



# 4Mi Cities: Data Collection on Urban Mixed Migration Barranquilla City Report

January 2022



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## About this report

This city report presents the work carried out by the Mixed Migration Centre and the Mayors Migration Council (shortened to MMC<sup>2</sup>, given the matching acronyms) in Barranquilla, as part of a pilot of the 4Mi Cities project.

In close partnership with city governments at the frontline of migrant reception and inclusion, 4Mi Cities collected data on the needs, assets, and aspirations of urban migrants and refugees as they interact with local policies and services in three Latin American cities (Barranquilla, Medellín, and Mexico City). Data collected will be used by city governments involved in the project, as well as humanitarian and development actors, to improve their current migration policies and responses at city level.

The research methods, data sources and analysis structure are aligned across the project cities, to allow comparisons between the specific situation of refugees and migrants across locations. The other reports can be found here:

[4Mi Cities: Data Collection on Urban Mixed Migration - Medellín City report](#)

[4Mi Cities: Data Collection on Urban Mixed Migration - Mexico City report](#)

The 4Mi Cities pilot project in Latin America and the Caribbean was supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The views expressed herein should however not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Responsibility for the content of this report lies entirely with the Mixed Migration Centre and the Mayors Migration Council.

## About the Mixed Migration Centre

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of six regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, North Africa, West Africa and Latin America & Caribbean) and a central unit in Geneva. It is a leading source of independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The Mixed Migration Centre aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. Its overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The Mixed Migration Centre is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures its work is grounded in operational reality, the Mixed Migration Centre acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the Mixed Migration Centre does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on the Mixed Migration Centre visit the website: [www.mixedmigration.org](http://www.mixedmigration.org)

## About the Mayors Migration Council

The Mayors Migration Council (MMC) is a mayor-led organization that helps cities shape national and international action on migration and displacement. Its mission is to ensure that global responses to pressing challenges—from pandemics to the climate crisis—both reflect and address realities on the ground for the benefit of migrants, displaced persons, and the communities that receive them.

To fulfil its vision, the Mayors Migration Council secures cities' formal access and representation to national, regional, and international policy deliberations; builds cities' diplomatic, advocacy, and communications skills so they can effectively influence decisions; unlocks technical and financial resources to cities so they can deliver better outcomes on the ground; and helps cities implement local solutions efficiently and at scale to accelerate global commitments.

Created by mayors for mayors, the Mayors Migration Council is a nimble team of political advisors and urban practitioners led by a Leadership Board composed of the mayors of Amman, Bristol, Freetown, Kampala, Los Angeles, Milan, Montreal, and Zürich. It is managed as a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and operate with the institutional support of Open Society Foundations, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Robert Bosch Stiftung, in addition to other project-based donors.

For more information on the Mayors Migration Council visit their website: [www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org](http://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org)



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# List of acronyms

<b>CILM</b>	Local Integration Centre for Migrants (Centro de Integración Local para Migrantes)
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>ETPV</b>	Temporary Protection Status (Estatuto Temporal de Protección para venezolanos)
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussions
<b>GIFMM</b>	Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (Grupo Interagencial para Flujos Migratorios Mixtos)
<b>IO</b>	International Organization
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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# Summary and key findings

This report aims to fill information gaps on the experience of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Barranquilla, Colombia. It is based on survey data, focus group discussions, and secondary sources. After a short introduction on the city's mixed migration dynamics and the local responses to these movements, the report presents the main findings of the project. The report concludes by specifying the implications of the findings for policy and programming and elevating the city's uptake of the evidence and their commitments on policy and programming for refugees and migrants.

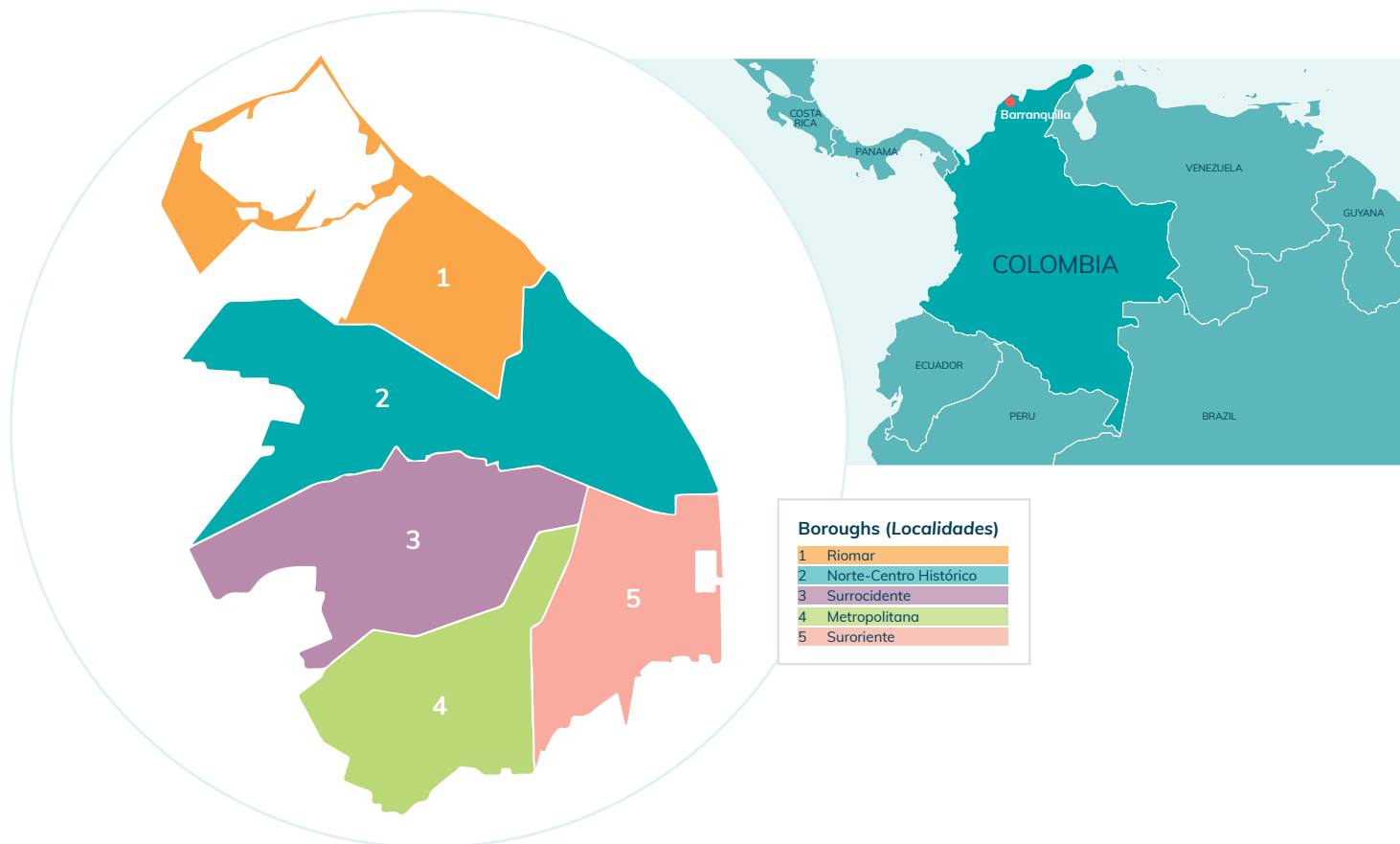
Key findings from the surveys administered in Barranquilla include:

