



**Report Title:** Women and Girls, Mixed Migration, and Violence in Mexico and Central America's Northern Triangle: Data, Trends and Resources

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## Overview

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This document provides information and suggests resources related to gender-based violence (GBV) in the context of mixed migration in and through Mexico, primarily from Central America's Northern Triangle Countries (El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala). While the document gives some insight into issues connected to mixed migration and violence against women and girls (VAWG) more broadly, it is primarily intended for use by GBV/VAWG practitioners in the region, particularly those working with migrant, asylum-seeking, returned and/or deported women and girls.

The report outlines what is known about VAWG in Mexico and Central America's Northern Triangle countries during the different stages of the migration cycle – before leaving their home country, in transit, and after arrival in the destination country or return/deportation. It also highlights the intersection of different forms of vulnerability for women and girls on the move. Lastly, the report suggests some key resources to support practitioners working GBV survivors in this context.

Migrants moving from the Northern Triangle countries to and through Mexico are in many cases fleeing extreme violence and are exposed to multiple human rights violations along their journey (Amnesty International, 2010). While data is limited due to the irregular nature of much of the population movements as well as low levels of reporting of violence (Fernandez Aponte, 2018), the data that is available shows high rates of GBV in the region before, during and after migration (Fleury, 2016). Many women and girls cite violence – both within the household and perpetrated by criminal gangs – as a key reason for fleeing their home country; between 60 and 80 percent of women and girls on the move report having experienced violence during their journey, perpetrated by partners, other migrants, people smugglers or traffickers, and authorities (Fleury, 2016); and many women and girls report experiences of

GBV after arrival in their destination country, as well as after return or deportation to their home country, where they may face retaliatory violence for having left as well as discrimination and stigmatization (UNHCR, 2015). Characteristics such as age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and legal status are all considered likely to exacerbate vulnerability to GBV, though very little available data is disaggregated by sex, and still less by other characteristics, making it difficult to fully understand women and girls' migratory experiences (Fleury, 2016).

## **Migration Flows in Mexico and Central America's Northern Triangle**

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**Mexico and Central America's Northern Triangle are home to complex population movements including asylum-seekers, refugees, migrants (motivated by both economic and non-economic factors), and victims of trafficking;** such flows are increasingly known as 'mixed migration' (MMC, 2018). According to the International Organization for Migration (2008: 2), "the principal characteristics of mixed migration flows include the irregular nature of and the multiplicity of factors driving such movements, and the differentiated needs and profiles of the persons involved". People in mixed flows may have different legal statuses but travel along similar routes using similar means of transport, often irregular and assisted by smugglers. While refugees and asylum-seekers may have special status under the law, the majority of individuals on the move have complex motivations, vulnerabilities and needs, and rarely fit easily into any one particular category (MMC, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

**Migration flows in the region are significant and increasing.** Data on irregular migration flows are extremely difficult to capture due to the often clandestine nature of the movement, with the result that the overall picture of population movements remains incomplete (IOM, 2018). However, statistics on apprehension and deportation by authorities give some insight into the size of migration flows more generally, and some overall estimates are available (IOM, 2018). For example, reports indicate that 265,000 people, on average, have left El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras every year in the past five years, and that this number increased significantly in the first half of 2019, with an estimated 508,000 leaving between January and August (Congressional Research Service, 2019: 1). The number of refugees and asylum-seekers (globally) from Honduras increased by approximately 2,128 percent (from under 3,500 to over 78,000) from 2012 to 2018; for Guatemala, the increase was from fewer than 8,000 to more than 92,000 in the same period, while the number of asylum-seekers and refugees from El Salvador increased from fewer than 10,000 to over 130,000 (UNHCR, no date). Many of these individuals move through Mexico, which is at once a point of origin, transit and destination for migrants, to the United States of America (USA) in search of safety or better opportunities (Amnesty International, 2012; 2014). The number of Central American migrants detained by Mexican immigration authorities in the period from April to June 2018 increased by 59 percent (from 17,330 to 27,559) compared to the same period in 2017 (IOM 2018).

**Population movements in the region are motivated by a variety of factors, including poverty, lack of opportunities, policy changes and violence.** While such motivations are complex, it is clear that violence is a common and significant thread, including "murder, kidnapping, extortion,

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'migrant' is used in this report to denote anyone moving as part of a mixed migration flow, except where the specific status of the individual or group is known.

and forced gang recruitment” (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018<sup>2</sup>). El Salvador and Honduras have the highest homicide rates in the region, and are among the top five globally, at 62.1 and 41.7 intentional violent deaths per 100,000 people<sup>3</sup>, respectively (UNODC, 2019: 17). While Guatemala has a comparably lower rate overall at 27.6 per 100,000 people, it remains in the top 20 worldwide, and Guatemala City in particular shows an extremely high violent death rate at 65 per 100,000 (UNODC, 2019: 52). Mexico also suffers from endemic violence in some areas of the country, though on a less severe scale, causing many residents to seek refuge elsewhere (UNHCR, 2015).

