

CARTAS AL EDITOR

Analysis of migration patterns, social characteristics, and access to health services for people on the move in Mexico

Dear editor: Migration from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) towards Northern America has been increasing since 1990, and the Mexico-US border has been the world's largest migratory corridor.¹ Understanding the humanitarian needs and protection concerns of these populations has been a complex task due to its constant change over time, mostly related to its social composition, and the contextual spaces they cross. National migration policies, including the USA's restrictive Migration Protection Protocols (MPP)² and Title 42³ have shaped people-on-the-move's (PoM) exposition to violence and have had a direct impact in their health.

In an effort to better understand the health needs of PoM, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) designed the Migration History Tool (MHT), which investigates the characteristics and health conditions of PoM. In this article, we report on the preliminary results from the MHT in three Mexican cities, Mexico City, Tapachula, and Reynosa, between November 4th and December 9th, 2022. Interviews

were conducted in Spanish and study inclusion required participants to be 15 years or older and in transit.

A total of 1 356 PoM were interviewed: 661 in Mexico City, 458 in Reynosa, and 237 in Tapachula. 51% of participants identified as men, 15% reported being indigenous, 59% were married, and the median age was 29 (IQR 24-37). Participants originated from 16 different countries, with most participants coming from Venezuela (46%). PoM in Mexico City reported more health problems while migrating (50%) than those in Reynosa (34%) and Tapachula (44%) but were the least likely to seek care. More individuals in Reynosa and Tapachula reported experiencing kidnapping, physical assault, and sexual abuse when migrating to Mexico than individuals in Mexico City. More people in Mexico City reported having sought help after being sexually abused than in the other study sites (table I).

Several key points arise from our survey. First, socio-demographics and exposure to violence PoM experience does differ by several factors, therefore having implications for cultural competency standards in the delivery of health services and health promotion strategies. Second, there is a difference in mobility patterns across cities; meaning that types and models of health services offered to PoM should

also be adapted to ensure accessibility and availability. Third, the high rates of exposure to violent events in Mexico must inspire additional protection interventions. These results provide elements to raise awareness about the specific health needs of PoM in Mexico and should serve as a framework for MSF and other service providers when improving programming and screening of needs related to health and exposure to violence.

Declaration of conflict of interests. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

Derek Johnson, PhD,⁽¹⁾
 msfch-mexico-epidemiomanager@geneva.msf.org
 Marcos Tamariz, MA,⁽¹⁾
 Marwa Saleh, MD,⁽¹⁾
 Serena Sorrenti, MA,⁽¹⁾
 Tiago Nascimento, MA,⁽¹⁾

(1) Médicos Sin Fronteras, Oficina Integrada de Centroamérica y México. Ciudad de México, México.

<https://doi.org/10.21149/15247>

References

1. International Organization for Migration. Central America, North America and the Caribbean. Regional Strategy 2020-2024. San José: IOM, 2020 [cited August 30, 2023]. Available from: <https://publications.iom.int/books/central-america-north-america-and-caribbean-regional-strategy-2020-2024> <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/CA-NA-and-the-Caribbean-Regional-Strategy-%202020-2024.pdf>

2. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Secretary Kirsjen M. Nielsen announces historic action to confront illegal immigration. Washington DC: DHS, 2018 [cited August 30, 2023]. Available from: [https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/12/20/](https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/12/20/secretary-nielsen-announces-historic-action-confront-illegal-immigration)

secretary-nielsen-announces-historic-action-confront-illegal-immigration
3. U.S. Congress. United States Code: The Public Health Service, 42 U.S.C. §§ 201-291 n. Washington DC: U.S. Congress, 1952 [cited August 30,

2023]. Available from: <https://www.loc.gov/item/uscode1952-004042006a/>

Table I
CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE-ON-THE-MOVE BY MEXICO INTERVIEW SITE. DATA WAS COLLECTED BETWEEN NOVEMBER 4 AND DECEMBER 9, 2022