- **Refugees and migrants find a new home in Barranquilla.** The city gave respondents better access to food (67%), healthcare (66%) and education (65%) compared to their country of origin. Additionally, 51% of respondents felt that they have more liberty to make decisions that affect their lives compared to when they lived in Venezuela, and 45% felt they belong to a community. Most respondents stated having good relations with the local population in their neighbourhood (67%) and where they work (73%), even though they also perceived discrimination against Venezuelans to be high (41%).
- **At the same time, Barranquilla is not a safe place for refugees and migrants.** 63% of respondents reported of refugees and migrants who faced protection risks while in the city and 39% had been direct victims of a crime or an attempted crime. Only 37% of respondents felt safe where they live. Common crime, risks related to natural disasters and drug consumption are the main reasons why respondents feel unsafe.
- **Despite feeling at home to some extent, the refugee and migrant population tends not to engage with authorities within the city.** This leads to limited access to justice (of those respondents who were victims of a crime or attempted crime, only 15% have filed a complaint or a report about it), and a low level of civic engagement in local decision-making processes (66% of respondents do not participate in discussions about the neighbourhoods or the city's functioning).
- **There is a housing supply shortage in Barranquilla.** 65% of survey respondents lived in makeshift houses in an informal settlement<sup>1</sup>, while the remaining percentage lived with their family in rented apartments or houses but in poor conditions. Although living in informal settlements allows some respondents to own their house instead of renting, the living conditions in these settlements are poor and residents face environmental risks such as landslides and flooding. Further complicating matters, these settlements are often located on properties whose ownership is under dispute or on public land. FGD participants also highlighted adequate housing as one of their most pressing needs.
- **Refugees and migrants struggle to earn a living.** The vast majority of respondents who were employed had an informal contract (86%), exposing them to instability and exploitation, and only 10% stated their earnings are always sufficient to cover the household's needs. Additionally, more respondents were dedicated to street vending or unemployed in the city of destination, than they were in Venezuela.
- **Most respondents could access general healthcare when needed (90%), although many had to do it through emergency services,** while mental health and specific services for people with disabilities were much more difficult to access. 75% of respondents who mentioned having a person with a disability within their household have not been able to access specialized services. As for mental health services, only 6% reported having had access, against 78% having experienced symptoms of mental ill-health since they arrived in the city.
- **Access to long-term integration support remains a major gap.** Assistance provided by local actors, including international NGOs and local civil society organizations, is designed to provide ad hoc and emergency response: half of the respondents have received assistance since they arrived in Barranquilla, primarily food (58%), cash transfers (39%), and medical care (24%). Orientation on employment and/or training, and on their rights as refugees and migrants are limited: only 3% of respondents had access to employment and/or training programmes and/or received information on their rights.

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1 To some extent, the level of informal housing reported is a result of site selection (two out of three data collection locations for this project were informal settlements, please refer to the methodology section below for more detail). While there may be overreporting of makeshift housing, the sites were selected because of the density of the Venezuelan population, indicating that housing is a particular problem for Venezuelans in the city.

**Figure 1. Map of Barranquilla**



Source: Alcaldía de Barranquilla (2019) [Mapas: localidades de Barranquilla](#).

## About the 4Mi Cities project

Localized data and analysis on migration is often limited, hampering city government decisions and policy development. The Mixed Migration Centre and the Mayors Migration Council (shortened to MMC<sup>2</sup>, given the matching acronyms), working in close partnership with three city governments (Medellín, Barranquilla and Mexico City), designed and implemented a pilot data collection project called 4Mi Cities. MMC<sup>2</sup> developed and applied a new 4Mi toolkit to find out specifically about refugees' and migrants' urban experience in a way that can support improved policy and service provision at the city level.

