

Access to information among refugees and migrants in Mexico

Information is fundamental for refugees and migrants to evaluate their options before and during their migration journey, choose a destination, estimate costs and determine the safest and most accessible route. How do they gather information before and during the journey? Which kind of information do they have access to and what are the gaps? Which sources of information are the most used and which are the most trusted?

This snapshot offers an analysis on access to information among refugees and migrants interviewed in Mexico. 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

- Less than half of surveyed refugees and migrants (45%) reported having accessed information about routes, destinations, costs and risks before starting their journey. This low proportion can be explained by the specific migration dynamics in the region. The trends found in Latin America are quite different from those indicated by 4Mi data from other regions.¹
- The main sources of information consulted before the journey were personal contacts such as friends or family in the country of arrival or departure.
- Only 48% of all respondents mentioned having received information during the journey about routes, destinations, costs and risks, mainly from the local population.
- The most frequently reported information gap is that of rights in countries of transit or destination, particularly among asylum seekers.
- Information was mainly obtained through phone calls and in-person conversations. The use of social media or messaging apps was reported less often.

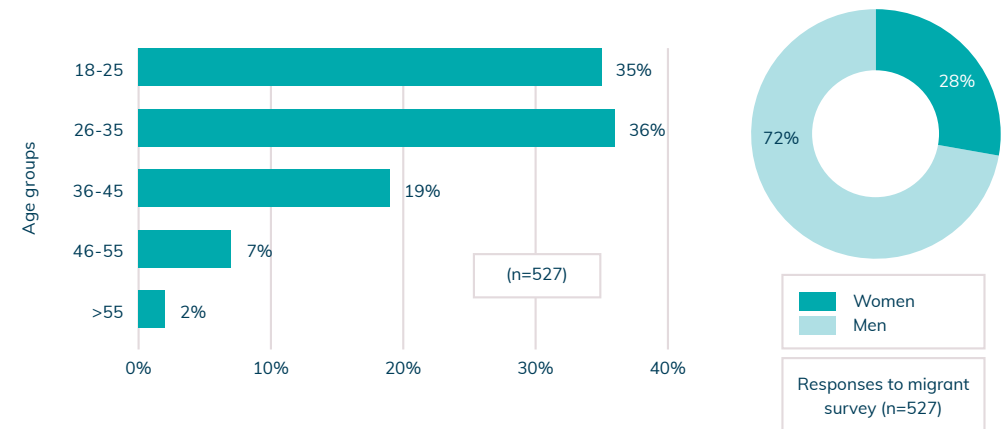
1 MMC (2018): [Access to information of refugees and migrants on the move in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso](#); MMC (2019): [Access to information of refugees and migrants in Libya](#)

Profiles

The analysis is based on 527 surveys conducted in Mexico between February and June 2021, partially by face-to-face interview (95%) and partially by phone (5%). 80% of the surveys were carried out in Tapachula, 19% in Tijuana² and the remaining 1% in cities such as Monterrey, Ciudad Hidalgo and Rosarito.

72% of respondents were men and 28% were women. Respondents were more frequently aged between 26 and 35 (36%) and the average age of the sample was 31 years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Sex and age ranges

