

Drivers of migration for refugees and migrants in Mexico

This snapshot offers an analysis of the reasons why people on the move in Mexico decided to leave their country of origin. 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 in the country.

Key findings

- Most respondents (69%) mentioned multiple reasons for leaving their country: economic drivers and factors relating to violence and insecurity are often combined.
- The four main reasons why respondents in Mexico left their country of origin were violence, economic factors, lack of rights and freedoms, and reasons related to natural disasters.
- Organized crime and general insecurity in their country of origin was the principal violence-related migration driver for 96% of respondents who indicated violence as a reason to leave their country.
- While only 21% of all respondents stated they migrated because of natural disasters when first asked about migration drivers in general, the proportion doubled to 42% when they were asked directly if environmental factors had a role in their decision to migrate.
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is proving a driver of migration, reported by 42% of respondents when directly asked.

Profiles

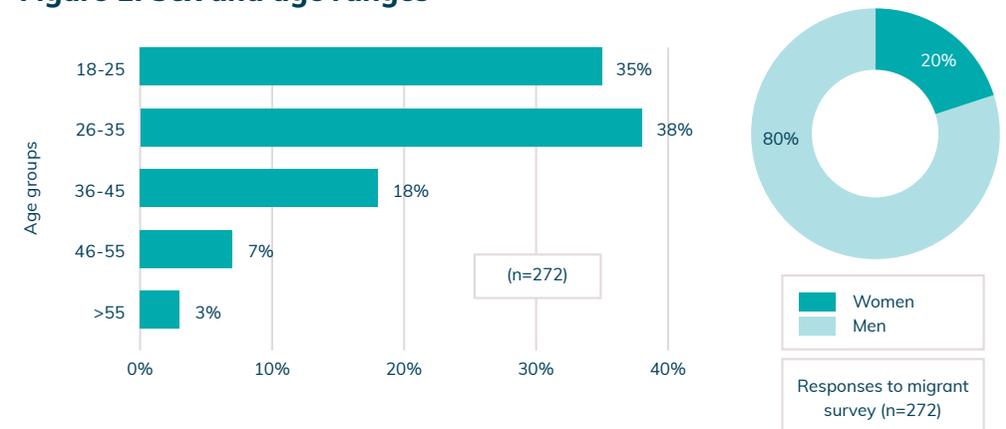
The analysis is based on 272 surveys conducted in Mexico between February and April 2021, partially by face-to-face interview (91%) and partially by phone (9%). 91% of the surveys were carried out in Tapachula, 8% in Tijuana,¹ and the remaining 1% in cities such

¹ 4Mi monitors in Mexico are currently located in Tapachula and Tijuana. Data collection however began later in Tijuana (end of April 2021), meaning that data from this location is more limited.

as Monterrey, Ciudad Hidalgo and Rosarito.

80% of respondents were men and 20% were women. Respondents were more frequently aged between 26 and 35 (38%) and the average age of the sample was 31 years (see Figure 1).

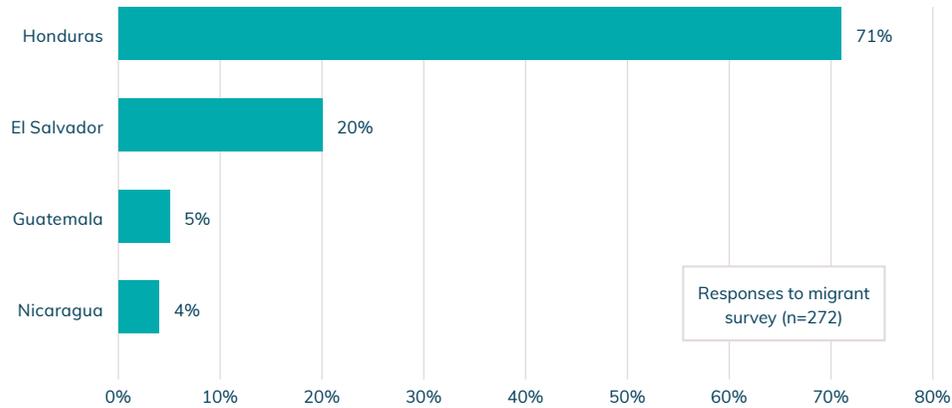
Figure 1. Sex and age ranges



71% of all respondents came from Honduras, 20% from El Salvador, 5% from Guatemala and 4% from Nicaragua (see Figure 2). Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua are among the main countries of origin for people on the move entering Mexico. While the very nature of irregular migration makes it impossible to provide accurate statistics on its magnitude and composition, reports by organizations working with people on the move in the country can provide indicative trends. In 2019, the IOM, for the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in Tapachula (Mexico), realized 308 surveys: 47% of all respondents came from Honduras, 9% from El Salvador, 3% from Nicaragua and 2% from Guatemala.²

