et al. (2023), including extraction, cleaning, network construction, and cluster visualization.

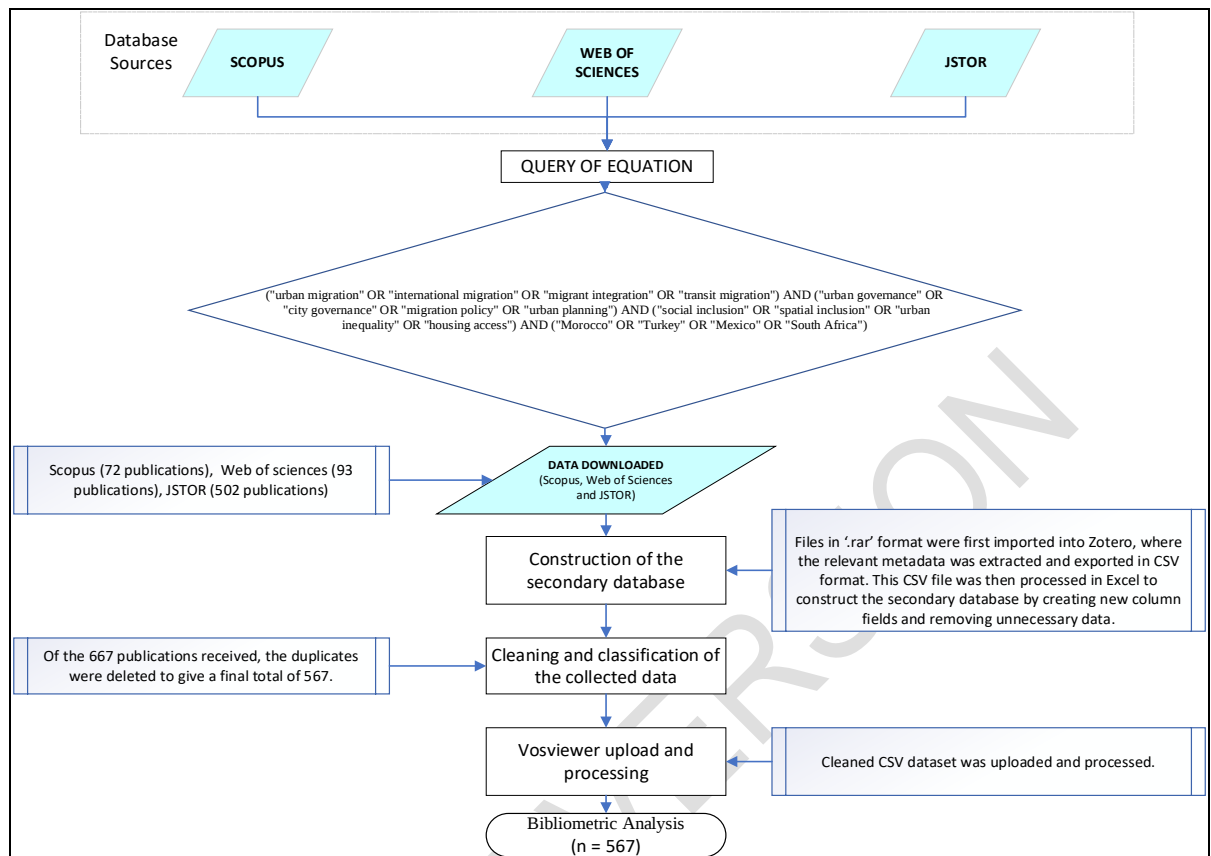


Figure 6. VOSviewer Data Processing Workflow. (Adapted from Konou et al., 2023)

The VOSviewer outputs provided a structured empirical basis for identifying conceptual patterns across the four focus countries. For instance, Figure 7 reveals that Turkey's prominence in "migration governance" clusters reflected its strategic role in the EU–Middle East transit corridor, while Mexico's concentration around "social inclusion" and "urban inequality" highlighted policy debates on informal settlements and local integration. Similarly, South Africa's thematic density in "urban resilience" and "labor migration" linked directly to SADC's regional migration dynamics, whereas Morocco exhibited strong cross-references between "transit migration," "border governance," and "policy frameworks." Figures 8 and 9 reveal re-occurring concepts on the targeted databases.