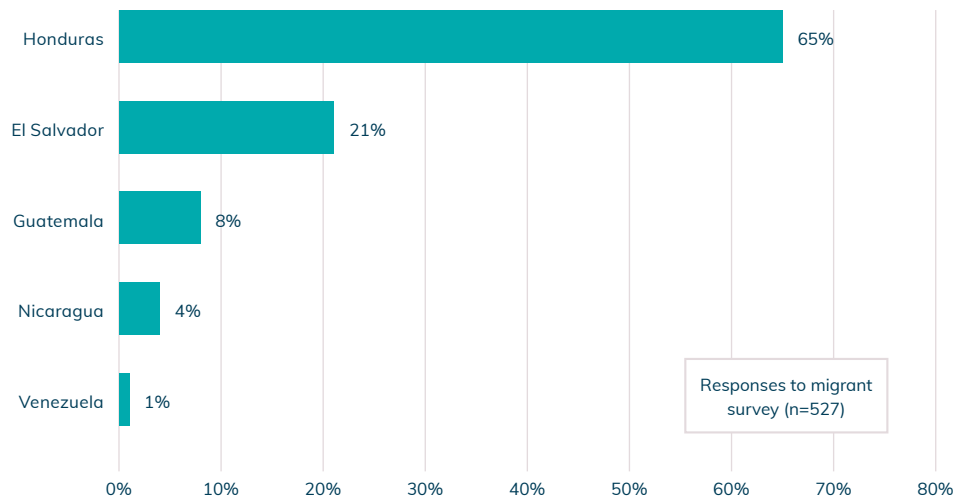


2 4Mi monitors in Mexico are currently located in Tapachula and Tijuana. Data collection however began later in Tijuana (end of April 2021) meaning that data from this location is more limited.

The highest level of education completed for most respondents was primary school (44% of all respondents), followed by secondary or high school (43%). 6% of respondents had completed vocational training, while only 1% had a university degree. Respondents who did not complete any educational level made up 6% of the sample.

65% of respondents came from Honduras, 21% from El Salvador, 8% from Guatemala, 4% from Nicaragua, and 1% from Venezuela (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. What is your country of nationality?



Only 45% of respondents had access to information before starting their journey

55% of all respondents did not obtain information before leaving their country of departure. According to 4Mi enumerators, many respondents declared not having been able to gather information before beginning their journey because they had to leave their country of departure suddenly, as their life was in danger due to violence or persecution. Others had to face the impact of natural disasters that made them lose everything from one day

to the next.³ In many cases, refugees and migrants have to undertake their journey in fast-changing environments, without being able to prepare.

In addition, a substantial proportion of refugees and migrants from Central America migrate to Mexico or the United States with the help of a smuggler.⁴ They do not gather information on routes or risks because the smuggler organizes all aspects of the journey for them. The information that most of them do search are the contacts of smugglers referred/suggested by relatives or friends who already migrated. Only 2% of respondents mentioned smugglers as a source of information, although this proportion could be higher in reality according to 4Mi enumerators: respondents are often reluctant to talk about their interactions with smugglers.

There are also other more generalized obstacles to accessing information. Only 40% of the population have access to internet in Honduras, 57% in El Salvador.⁵ Rural areas are much less connected to the internet than urban areas.⁶ In Honduras, only 16% of the population has access to a computer in urban areas and the proportion plummets to only 1,9% in rural areas.⁷ According to a 2018 study by ECLAC and FAO, the majority of refugees and migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador come from rural areas.⁸ In line with these findings, 53% of 4Mi respondents covered in this snapshot lived in a rural area before leaving their country of departure.

Personal connections were the main source of information before migrating

For respondents who did obtain information before leaving their country (n=235), information was mainly gathered from personal connections, such as friends and family in another country (58%) and friends or family in the country of departure (27%). This was followed by the wider diaspora (13%) and other migrants (12%).

