

4. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND RISK FACTORS FOR MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN FROM VENEZUELA DURING THE MIGRATION JOURNEY

As of 5 November 2020, there were 4,6 million refugees and migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela) living in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹ Since 2017, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has conducted surveys in 16 host countries and inside Venezuela with mobile and stationary populations, at border crossings, along migratory routes, and in those areas with a high concentration of refugees and migrants from Venezuela. Although this data is not representative,² it is possible to conduct a gender analysis of human mobility from Venezuela. To respond in a dignified, appropriate and safe manner to the human mobility crisis, the needs, skills and opportunities of various affected groups, such as women, must be analysed.³ In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the conditions of access to services and the guarantee of women's rights,⁴ which is why it is essential to have a disaggregated analysis of data collected through the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM).

This paper, which is the fourth in a series of four,⁵ presents and analyses information collected by DTM in 2019, focusing on gender-based violence (GBV) and risk factors faced by migrant and refugee women from Venezuela, as well as the main difficulties they experienced.

Key points:

- Venezuelan migrant and refugee women reported that their main priority needs are the following: income/employment (28%), legal support (19%), document assistance (16%) and medical help (16%).
- At the same time, the four main difficulties during the trip reported by women were: lack of resources (67%), lack of food/water (35%), lack of means of transport (33%) and lack of information (33%).
- The most frequently mentioned types of violence suffered by surveyed women were: physical violence (35%), verbal violence (25%), psychological violence (11%) and sexual violence (10%).

- Forty per cent of the women surveyed responded that they had experienced discrimination and 86 per cent of them reported that it had been based on their nationality.

NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES DURING THE MIGRATORY JOURNEY CAN INCREASE THE RISKS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

When asked about their needs, 28 per cent of the women surveyed indicated that their main priority needs were income/employment, followed by 19 per cent that reported legal support (including help with migration and refugee status), 16 per cent mentioned document assistance and another 16 per cent medical help. In addition, 28 per cent of women responded that they had experienced difficulties during their migratory journey. The four main difficulties were lack of resources, food and water, means of transport and information. Sixty-seven per cent of the women said they experienced lack of resources, 35 per cent reported lack of food and water, 33 per cent mentioned they lacked means of transport and another 33 per cent stated that they did not have access to information (Graph 1).

First, it is important to note that both needs and difficulties are related to having no resources and no support in accessing information. Secondly, although these types of difficulties (and needs) are common in human mobility, for many women they have exacerbated and aggravated impacts since in many cases, facing these difficulties exposes them to situations of GBV or risks. An example of these are: passing through routes or dangerous places where they may be victims of robbery, sexual violence and disappearance. They could also be forced into transactional sex because they have no other resources to support themselves and their families, exposing themselves to contracting sexual diseases; having to use private vehicles where they cannot guarantee their own or their family's safety; being exposed to networks of human trafficking or smuggling of migrants; being subjected to the violence exercised by illegal armed groups and drug traffickers, among others.

1 See: <https://r4v.info/es/situations/platform>

2 The sample is not representative, i.e. it does not necessarily have the same characteristics as the entire Venezuelan population; this does not mean that it does not allow for a solid analysis of gender characteristics.

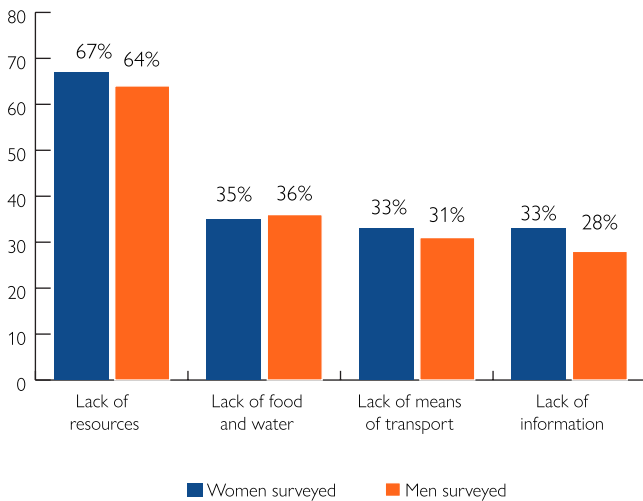
3 The DTM does not collect data from girls and young women under the age of 18, only the questions about respondents' relatives.