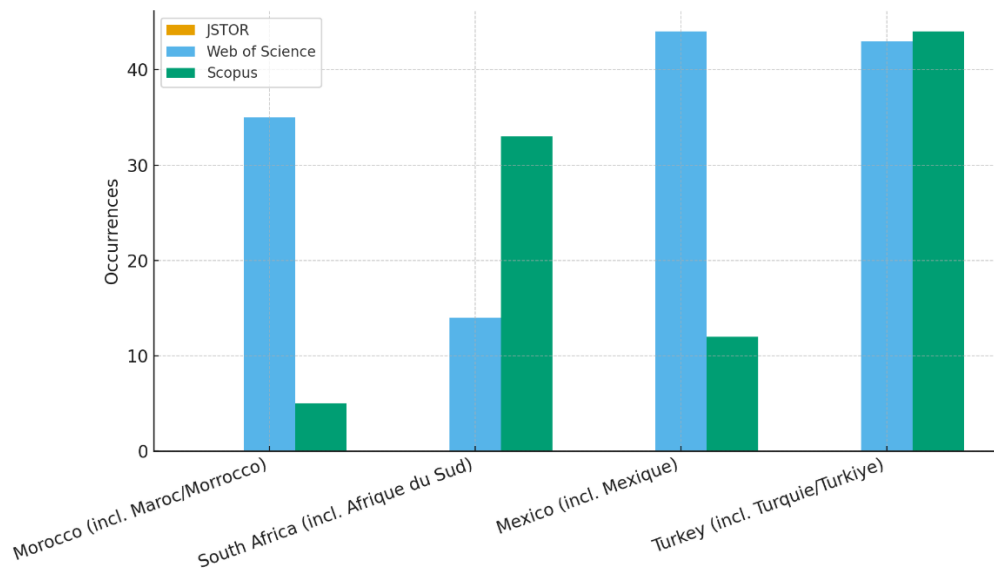


Figure 7. Country occurrences by database

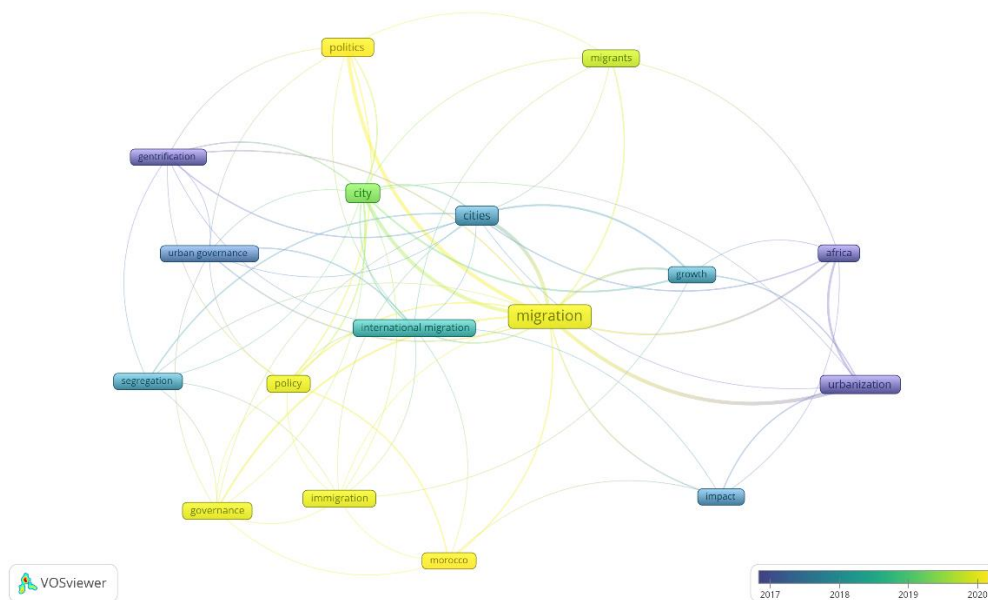


Figure 8. VOSviewer Cluster Visualization of Term Co-occurrence in documents

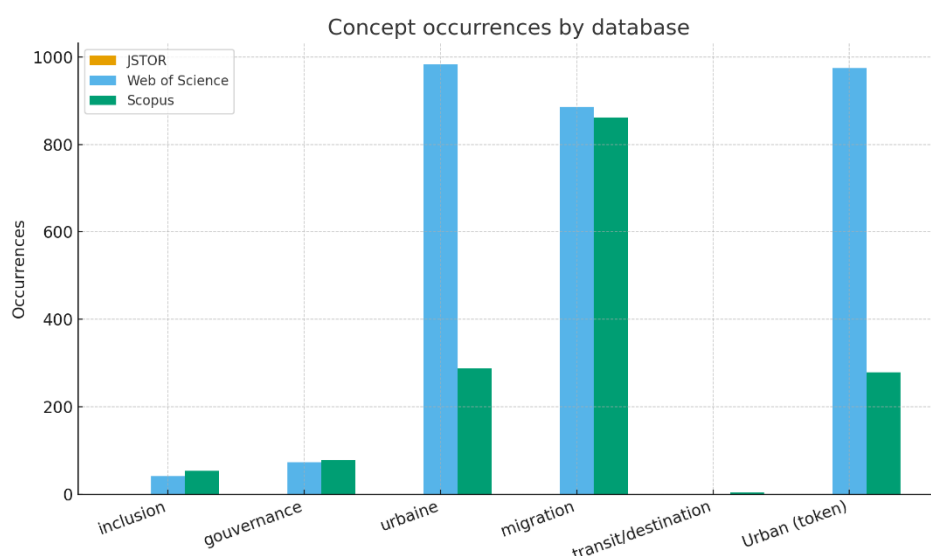


Figure 9. Concept occurrences by database

Together, these bibliometric insights strengthened the qualitative coding and comparative interpretation in later sections, offering an evidence base for the multidimensional analysis of hybrid migration systems, governance architectures, and inclusion outcomes in the Global South.

4.2.1.2. Open Source

In line with the conceptual framework of this research, the open-source data collection aims to document migration dynamics and urban integration processes through three key dimensions: the hybrid nature of transit and destination countries, urban governance of migration, and social and spatial inclusion policies. This step is based on the extraction of data from reliable and accessible sources, including government databases, reports from international organizations (UN-Habitat, IOM, UNHCR, World Bank) and recognized non-governmental organizations.

The data collected will include detailed statistics on migrant populations (origin, legal status, spatial distribution), their access to essential urban services (housing, employment, health, education), as well as indicators related to social cohesion and civic participation in the four countries studied: Morocco, Turkey, Mexico and South Africa (United Nations DESA, 2020; OECD, 2023).

The objective is to constitute a multidimensional dataset to assess the interactions between public policies, governance structures and levels of inclusion in differentiated urban contexts. This collection process will take into account temporal variations (2010–2025) in order to monitor the evolution of migration dynamics and institutional responses, thus providing a solid basis for cross-national comparisons and subsequent quantitative analysis.

4.2.2. Open Source Data Analysis Methods

The analysis of the open source data will be based on a mixed approach combining statistical, comparative and spatial methods, in order to empirically translate the three dimensions of the conceptual framework, migration governance, transit and destination dynamics, and urban inclusion policies.

First, a descriptive statistical analysis will be carried out to draw up the socio-economic and demographic profile of migrant populations in the four countries studied. This step will make it possible to characterize the major trends in terms of spatial distribution, access to housing, employment and essential services. Integration indicators (formal employment rate, school enrolment rate, regularization of status, participation in public programmes) will be calculated and compared between countries and between key cities (e.g. Rabat, Istanbul, Mexico City and Johannesburg).

In a second step, a correlational and comparative analysis will be used to explore the links between local governance (institutional capacity, financing, partnerships) and levels of inclusion of migrants. This step aims to identify the convergences and divergences between national and urban models of migration management, in relation to their status as transit or destination countries.

Finally, a spatial analysis using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) will be carried out in order to visualize the geographical distribution of migrants, areas of exclusion or concentration, as well as differentiated access to urban infrastructure. This mapping will help to understand how local policies and socio-economic dynamics influence the location and integration of migrants in urban spaces.

All of these analytical methods will make it possible to cross-reference quantitative and spatial data with qualitative observations from the case studies, thus strengthening the comparative robustness of the study and the validity of its conclusions on the urban integration of migrants in the Global South.

Table 1. Indicators of the three key dimensions of the analysis

Analytical dimension	Key indicators		Potential sources
1. Hybrid nature of transit and destination countries	1	Inward and outward migration flows (per year)	IOM; UNHCR; UNDESA;
	2	Geographical origin and legal status of migrants	World Bank; Policy Center for the New South; African Migration Observatory
	3	Average length of stay (transit vs. settlement)	
	4	Rate of naturalization or obtaining of residence permits - Volume of remittances (% of GDP)	
	5	Existence of national migration policies (plans, regularizations, bilateral agreements)	
	6	Intensity of international migration management agreements (EU, AU, OECD)	
	7	Frequency and main migration routes	
2. Urban governance of migration	1	Existence of local institutional structures dedicated to migration	UN-Habitat; OECD (Local Governance Indicators);
	2	Municipal budget allocated to integration programs	Municipal reports (Rabat, Istanbul, Mexico City, Johannesburg); Local and international NGOs (Caritas, Amnesty, IOM Urban Migration Report)
	3	Inter-institutional partnerships (State-municipality-NGO-private sector)	
	4	Degree of decentralization of migration policies	
	5	Local implementation of national policies	
	6	Density of civil society organisations active on migration	
	7	Vertical coordination between levels of governance	
	8	Inclusive urban policies (urban planning, housing)	
	9	Participation of migrants in local bodies (consultations, elections, citizens' forums)	
3. Social and spatial inclusion policies	1	Access to formal/informal housing (% of migrants in settlements)	UNHCR; UN-Habitat; IOM;
	2	Access to formal/informal employment and migrant unemployment rates	Afrobarometer; Latino-barómetro; National censuses; Employment and housing
	3	Access to health and education (school enrolment, medical coverage)	

4	Access to basic urban services (water, transport, electricity)	surveys; Academic Studies (Crush, Berriane, İçduygu)
5	Level of spatial segregation (center–periphery distance, density)	
6	Social cohesion index (associative participation, trust, perceived security)	
7	Level of perceived discrimination (xenophobia, exclusion)	
8	Existence of local inclusion programmes (employment, training, housing)	

This assessment will provide an overall score that reflects the performance and conditions in each study area, which will guide analysis and subsequent decision-making.

4.3. Case Study Benchmarking step

This comparative assessment provides an overall composite score that reflects the performance and structural conditions of each study area, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa, across the 24 analytical indicators. These results serve as a basis for guiding cross-country analysis, identifying governance strengths and gaps, and informing subsequent decision-making.

4.3.1. Case selection criteria

4.3.1.1. Geopolitical position and migration dynamics

Each selected country plays a pivotal role within its regional migration architecture:

- Morocco, situated at the crossroads of Africa, Europe, and the Mediterranean, has evolved from a traditional transit hub for Sub-Saharan migrants into a destination country, especially since its 2013 and 2017 regularization campaigns (de Haas, 2014; Berriane & de Haas, 2012). Its strategic proximity to Spain (via Ceuta and Melilla) situates it at the frontline of Euro-African mobility governance.
- Turkey functions as a dual gateway between Europe and Asia, hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations, over 3.6 million Syrians under temporary protection. Its geographic and political positioning, reinforced by the EU–Turkey Statement (2016), highlights its central role in Eurasian migration governance (Kırisci, 2014; İçduygu & Nimer, 2020).
- Mexico, at the nexus of Latin America and the United States, operates as both a transit and destination country, with large numbers of Central American migrants (from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala) settling in urban centers like Tapachula, Mexico City, and Tijuana. Its policies on humanitarian visas and urban integration demonstrate adaptive governance under external pressure (García, 2019; Smith, 2020).
- South Africa remains the principal migration destination within the SADC region, attracting labor migrants and asylum seekers from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Somalia. Despite its economic dominance, South Africa faces systemic governance

and social cohesion challenges shaped by inequality and xenophobic tensions (Crush, 2011; Landau & Freemantle, 2016).

Together, these cases illustrate the structural diversity of hybrid migration systems, linking North–South and South–South dynamics while highlighting the interdependence between national migration policies and urban governance practices.

4.3.1.2. *Migration Intensity and Urbanization Processes*

All four countries exhibit high migration intensity and accelerated urbanization, which jointly influence the spatial and social dynamics of integration. Migrant populations in these contexts are highly heterogeneous, comprising asylum seekers, irregular migrants, and labor migrants from neighboring regions or continents (UNHCR, 2021; IOM, 2020).