3 NY Times (2021): ["Estamos signados": la devastación de los huracanes impulsa la migración en Honduras](#)

4 OIM (2021): [El tráfico ilícito de migrantes en América Central y México en el contexto de la COVID-19](#)

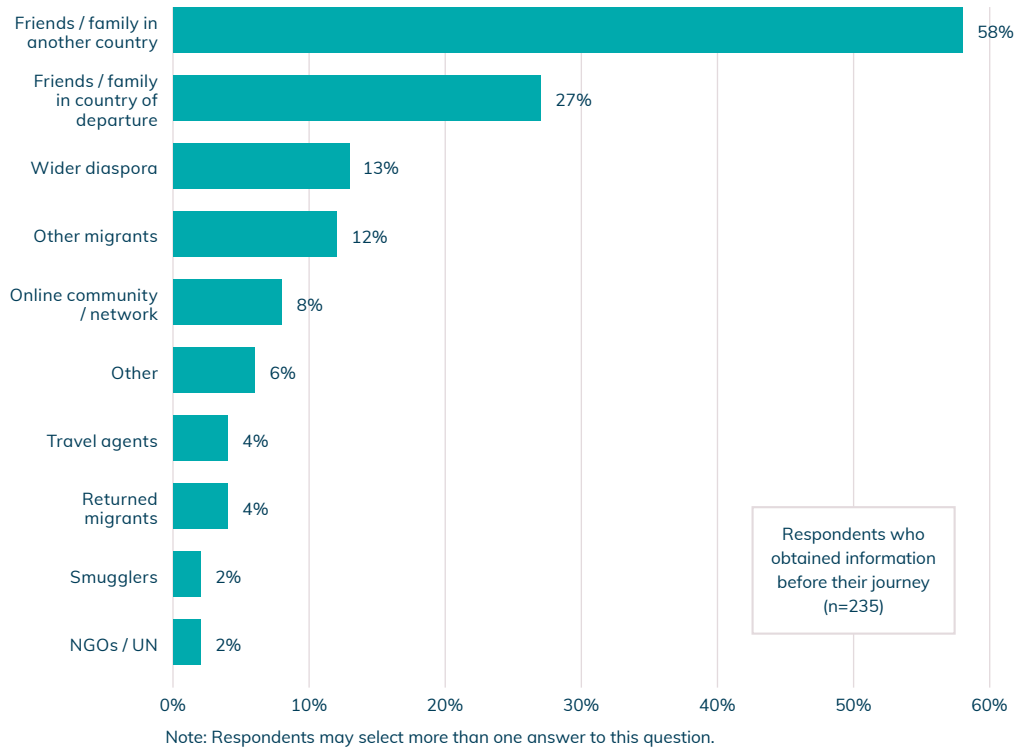
5 La Prensa (2020): [Solo el 40% de los Hondureños tiene acceso a Internet](#); El Mundo (2020): [El Salvador alcanzó los 3.8 millones de usuarios de internet en 2020](#)

6 PNUD (2021): ["Estás en Mute": Porque el acceso a Internet no es suficiente para la digitalización inclusiva de América Latina y el Caribe](#)

7 Forbes (2020): [La poca cobertura de Internet en Honduras es el fracaso de las clases virtuales](#)

8 ECLAC (2018): [Atlas of Migration in Northern Central America](#)

Figure 3. What were your sources of information about routes, destinations, costs, risks, etc. before your journey?



The means most commonly used to obtain information before the journey were phone calls (49%) and in-person conversations (46%). Contrary to what one might expect, the use of social media or messaging apps (20%), websites (9%) and traditional channels such as radio, TV, or newspaper (5%) were reported much less often.