**Recent changes in US immigration policy have had a significant impact on population flows to, in and through Mexico**, narrowing eligibility criteria for asylum-seekers, separating families, limiting the number of people processed per day and prolonging detention periods (HRW, 2019). In January 2019, the ‘Migrant Protection Protocols’ (MPP, known colloquially as ‘Remain in Mexico’) were introduced, forcing asylum-seekers to return to Mexican border towns to await the outcome of court proceedings. Human Rights Watch (2019) documents the situation in such cities, where a severe shortage of shelter space forces migrants who cannot afford to pay for a private room – which is the situation for many migrants from Central America - to sleep in the street, churches or abandoned residences, increasing risk of serious crime, including kidnapping, sexual assault, and other forms of violence. Access to information and legal assistance is limited.

**The number and proportion of women migrating through Mexico is increasing significantly** as more women seek safety from violence, discrimination or poverty and the opportunity for a better life for themselves, and often for their children. In Mexico for example, data show a clear increase in both the number and proportion of women migrants detained, from 11, 336 in 2012 (13% of the adult total) to 30, 541 (25% of the adult total) in 2017 (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018). Globally, IOM (2014<sup>4</sup>) reports that “while many women travel with their families...an increasing number of women [are] migrating on their own to an unknown, unpredictable, and often dangerous future. Women and children migrants are dying with increasing frequency at sea, crossing deserts, and on other hazardous routes”.

## **Gender-Based Violence in the Context of Mixed Migration**

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Gender-Based Violence is “any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty” (IASC 2015: 5). Before, during and after migration, women and girls are at extreme risk of physical and sexual violence and exploitation by partners, other migrants, people smugglers, and authorities (IOM, 2014). The following section outlines what is known about the experience of GBV before departure, during population movements, and after arrival, return or deportation.

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<sup>2</sup> No page numbers are available for this online resource

<sup>3</sup> El Salvador and Honduras rates are for 2017, while Guatemala statistics are only available for 2016.

<sup>4</sup> No page numbers are available for this online resource

Data regarding GBV against women and girls in migration flows from Central America to, in and through Mexico and to the USA are limited. Mexican and US immigration authorities collect data regarding the number of asylum-seekers, refugees and apprehended irregular migrants; however, many of these datasets are not disaggregated by sex or other characteristics such as ethnic background, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Moreover, these datasets by their nature do not include information regarding numbers of irregular migrants who are not apprehended by authorities. No consolidated datasets are available regarding cases of GBV across the relevant population, and where statistics are available on GBV they are often not disaggregated by age or type of violence. Overall GBV prevalence data is available for El Salvador from 2017, while Honduras and Guatemala have prevalence data regarding only Intimate Partner Violence (from 2013 and 2015 respectively). Much of the quantitative data used in this report is sourced from a limited number of studies conducted with migrants (described below); the remaining information is derived from qualitative interviews, document reviews, grey literature and news reports.

### ***Violence at Home***

**Violence is an important push factor for many women and girls fleeing Central America's Northern Triangle countries.** A culture of machismo, inequitable social norms, inadequate legal frameworks and poor implementation help to perpetuate patterns of violence, and allow impunity for perpetrators (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018). 67.4 percent of women and girls in El Salvador report having experienced GBV, including 40 percent who have experienced sexual violence (Ministry of the Economy and General Office of Statistics and Census, Government of El Salvador, 2017), while more than 100 cases of GBV are reported each day in Guatemala (Ivan, 2017), where 18 percent of women have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) (Ministerio de Salud Publica y Asistencia Social, 2015). In Honduras, IPV prevalence rates are given as 22 percent (Secretaría de Salud [Honduras], 2013), and GBV is the "second leading cause of death for women of reproductive age" (Jones 2012, cited in Alberto and Chilton, 2019). A review of data from the Honduran Courts of Peace and Letters conducted by the Latin American Working Group concluded that there was a 390 percent increase in IPV cases between between 2008 and 2015 (Fernandez Aponte, A., 2018). Women migrants from Central America interviewed by UNHCR (2015) described brutal and long-term histories of IPV, including repeated rape, beatings with hands and baseball bats, kicking, use of knives and other weapons, and being thrown against walls and to the ground.