### What is 4Mi?

Set up in 2014, 4Mi is a unique network of field enumerators situated along frequently used mixed migration routes and in major migratory hubs. It aims to offer a regular, standardized, quantitative and globalized, system of collecting primary data on mixed migration. 4Mi predominantly uses a closed question survey to invite respondents to anonymously self-report on a wide range of issues that results in extensive data relating to individual profiles, migration drivers, means and conditions of movement, the smuggling economy, aspirations, and destination choices. 4Mi data allow MMC and its partners to inform migration policies, debates, and protection responses for people on the move through the production of high-quality quantitative analysis grounded in evidence.

Like many other urban centres, the three cities included in this pilot – Barranquilla, Medellín, and Mexico City – all host refugee and migrant populations. Whether they represent an intended, or final, destination or not, they offer economic opportunities, access to services, and a diaspora community, but at the same time, barriers such as xenophobia and lack of knowledge regarding available services and programmes persist. In addition, access to services is often tied to a regular immigration status, which can be difficult to obtain. Access to livelihoods can also be a challenge, along with housing. City governments have made efforts to meet refugees' and migrants' needs by developing policies, and designing assistance programmes, but gaps persist.

4Mi Cities aims to build evidence to better inform local responses to mixed migration in cities and create a strong case for national and international legal, fiscal and policy frameworks that enable cities to adequately provide necessary services to refugee and migrant populations. The data collected will be used by city governments involved in the project, as well as humanitarian and development actors, to improve their current migration policies and responses at city level.

**Figure 2. Project locations**





# 1. Methodology

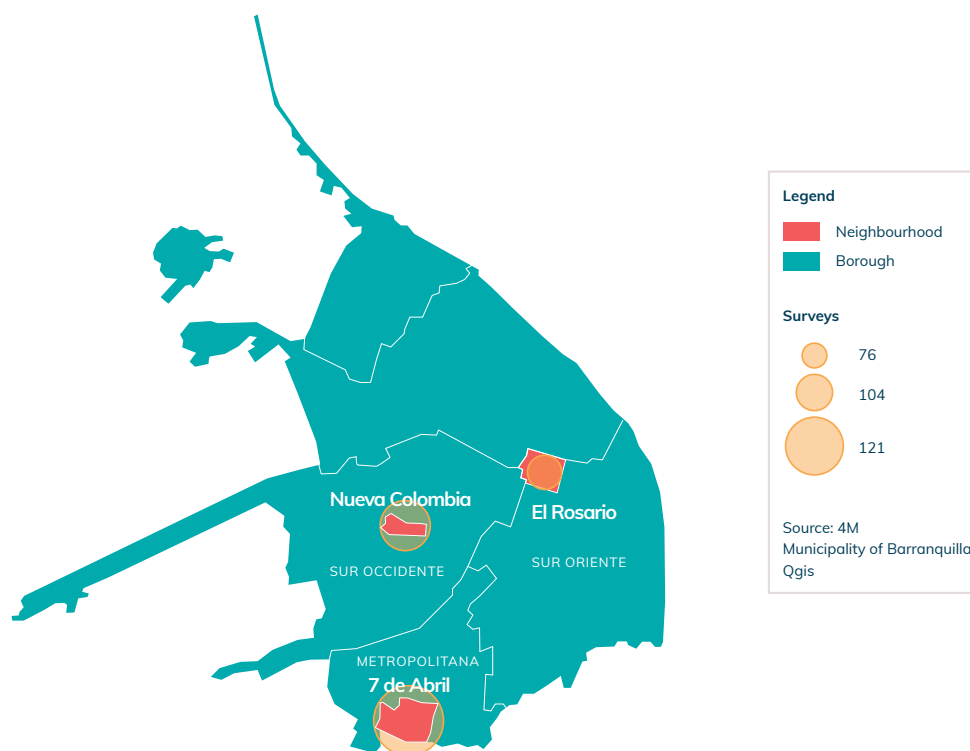
The research questions that the 4Mi Cities project set out to answer are:

1. What are the profiles of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Barranquilla?
2. What are the reasons behind their decision to choose Barranquilla as a destination?
3. What are the protection risks and challenges they face in the city?
4. What are the opportunities that refugees and migrants encounter?
5. What access do they have to services in the city?
6. Are refugees and migrants satisfied with their decision to migrate to Barranquilla and what are their future intentions?

The 4Mi Cities project took a mixed-methods approach, including both qualitative and quantitative research as well as several consultation and validation workshops. The pilot of the project in Barranquilla was conducted between June and October 2021 and was based on the following activities:

- **Urban context analysis**, largely based on secondary sources and a select number of key informant interview with city government staff.
- **Two focus groups** with Venezuelan refugees and migrants, both female and male.
- **Three workshops with mixed migration actors**. Experts from the public and private sector, IO, NGO, and UN agencies participated in: i) a mapping workshop to determine key locations where the target population lives and gathers and to identify sites for data collection; ii) a survey workshop to ensure that the information to be collected by the project would fill gaps and meet the needs of local actors; and iii) a validation workshop to discuss results with city government staff and other local actors.
- **301 interviews with refugees and migrants** in three boroughs (“localidades”), conducted by 10 4Mi Cities enumerators at three prioritized data collection sites: the Bajo Manhattan informal settlement in the Metropolitana borough (neighbourhood 7 de Abril); the Villa Esperanza informal settlement in the Sur Occidente borough (neighbourhood Nueva Colombia); and the Local Integration Centre for Migrants (CILM, for its Spanish acronym) in the Norte Centro Histórico borough (neighbourhood El Rosario).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 3. 4Mi Cities’ sample distribution<sup>3</sup>**



2 The sample size was distributed in the following way: Bajo Manhattan settlement (121 surveys), Villa Esperanza settlement (104 surveys), and the CILM (76 surveys).

