

Profiles and housing conditions of refugees and migrants in Guatemala during the COVID-19 pandemic

This snapshot offers an analysis of housing conditions for refugees and migrants in Guatemala during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a disaggregated analysis based on their profiles. 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.

Like in many countries, the first preventive measure implemented in Guatemala by the authorities amid the pandemic was mandatory self-isolation, to reduce transmission of the virus. What did this imply for people on the move in the country? Data presented in this snapshot show that most respondents did not live in adequate housing conditions, making it impossible to meet self-isolation and physical distancing guidelines, with those in irregular status and/or recently arrived in the country facing more precarious conditions.

Recommendations

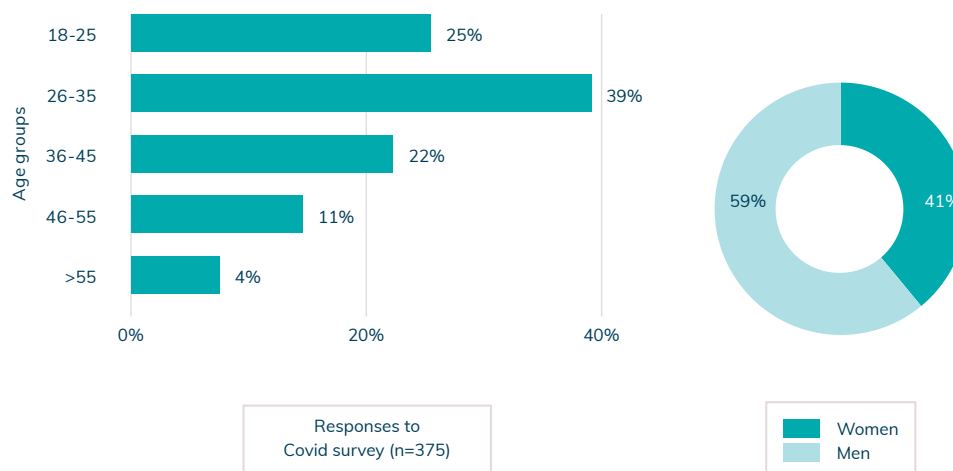
- Establish or strengthen cash-based assistance programs for refugees and migrants to cover housing needs, focusing on people on the move who recently arrived in Guatemala.
- Increase the offer of shelter, to reduce overcrowding and provide temporary housing for refugees and migrants who are currently homeless.
- Develop livelihoods programs to guarantee long-term access to decent housing.
- Provide refugees and migrants with information on locations, prices and procedures for accessing temporary housing.

Profiles

The analysis is based on 375 surveys conducted between July 2020 and January 2021, partially by face-to-face interview and partially remotely, by phone. 76% of the respondents were living in Guatemala City, 11% in Puerto Barrios, 8% in Jutiapa, 1% in San Juan Sacatepéquez, among other municipalities with lower percentages.

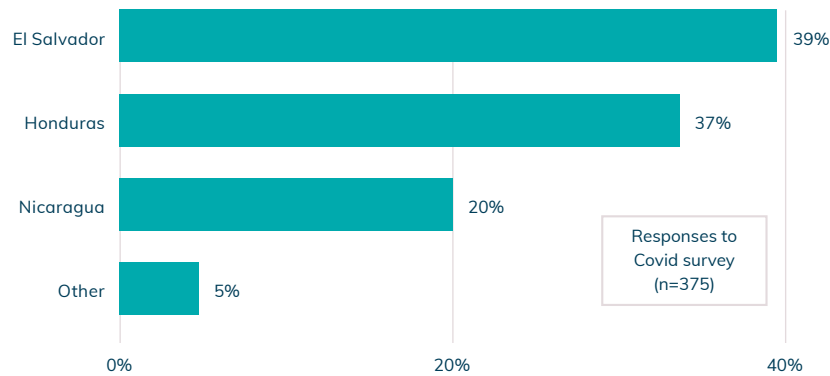
Respondents were more frequently aged between 26 and 35 (39%) and the average age of the sample was 33 years (see Figure 1). 22% of respondents were living or traveling with children in their care, at the time of the interview.