² OIM, (2019): [DIAGNÓSTICO PARA MONITOREO DE FLUJOS, Tapachula, Chiapas.](#)

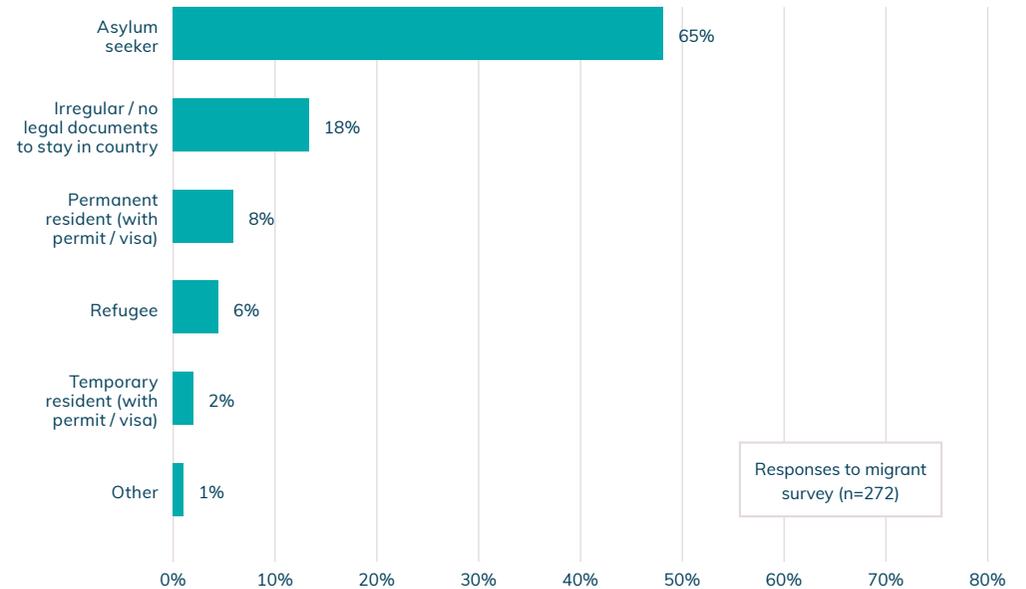
Figure 2. What is your country of nationality?



Most respondents (65%) indicated being asylum seekers, while 18% declared not having legal documents to stay in the country. Regular migrants were a minority of the sample (10%), just as respondents who had already been recognized as refugees (6%) (see Figure 3). The sample did not show large differences in migratory status according to nationality.

The proportion of asylum seekers may, however, be lower in the general population of people on the move in Mexico than in the sample, as 4Mi sampling is not random and the locations where 4Mi monitors recruit respondents include places where a high proportion of asylum seekers gather. There is also an over-representation of asylum seekers in Tapachula because it is the first city that people on the move reach after entering Mexico from one of the main border crossings with Guatemala. People on the move who wish to seek asylum are more likely to stop in Tapachula, where they can apply for international protection. Those who do not are unlikely to stop in the city.

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



Drivers of migration are often multiple and intertwined

Data show that the reasons that lead people on the move to leave their country are complex. A majority of respondents (69%) mentioned multiple reasons for leaving; in most cases, this was a combination of issues relating to violence and insecurity, and economic drivers, and was mentioned by both migrants and asylum seekers or refugees. This indicates that the causes of migration are often multiple and intertwined and cannot be reduced to a binary narrative opposing people fleeing violence and persecution, on the one hand, and people seeking better economic opportunities, on the other.