3 The neighbourhood El Rosario is commonly considered to be located within the Norte Centro Histórico borough, but the National Planning Department (Departamento Nacional de Planeación) includes it in the Sur Oriente borough.

The 4Mi Cities survey covered six main themes relating to the research questions: i. demographic and migration profile; ii. housing; iii. access to services (healthcare, mental health, education, and early childcare); iv. livelihood opportunities and challenges; v. protection risks and access to justice; and vi. life in the city (interactions with the local population, with city government and NGOs, access to public places and transportation, among other topics). The closed-question survey of 95 questions was answered only by Venezuelan refugees and migrants (18 years and older) who had been residing in Barranquilla for more than three months and less than five years at the time of the interview. The surveys were complemented by the focus group discussions, which covered the same topics more in depth.

Several limitations to the data are worth noting. As the 4Mi Cities sampling process was not randomized and three specific data collection sites were prioritized, the survey responses are not representative of the entire refugee and migrant population in the city of Barranquilla. Additionally, the responses of participants in the 4Mi Cities survey cannot be independently verified, and there may be response bias. Nonetheless, the findings from the survey can provide important insights into the life of refugees and migrants in Barranquilla. Informed consent and anonymity were communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the surveys.

The next section of the report will present the context overview, based on the secondary data review and key informant interviews. The report then presents analysis of the survey and focus group discussion results, according to the themes in the research questions.

## 2. Context overview

### 2.1 Migration dynamics in Barranquilla

Barranquilla is the capital of the Department of Atlántico, in the northern part of Colombia, along the Caribbean coast. It is considered to be the fourth most important city in the country both in terms of economy and population size (1,112,889 inhabitants).

Barranquilla has been the destination of internally displaced people in the past, especially from nearby towns where there has been a greater presence of armed groups and criminal gangs. This displacement has mainly been due to Colombia's internal armed conflict, and, to a lesser extent, to drug trafficking and violence over territorial control between gangs. As of October 31st, 2021, official data registered 131,778 victims of the armed conflict residing in the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area, of which 94% had been victims of forced displacement.<sup>4</sup> In addition to displacement from other areas, Barranquilla also faces intra-urban forced displacement dynamics, in which people are forced to leave one area of the city and settle in another due to violence and threats from criminal groups.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2014, Barranquilla has also been a destination for mixed migration flows<sup>6</sup> from Venezuela. According to the country's national migration authority, of all cities in Colombia, by August 2021 Barranquilla hosted the fourth largest population of refugees and migrants.<sup>7</sup> Under-registration of refugees and migrants in Colombia is common, due to their entry into the country through irregular routes, and therefore the total number of Venezuelans living in Barranquilla is likely higher.

Although not the subject of this report, migration flows from Venezuela also include Colombian nationals returning to their country of origin.

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4 Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas (2021) [Reportes](#).

5 Ramos, Ignacio (2018) [Desplazamiento forzado y adaptación al contexto de destino: el caso de Barranquilla](#).

6 "Mixed migration refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel – often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers." Source: [Mixed Migration Centre](#)

7 Migración Colombia (2021) [Distribución de Venezolanos en Colombia corte a 31 de agosto de 2021](#).

## 2.2 Local responses to migration

Colombian national authorities define the overall guidelines for the registration and regularization of refugees and migrants and allocate economic resources from the national budget to local authorities. City governments perform administrative functions and decide on the allocation of the resources to programmes and services.

That said, several decision-making processes are still centralized in the national government, limiting the ability of cities to expand the supply of services in the local context. For example, resources to finance education and healthcare services are distributed first to the corresponding Ministries and other national government agencies, and later to local authorities, based on the registration of Venezuelan citizens with the National Registry and/or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Cancillería*) in each city. However, there is a lack of information on refugees and migrants who live in each local-administrative subdivision (*comuna*) or neighbourhood. Under-registration of migrants and refugees due to their irregular status also hinders the ability of local authorities to request and receive the necessary resources and adequately address the needs of this population. And limited local autonomy often leads the city government to focus on aiding on a case-by-case basis, rather than developing or strengthening public policies or programmes.

The local government structure in Barranquilla is centralized in the Mayor's Office (the city government). The implementation of government policies and programmes is carried out under the direction of different Secretariats. The Secretariat in charge of coordinating the response to migration is the Secretariat of Government (“*Secretaría de Gobierno*”). This is the city government entity that develops, coordinates, and implements strategies and public policies aimed at the promotion, protection, and guarantee of the rights of the different population groups, among other functions.<sup>8</sup>

Barranquilla was one of the first non-border cities to create public policies to respond to mixed migration flows from Venezuela. This is due in part to the close relationship and history of movement between the Colombian department of Atlántico and the Venezuelan state of Zulia, which has led to the strengthening of family and commercial ties between the two regions. In 2019, the city implemented its first local public policy on migration from Venezuela, the “*Política Pública para la Protección Integral de los Migrantes provenientes de Venezuela en Estado de Vulnerabilidad en el Distrito de Barranquilla*”.