**Sexual violence is also routinely and systematically perpetrated by criminal gangs in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico** (UNHCR, 2015). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2015) interviewed 160 women from the four countries seeking asylum in the United States; of these women, 85 percent came from neighbourhoods controlled by gangs, which coerce, threaten or force young women and girls into sexual relationships, or "exact vengeance on rivals via the rape and murder of daughters and sisters" (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018). Women reported being raped, assaulted and threatened by gang members (UNHCR, 2015), and 64 percent of the women interviewed in the study cited above rated the risk of "rape, assault, extortion, and other threats [from gangs] as their main reason for migrating to the United States" (Fleury, 2016: 3).

**Impunity for cases of gender-based violence, up to and including femicide, is pervasive in the region;** a desk review (Dotson, R. & Frydman, L, 2016: 7) showed that “impunity rates for violence against women and girls in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are at, or over 95 percent”. 40 percent of the women asylum-seekers interviewed by UNHCR did not report the violence they experienced to the police; some women felt that gang control of their neighbourhoods meant that authorities were of no use, while others were afraid of being associated with police and thereby singled out for further violence (UNHCR, 2015; Fernandez Aponte, A. 2018). Gang control may exacerbate both the severity of IPV and the likelihood of violence going unpunished, especially where the violent partner is part of, or connected to, a criminal group - indeed, reporting rates of IPV are lower in gang-controlled neighbourhoods (Fernandez Aponte, A. 2018).

### ***Violence in Transit***

**The link between displacement and increased GBV risk has been well-documented in multiple settings.** Globally, “displacement exacerbates already existing gender inequalities and protection risks, particularly for women and girls. As such, sexual violence and exploitation almost always increases in displacement. While all people can experience sexual assault, those risks are greater for women or girls traveling alone, women and girls with disabilities, women and girls who have already survived sexual violence, and for sexual minorities, among others.<sup>5</sup> These groups often have less forms of built-in social protection and their needs are often not considered a top priority in humanitarian programming” (Refugees International, 2014). The Women’s Refugee Commission (2016) found that among urban refugees surveyed in Quito, Beirut, Delhi, and Kampala, six in ten had either experienced sexual coercion or knew someone who had. A study conducted by UNICEF in 2017 reported that nearly half of women interviewed in the central Mediterranean refugee and migrant crisis reported sexual violence during their journey (Refugees International, 2014).

**Though many women and girls flee their home country to escape violence, migration routes also present significant risks of physical and sexual assault and exploitation.** It is widely reported that 60 percent of migrant women and girls travelling to Mexico from Central America experience sexual assault in transit<sup>6</sup>, while other data indicates that up to 80 percent of women may experience rape and sexual assault during the migration process (Morales 2008, cited in Dimmitt Gnam, 2013). Sexual violence, or the threat of violence, is used to terrorise women and their families throughout this journey (Amnesty International, 2010), and those who are captured by gangs are often sold into prostitution and trafficking (Meyer and Brewer 2010, cited in Dimmitt Gnam, 2013). For example in Mexico, “more than 20,000 people are sold into trafficking every year (IOM 2010, cited in Dimmitt Gnam 2013); the vast majority (one study shows 80%) of those trafficked are women, of whom many are forced into prostitution (Le Goff and Lothar Wiess 2011 cited in Fleury, 2016).

**Women and girl migrants travelling from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries face sexual violence at the hands of criminal gangs, people smugglers (known as coyotes), traffickers, other migrants and authorities (UNHCR, 2015).** According to Sylvanna Falcon’s review of documented cases of reported rape (2017: 119), Border Patrol and Immigration authorities on both sides of

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<sup>5</sup> See following section for information on particular vulnerabilities in the Central American and Mexican contexts.

<sup>6</sup> This study is widely cited but information on the study methodology could not be found.

the Mexico-US border “routinely and systematically” commit sexual assault against migrants, taking advantage of their positions of power over undocumented women. “In a study on migrant women detained in Mexico City, 25 percent reported violence or aggression by INM authorities while in detention. Most women chose not to file complaints to avoid additional problems out of fear that it would prolong their detention and deportation process or simply because they didn’t know how to file a complaint” (Diaz and Kuhner 2008, cited in Fleury, 2016). In Mexico, areas that border the United States are considered to be particularly dangerous for women and girls (Rama and Diaz, 2014). News reports describe the existence of ‘rape trees’<sup>7</sup> near the border, where victims’ underwear and used condoms are hung as trophies by perpetrators (Rama and Diaz, 2014). Many women and girls are forced into prostitution in towns along the Mexico-U.S. border either through trickery by people smugglers/traffickers or financial necessity; unfair accounting systems leave women owing extensive fees to brothel owners and unable to escape what amounts to bondage (Bonello and Siegal McIntyre, 2014).