Their major cities, Rabat, Istanbul, Mexico City, and Johannesburg, serve as both administrative and economic gateways, offering opportunities while amplifying pressures on housing, infrastructure, and public services. The coexistence of formal and informal urban settlements in these spaces' shapes differentiated patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and spatial segregation (Smith, 2020; Stephen, 2021).

By focusing on these contexts, the study captures a representative range of migration–urbanization interfaces found across the Global South, linking macro-level migration policy frameworks with micro-level urban governance realities.

4.3.1.3. *Socio-economic and political context*

Socio-economic inequality, unemployment, and governance fragmentation are defining features of the four cases. Each country has adopted varied responses reflecting its political system and policy capacity:

- Morocco's national migration strategy (SNIA, 2013) integrates a rights-based approach within municipal governance reforms;
- Turkey's temporary protection framework (2014–2021) formalizes refugee access to health, education, and employment;
- Mexico's urban inclusion initiatives in Tapachula and Tijuana reflect decentralized humanitarian governance; and
- South Africa's urban policy debates around informal settlements and service delivery underscore tensions between constitutional rights and municipal constraints (Erdoğan, 2020; Peberdy, 2016).

This diversity of institutional architectures allows a cross-case examination of how national policy orientation, local administrative capacity, and public attitudes toward migrants jointly shape integration outcomes.

4.3.2. *Comparative analysis of multi-case indices*

The comparative benchmarking applies a cross-country index system consisting of 24 indicators grouped under three interrelated analytical dimensions:

1. Hybrid Migration Systems (transit/destination dynamics);
2. Governance Architectures (institutional, fiscal, and participatory mechanisms); and

3. Inclusion Outcomes (social, spatial, and economic integration).

Each country's performance is quantitatively assessed across these dimensions to reveal structural strengths, governance gaps, and policy convergence trends. The multi-case index model systematically compares Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa to uncover patterns, similarities, divergences, and best practices in managing urban migration.

This hybrid analytical approach, combining quantitative scoring and qualitative interpretation, facilitates:

- Identification of effective policy configurations;
- Evaluation of local-level implementation gaps; and
- Contextual understanding of how national migration regimes translate into urban realities (Stake, 1995; George & Bennett, 2005; Ragin, 1987).

The following section presents Step 1 (Assigning the Dimension Weighting), which details the procedure for structuring and weighting the 24 indicators across the three dimensions of hybrid migration systems, governance architectures, and inclusion outcomes.

Step 1: Assign the dimension weighting

To ensure analytical consistency and comparability across the twenty-four (24) indicators listed in Table 1, a two-level weighting system was developed. Each indicator (i) is associated with one of the three key analytical dimensions: (1) *Hybrid nature of transit and destination countries*, (2) *Urban governance of migration*, and (3) *Social and spatial inclusion policies*. Indicators are then weighed both within and across these dimensions according to their policy relevance and empirical variability. This structured approach ensures that the resulting composite model accurately reflects both theoretical priorities and observable differences among the four case countries (Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa).

Two-Level Weighting Structure was first developed. At the first level, each analytical dimension (C) is assigned a category weight (W_C) that reflects its overall contribution to the composite model. These category weights determine the relative importance of each dimension in shaping the comparative assessment across countries. At the second level, each indicator within a given dimension receives an individual indicator weight ($w_{i|C}$) that captures its specific significance in explaining performance variations within that dimension.

The final composite weight for each indicator is given by (1):

$$w_i = W_{C(i)} * w_{i|C} \quad (1)$$

subject to the normalization condition:

$$\sum_i w_i = 1 \quad (2)$$

This two-level structure maintains a balanced representation across the three analytical dimensions while allowing differentiation among indicators according to their conceptual importance and empirical behavior.

Each indicator in Table 1 was then evaluated using a dual weighting approach that integrated two complementary logics:

Normative weighting, based on conceptual and policy relevance drawn from literature (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; İçduygu, 2020; OECD, 2023); and

Data-driven weighting, based on statistical variability and information content across the four case countries (Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, South Africa).

This integration ensures that both theoretically significant and empirically discriminant indicators contribute proportionately to the final model. The normative component applies an Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) (Saaty, 1980) to reflect their conceptual importance in shaping migration governance and inclusion outcomes. The relative importance of indicators within each dimension is normalized to produce proportional weights. The empirical component, meanwhile, employs an entropy weighting approach to capture the information content of each indicator. Indicators that show greater variability across countries receive higher weights, as they provide more discriminatory power for comparative analysis. The entropy of each indicator is calculated as:

$$E_i = -K \sum_j p_{ij} \ln(p_{ij}) \quad (3)$$

where p_{ij} is the normalized value of indicator i for country j , and E_i represents the level of uncertainty or uniformity in that indicator's distribution.

The normalized data-based weight for indicator i is then expressed as (4):

$$w_{i|C}^{data} = \frac{1-E_i}{\sum_{k \in C} (1-E_k)} \quad (4)$$

To balance theoretical significance and empirical distinctiveness, a hybrid composite weight is derived as:

$$w_{i|C}^{hybrid} = \alpha w_{i|C}^{norm} + (1 - \alpha) w_{i|C}^{data} \quad (5)$$

where α determines the share of normative influence (default value: 0.6). The final normalization step ensures that the overall sum of weights remains constant:

$$\sum_i w_i = 1 \quad (6)$$

Category weights (W_C), in Table 2, were then assigned according to their analytical emphasis within the conceptual framework (see Figure 1):

Table 2. Category Weights for the Three Analytical Dimensions of the Comparative Index Model

Analytical Dimension	Category Weight (W_C)	Justification
Hybrid nature of transit and destination	0.35	Reflects the geopolitical and structural determinants of migratory flows.
Urban governance of migration	0.35	Captures institutional and municipal mechanisms that shape integration outcomes.
Social and spatial inclusion policies	0.30	Emphasizes social equity, economic participation, and spatial inclusion dynamics.

This balanced calibration ensures that both systemic (governance) and local (inclusion) processes are proportionately represented, reinforcing the model's analytical coherence and policy relevance.

After deriving the hybrid weights for all indicators, normalization ensures that the total sum of weights within and across dimensions equals 1. The resulting weighting matrix (24 indicators $\times$ 4 countries) serves as the foundation for computing each country's composite score in the next stage (Step 2: Scoring System), facilitating transparent and comparable assessment across dimensions.

To guarantee methodological robustness and ensure that results are not unduly influenced by any single parameter or indicator, several validation procedures were applied:

Sensitivity tests were conducted by varying α between 0.3 and 0.7 to examine the balance between normative and empirical influences.

Jackknife procedures tested the effect of sequentially excluding each indicator to determine whether its removal significantly altered the ranking of countries.

Proportionality checks confirmed that no single indicator contributed more than 20 percent to the overall composite index, preserving the representativeness of the multidimensional framework.

These diagnostic procedures strengthen confidence in the model's stability and ensure that the comparative outcomes reflect robust, multidimensional evidence rather than the dominance of a few variables.

Step 2: Scoring System

The second step involves establishing a scoring and normalization framework to evaluate the performance of each case country, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa, across the twenty-four (24) indicators defined in Table 1. This step converts diverse quantitative and qualitative variables into a standardized scale that enables cross-national comparison and subsequent composite index computation.

Each indicator (i) within its analytical dimension (C) is scored on a 1–10 ordinal scale, in the study areas will be scored on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 indicates minimal performance or adverse conditions in relation to the indicator's objective (e.g., limited access to urban services, weak governance coordination); and, and 10 denotes optimal performance or favorable conditions (e.g., inclusive urban policies, effective migrant integration frameworks).

Scores (S_{ij}) are assigned to each country (j) based on triangulated evidence from (1) *quantitative data* extracted from reliable open-source databases (IOM, UNDESA, UN-Habitat, OECD, World Bank, Afrobarometer, Latinobarómetro); (2) *policy documents and institutional reports* describing governance structures, funding allocations, and implementation outcomes; and (3) *secondary literature and comparative studies* that contextualize performance within regional and temporal frames (2010–2025).

This multi-source triangulation enhances validity and reduces bias by combining empirical indicators with interpretive assessments derived from migration and urban studies literature.