The current city government (since 2020) has established a series of policies, strategic plans, and actions that benefit refugees and migrants. The local administration's development plan for 2020-2023 – *el Plan de Desarrollo 2020-2023: “Soy Barranquilla”* – includes a programme to assist people on the move, specifically. This programme proposes the creation of a local reception centre; the provision of comprehensive assistance to refugees and migrants; vocational training sessions for refugees, migrants, returnees, and the local population; and training for city government staff on how to assist refugees and migrants. The development plan also includes policies of a more general nature, but clarifying their specific relevance for refugees and migrants, such as the health policy for the refugee and migrant population in the city.

In accordance with the local development plan, in 2020, the city government created the Local Integration Centre for Migrants (CILM, for its Spanish acronym), which provides orientation, referrals, and support to Venezuelan refugees and migrants, as well as Colombian returnees from Venezuela, to grant them access to procedures and services.<sup>9</sup> The Secretary of Government also coordinates with other Secretaries – mainly the Secretary of Social Management, the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of Education and *Migración Colombia*, Colombia's national migration authority – to achieve access. Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies are also present in the CILM and receive referrals from the local authorities, according to the specific protection and assistance needs of refugees and migrants. The city government also strives to improve access to livelihoods for refugees and migrants through the Opportunities Centre, which attends to the local population and refugees and migrants alike, with the support of international entities such as the Inter-American Development Bank.<sup>10</sup> In 2020, some accommodation centres (shelters and hostels) started accepting referrals of refugees and migrants from the CILM. HIAS and Airbnb also provide new arrivals with temporary housing. Additional temporary housing options for refugees and migrants run by NGOs, religious organizations, and local authorities were being developed while this report was being drafted. Beyond housing, Barranquilla is also a grantee of the Global Cities Fund, as described below.

8 Alcaldía de Barranquilla (2021) [Secretaría de Gobierno](#).

9 Alcaldía de Barranquilla (2020) [Centro de integración local para migrantes](#).

10 Alcaldía de Barranquilla (2021) [Atención integral oportuna: así ha respondido Barranquilla a la migración venezolana](#).

### **Todos Somos Barranquilla**

Barranquilla was one of the first five city grantees of the Global Cities Fund, the Mayors Migration Council's response to the unmet needs of cities as they support migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people in the face of pressing global challenges. Barranquilla's project, Todos Somos Barranquilla, offers a comprehensive package of livelihoods services to over 100 clients, providing them with specialized vocational training, psychosocial support, legal advice, and direct access to over 90 potential employers. Focused on Venezuelan refugees and migrants, beneficiaries include women, youth, victims of the armed conflict, and persons living with disabilities

From the civil society side, the Interagency Group on Mixed Migration Flows (GIFMM) aims to coordinate the actions of humanitarian and development organizations in response to the needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, Colombian returnees, and the host population, in collaboration with the government. This entity is co-led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and comprises 31 members at the Caribbean Coast regional level, including UN agencies, IOs, and NGOs, and members of the Red Cross Movement. The Costa Caribe GIFMM<sup>11</sup> also counts with the participation of refugee and migrant organizations and other non-profit organizations that, although initially not focused on migration, over time have begun to provide support to refugees and migrants as well, such as the *Fundación de Atención Inclusiva Social y Humana* (FUVADIS), and migrant grassroot organizations such as *Venezolanos en Barranquilla*<sup>12</sup>.

## **3. Profile of 4Mi Cities respondents**

### **3.1 Survey respondents**

301 refugees and migrants were interviewed for this project: 47% of respondents were men and 53% were women. The majority were between 25-34 years old (41%), had completed secondary (52%) or primary education (28%) and had irregular immigration status (72%). Most respondents mentioned being single (55%) or being part of an unmarried couple (32%).

Survey data also includes some information regarding the respondents' household. The average household consisted of 4.6 people; in total the survey gathered data on 1,388 people. Most household members were between 0-24 years old and 81% were Venezuelan, while the remaining 19% were Colombian. 86% of households included at least one child and the average number of children per household was two. 23% of respondents were single head of household with children. In addition, 58% of respondents mentioned their household included at least one person with specific needs, including breastfeeding women (19%) and people with disabilities (17%).

### **3.2 Focus group discussion participants**

13 refugees and migrants participated in two FGDs and most participants were between 18 and 59 years of age. The distribution of respondents' age group, type of residence permit, and time of residence in Barranquilla was as follows:

11 Response for Venezuelans – R4V – Platform (2021) [GIFMM Costa Caribe – Colombia](#).

12 Venezolanos en Barranquilla (s.f.) [Quiénes somos](#).

**Table 1. Focus group discussion overview**

Focus group	1	2
Target population	Men (3); Women (5)	Men (2); Women (3)
Nationality	Venezuelan (8); 3 participants had dual citizenship	Venezuelan (5)
Number of participants:	8	5
<b>Age group</b>		
18-59 years of age	6	5
60+ years of age	2	0
<b>Type of residence permit</b>		
Without a residence permit	It was not possible to identify the immigration status of each participant, however, there was a variety between those with a permanent/temporary residence permit and those without a residence permit.	
With a residence permit		
Asylum-seeker		
Refugee		
<b>Length of residence in Barranquilla</b>		
Between 1 and 2 years	4	2
Between 3 and 5 years	4	3

## 4. Results: Life in Barranquilla<sup>13</sup>

**Barranquilla is often the first destination option for Venezuelan refugees and migrants:** only 29% of respondents stopped in another Colombian city before arriving in Barranquilla. According to FGD participants, these first stops were mostly other cities along the Caribbean coast of Colombia such as Riohacha and Santa Marta.

