

Impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants in Guatemala and Mexico

This snapshot focuses on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the daily life of refugees and migrants in Guatemala and Mexico. It is based on 4Mi interviews with refugees and migrants and a few key informant interviews in Guatemala City and Tapachula. It aims to contribute towards a solid evidence base to inform targeted responses on the ground, as well as advocacy efforts related to the situation of refugees and migrants during the coronavirus pandemic.

Recommendations

- Promote livelihoods programs and facilitate access to the labor market for refugees and migrants, including remote working arrangements, to help them cope with the economic impact of the pandemic.
- Suspend all evictions during the COVID-19 crisis, including for refugees and migrants.
- Ensure the continuity of asylum procedures during the pandemic, while taking adequate measures to minimize the risk of contagion.

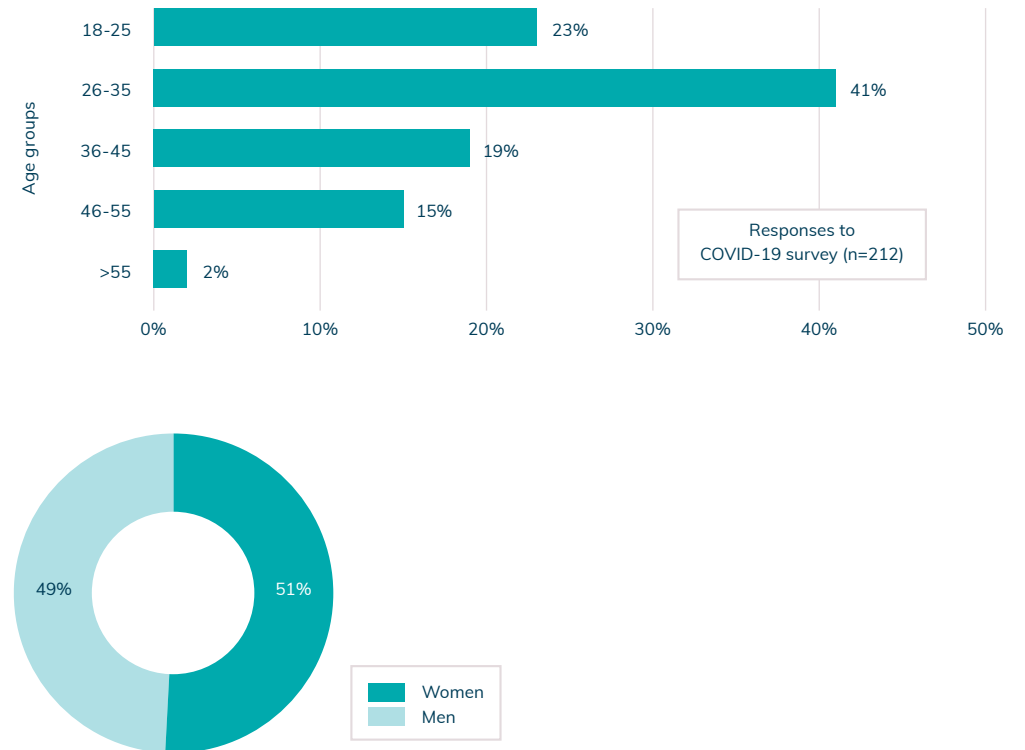
Profiles

This analysis is based on 212 surveys conducted between 13 July and 29 August 2020. Data collection was carried out remotely by phone.

59% of respondents were interviewed in Guatemala and 41% in Mexico. 87% of those surveyed in Guatemala were in the country's capital, Guatemala City, while 13% were in other cities such as Chimaltenango, Escuintla, Quetzaltenango, Sacatepéquez, among others. 91% of respondents in Mexico were in Tapachula (State of Chiapas) and the remaining 9% were in different cities including Ciudad Hidalgo and Escuintla.

51% of all respondents were women and 49% were men. The average age of respondents was 34 (see Figure 1).