**It is likely that even these figures and stories do not capture the full picture of violence against women and girls during migration from Central America and Mexico, given likely underreporting due to difficulties in accessing services, fears of deportation, and the stigma attached to sexual violence.** Indeed, sexual violence is so pervasive that it is widely considered to be the ‘price’ that women and girls must pay for migration, and has even given rise to the coining of new slang: ‘*cuerpomátic*’ or ‘*cuerpomático*’, meaning to use one’s body as a form of currency – likely a play on Credomatic, a regional credit-card processing firm, and *cuervo*, the Spanish word for body (Bonello and Siegal McIntyre, 2014).

### ***Violence Upon Arrival and after Deportation or Return***

**Women and girl migrants who manage to arrive at their destination in the United States face ongoing challenges and risks of violence**, which are particularly severe for those without documented legal status (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018). This includes experiencing abuse by partners who use the threat of deportation to exert control, and sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace (Hallock et al., 2018). Those who have fled an abusive partner may face stigma within their community for their choice to leave, and irregular immigration status may prevent them from accessing bank accounts and limit their job options (Parish, 2017). “Limited job opportunities with low pay and long hours place further pressure on women, especially mothers, as they simultaneously care for those around them or send money to family in their country of origin” (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018).

**Those who return to their country of origin or are deported often face societal stigma and a lack of resources and opportunities, leading to heightened vulnerability to GBV (UNHCR, 2015).** Many deported migrants return without important identification documents and with minimal financial resources, leading to obstacles in accessing basic services and finding employment (Burgi-Palomino, 2017). Some used all of their resources in order to migrate, while others have lost documents or been robbed en route – some receive provisional identification, but there are often delays in receiving this (Burgi-Palomino, 2017). Jobs are difficult to come by, due to stigma, companies’ unwillingness to employ deportees – especially if they do not have the

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<sup>7</sup> Note that Johnson (2014) questions whether these stories are accurate or simply repeated myths brought to the forefront by one circulating article. x

correct paperwork or cannot show they have previously worked in the country (UNHCR, 2015). Lack of employment opportunities leaves women vulnerable to further exploitation, and economic vulnerability may be increased by the fact that the family can no longer rely upon remittances are no longer received (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018).

**Returning can put women migrants in imminent danger.** According to a report by the Latin American Working Group, returning is especially dangerous for women, who are often forced to “relocate internally and remain socially anonymous for fear of detection by the gangs or partners they fled” (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018). Many women are killed by gang members or former partners within a few days of their return (Lewis, 2012). Returning women also face stigma and shame for a variety of reasons, including being labelled a ‘failed’ migrant, a criminal, promiscuous – due to the presumption that they engaged in sexual activity during the journey - or a bad mother for leaving children behind (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018). Furthermore, many women are facing long periods of separation from family members who remain in the United States.

## Multiple Vulnerabilities

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In a given context, a variety of factors may influence women and girls’ risk of experiencing GBV (Morrison, A, Ellsberg, M, & Bott, S., 2004). While the available data concerning women and girls on the move in Mexico and Central America is too limited to allow for strong conclusions on the influence of any individual characteristic, the below factors are likely to exacerbate vulnerability to violence.

**Age** – The number of children in population flows in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries, including those travelling alone, has grown significantly in recent years (WRC, 2012). In 2012, the Women’s Refugee Commission interviewed 151 children from the Northern Triangle countries detained in the USA; over 77 percent of participants cited violence as a primary reason for fleeing their home country (WRC, 2012). For the girls among the cohort, fear of sexual assault and rape was a significant factor in their decision to flee (WRC, 2012). News reports show that teenage girls are frequent targets of kidnapping and rape by gangs in the region, and that girls as young as eight have experienced sexual violence (Dotson, R. & Frydman, L., 2016). Children, both boys and girls, are coerced into joining gangs through threats, intimidation and violence towards themselves or family members; girls who are forced to become gang members face a high risk of sexual violence (UW, 2017).

Girls continue to face high risks of GBV during migration, particularly when travelling alone – many experience physical and sexual violence or are forced or sold into sexual exploitation (IFRC, 2018). Sexual exploitation of child migrants is rife in Mexico, where children have also experienced sexual abuse in migrant shelters and immigration facilities (Colleen, 2019).