	N	Total (%)	Mexico City (n= 653) (%)	Reynosa (n= 456) (%)	Tapachula (n= 236) (%)
Sex*	1 342				
Male		686 (51)	400 (61)	181 (40)	105 (45)
Female		656 (49)	251 (39)	275 (60)	130 (55)
Median age (IQR)*	1 340	29 (24, 37)	30 (24, 37)	28 (23, 36)	29 (23, 37)
Do you identify as indigenous*	1 244	189 (15)	56 (8.8)	100 (24)	33 (17)
Are you married	1 339	793 (59)	402 (62)	258 (57)	133 (57)
What country were you born in*	1 344				
Venezuela		614 (46)	526 (81)	10 (2.2)	78 (33)
Guatemala		289 (22)	7 (1.1)	19 (4.2)	18 (7.6)
Honduras		289 (22)	32 (4.9)	180 (39)	77 (33)
Mexico		91 (6.8)	0 (0)	90 (20)	1 (0.4)
Other		85 (6.3)	28 (4.3)	51 (11)	17 (7.2)
El Salvador		78 (5.8)	10 (1.5)	49 (11)	19 (8.1)
Haiti		67 (5.0)	10 (1.5)	53 (12)	4 (1.7)
Colombia		37 (2.8)	28 (4.3)	4 (0.9)	5 (2.1)
Ecuador		28 (2.1)	11 (1.7)	0 (0)	17 (7.2)
When did you arrive in Mexico*	1 306				
Less than a week		145 (11)	42 (6.6)	17 (3.9)	86 (37)
Between 1 and 4 weeks		448 (34)	269 (42)	114 (26)	65 (28)
Between 1 and 3 months		463 (35)	280 (44)	120 (28)	63 (27)
Between 3 and 6 months		123 (9.4)	19 (3.0)	93 (21)	11 (4.7)
Between 6 months and one year		63 (4.8)	4 (0.6)	55 (13)	4 (1.7)
More than one year		64 (4.9)	24 (3.8)	35 (8.1)	5 (2.1)
What is your final destination*	1 293				
Canada		40 (3.1)	20 (3.2)	9 (2.0)	11 (4.8)
Mexico		170 (13)	131 (21)	1 (0.2)	38 (17)
USA		1 057 (82)	455 (73)	431 (97)	171 (74)
Other		26 (2.0)	14 (2.3)	2 (0.5)	10 (4.3)
Have you ever been deported	1 328	284 (21)	132 (21)	89 (20)	63 (27)
Did you suffer any incident from the authorities	275	51 (19)	30 (24)	10 (11)	11 (18)

(continues...)

(...continuation)

Did you experience any harassment in 2021*	I 345				
Yes		251 (19)	103 (16)	87 (19)	61 (26)
No		1 094 (81)	550 (84)	369 (81)	175 (74)
Did you experience any physical assault in 2021*	I 345				
Yes		185 (14)	62 (9.5)	79 (17)	44 (19)
No		1 160 (86)	591 (91)	377 (83)	192 (81)
Did you experience a kidnapping in 2021*	I 345				
Yes		55 (4.1)	19 (2.9)	27 (5.9)	9 (3.8)
No		1 290 (96)	634 (97)	429 (94)	227 (96)
Have you experienced sexual abuse*	937				
No		793 (85)	456 (93)	218 (74)	119 (77)
Didn't respond		53 (5.7)	12 (2.5)	36 (12)	5 (3.2)
Yes		91 (9.7)	21 (4.3)	40 (14)	30 (19)
Did you seek help for your sexual abuse*	89				
No		65 (73)	13 (62)	35 (88)	17 (61)
Didn't respond		9 (10)	2 (9.5)	1 (2.5)	6 (21)
Yes		15 (17)	6 (29)	4 (10)	5 (18)

* p value less than 0.05.