**Presence of family or friends, employment opportunities, and proximity to Venezuela** are the main factors for choosing Barranquilla as a destination. Barranquilla offers better economic opportunities than other coastal cities, according to FGD participants. As for the main reasons that led them to leave Venezuela, respondents often mentioned more than one<sup>14</sup>: 92% of respondents reported economic reasons, followed by access to services and corruption (66%) and personal or family reasons (29%). None of the respondents mentioned leaving their country of origin because of natural disasters or environmental factors.

Despite challenges, **most respondents considered that Barranquilla has offered something to them and their families, especially those who have been in the city for longer.** Only 1% of respondents considered that the city has not offered them anything. 93% of respondents intended to stay in Barranquilla, while only 3% intended to move to another city within Colombia. Specifically, qualitative data suggests that Barranquilla is a common destination for refugees and migrants with a disability, as healthcare services in the city are perceived as being of good quality.

### 4.1. Documentation and regularization

**72% of respondents did not have a residence permit at the time of interview,** which constitutes a barrier for job security, housing and access to public services. Similarly, around **65% of respondents reported that all children in their household are undocumented** and 14% declared that only some children in their household have a permit.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, please consult Appendix 1, which includes a profile of 4Mi Cities' respondents, data disaggregation and more results.

<sup>14</sup> The survey question concerning migration drivers is a multiple-choice question.

Of those without a residence permit, 54% had already applied for one - Temporary Protection Status (ETPV for its Spanish acronym)<sup>15</sup>, while 44% would like to apply but did not have the necessary information. FGD participants also pointed to a lack of information on the permit, by stating they do not understand the different phases of the application process.

Disinterest and lack of information are the main reasons why most Venezuelans in Barranquilla have not applied for asylum (international protection).

## 4.2. Livelihoods

There are strong differences between the respondents' occupation in the country of origin and their occupation in Barranquilla. Data indicates that more respondents are dedicated to street vending (from 3% to 29%) or unemployed (from 2% to 12%) in Barranquilla compared to their occupations in Venezuela. In the two informal settlements where data was collected a considerable share of respondents were waste pickers, according to additional observations shared by enumerators.

Lack of proper documentation<sup>16</sup> (81%), lack of employment opportunities (55%) and lack of resources to purchase supplies (40%) were the main reported barriers to accessing decent employment and starting up a business. According to FGD participants, employers' difficulties verifying references and employment history are also a barrier to accessing employment opportunities. Additionally, employers often request a "Working at Height Permit" as a prerequisite for jobs in construction and other sectors. This permit allows trained personnel to work at heights and informs them of the potential hazards and risks associated with working at heights. While a good and important requirement, Venezuelans struggle to obtain such permit both due to its cost and the relevant legal requirements, therefore representing de facto a barrier for accessing an important labour sector.

Intra-urban mobility to access job opportunities and local services is high. Most respondents – between 63% and 80% in the settlements of Bajo Manhattan and Villa Esperanza, respectively – commute to other areas of the city or the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area to work. Only 15% of 76 refugees and migrants who were interviewed at the CILM live and/or work in the same borough, while 83% live in other boroughs.

Financial anxiety and stress are high among respondents: 43% of respondents' households rely on just one person earning an income. 31% of respondents report that household income is never enough to cover their basic needs, while 59% of respondents can only cover the household's basic needs sometimes. Disaggregated data indicate that only 34% of respondents who are employed always cover the needs of the household, and the percentage decreases to 20% for those self-employed and 8% among street sellers.

Household coping strategies for lack of financial resources include reducing food portions for all household members (69%), borrowing money (61%), prioritizing food security for the most vulnerable members of the household (52%) and reducing other expenses such as utilities, clothes, and rent (50%).

Access to savings is limited. 63% of respondents are unable to save after covering their household's basic needs. Additionally, 86% of respondents' households do not have access to financial services; only 6% of respondents have a bank account. According to FGD participants, refugees and migrants often borrow from loan sharks who later impose high daily interest payments and limited time to pay back the loan.

## 4.3. Access to public services

The enrolment rate in early childhood education and care is limited, particularly among new arrivals. While 45% of respondents say their children 0-5 years of age are enrolled in a day care centre or a local/national government-run children centre, 32% say their children do not have access to childcare, which prevents parents from working, according to the qualitative data. The main reasons for lack of access to childcare options relate to the lack of documentation (39%), available places (31%) and financial resources (24%), and a support network who can take

15 In February 2021, the Colombian government launched the Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV, for its Spanish acronym) with the intention of offering a long-term permit to Venezuelans who entered the country prior to January 31st, 2021 and those who intend to enter the country within the next two years who meet certain requirements. The ETPV is valid for 10 years. Cancillería de Colombia (2021) [Abecé del Estatuto Temporal de Protección para Migrantes Venezolanos](#).

16 Includes basic identity documents, temporary/permanent residence permit, school transcripts, apostilled diplomas/certificates, ect.

care of them (20%).<sup>17</sup> FGD participants mentioned that day care centres often require an apostilled birth certificate for enrolment, which are often not in the parents' possession.

**The school enrolment rate of children over 5 years old is also low, not only among new arrivals but also among those who lived in the city for 1-2 years.** Half of respondents with children over 5 years old mentioned their children are not attending school and 13% of households interviewed reported that only some of the children attend. The main reasons for not enrolling include lack of documentation (46%), insufficient school places (45%), and lack of financial resources (33%). According to FGD participants, there are limited places for Venezuelan children available in schools.