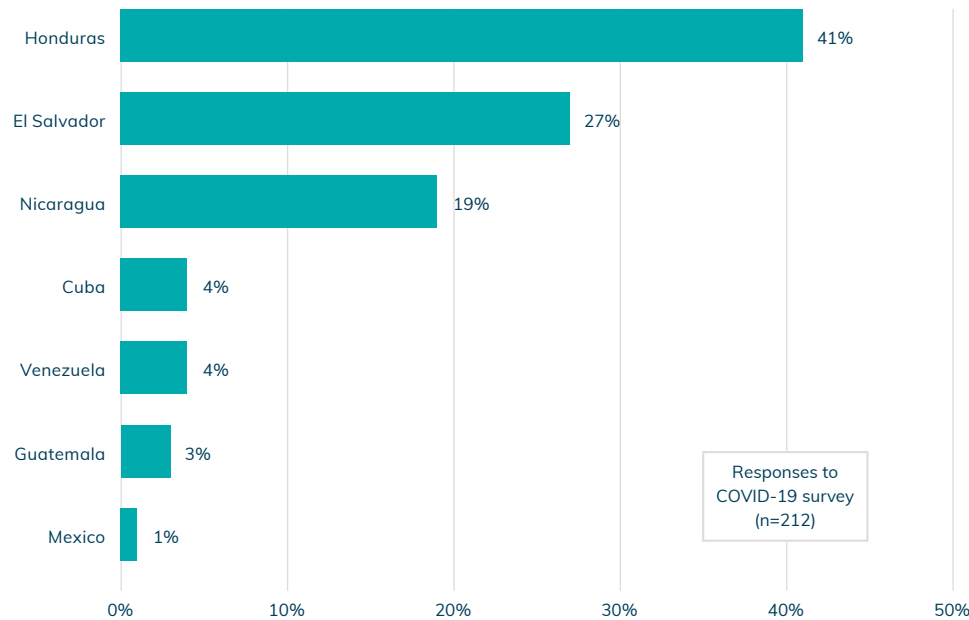
Figure 1. Age range and sex



38% of respondents had completed high school, followed by elementary school (25%), vocational training (19%) and higher education (13%).

Most respondents came from Honduras (87 of 212, or 41%), El Salvador (58 of 212, or 27%) and Nicaragua (41 of 212, or 19%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Country of nationality



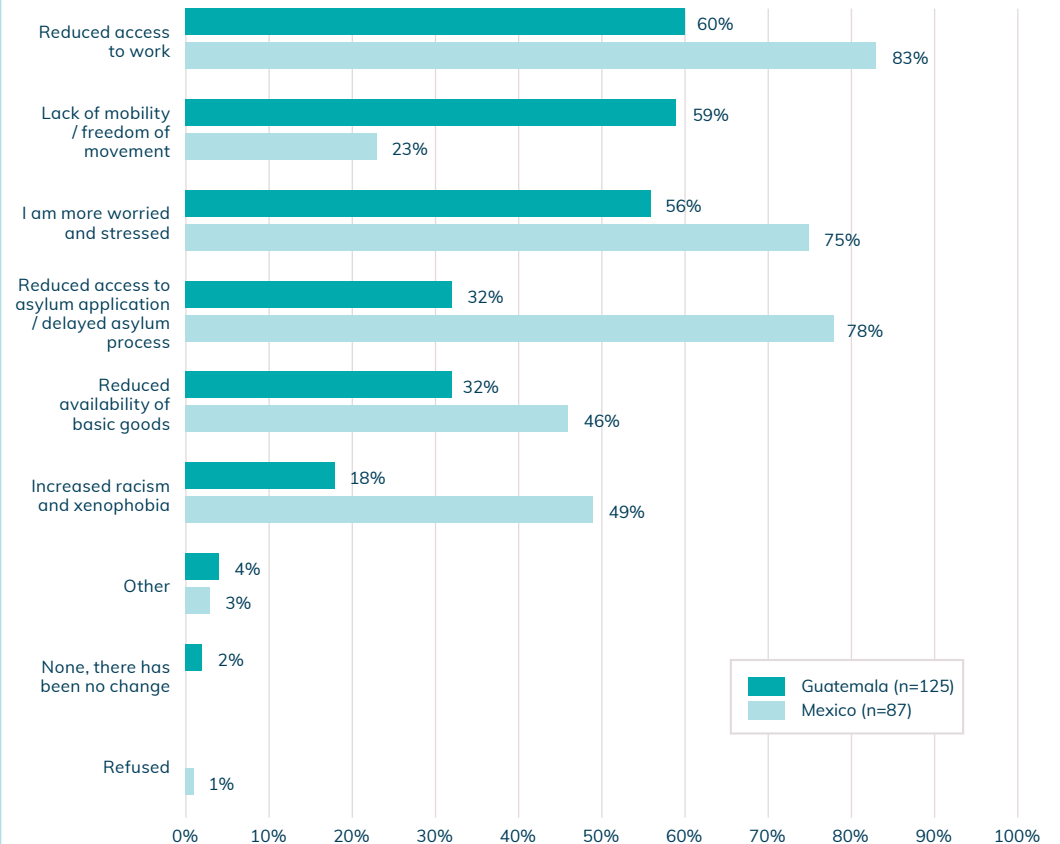
Reduced access to work and asylum amid the pandemic