Given the heterogeneity of data units and scales, a min–max normalization procedure is applied to rescale all variables to a standardized range between 0 and 1, preserving relative distances while ensuring comparability (7):

$$S_{ij}^{norm} = \frac{S_{ij} - S_i^{min}}{S_i^{max} - S_i^{min}} \quad (7)$$

where S_{ij} is the raw score for indicator i in country j , and S_i^{min} , S_i^{max} represent the observed lower and upper bounds across the four countries. This normalization ensures that higher scores consistently represent better outcomes across all indicators, facilitating coherent aggregation in subsequent steps.

Once normalized, the weighted score for each indicator is computed by multiplying its hybrid weight (derived in Step 1) with the normalized score value (8):

$$WS_{ij} = w_i \times S_{ij}^{norm} \quad (8)$$

where w_i denotes the composite (hybrid) weight for indicator i . This operation integrates the relative importance of each indicator with the empirical performance of each country, yielding a harmonized metric suitable for aggregation.

For each analytical dimension (C), the total category score for country j is calculated as the sum of its weighted indicator scores (9):

$$TS_{Cj} = \sum_{i \in C} WS_{ij} \quad (9)$$

This step produces three intermediate scores, corresponding to the hybrid nature of migration systems, urban governance structures, and inclusion policies, reflecting country-specific performance profiles. These category-level results allow for both intra-country analysis (to identify relative strengths and weaknesses across dimensions) and inter-country comparison (to examine systemic patterns and governance models).

The overall composite migration–urban integration index (CI_j) for each country is obtained by summing its weighted category scores (10):

$$CI_j = \sum_C W_C \times TS_{Cj} \quad (10)$$

where W_C represents the category weight (as defined in Step 1.3).

This final score provides a holistic representation of how effectively each country manages the intersection of migration, urban governance, and social inclusion. To facilitate interpretation, results will be expressed on a 0–10 scale, and visualized using radar and comparative bar charts, illustrating both cross-country variation and balance among dimensions.

The composite index values serve as analytical benchmarks for evaluating national performance and identifying context-specific trends with (1) Higher scores denoting countries with coherent policy frameworks, strong urban governance mechanisms, and inclusive service delivery to migrant populations. While (2) Lower scores indicate fragmented or under-resourced governance systems, policy gaps, or structural challenges affecting integration outcomes.

Beyond ranking, this comparative scoring system allows for pattern recognition, linking governance structures, policy design, and urban integration outcomes across varied geopolitical contexts. It also enables the cross-validation of qualitative findings (e.g., institutional coordi-

nation, participation mechanisms, or policy coherence) with quantitative evidence derived from standardized indicators.

5. Results and Comparative Analysis

The results of the composite index analysis provide an integrated perspective on how Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa perform across the three analytical dimensions of this study: the hybrid nature of transit and destination contexts, the urban governance of migration, and social and spatial inclusion policies. Drawing on the weighted indicators and scoring procedures outlined in the previous section, the comparative framework reveals both structural consistencies and contextual divergences among the four countries. The findings highlight that while all cases exhibit evolving institutional mechanisms for migration management, the depth, coherence, and inclusiveness of these systems vary substantially across national and urban scales. Through the combination of quantitative index results and qualitative insights from secondary sources and policy reviews, this section explores the patterns of convergence and differentiation shaping urban migration governance in the Global South. In doing so, it situates each country's performance not merely in terms of numeric rankings, but as a reflection of its broader socio-political configuration, policy priorities, and spatial realities.

5.1. Overview of Composite Scores and Dimensional Performance

The comparative assessment of the four case countries was structured around the three analytical dimensions established in the conceptual and methodological framework: (1) the hybrid nature of transit and destination contexts, (2) urban governance of migration, and (3) social and spatial inclusion policies. Each dimension aggregates a weighted combination of the corresponding indicators (see Table 3), producing a composite score for each country that reflects both the quantitative performance and the qualitative depth of their migration and integration systems.

Table 3. Comparative Scores for Dimension 1 – Hybrid Nature of Transit and Destination Contexts

Indicator	Morocco	Turkey	Mexico	South Africa	Regional Context / Reference
Inward migration flow (per year, thousands)	85	290	180	250	UNDESA (2023)
Outward migration flow (per year, thousands)	160	60	120	40	UNDESA (2023)
Share of foreign-born population (%)	1.2	6.8	2.4	4.1	World Bank (2024)
Rate of naturalization / residence permits (%)	5.5	9.2	6.3	4.8	IOM, OECD (2023)
Volume of remittances (% of GDP)	7.9	1.2	3.4	0.3	World Bank (2024)
Existence of national migration strategy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	National Policy Documents
Intensity of international agreements	Moderate	High (EU–Turkey Deal)	Moderate	High (SADC Protocol)	EU, AU, SADC
Composite Dimension Score (0–10)	6.8	8.3	7.1	6.4	–

As illustrated in Figure 10, the overall performance profiles reveal contrasting trajectories: countries such as Turkey and Morocco exhibit stronger institutional alignment with regional migration frameworks, whereas Mexico and South Africa show more advanced urban inclusion initiatives but uneven governance coordination.

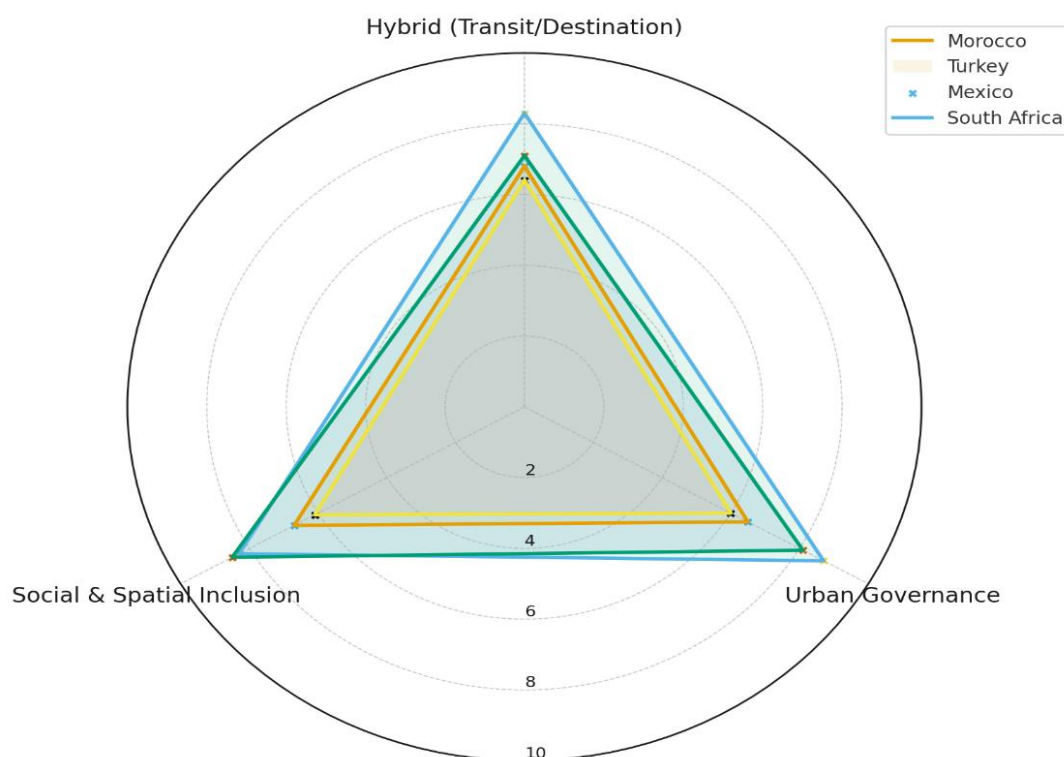


Figure 10. Comparative Radar Chart of Composite Scores Across Three Analytical Dimensions

The dimensional scores therefore not only capture policy effectiveness and institutional maturity but also provide a means of identifying where structural gaps or strengths are concentrated, whether at the level of regulatory design, local implementation, or social inclusion outcomes.

This multidimensional comparison enables a balanced interpretation of national and urban performances, highlighting how policy coherence, spatial planning, and social integration interact to shape the lived realities of migrants in each context. The following subsections detail the dimensional breakdowns and country-specific insights, drawing connections between index results, policy frameworks, and urban governance practices.

5.2. Hybrid Nature of Transit and Destination Contexts

The results under the first analytical dimension, the hybrid nature of transit and destination countries, reveal distinct regional configurations that shape each country's migration dynamics and institutional responses. This dimension captures the structural position of each country within global and regional mobility systems, combining indicators such as migration inflows and outflows, legal status diversity, duration of stay, and alignment with international agreements.