4 See: IOM, UNHCR, UN WOMEN (2020) Migrant and Refugee Women in the Context of COVID-19. p.1.

5 The other three documents have information on demographics, education, protection, and gender-based violence (GBV).

GRAPH 1

Top four main difficulties for men and women during the migration journey



MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN FROM VENEZUELA REPORTED VIOLENCE DURING THEIR MIGRATORY JOURNEY

Thirteen percent of women reported having suffered some form of violence during the journey. An almost equal, slightly higher percentage of men, 14 per cent, also reported experiencing violence (Graph 2). Gender-based violence such as sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and sexual violence, among others, continue to be naturalised, silenced and made invisible by men and women, while other types of violence suffered by men during the journey can be more easily identified and recognised. It is crucial to remember that, according to information from 2019 published in reports and research articles in the press, Venezuelan women, whether on their migratory journey or at their destination, are exposed in a generalised, systematic and constant manner to situations of sexual harassment on the street and demands for survival sex, among other forms of violence.⁶ In addition, it has been recorded that there were more than 120 cases of women victims of femicide during the migration journey, from 2017 to mid-2019.⁷ Among other research with information from 2019, a report published by UNDP and RV4, concluded that the violence experienced by Venezuelan refugee and migrant women is widespread, occurs at all stages of the migration process and takes several forms.⁸

6 See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/26/venezuelas-border-with-colombia-women-suffer-extraordinary-levels-violence/> and UNHCR. (2019). Aspectos claves del Monitoreo de protección. Situación Venezuela. January-june 2019.

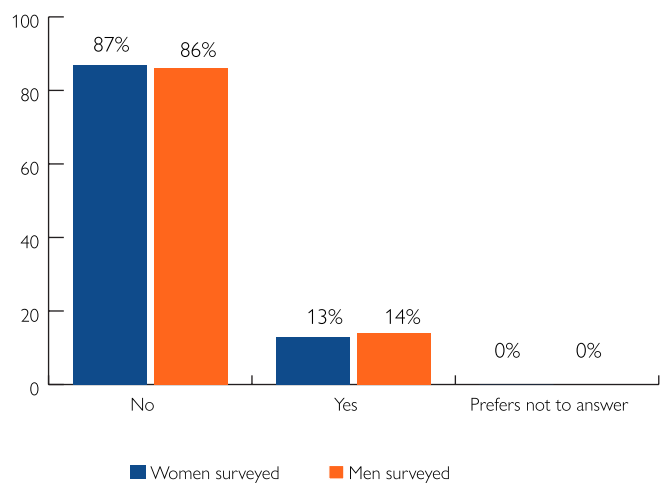
7 See: Una masacre silenciosa: las venezolanas muertas en el extranjero (2019). See in https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/09/02/planeta_futuro/1567434636_760205.html

8 UNDP and R4V, "Reinventarse sobre la marcha: Mujeres refugiadas y migrantes de Venezuela. Un estudio sobre condiciones y acceso a medios de vida en Colombia, Ecuador y Perú", 2020, p. 126-128.

Official gender agencies of the Organisation of American States have also found that there is a high under-reporting of gender-based violence suffered by women both in administrative statistics as well as in relation to complaints in the justice system specifically, including in migration crises and human displacement.⁹ This is due, among other things, to the lack of safety nets and access to basic legal reporting and protection services. Given this high under-reporting, the fact that almost a quarter of women mentioned having experienced violence during the journey indicates that the extent of gender-based violence against migrant and refugee women from Venezuela could be much greater.

GRAPH 2

Violence experienced during the journey by women and men



DIFFERENT TYPES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AFFECT THE LIVES OF VENEZUELAN MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN DURING THE MIGRATION JOURNEY

Thirty-five percent of women reported having suffered physical violence, 25 percent verbal violence, 11 percent psychological violence and 10 percent sexual violence (Graph 3). Most women who experienced these four forms of violence were between 18 and 34 years old and had a secondary level of education. Among those women who travelled alone, 39 per cent reported being victims of physical violence, 24 per cent reported suffering verbal violence, 12 per cent reported being victims of sexual violence and 9 per cent reported experiencing psychological violence (Graph 4). Lastly, 40 per cent of women mentioned that they had experienced discrimination and 86

9 MESECVI (Mecanismo de Seguimiento de la Convención de Belém do Pará) (2008), Informe hemisférico (MESECVI-II/doc.16/08rev.1), Washington, D.C., Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres (CIM)/Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)