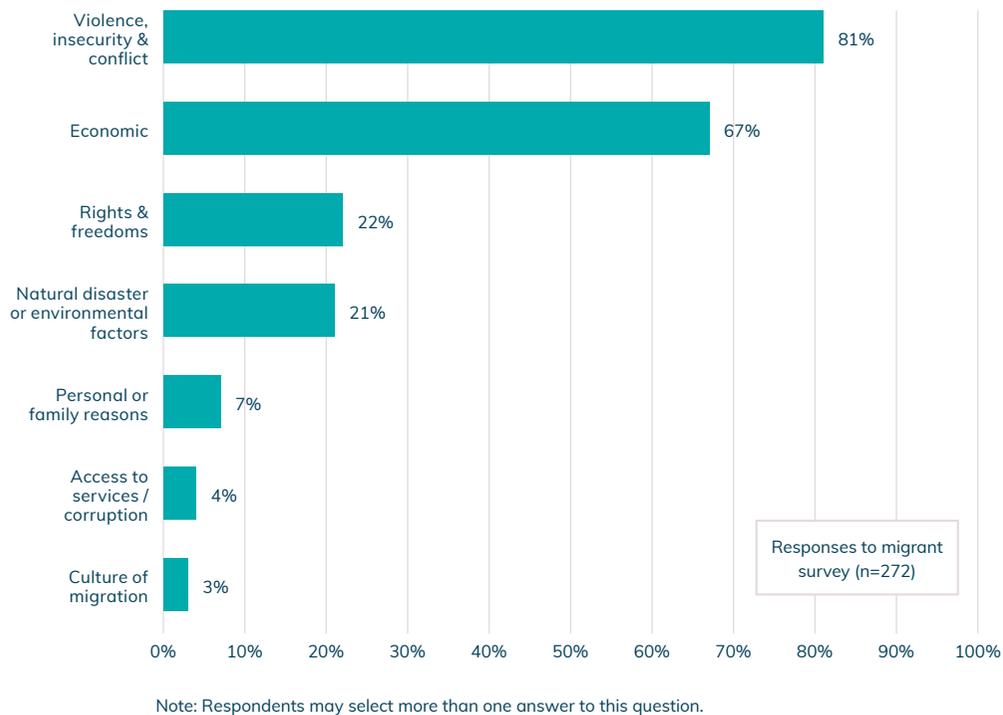
For the vast majority of interviewees (81%), the most frequently reported reason behind their decision to leave their country was related to violence, insecurity and/or conflict. The second most frequently reported reason for migrating was related to economic factors (67%), followed by reasons related to lack of rights and/or freedoms (22%) and reasons associated with environmental factors (21%) (see Figure 4).

Respondents from Honduras were more likely to have migrated for reasons associated with natural disasters or environmental factors (27%) compared to other nationalities.³ Honduras was strongly impacted by the hurricane season in November 2020.⁴

Significant differences between answers were found by sex, with women respondents more frequently saying they had migrated for personal or family reasons (15% of women compared to 5% of men).

The proportion of respondents who left their country due to violence and insecurity did not show strong differences depending on the nationality, meaning that violence is a common migration driver among respondents in our sample, regardless of the country of departure.

Figure 4. For what reasons did you leave?

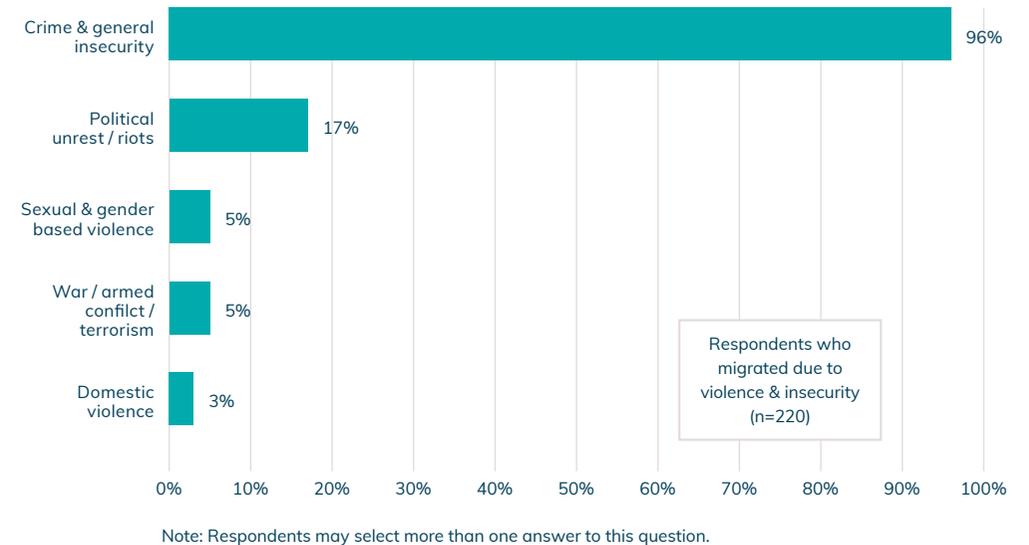


3 Significant differences identified throughout this analysis were found through z-tests at the 0.05 level of significance.
 4 OCHA, (2020), [Honduras: Flash Appeal - Tropical Storm Eta, November 2020](#).