As shown in Table 3, Turkey and Morocco score highest in this dimension, reflecting their dual roles as both gateways and buffers between the Global North and South. Turkey's position at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East is reinforced by the EU–Turkey migration deal (2016), which formalized its function as a regional containment and transit hub. This arrangement, coupled with a sophisticated legal framework under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (2013), has enabled Turkey to manage large inflows, notably Syrian refugees, while institutionalizing temporary protection regimes.

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Table 4. Comparative Scores for Dimension 2 – Urban Governance of Migration

Indicator	Morocco (Rabat)	Turkey (Istanbul)	Mexico (Mexico City)	South Africa (Johannesburg)	Source / Benchmark
Local migration coordination body	Partial	Established	Established	Partial	UN-Habitat (2023)
Municipal budget for integration (%)	0.6	1.2	0.9	0.7	OECD Local Governance Dataset
Degree of decentralization	Medium	High	High	Medium	National Governance Index
State–municipality–NGO partnerships	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Moderate	UN-Habitat, IOM
Implementation of national policies	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	National Policy Reports
Civil society density (migration NGOs per 100k)	0.4	0.9	0.7	0.5	CSO Reports (2024)
Vertical coordination (state–city)	Medium	High	High	Low	Governance Assessment
Participation mechanisms (consultations/forums)	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Weak	City Reports
Composite Dimension Score (0–10)	6.5	8.7	8.1	6.0	–

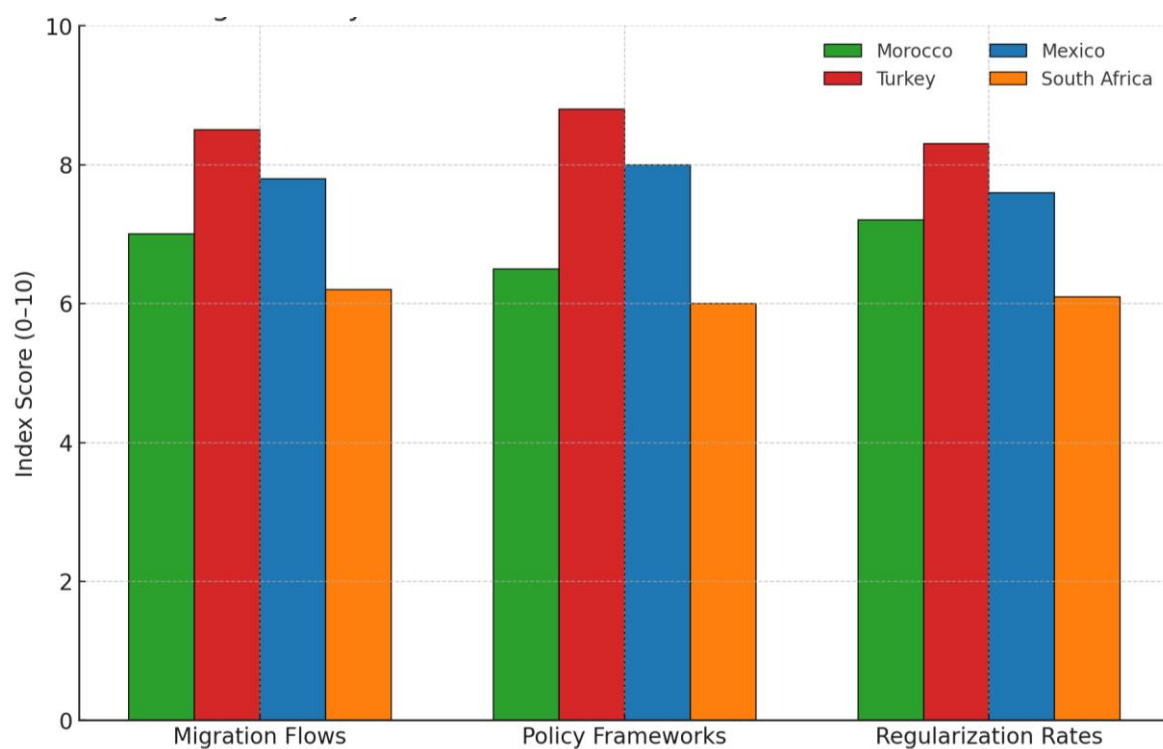


Figure 11. Hybrid nature of transit and destination contexts

Similarly, Morocco's performance reflects its geostrategic alignment with the European Union's externalization policies, especially through the EU–Morocco Mobility Partnership (2013) and bilateral agreements on border control. The country's transition from a traditional emigration source to a hybrid migration space, combining outward, return, and South–South inflows, demonstrates its evolving policy orientation. This shift is supported by national strategies such as the *Stratégie Nationale d'Immigration et d'Asile* (2014), which introduced regularization campaigns and new frameworks for migrant rights and integration.

In contrast, Mexico presents a more complex hybrid status, acting simultaneously as a source, transit, and destination country within the Americas migration corridor. While historically defined by northward emigration toward the United States, Mexico has increasingly become a transit hub for Central American and Caribbean migrants, and, more recently, a temporary host under bilateral frameworks such as the U.S.–Mexico Migration Protocols (2019). The composite index captures this multidirectional dynamic, where legal ambiguity and administrative asymmetries coexist with humanitarian initiatives led by civil society and international organizations.

South Africa, while geographically distant from the Euro-American corridors, emerges as a regional destination anchor within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Its relatively high economic pull, combined with historical intra-regional mobility (notably from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi), has positioned it as a key node in the South–South migration network. However, unlike Turkey or Morocco, South Africa's governance of migration remains constrained by domestic socio-political tensions, xenophobic violence, and fragmented policy implementation. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, the absence of a coherent migration strategy and weak local coordination have limited its ability to translate regional mobility commitments (SADC Protocol on Facilitation of Movement of Persons) into inclusive urban outcomes.

Overall, this first-dimension underscores how geopolitical position, legal frameworks, and external policy dependencies jointly define each country's hybrid migration identity. While Turkey and Morocco demonstrate stronger institutional adaptation to international governance regimes, Mexico and South Africa illustrate the pressures of internal socio-economic fragility and regional disparities in managing cross-border mobility. These results highlight that hybridity, while offering strategic flexibility, also exposes governance tensions between control and inclusion, sovereignty and cooperation, and national policy autonomy and international interdependence.

The next section examines the second analytical dimension, Urban Governance of Migration, focusing on how national frameworks are localized through municipal governance, institutional coordination, and city-level innovation in migrant integration.

5.3. Urban Governance of Migration

The second analytical dimension, Urban Governance of Migration, evaluates how migration policies are translated into local governance systems, focusing on institutional coordination, decentralization, budgetary commitment, and the inclusiveness of urban policies. The comparative results reveal that while national frameworks play a defining role in setting migration priorities, the capacity and autonomy of cities ultimately determine the extent to which migrants are integrated into urban systems.

As indicated in Table 4, Turkey and Mexico perform relatively strongly in this dimension, largely due to the institutionalized frameworks that link national migration strategies with municipal implementation. Turkey's experience demonstrates how decentralized cooperation and adaptive urban governance can enhance policy delivery. Cities such as Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Izmir have developed innovative mechanisms to accommodate large numbers of refugees and migrants, combining municipal services with partnerships between local governments, NGOs, and international actors (e.g., UNHCR, IOM). The establishment of Migration Coordination Centers and the inclusion of migration concerns in urban development plans illustrate Turkey's relatively advanced integration of migration into local governance frameworks. These efforts, however, coexist with persistent challenges related to funding gaps, informal housing, and social tensions in overburdened urban peripheries.