**Most respondents mainly accessed healthcare services through a public health centre/hospital and had used emergency services** as the only option available to them. Lack of access to non-emergency services also means **access to health services for Venezuelan refugees and migrants with a disability is a challenge.** 75% of respondents with a family member with a disability reported that they have not had access to adequate services.

**In theory, better access to health services is available, but there is confusion among refugees and migrants on how to access them.** Upon presenting a request to the city government, uninsured refugees and migrants can receive an official document certifying they do not have sufficient resources to cover medical expenses and free public healthcare must be made available to them. Several FGD participants did not know about this. Some participants also mentioned that, in 2021, public hospitals/centres started requiring this document as a prerequisite to accessing healthcare.

**Access to family planning services is limited.** Female FGD participants seeking sterilization reported having been arbitrarily denied access by medical providers. Participants also mentioned inequity in access to long-term contraceptive methods for refugees and migrants, compared to the local population.

**Access to adequate care for mental health is very low despite the needs.** 78% of respondents have experienced adverse mental health symptoms (depression, anxiety, stress, mood swings) since arriving in Barranquilla, but only 6% received professional support. The majority seeks help from family members or friends, while 12% have not sought any support. FGD participants mentioned a specific, additional mental health impact for people above 50 years of age who are not able to contribute to household income.

**Access to the internet is limited, obstructing access to online information, tools and services and preventing migrants and refugees from keeping in touch with family.** 46% of respondents do not have regular access to internet at home, and 37% only have access sometimes. Disaggregated data indicate that respondents living in informal settlements have least access to the internet.

## 4.4. Housing

**Living in makeshift housing is common among refugees and migrants.** 65% of respondents lived in makeshift houses, while the rest lived with family members in private rented apartments or houses. Although living in informal settlements allows some respondents to "own" their house rather than paying rent to a third person, the living conditions in these settlements are precarious and at risk of natural disasters. According to FGD participants, the supply of housing in Barranquilla is insufficient, which leads to the continuous growth of informal settlements.

**Access to utilities is inadequate.** Only 66% of respondents had adequate access to water<sup>18</sup> and 54% had access to a private bathroom in their home. Access to a toilet inside the house was lower among respondents who lived in the Metropolitana and Suroccidente boroughs. While 96% of respondents indicated having access to electricity, additional qualitative data indicates that such access may not be legal as electricity theft from the electricity network is common in these settlements.

**Average tenure security.** 24% of respondents are homeowners, while 47% pay for their housing monthly, securing tenure to some extent. This relative security is however countered by the fact that 85% of respondents have an informal lease agreement (verbal) and that the informal settlements in which they "own" a house are located on land that is under dispute or publicly owned.

**Exposure to risks of natural disasters and/or environmental hazards is high.** 62% of respondents reported that their homes are at risk of environmental hazards, mostly landslides and flooding. Disaggregated data indicate that

<sup>17</sup> Respondents can provide more than one answer to this question.

<sup>18</sup> Measured as the share of respondents who had access to water inside their house through the public network.

respondents' homes are at very high risk of flooding and landslides in the Metropolitana (85%) and Suroccidente (69%) boroughs.

## 4.5. Protection risks, security and access to justice

**Barranquilla tends not to be a safe place for Venezuelan refugees and migrants.** 63% of respondents knew of refugees and migrants who have faced protection risks while in the city and 39% had been direct victims of a crime or an attempted crime. According to information shared by the project's data collection team, most respondents were unwilling to share specific details out of fear, as the perpetrators live in the same settlement. Among the most frequently mentioned protection risks were **theft, non-physical violence (harassment) and labour exploitation/forced labour**.

Locations where **protection risks** are most likely to occur include **the street/public places** (76%), the **community/neighbourhood** (51%) and **the workplace** (36%). Possible perpetrators of these risks include strangers/local population (72%), criminal groups (35%), co-workers/employer (26%) and other Venezuelan refugees and migrants (19%). Male respondents more often mentioned co-workers/employer and law enforcement (police and military) as likely perpetrators compared to female respondents.

**Access to justice is limited.** Only 15% of respondents who suffered a crime or attempted crime filed a complaint. Those who did not file a complaint, most frequently did not do so because of mistrust in the police/institutions (53%), fear of retaliation from perpetrators (31%) and discrimination (21%). According to additional qualitative information, many Venezuelans mistrust authorities in general due to their interaction with authorities in Venezuela.

**Only 37%** of respondents **felt safe where they live. Common crime, risks related to natural disasters and drug consumption** are the main reasons why respondents **feel unsafe**. FGD participants mentioned they do not allow their children to leave the house as a risk mitigating mechanism.

## 4.6. Coexistence, discrimination and participation

**Perceived discrimination against refugees and migrants is relatively high.** 41% of respondents have felt discriminated against, mainly because of their nationality. The places where they most perceived discrimination included **the street/public places, the workplace, and the community/neighbourhood**: the same places where protection risks are most present. Disaggregated data indicate that perceived discrimination was higher among those interviewed in the Metropolitana borough (Bajo Manhattan settlement) compared to other data collection locations.

**However, respondents mentioned good relations with the local population in their neighbourhood and where they work.** 67% of respondents claim to have good or very good relations with the local (Colombian) population, as well as with their co-workers (73%). FGD participants emphasised better relations with the local population in Barranquilla compared to other places where they had stayed in Colombia. **The sense of belonging to a community is relatively high.** 45% of respondents felt part of a community and 51% felt they have more freedom to make decisions on their lives in Barranquilla, compared to their country of origin.