Figure 1. Age range and sex



95% of all respondents came from El Salvador (39%), Honduras (37%) and Nicaragua (20%), while the remaining 5% came from other countries such as Venezuela, Cuba and Colombia (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Nationalities

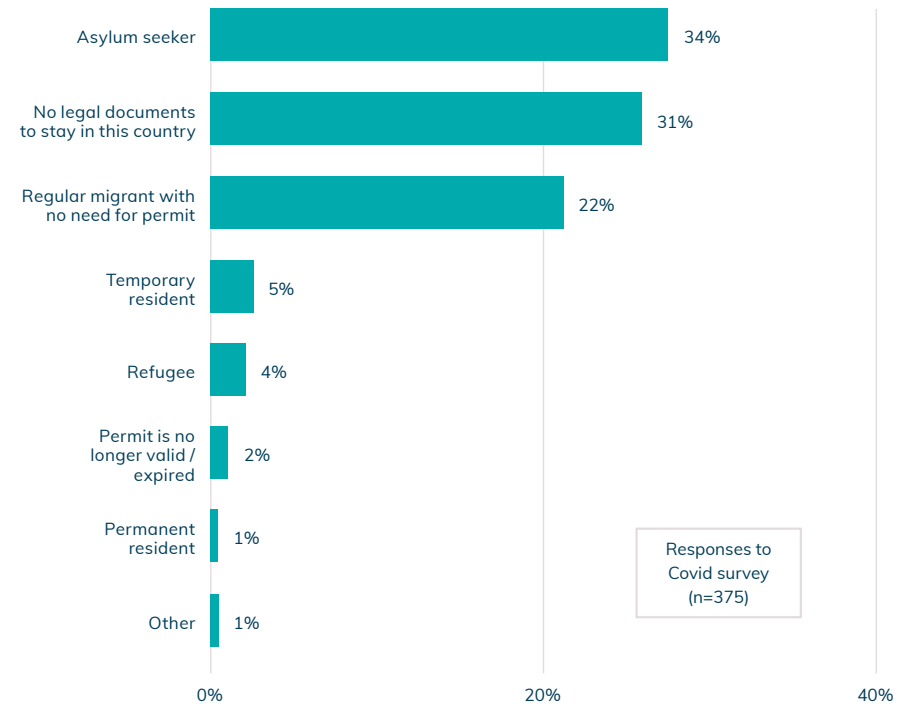


A third of all respondents indicated being asylum seekers (34%), while 31% declared not having legal documents to stay in the country. Regular migrants who did not need a permit represented a minority of the sample (22%) (see Figure 3).

The proportion of asylum seekers may however be lower in the general population of people on the move in Guatemala than in the sample, as 4Mi monitors frequently recruited respondents in front of the Guatemalan immigration institute and NGO premises, where the proportion of asylum seekers is high.

Guatemala has signed the Central America-4 Free Mobility Agreement (CA-4) with El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Citizens of those four countries can travel to another signatory country without restrictions or controls. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Guatemala closed its borders on March 16 of 2020, suspending the implementation of the CA-4 agreement. Borders were reopened in September 2020 but, since then, all foreigners trying to enter the country must show a negative PCR test for COVID-19 to be allowed in. Respondents from el Salvador and Honduras mentioned to 4Mi monitors that taking the test would cost around 100-130USD in their country of origin and this represented a significant obstacle for many refugees and migrants who did not have the money to pay for this test, and therefore decided to enter Guatemala irregularly.

Figure 3. What is your current migration/legal status?