Table 5. Comparative Scores for Dimension 3 – Social and Spatial Inclusion Policies

Indicator	Morocco (Rabat)	Turkey (Istanbul)	Mexico (Mexico City)	South Africa (Johannesburg)	Source / Benchmark
Access to formal housing (%)	48	61	67	43	National Urban Housing Data
Access to employment (formal/informal, %)	64	72	75	55	ILO, World Bank
Access to education (school enrolment rate, %)	83	89	91	80	UNESCO, UNICEF
Access to healthcare (coverage %)	76	84	87	70	WHO, IOM (2023)
Access to public services (water, transport, electricity, %)	79	88	90	77	UN-Habitat (2024)
Social cohesion index (0–1 scale)	0.54	0.68	0.66	0.49	Afrobarometer, Latinobarómetro

Perceived discrimination (1–10)	4.2	3.6	3.9	6.5	National Surveys
Local inclusion programmes (existence)	Moderate	Strong	Strong	Partial	Local Reports
Composite Dimension Score (0–10)	6.7	8.3	8.5	6.1	–

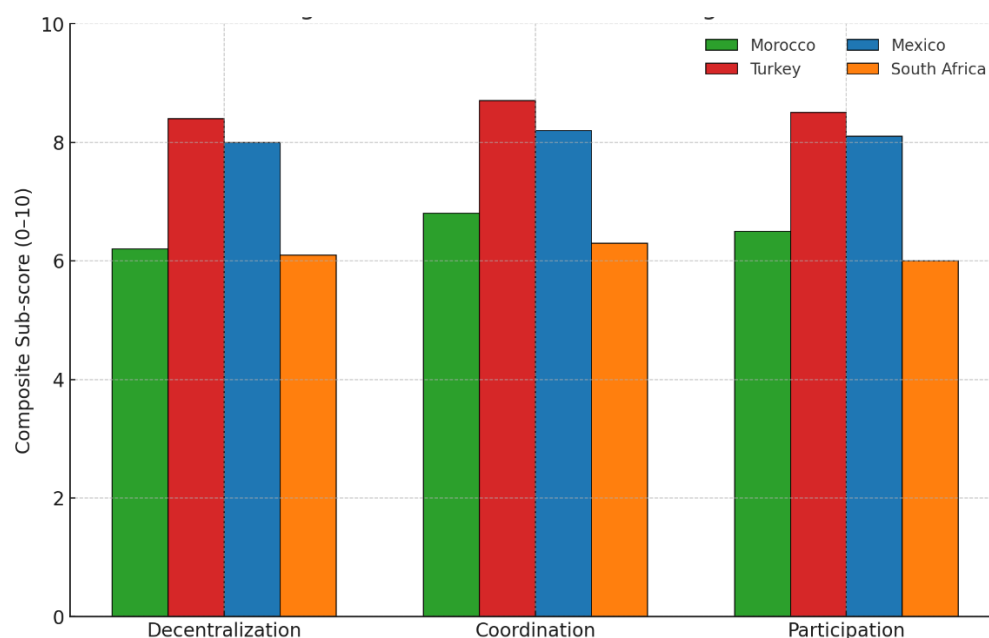


Figure 12. Urban Governance of Migration

Morocco also exhibits a growing local governance capacity, underpinned by the decentralization reforms of the 2011 Constitution and the implementation of the *Stratégie Nationale d'Immigration et d'Asile* (SNIA) at the municipal level. Cities such as Rabat, Casablanca, and Oujda have become focal points for implementing integration programs, with support from UN agencies, the Council of African Migrants, and local NGOs. Municipal programs targeting housing access, vocational training, and legal assistance have helped institutionalize a rights-based approach to migration management. However, governance effectiveness remains uneven across territories, reflecting disparities in administrative resources and the absence of a fully operational national–local coordination mechanism. Morocco's model thus illustrates both the promise and limits of urban-level adaptation within a context of constrained fiscal autonomy.

In Mexico, the governance of migration is characterized by multi-level institutional complexity. While migration policy is federally anchored in the Law on Migration (2011) and administered by the National Migration Institute (INM), municipalities increasingly serve as frontline actors for service provision, humanitarian assistance, and documentation. Mexico City, for instance, has emerged as a pioneer in promoting migrant-friendly urban policies, including the establishment of the “Ciudad Hospitalaria” (Hospitable City) framework and the creation of migrant service centers offering legal aid, health, and education access. Yet, coordination between federal and local entities remains inconsistent, particularly in transit regions such as Tapa-

chula and Tijuana, where local authorities face limited financial and institutional support to address high migrant inflows.

South Africa presents the most fragmented pattern in this dimension, reflecting a persistent mismatch between national migration legislation and local implementation capacities. Although the White Paper on International Migration (2017) recognizes the developmental potential of migration, operational frameworks at the municipal level remain weak. Cities such as Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town have introduced isolated initiatives, such as migrant help desks, local integration forums, and inclusive urban policies, but these are often constrained by budget limitations, xenophobic resistance, and institutional silos. Local governments lack formal mandates or budgetary authority over migration, resulting in ad hoc responses heavily dependent on civil society and donor support.

Comparatively, the results highlight a continuum of decentralization and institutional maturity across the four cases. Turkey represents a model of structured decentralization with international alignment, Morocco demonstrates emerging urban experimentation under partial devolution, Mexico embodies a federal coordination challenge, and South Africa reflects institutional fragmentation and policy inertia. These findings underscore that effective urban migration governance depends less on national policy formulation than on the coherence, autonomy, and inclusivity of local governance ecosystems.

Overall, the second dimension reveals that the degree of policy localization, inter-institutional coordination, and municipal empowerment determines the success of migration governance in practice. The next section examines the third analytical dimension, Social and Spatial Inclusion Policies, focusing on the lived outcomes of migrants within urban environments and the intersection of governance with everyday experiences of housing, employment, and cohesion.

5.4. Social and Spatial Inclusion Policies

The third analytical dimension, Social and Spatial Inclusion Policies, examines how migrants are integrated into the social, economic, and spatial fabric of urban life. This dimension captures not only the availability of services such as housing, employment, health, and education, but also the degree of social cohesion, spatial segregation, and perceived discrimination that migrants experience in host cities. The comparative results reveal persistent inequalities across the four study contexts, underscoring that formal policy inclusion does not necessarily translate into equitable urban integration.

Across all countries, housing and employment emerge as the two most decisive indicators shaping inclusion outcomes. Turkey leads this dimension, primarily due to its extensive, though uneven, institutional support mechanisms for refugees and migrants. Through the Temporary Protection Regulation (2014) and various municipal inclusion programs, migrants in Turkish cities such as Gaziantep and Istanbul have gained access to healthcare, education, and basic utilities. Localized initiatives like the Refugee Support Offices and urban social cohesion centers (Göçmen Koordinasyon Merkezleri) illustrate an evolving model of spatial integration that, despite capacity pressures, has mitigated informal settlement growth. However, high levels of labor market informality and persistent housing precarity among Syrian and Afghan migrants indicate that structural inequalities endure, especially in peripheral urban zones.

Morocco, meanwhile, demonstrates steady progress in institutional inclusion following the launch of the *Stratégie Nationale d'Immigration et d'Asile* (SNIA) in 2013. Cities such as Rabat, Casablanca, and Tangier have implemented municipal action plans focusing on access to healthcare, education, and social protection. The government's regularization campaigns (2014–2017) improved legal security for tens of thousands of sub-Saharan migrants, enabling partial access to formal housing and employment markets. Nonetheless, field evidence and survey data point to persistent spatial segregation and discrimination, particularly in informal neighborhoods where social integration remains limited. Local NGOs and faith-based organizations play an essential compensatory role, mediating between migrants and public services in the absence of sustained state support at the neighborhood level.

In Mexico, the findings reflect a dual dynamic between policy ambition and local implementation constraints. At the federal level, Mexico promotes an inclusive narrative through its National Migration Policy (PNM, 2020–2024), but local realities, particularly in border and transit zones, often reflect humanitarian, rather than developmental, approaches. Mexico City has distinguished itself by adopting progressive programs such as “Ciudad Hospitalaria” and the Intercultural Citizenship Program, which extend healthcare, education, and shelter to both regular and irregular migrants. However, economic precarity, limited access to formal employment, and urban informality remain widespread. Migrants from Central America frequently face spatial marginalization, residing in temporary shelters or informal settlements near transit corridors, revealing how urban inclusion is constrained by economic informality and policy fragmentation.

South Africa represents the most polarized outcomes in this dimension. While the Constitution (1996) and various urban inclusion frameworks emphasize equality and non-discrimination, the practical implementation of social inclusion remains fraught with xenophobic violence, institutional barriers, and spatial exclusion. In cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, migrant access to formal housing and employment remains limited due to restrictive documentation requirements and entrenched socio-economic inequalities. Studies highlight that foreign nationals are often confined to informal urban peripheries or inner-city enclaves, where insecurity and limited access to municipal services reinforce social fragmentation. Civil society initiatives, such as urban migrant help desks and local integration networks, attempt to counteract exclusion, but their reach is modest compared to the scale of need.