The main repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis on respondents' daily life included reduced access to work (69%) and increased stress (64%). Moreover, a relevant percentage of interviewees have faced greater obstacles in applying for asylum (51%), in addition to loss of mobility (44%), reduced availability of basic goods (38%) and increased racism and xenophobia (31%) due to the pandemic.

It seems that, in the Mexican State of Chiapas, the pandemic had a stronger impact on refugees' and migrants' life than in Guatemala, as respondents interviewed in Mexico more frequently reported more effects¹ (see Figure 3).

¹ p-value= 0.000.

Figure 3. Country comparison: What other impact has the crisis had on your day-to-day life?



Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

While 83% of respondents in Mexico reported having faced reduced access to work during the crisis, for instance, only 60% of respondents in Guatemala did. Respondents in Mexico also reported an increase in racism and xenophobia much more frequently (49%), compared to those in Guatemala (18%). According to a local organization based in Tapachula, this is linked to two main factors: on the one hand, in Mexico the media covered the spread of COVID-19 among people on the move with a sensationalist approach, conveying the idea of migrants and refugees as vectors for the virus. On the other, the economic crisis caused by the pandemic increased competition between migrants and the local population for both formal and informal jobs.

Lastly, 78% of interviewees in Mexico mentioned reduced access to asylum applications and/or a delayed asylum process during the pandemic, compared to 32% of respondents in Guatemala. According to information shared by local organizations, immigration and asylum systems in both countries have been functioning intermittently during the pandemic. In Guatemala, the authorities responsible for refugee status determination only analyzed a small minority of the pending cases in their backlog. In the same way, in Mexico, the refugee commission suspended all activities in March 2020.² While it gradually resumed activities between June and September, it is reportedly not yet operating at full capacity. The difference in the perceived impact of the pandemic on the functioning of the asylum system between the two countries of interview warrants further exploration. One reason behind it, however, may be that the already long waiting-times in Guatemala before COVID-19 meant that further delays in this country were less felt by respondents.

“It’s my second refugee application process here in Guatemala. The first application for Canada was negative. It causes me a lot of stress that those processes are very slow.”

35-year-old Mexican woman in Guatemala City

Loss of mobility was the only category reported more frequently by respondents in Guatemala (59%) than in Mexico (23%). This is likely to be linked to restrictions on movement between departments.³ It is important to note that, due to the current remote recruitment mechanisms, most respondents in both countries had already established in the city of interview. The lack of mobility caused by the pandemic among the general refugee and migrant population, including those still in transit, is thus likely higher.

As illustrated in the quote below, respondents also shared information about how mobility restrictions between countries in the region have affected them:

“My husband was detained in a migrant detention center in the US and they could not deport him at first, then they deported him to our country, but now due to the coronavirus crisis he cannot meet with us.”

31-year-old Salvadoran woman in Tapachula (Mexico).