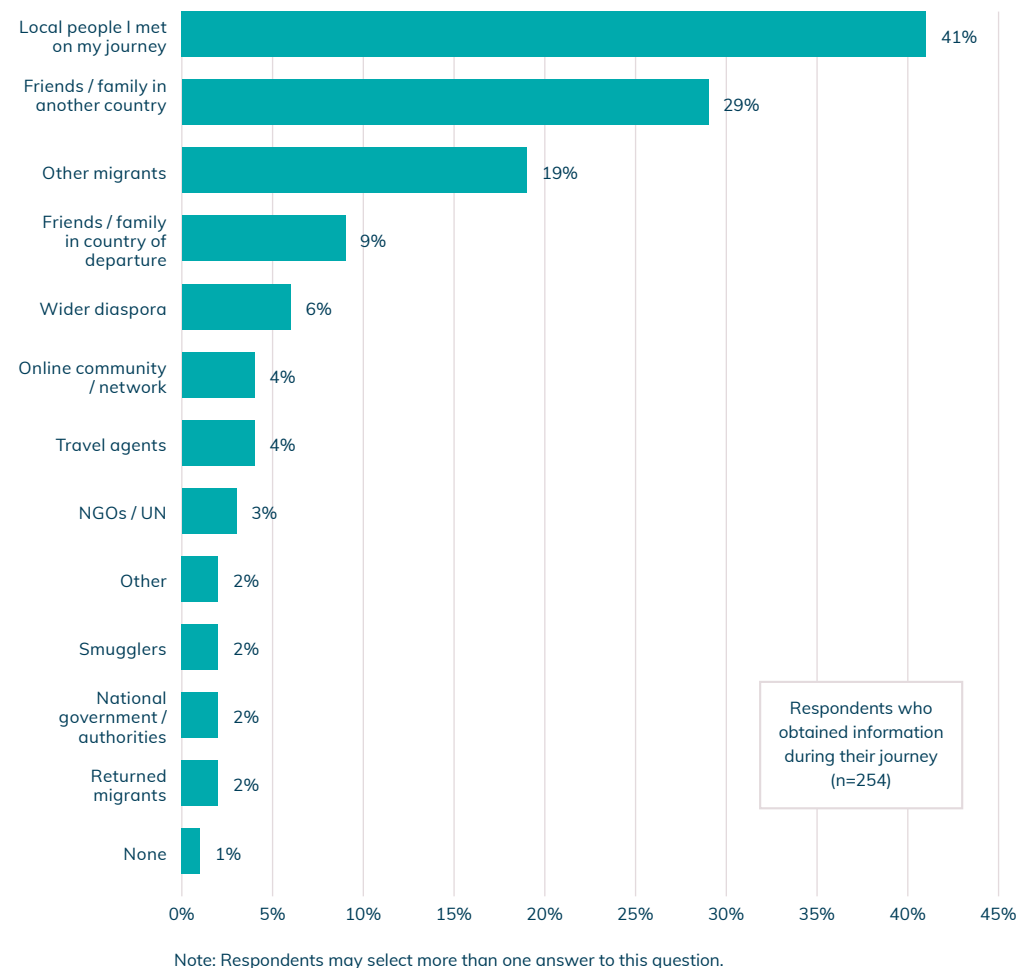
Local people were the main source of information during migration

Only 48% (n=254) of respondents stated having obtained information about routes, destinations, costs and possible risks during their journey.

For those who received information during their journey, local people they met while migrating were the main source of information (41%), followed by friends or family in another country (29%), and other migrants (19%) (see Figure 4).

Information was mainly received through in-person contact (68%) and phone calls (28%). While 69% of all respondents stated having a smartphone during the journey, social media or messaging apps and websites were very seldomly used to access information during the journey, by 13% and 10% respectively. According to 4Mi enumerators, respondents usually do not have enough money to pay for internet access on their smartphone.

Figure 4. What were your sources of information about routes, destinations, costs, risks, etc. during your journey?



Significant differences were found between places of interview in Mexico.⁹ Refugees and migrants surveyed in Tapachula, at Mexico's southern border with Guatemala, reported in lesser proportion that they had access to information during the journey (44%, 186/236) than those interviewed in Tijuana, at the northern border with the U.S. (65%, 34/64). This result indicates that interviewees gradually informed themselves along their journey.

Respondents who obtained information before or during the journey (n=353) were asked what the most reliable source of information had been overall. 49% indicated family or friends as the most trusted source of information, while 22% mentioned local people met during the journey. Only 3% reported NGOs, 2% mentioned smugglers and 1% mentioned national government/authorities.

According to a local actor in Tapachula, where 80% of 4Mi surveys in Mexico were collected, refugees and migrants often do not believe that NGOs can provide them useful information about the next steps of their migration journey, which is the topic that interests them most. They may also doubt the information they receive: many of them do not understand the role of NGOs and assume that they work for or with the government; they thus believe that the information given is an attempt to prevent them from continuing their journey. Additionally, the number of refugees and migrants passing through the municipality is so high that NGOs are only able to contact a small minority of them.

According to 4Mi enumerators, there is also a mistrust among respondents toward national authorities: most refugees and migrants in Mexico come from countries where corruption is considered widespread among state officials, which exacerbates the lack of trust toward authorities.¹⁰

Rights as migrants and refugees was the most useful information that respondents did not receive

When asked "what information would have been most useful that you did not receive?", 42% of all respondents answered it was information on their rights as migrants or refugees in countries of transit or destination. 36% mentioned information on safety and security along the journey, followed by legal procedures regarding migration and asylum (32%) and information on routes (29%), costs (20%) and how to access services (19%). Only 5% of respondents indicated having had all the information they needed (see Figure 5).