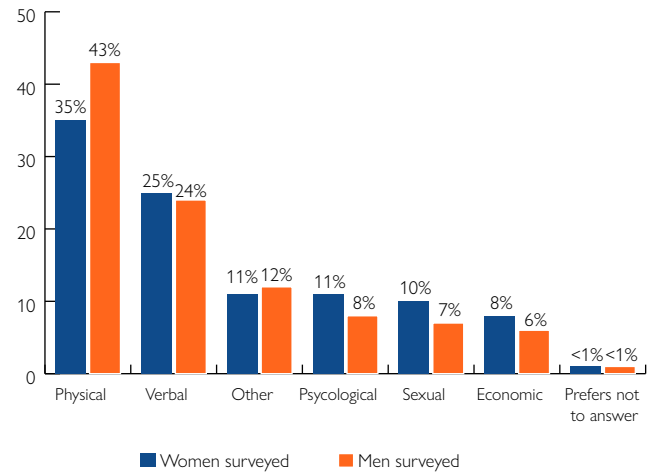
per cent of them reported that it had been based on their nationality.

The above figures reveal, on the one hand, that travelling alone is dangerous for Venezuelan women migrants and refugees and partly explains why more men than women are travelling alone. On the other hand, economic precariousness, expressed in the difficulties outlined above, and the overwhelming burden of care work for migrant and refugee women, exponentially increases their risk of suffering various types of violence. It is worth remembering that one of the main needs of migrant and refugee women is access to income and employment, given their precarious economic situation. Moreover, social isolation, fear of approaching the authorities and fewer contacts with support networks can increase the likelihood that women will suffer severe forms of violence for extended periods of time.¹⁰ This lack of support networks is also reflected in the fact that women's main needs, as outlined above, are information for legal procedures and access to services.

Observing that women between 18 and 34 years old are the ones who mainly experience this violence, it can be deduced that the dignified life projects of young women, instead of being empowered by the migration process, they are being severely affected. This analysis must consider that the limited or non-existent access to services such as health, protection or justice for migrant and refugee women during their journey increases the possibility of suffering a continuum of violence.¹¹ In other words, these types of violence reported by women, together with the high presence of xenophobic discrimination and the hyper-sexualisation of their bodies,¹² are a continuation of factors that normalise these forms of violence. Not only it prevents denunciation, but above all, it exacerbates the risk of experiencing various forms of sexual violence (extended sexual harassment, survival sex, rape and sexual exploitation), and even femicide.

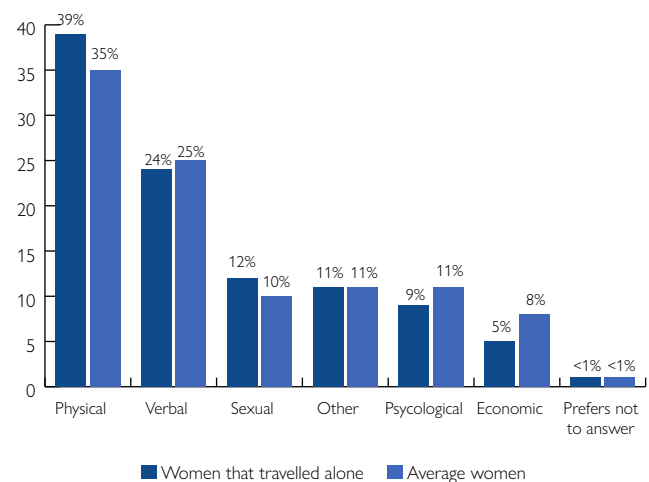
GRAPH 3

Types of violence experienced during the journey by women and men¹³



GRAPH 4

Types of violence experienced during the trip by women who travelled alone



10 International Organisation for Migration (IOM) / Ministerio de Desarrollo Social del Gobierno de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. (2014). Las mujeres migrantes y la violencia de género, aportes para la reflexión y la intervención. Pág. 77.

11 Op. Cit. n. 11, p. 58.

12 Ibid, p. 60.

13 In all the figures we are always referring to the Venezuelan migrants and refugees interviewed. The use of the word "average women" refers to the average of the responses given by Venezuelan migrant and refugee women.

METHODOLOGY

The database used in this report was compiled by IOM DTM teams in 11 countries that host refugees and migrants from Venezuela in Latin America and the Caribbean to better understand their movements, profiles and needs. Assessments were conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. The teams conducted surveys with moving and stationary populations both at border crossings and along migratory routes as well as locations with a high concentration of refugees and migrants from Venezuela, collecting disaggregated information including: demographics, education, labour profile and livelihoods, monitoring of mobility and routes, assessment of location, protection, health, needs and vulnerabilities. The surveys have a common and harmonised methodology, which allows the information to be used at the country level, to inform response and operations, but also gives a sub-regional view of the Venezuelan migration phenomenon. In most of the sample countries, IOM teams collected data through convenience sampling and surveys were administered face-to-face by trained enumerators..