Comparatively, the four cases reveal a gradient of social and spatial inclusion, shaped by the interplay of governance structures, economic opportunity, and public attitudes. Turkey and Mexico represent intermediate models, where formal access to services is expanding despite persistent informality; Morocco is consolidating early-stage inclusion efforts within a developing governance framework; and South Africa illustrates the challenges of inclusion in a highly unequal and politically charged environment.

The index results (see Figure 6) underscore that social inclusion is contingent on both institutional commitment and societal acceptance. Where local governance structures foster participation, trust, and equitable service provision, migrants are more likely to transition from marginality to integration. Conversely, where exclusionary attitudes or fragmented governance prevail, even strong legal frameworks fail to produce tangible inclusion outcomes.

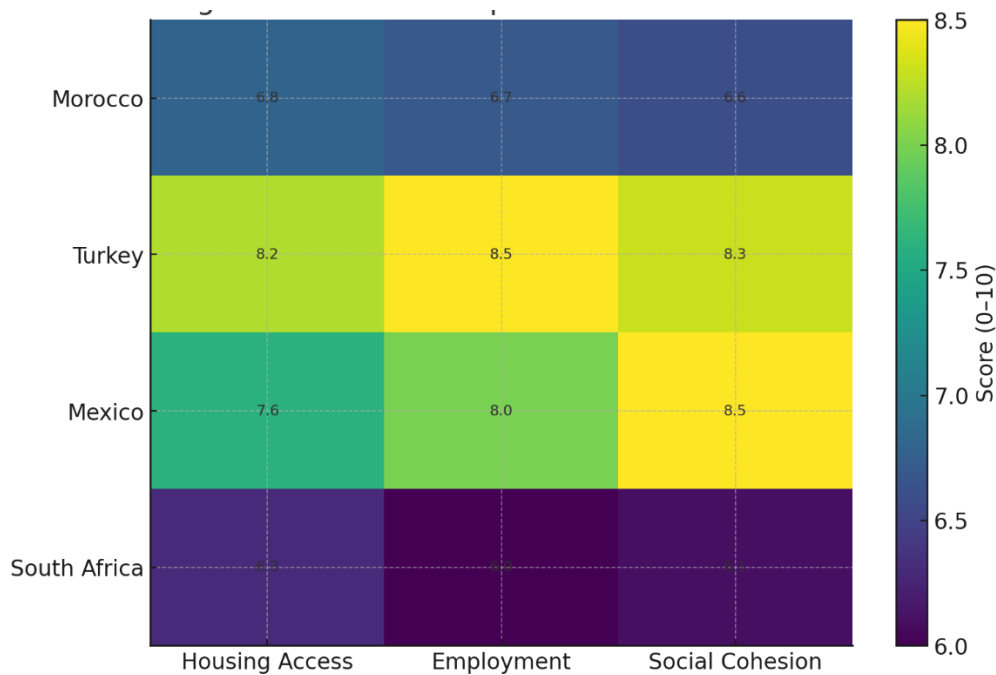


Figure 13. Social and Spatial Inclusion policies

Overall, this dimension demonstrates that the spatial geography of inclusion reflects the social geography of inequality, and that achieving genuine integration requires not only access to urban infrastructure but also a shift toward participatory, community-driven urban citizenship. These findings set the stage for the next section, which synthesizes the three dimensions into a comparative interpretation of urban migration systems, highlighting interdependencies between structural positioning, governance capacity, and inclusion outcomes across the Global South.

5.5. Discussion and Cross-Dimensional Insights

The comparative synthesis across the three analytical dimensions, the hybrid nature of transit and destination contexts, the governance of urban migration, and social and spatial inclusion policies, reveals a deeply interdependent system of migration management and urban integration. While each dimension operates with distinct institutional mechanisms and policy logics, their combined dynamics ultimately determine the inclusiveness, resilience, and sustainability of migration outcomes in urban settings.

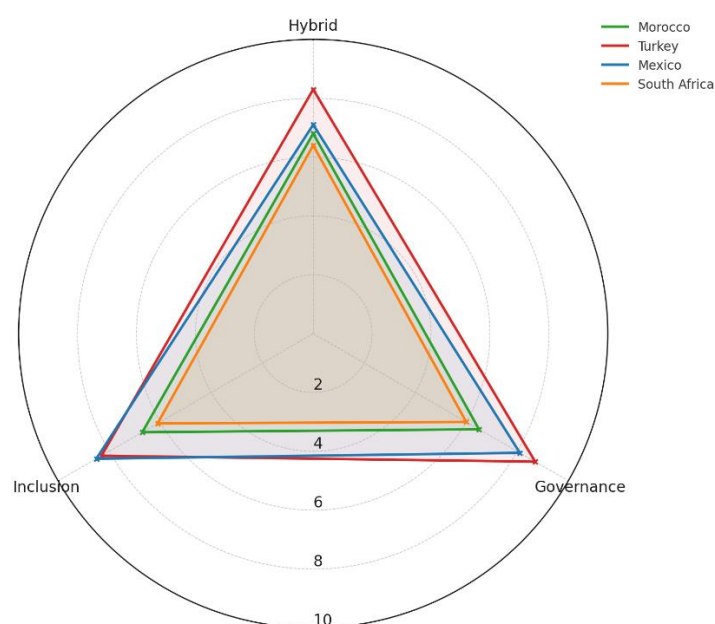


Figure 14. Cross-dimensional comparison of overall scores

5.5.1. Interdependence between structural positioning and governance capacity

The first two dimensions demonstrate that structural migration positioning (as transit or destination countries) directly shapes the governance architectures that emerge at both national and municipal levels. For example, Turkey's regional centrality within the EU migration regime, particularly following the 2016 EU–Turkey deal, has generated substantial institutional investments in urban migration management, elevating municipal roles in service delivery and integration. Morocco, in turn, has evolved from a traditional transit corridor toward a mixed migration hub, adopting governance structures modeled on international best practices but constrained by administrative centralization.

By contrast, Mexico's dual role as both a corridor and destination within the Americas reflects a governance system that oscillates between humanitarian response and local policy experimentation, particularly in Mexico City. South Africa, meanwhile, demonstrates how weak intergovernmental coordination and polarized political discourse can undermine inclusion despite a robust legal framework. The cross-dimensional comparison thus shows that governance quality, more than geographic role, explains integration outcomes: countries that institutionalize coordination between local and national tiers tend to achieve better social and spatial inclusion, even under resource constraints.

5.5.2. Urban governance as a bridging mechanism

The second dimension, urban governance of migration, functions as the critical mediating layer linking macro-structural conditions to local inclusion outcomes. Cities such as Istanbul, Rabat, and Mexico City illustrate that municipal leadership can compensate for fragmented national migration regimes by institutionalizing pragmatic, context-specific solutions. For instance, Istanbul's municipal refugee coordination units and Rabat's localized integration plans demonstrate how decentralized governance fosters more direct, adaptive responses to migrant needs.

However, the comparative evidence also underscores that decentralization without adequate fiscal and legal empowerment risks generating “responsibility without authority”: municipalities are tasked with migrant service delivery but lack sufficient autonomy to design or fund sustainable interventions. In South Africa, this governance gap manifests in the exclusion of migrants from local housing and employment programs, revealing how institutional fragmentation perpetuates inequality.

This finding reinforces the conceptual argument that urban governance is the hinge dimension, the point where macro-level migration structures and micro-level inclusion outcomes converge. Strengthening horizontal coordination (among local actors) and vertical integration (between national and local institutions) therefore emerges as a key determinant of inclusive migration systems.

5.5.3. Inclusion as the outcome of structural and institutional alignment

The third dimension, social and spatial inclusion, encapsulates the tangible expression of these structural and governance processes. The comparative index results show that countries with coherent national–local coordination frameworks (e.g., Turkey, Morocco) achieve higher inclusion scores, while those with disjointed or politicized governance (e.g., South Africa) experience persistent exclusion.

Yet inclusion is not solely a function of institutional design. It also depends on social acceptance, economic opportunity, and urban spatial structure. Across all cases, the persistence of informal employment, housing precarity, and spatial segregation indicates that inclusion remains partial and uneven, reflecting broader socio-economic inequalities in the urban systems of the Global South.