UNHCR reported that one important challenge for persons in need of international protection in Mexico has been the lack of information on how to access the asylum procedure in the country.¹¹ It should be noted that among the respondents who considered that receiving information on their rights as migrants or refugees would have been useful, 65% (343/527) reported being asylum seekers, and 19% (100/527) being migrants without legal documents to stay in the country of interview.

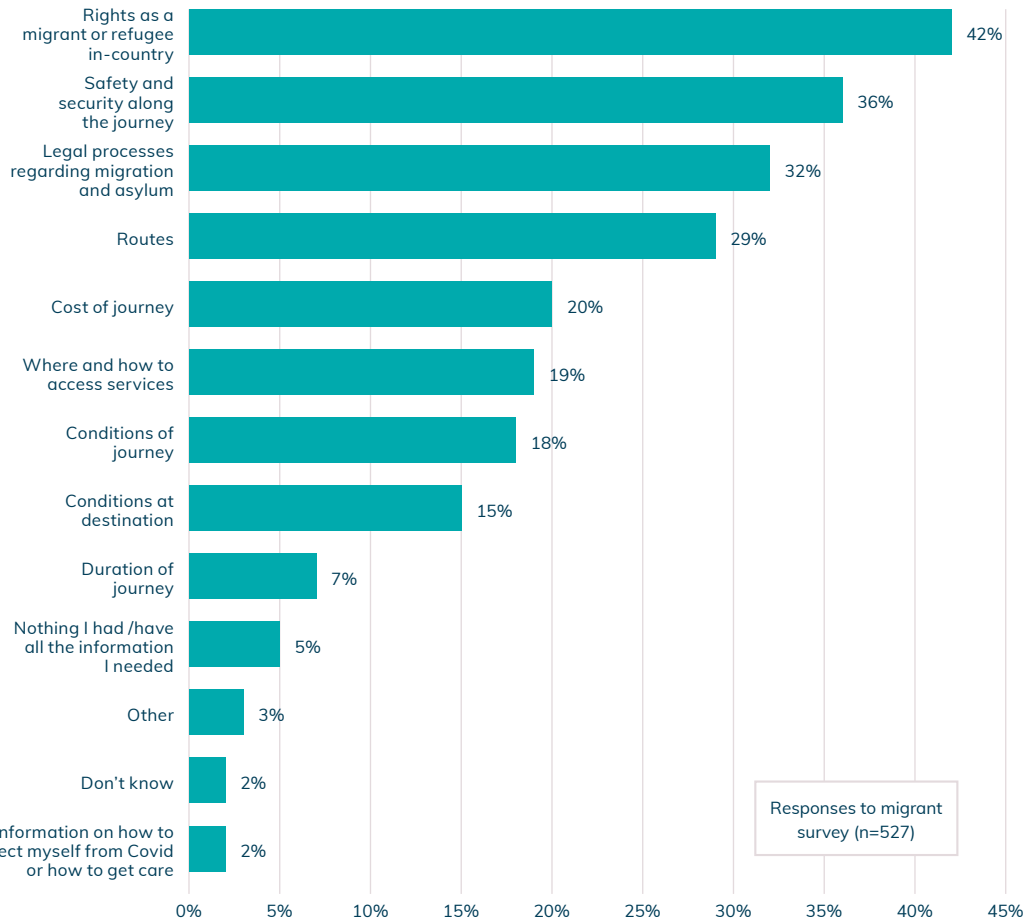
4Mi data thus points to information gaps related to migration decision-making, both prior to departure and during the journey. Nonetheless, when 4Mi respondents were asked if they would have still undertaken the journey knowing what they had come to know by the time of interview, 71% said they would while 29% stated they would not have attempted it.

9 Significant differences identified throughout this analysis were found through z-tests at the 0.05 level of significance.

10 UNHCR (2016): [Call to Action: Protection Needs in the Northern Triangle of Central America](#)

11 UNHCR (2019): [Factsheet Mexico - April 2019](#)

Figure 5. What information would have been most useful that you did not receive?



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



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4Mi data collection

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 enumerators 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

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