**Engagement in local decision-making processes is low.** 60% of respondents believe that their opinion is not considered in discussions about their neighbourhood or the city because they do not participate in them. Disaggregated data indicates that engagement in local decision-making processes is lower in the Suroccidente borough (Villa Esperanza settlement). According to additional qualitative data, many respondents do not feel represented by their local community leader, which is problematic given the fact that such leaders are the main interlocutor with local authorities and organizations.

## 4.7. Local actors supporting refugees and migrants

**More than half of the respondents have received some sort of assistance** since arriving in Barranquilla, but mostly short term: primarily food (58%), cash transfers (39%), and medical care (24%). **The offer of services and programs for refugees' and migrants' long-term inclusion is however limited:** only 3% of respondents received support in accessing employment and/or vocational training programmes and guidance on their rights, despite the existence of the



CILM and the Opportunities Centre.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, according to key informants, the offer of services and programmes is especially limited in the city's outskirts, more specifically at the city's limit with neighboring municipalities.

The **main assistance providers** mentioned by respondents were NGOs (70%), followed by a governmental institution (30%), and UN agencies (10%). According to additional qualitative data, in many cases, beneficiaries do not fully understand which institution/organization provided aid.

**Despite more than half of respondents having received assistance, knowledge of assistance programmes for refugees and migrants in the city was low, irrespective of how long respondents had been living in Barranquilla:** only 29% of respondents were aware of the existence of government programmes aimed at assisting refugees and migrants while 45% had knowledge of IO or NGO programmes (higher among female respondents and those between 45 and 54 years old). Only 13% of respondents indicated having heard of programmes from the city government, even though 25% of the surveys were conducted at the CILM – a city government centre aimed precisely at supporting the integration of refugees and migrants. This may be due to gaps in communications at or by the centre. According to qualitative data, the disconnect between the reception of assistance and the awareness of support programmes is due to, among other things, the fact that the assistance provided is often sporadic and, for this reason, beneficiaries do not relate it to the existence of a broader programme.

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19 In addition to lack of services, there are difficulties accessing existing services: not everyone can reach these centres due to financial or logistical barriers, and not everyone knows about what is available.

## 5. Conclusions

The 4Mi Cities project has shown the value of data collection at the city level in partnership with local stakeholders, and the potential of including data collection and analysis as an integral part of the policy and programming process. In Barranquilla, data collection and analysis has shown that refugees and migrants lack awareness of and access to the city government, its staff, and services. It has also indicated what refugees and migrants consider to be their priority needs, as well as specific obstacles to accessing services.

Finding a decent source of livelihood is a major challenge for refugees and migrants, as lack of proper documentation, employment opportunities and resources to buy supplies often prevent them from being hired and creating their own business. For those who do manage to find a job, informality and exploitation cause uncertainty and leaves refugees and migrants unable to adequately cover their needs. Refugees and migrants also face obstacles in accessing education mainly due to the limited availability of places in schools, the frequent requests for documents that are impossible for them to produce and the lack of resources. Access to healthcare is equally difficult, the main barriers in this case being irregular status, lack of information on how to access care and the lack of specialized services for disability- and mental health-related needs. Finally, the shortage of available housing, the prevalence of verbal lease contracts among those who rent, and the prevalence of living in informal settlements located on land that is under dispute or publicly owned, lead refugees and migrants to live in inadequate conditions and risk to suddenly lose their accommodation.

The identification of specific needs and gaps has enabled the city government, as well as other stakeholders, to draw up tailored policies and programmes that should be both more efficient and more effective, as the next section shows.

## 6. Evidence uptake

By working in close partnership with city governments and other local actors throughout the project's cycle, MMC<sup>2</sup> ensured that 4Mi Cities produced relevant and useful city-level data and analysis. It has produced information on the extent to which refugees and migrants are integrated in Barranquilla and the main barriers they face in accessing services, in contexts as different as informal settlements versus the local integration centre, which can guide the city government to develop and strengthen local policies. Detailed information on the needs and priorities of refugees and migrants in the city, be it in areas with limited institutional presence or on topics that are often not prioritized in emergency response, can also support humanitarian and development organizations in adjusting and consolidating their programming.

The city government of Barranquilla has identified concrete next steps based on the knowledge produced by 4Mi Cities and plans to:

- Promote and expand the services of the Local Integration Centre for Migrants (CILM), in coordination with the relevant city government departments, international cooperation organizations and community-based organizations.
- Raise awareness among migrants and refugees on the growing offer of services offered in Barranquilla, focused on their needs, and the importance of applying for the ETPV for those eligible.
- Expand *Todos Somos Barranquilla* as a permanent program of the Opportunities Centre while continuing to encourage the private sector to hire program graduates.
- Develop a city-wide strategy, in collaboration with international organizations and the national government, to grant access to adequate housing to migrants and refugees that considers multiple services, such as housing subsidies and/or temporary shelters.

- Strengthen migrants' and refugees' participation in decision-making processes at the city level through the CILM and the Mesa Migratoria and at the neighborhood-level through the Community Action Boards (*Juntas de Acción Comunal*)<sup>20</sup>. This participation will be carried out in coordination with community leaders, community-based organizations, international cooperation organizations and city government departments.

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20 A *Junta de Acción Comunal* (JAC) is a neighbourhood association, a civic non-profit organization whose members are the inhabitants of a neighbourhood working collectively to solve the most pressing issues of their community. JACs are independent from the municipality and self-funded through community-based activities. Their existence is widespread in Colombian cities, and they act as a sort of intermediary between the local population and the city government.



The MMC is a global network consisting of six regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Dhaka.

**For more information visit:**  
[mixedmigration.org](https://mixedmigration.org) and follow us at @Mixed\_Migration