Crime and general insecurity are the main reported violence-related drivers

96% (211/220) of respondents who said they had left their country for reasons related to violence identified the specific form of violence as crime and insecurity (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. For what kind of reasons relating to violence, insecurity, or conflict did you leave?



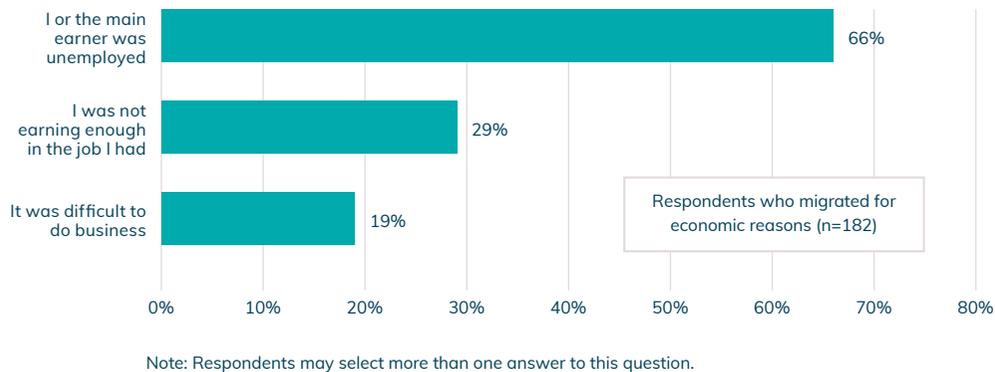
The countries of the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America – which includes El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala – have a strong presence of criminal actors, including gangs and drug-trafficking networks, that exert territorial control and engage in forced recruitment, extortion and homicide, driving thousands to seek a safer life in another country.⁵ In the case of Nicaragua, violence is usually not linked to criminal gangs but rather to human right abuses committed by pro-government paramilitary groups against the civilian population.⁶

5 MSF (2020): [No way out - The humanitarian crisis for Central American migrants and asylum seekers](#).
 6 UN News (2020), [Nicaragua: After two years of crisis, more than 100,000 have fled the country](#).

Unemployment is a key driver of migration

Among respondents who decided to migrate for economic reasons, 66% (120/182) stated having done so because they were unemployed, 29% (n=53) because they were not earning enough in the job they had and 19% (n=35) because they had difficulties in doing business (see Figure 6).

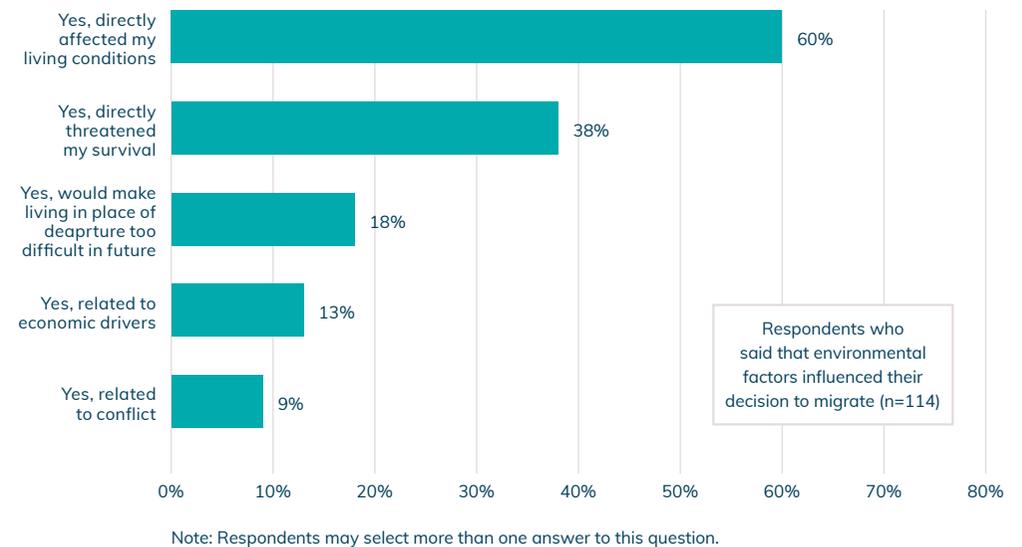
Figure 6. For what kind of economic reasons did you leave?