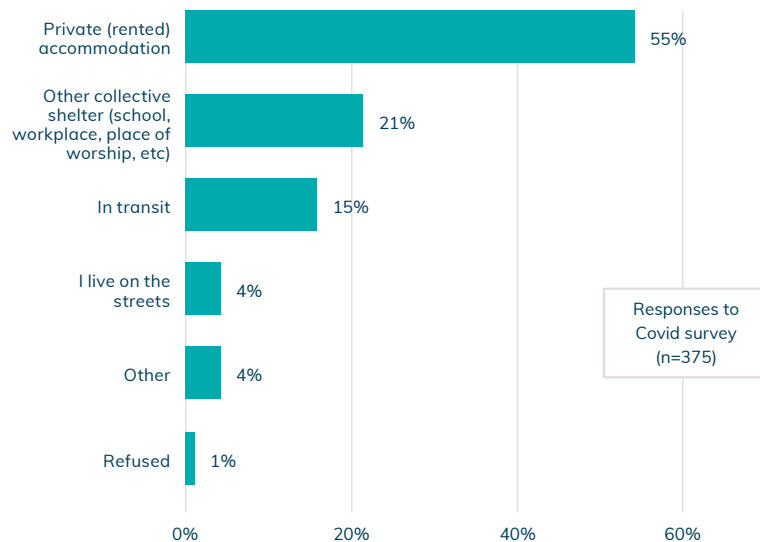


According to 4Mi monitors' direct observation, once COVID-19-related movement restrictions were imposed in Guatemala, many respondents who were in transit decided to temporarily stop in the city of interview to work and earn some money to pay for the rest of the journey, while waiting to be able to continue their journey. Others decided to apply for asylum or regularization, due to the uncertain prospects regarding freedom of movement and immigration procedures during the pandemic.

New arrivals are mainly living in shelters

In the 4Mi COVID-19 survey, respondents were asked where they lived, in order to get a better understanding of their housing conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. 55% of all respondents answered that they rented private accommodation, while 21% indicated that they were staying in shelters run by local NGOs or “alternative shelters”, such as schools or places of worship. 15% indicated they were only in transit in Guatemala, mostly traveling in the so-called “migrant caravans” towards North America, and as they had just entered Guatemala and did not plan to stay in the country, they indicated no housing situation. 4% of the sample indicated that they were living on the streets (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Where do you currently live?



The type of housing is strongly related to the duration of the respondents' stay in the country. While 62% of respondents staying in private housing have been in Guatemala for more than 6 months, 77% of respondents staying in shelters have been in the country for less than 3 months.

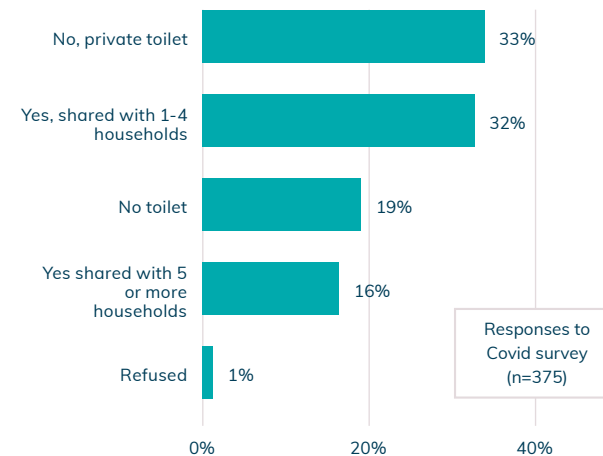
In addition to the duration of stay in Guatemala, legal status also had an impact on the respondent's type of housing. 92% of respondents who were asylum seekers were living in private housing, at the time of the survey.

These respondents were already relatively settled in Guatemala: 81% had been in the country for more than 6 months. Respondents in irregular situation have worse shelter conditions: 50% of them were living in alternative shelter at the time of the interview.

48% of respondents share a bathroom with other households and 19% do not have access to a bathroom at all

To delve deeper into the living conditions of refugees and migrants in Guatemala during the pandemic, the 4Mi COVID-19 survey asked respondents whether they had sanitary facilities available at home and whether these are shared with people other than their family members. 33% of respondents declared having a private toilet, while 32% share a bathroom with 1 to 4 households, 19% have no bathroom at their disposal, and 16% share a bathroom with 5 or more households (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Do you share a toilet with other households?



The situation for respondents with irregular status was again more precarious than for others: 61% of them had to share the bathroom.

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

This document covers humanitarian aid activities implemented with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Union, and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.