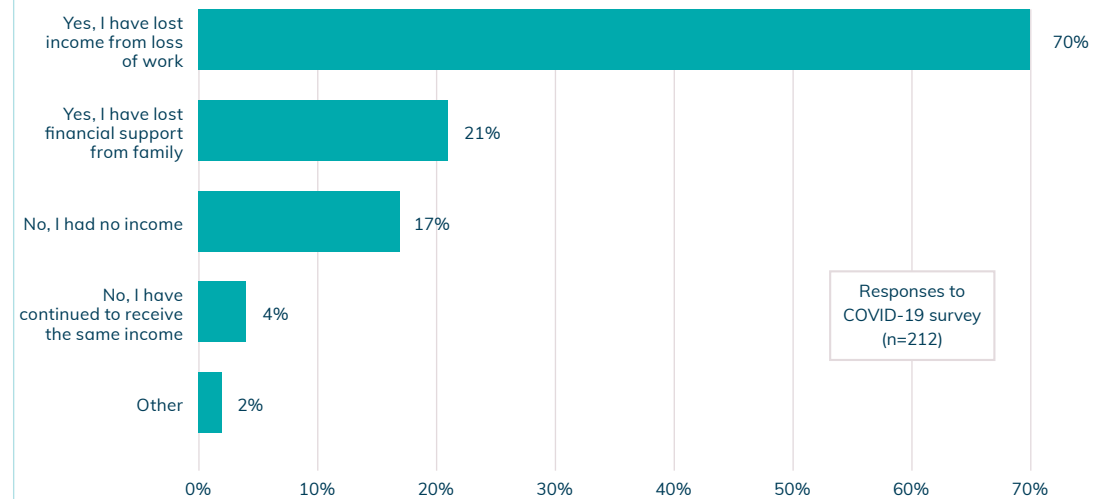
² Perspectivas (2020) [Comar suspende actividades a nivel nacional.](#)

³ Europa Press (2020) [Guatemala prorroga 15 días más sus medidas de restricción de movimientos para frenar la COVID-19.](#)

Most respondents have lost income

Most refugees and migrants interviewed had lost income during the COVID-19 pandemic (77% of all respondents). 70% had lost income due to loss of work and 21% had lost financial support from their family. 17% of respondents did not lose income because they already had no income before the crisis. Only 4% (8 of 212) of the refugees and migrants interviewed continued to rely on the same income during the pandemic (see Figure 4).

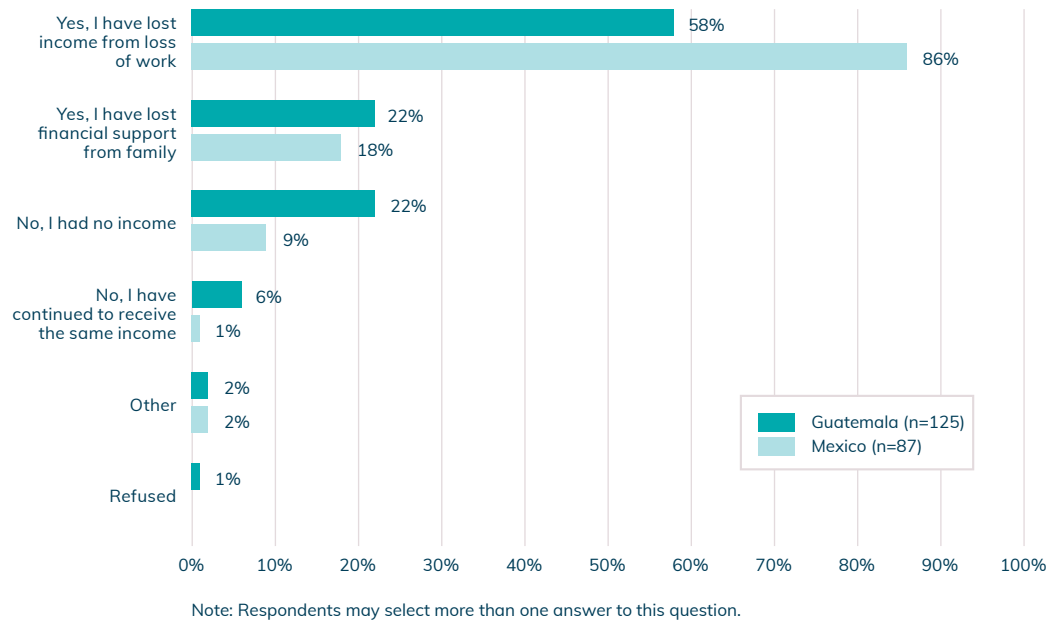
Figure 4. Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?



Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

There is a significant difference⁴ between the dynamics of the loss of income indicated by respondents in the two countries of interview. 86% of respondents in Mexico said that their loss of income was related to loss of work, versus 58% in Guatemala. At the same time, 22% of respondents in Guatemala reported they had no income before the crisis, while only 9% of respondents in Mexico said so (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Country comparison: Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?