Environmental factors seem to play an important indirect role in the decision to migrate

When initially asked for what reasons they left their country of departure, only 21% of respondents indicated environmental factors. However, when they were asked if environmental issues were a factor in their decision to migrate, the proportion doubled (42%). Environmental issues often manifest themselves as a stress multiplier, affecting other drivers of migration, such as a lack of livelihood opportunities, which was reported by 60% (68/114) of respondents who indicated environmental issues as a factor of migration. 38% (n=43) said such factors directly threatened their survival and 18% (n=21) perceived that environmental factors would negatively affect their living conditions in the future (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Were environmental issues a factor in your decision to leave your country of departure?



The Central American and Caribbean region was hit by 13 hurricanes in 2020.⁷ In November 2020, hurricanes Eta (category 4 storm) and Iota (category 5) caused hundreds of deaths and widespread destruction in Honduras. 57% of Honduran respondents came from the regions that were most affected by the storms: Cortes, Yoro, Santa Barbara y Atlántida.⁸ According to various studies, climate-induced migration and displacement could grow in the future as natural disasters intensify due to climate change.⁹

The Covid-19 pandemic was a factor in the decision to migrate for 42% of respondents

42% of respondents who started their migration journey since April 2020 stated that the pandemic had an influence on their decision to leave their country.

Of the consequences of the pandemic that respondents indicated as relevant factors in their decision to migrate, most were linked to economic factors (for 93% of 106

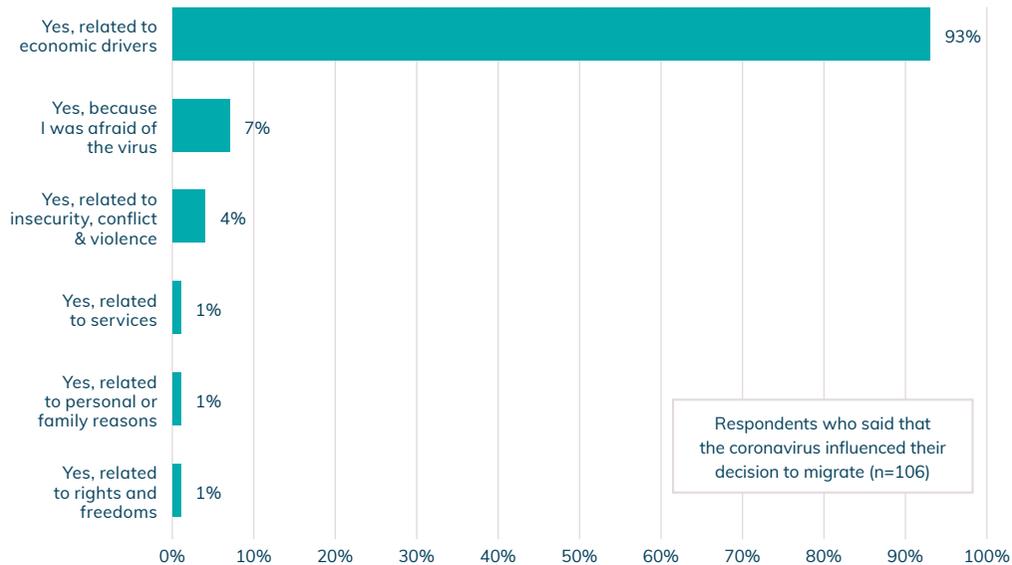
⁷ Reuters (2020), [Storms that slammed Central America in 2020 just a preview, climate change experts say.](#)

⁸ CEPAL (2020), [Efectos e impactos de la tormenta tropical Eta y el huracán Iota en Honduras.](#)

⁹ New-York Times (2020), [The great climate migration.](#)

respondents), while a minority related to fear of infection (7%) or healthcare access (1%) (see Figure 8). Unemployment and poverty have increased in Central America since the pandemic began: the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimated that the region experienced in 2020 a growth of 4.4% of the poverty rate in all Latin America, which represents 16 million people pushed into poverty during the pandemic.¹⁰

Figure 8. Was coronavirus a factor in your decision to leave your country of departure?



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

Respondents who said that the coronavirus influenced their decision to migrate (n=106)

10 ECLAC, (2020): [Estudio económico de Centroamérica y la República Dominicana en 2019 y perspectivas para 2020](#).



4Mi data collection

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 and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field monitors are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. 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.