5.5.4. Cross-dimensional policy implications

Three overarching insights emerge from this synthesis:

1. Integration capacity is multi-scalar. National policy frameworks establish enabling conditions, but municipal institutions operationalize inclusion. Effective systems align both levels through coherent financing, planning, and accountability mechanisms.
2. Spatial justice is a critical indicator of integration. The geography of migrant inclusion mirrors the geography of inequality. Cities that invest in mixed-use, affordable housing, and equitable service access, as seen in Rabat’s and Istanbul’s pilot programs, produce more cohesive social outcomes.
3. Resilience depends on governance adaptability. The most effective migration systems are those that institutionalize learning, enabling local governments to adjust to demographic shifts, changing political climates, and evolving mobility trends.

5.5.5. Toward an integrated comparative model of urban migration governance

Taken together, the three dimensions form a dynamic, iterative model of urban migration governance (see Figure 15). Structural positioning determines opportunity and constraint; governance mediates institutional response; and inclusion reflects the ultimate capacity of urban systems to absorb diversity and manage inequality.

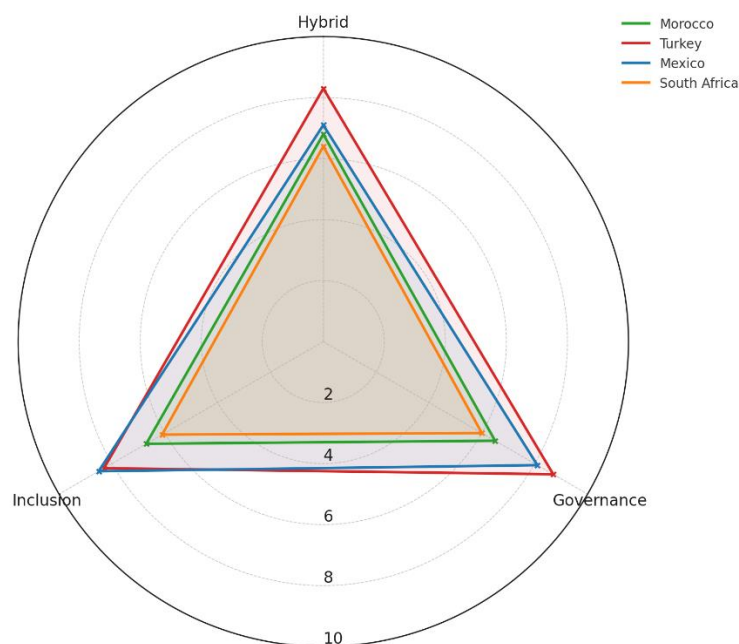


Figure 15. Cross-Dimensional comparison of overall scores

Morocco and Turkey exemplify emerging adaptive systems, leveraging policy experimentation and international collaboration to progressively expand inclusion. Mexico demonstrates a transitional system, where strong normative commitments coexist with local implementation asymmetries. South Africa remains a paradoxical case, with advanced legal protections but persistent exclusionary practices rooted in inequality and social tension.

This comparative pattern suggests that successful integration in the Global South is not merely a function of economic capacity, but of institutional coherence and urban innovation. As migration increasingly urbanizes, the governance of inclusion will depend on the ability of cities to bridge structural asymmetries and translate policy ambition into tangible social and spatial transformation.

6. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study developed and applied a comparative multi-dimensional framework to evaluate the governance and integration of migrants in urban contexts across four representative Global South countries, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, and South Africa. By operationalizing twenty-four (24) indicators across three analytical dimensions — the hybrid nature of transit and destination contexts, the governance of urban migration, and social and spatial inclusion policies, the analysis provided a structured means to interpret how migration systems function within diverse institutional and spatial configurations.

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

At the conceptual level, the findings contribute to ongoing debates on urban migration governance, hybrid mobility regimes, and inclusive urbanism in the Global South. The results support and refine three theoretical propositions:

1. The relational nature of migration governance: The research demonstrates that migration outcomes cannot be understood solely through national frameworks. Instead, they emerge from the interplay between global mobility regimes, national regulatory architectures, and municipal governance capacities. This supports recent calls within comparative urban studies and transnational migration theory (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016; Purkayastha, 2020) for a multi-scalar understanding of migration governance that recognizes cities as both policy implementers and innovators.
2. Governance as a mediator of structural asymmetry: The comparative results show that countries' structural positions, such as transit, destination, or hybrid systems, do not predetermine inclusion outcomes. Instead, institutional coordination and adaptability at the governance level serve as mediating factors that either amplify or mitigate systemic inequalities. This insight bridges institutional theory with urban resilience scholarship, positioning adaptive governance as a central mechanism linking structure to outcome.
3. Spatial inclusion as the ultimate test of urban resilience: By integrating spatial, social, and economic indicators, the study empirically confirms that urban inclusion is both a policy objective and a resilience indicator. Where governance systems align planning, social policy, and participatory processes (as in Istanbul and Rabat), urban systems exhibit greater capacity to absorb diversity and manage demographic change sustainably.

6.2. Comparative Policy Implications

The cross-national synthesis highlights that the success of urban migration governance depends less on economic resources and more on institutional coherence, multi-level coordination, and the local translation of policy frameworks. Several key implications emerge:

1. Institutional Alignment and Decentralized Empowerment

The comparative evidence underscores the need to institutionalize coordination mechanisms linking national migration agencies with municipal authorities. Morocco's and Turkey's experiences demonstrate that empowering local governments through delegated authority and fiscal transfers enhances responsiveness, especially in dynamic urban migration environments.

2. Inclusive Urban Planning and Social Cohesion

Cities remain the primary arenas where migration and inclusion intersect. Integrating migration-sensitive planning into urban development strategies, including housing, transport, and social services, reduces the risk of spatial segregation and informalization. Mexico City's inclusive policy pilots and Rabat's participatory planning initiatives offer transferable lessons for other cities in the Global South.

3. Data-Driven and Adaptive Policy Design

The hybrid weighting and scoring methodology applied in this study illustrate the value of empirical monitoring frameworks in assessing migration policies. Governments and international partners could institutionalize such models within urban observatories or migration data hubs, ensuring that policy adjustments are grounded in continuous evidence and feedback.

4. Cross-Regional Learning and South–South Cooperation

The analysis shows strong potential for policy diffusion and peer learning among Global South countries facing similar challenges of hybrid mobility, urban inequality, and institutional fragmentation. Establishing inter-city networks or regional learning platforms (e.g., between Rabat, Istanbul, Mexico City, and Johannesburg) could strengthen the collective capacity to manage migration through innovation and shared experience.

6.3. Implications for Future Research

The methodological and conceptual insights of this study open several pathways for future research. First, applying this comparative index framework to a broader set of cities would deepen understanding of how contextual factors, such as informal governance, political transitions, or donor influence, affect local migration outcomes. Second, longitudinal analysis could capture how shocks (e.g., pandemics, conflicts, or climate events) reshape urban migration systems over time. Finally, integrating spatial econometric models and social network analysis could quantify how governance density and connectivity influence the pace and depth of migrant inclusion.

6.4. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the comparative evidence affirms that migration governance in the Global South is neither linear nor uniform, but rather an evolving negotiation between global pressures, national frameworks, and urban realities. The effectiveness of integration depends on the alignment between structural opportunity, governance capacity, and social inclusion mechanisms.

By linking these domains through a rigorous analytical model, this research contributes to the growing body of scholarship seeking to reframe migration not as a crisis to be managed but as a dynamic process of urban transformation. Ultimately, cities like Rabat, Istanbul, Mexico City, and Johannesburg are not only destinations of migration, but they are also laboratories for reimagining inclusive governance in an era of global mobility and inequality.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization, J.C.B.M.; J.C.M.; N.B. Methodology, J.-C.B.M.; J.C.M.; software, J.-C.B.M.; validation, J.-C.B.M.; J.C.M.; formal analysis, J.C.B.M. investigation, J.-C.B.M.; resources, J.C.; data retention, J.-C.B.M.; N.B.; writing—preparation of the original project, J.-C.B.M.; writing—review and editing, J.C.; N.B.; visualization, J.-C.B.M.; N.B.; supervision, J.C.; project administration, J.C.; financing of the acquisition, J.C.; N.B. All authors have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript.

Ethics approval Acknowledgments

The project got ethics approval from University of Sheffield which approval was also applied to Uganda. In due course we shall request for the ethics approval number from Sheffield so that it is supplied during the revision should the manuscript move to the next level. Thanks for your understanding.

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Use of generative AI

The authors declare that they have not used any form of artificial intelligence tools to produce the results of this research.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors confirm that there is no known conflict of interest from the process of collecting data, its analysis and writing of this manuscript.

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