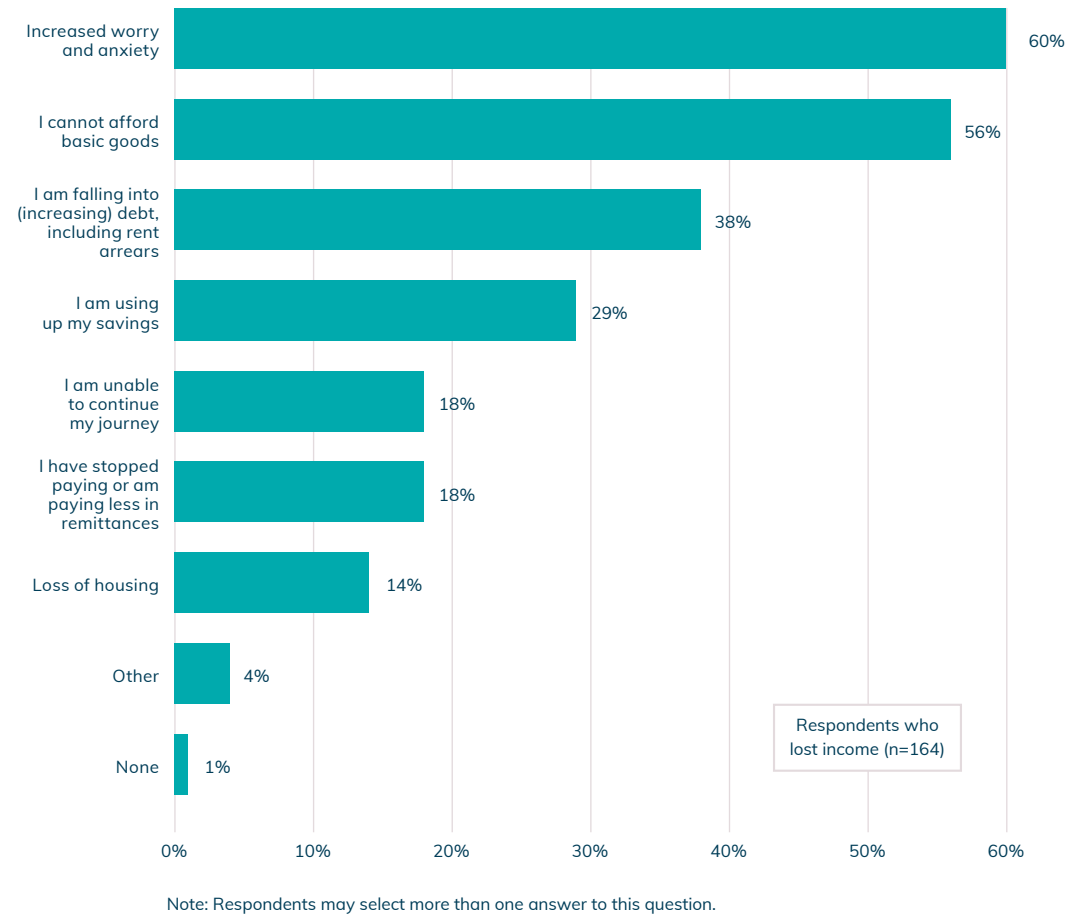


4 p-value= 0.000.

Increased worry and anxiety, and inability to afford basic goods, because of loss of income

Loss of income had a strong adverse impact on respondents, including by causing increased worry and anxiety (60%), inability to purchase basic goods (56%), increasing debt (38%) and using up savings (29%). 18% of respondents indicated being unable to continue their migration journey as a result, and the same percentage mentioned being unable to send remittances to the country of origin. Additionally, 14% of respondents indicated having lost their housing due to the loss of income (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. What impact has the loss of income had?



"My migration has been a bad experience, because I haven't been able to access education nor work. I don't have social security; I struggle to pay for my accommodation and for basic products. All this because of the virus, it has complicated things more."

19-year-old Nicaraguan woman in Guatemala City

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4Mi & COVID-19

The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](#) (4Mi) is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements. Normally, the recruitment of respondents and interviews take place face-to-face. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face recruitment and data collection has been suspended in all countries.

MMC has responded to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. Respondents are recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms; sampling is through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches. A new survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, and the surveys are administered by telephone, by the 4Mi monitors in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia and Latin America. Findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make inferences about the total population of refugees and migrants, as the sample is not representative. The switch to remote recruitment and data collection results in additional potential bias and risks, which cannot be completely avoided. Further measures have been put in place to check and – to the extent possible – control for bias and to protect personal data. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

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