**Socio-Economic Status** - Poverty is a strong driving force behind migration from the Northern Triangle countries (UW, 2017). In all three countries, poor socio-economic conditions affect the majority of the population; in Guatemala, approximately 54 percent of the population lives in poverty, while in Honduras the figure is 62 percent (UW, 2017: 15-18). For women and girls, economic vulnerability is strongly tied to vulnerability to violence: for example, women and girls on the move who have less access to economic resources – or who have used these

resources for migration or been robbed en route - are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and to being coerced into prostitution or other forms of exploitative work (IOM, 2014). One study among 52 migrant sex workers showing that “unsafe transit experiences” such as irregular border crossings and extortion contributed to higher levels of GBV (Rocha-Jimenez, T. et al., 2016).

**Legal Status** - Women and girl migrants in/from Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries without the appropriate documentation are at heightened risk of sexual violence, particularly by partners, smugglers, people traffickers and authorities who may use their status against them; such women are less likely to seek support and services, and are less likely to report violence to authorities due to fears of apprehension and deportation (Amnesty International, 2010). Many undocumented women have limited legal options available to them as they must run the risk that if they report the crime they may face deportation or lose their chance to reach the USA (Hallock, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Fix, M., 2018). As a result, women migrants rarely file criminal complaints (Amnesty International, 2010). The 2017 Advocate and Legal Service Survey Regarding Immigrant Survivors asked advocates and attorneys about the barriers to immigrant survivors seeking services; 78 percent of respondents stated that survivors were afraid of contacting police due to deportation fears, and 43 percent stated that survivors have dropped criminal or civil cases due to fear of apprehension (Lockhart, 2017).

**Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** – Lesbian, Gay , Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people are also vulnerable to violence in the Northern Triangle countries, and during migration, on the basis of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation (Amnesty International, 2017; Lewis, 2012). While comprehensive data on experience of violence disaggregated by sexual orientation and gender identify are not available (Morondo Taramundi, D & Blanco Lo Coco, D., 2018), smaller studies give some indication of the scale of the problem. For example, a mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative study conducted through interviews with 15 transwomen from El Salvador showed that 100 percent of respondents had experienced some form of GBV in healthcare, education or police settings in El Salvador – with the majority of respondents reported experiencing emotional violence, though some also reported sexual abuse and exploitation (Lanham, M. et al., 2019). Furthermore, in the first three months of 2017, 17 LGBTI individuals were killed in El Salvador alone (Morondo Taramundi, D & Blanco Lo Coco, D., 2018). According to UNHCR (cited in Amnesty International, 2017<sup>8</sup>), 88 percent of LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees from Northern Triangle countries interviewed reported having suffered sexual and gender-based violence in their countries of origin. Many LGBTI individuals report discrimination and violence committed by other migrants and authorities during their migration journey and after return or deportation (Lewis, 2012).

**Disability** - It is globally accepted that individuals living with disabilities face specific risks and vulnerabilities, particularly in situations of displacement (Refugees International, 2019). The situation is no different for women and girls on the move in Mexico and the Northern Triangle Countries. Individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities, many of whom already faced violence and discrimination in their home countries, have also experienced violence and discrimination throughout the journey (Rios Espinosa, 2018). Transit and detention centres are often not accessible to individuals with physical disabilities, and individuals with intellectual

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<sup>8</sup> 15 transwomen were interviewed as part of a study involving 160 women seeking asylum.

disabilities have been separated from their families and left alone without appropriate support (Gabbatt, 2019). News reports based on interviews with women migrants moving through Mexico show that some have experienced violence due particularly to their disability; for example deaf women who were unable to hear the instructions of smugglers have been threatened or physically harmed, while others have experienced violence by their partners (Rios Espinosa, 2018). Some individuals with physical disabilities that leave them unable to keep up with a caravan may be left behind (Rios Espinosa, 2018).

***Ethnic Background*** – Indigenous populations have been “disproportionately affected by the humanitarian crisis in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America” (Lopez, E. & Hastings, M., 2016). Indigenous populations in Guatemala suffer higher levels of poverty than non-indigenous populations (74% compared to 56.19%); in Honduras, an estimated 88.7 percent of indigenous and Afro-Honduran children live in poverty compared to 10.4 percent of Honduran children overall (Lopez, E. & Hastings, M., 2016: 1109). Indigenous women in the region are often forced into early marriages, which put them at increased risk for sexual and physical intimate partner violence, and early pregnancies (Lopez, E. & Hastings, M., 2016: 1116). Of the 15 indigenous women asylum-seekers from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala interviewed by UNHCR, 12 had been physically abused and 11 had experienced sexual abuse (UNHCR, 2015: 19). In addition to GBV, Afro-descendent and indigenous girls suffer “widespread discrimination and social, political, and economic exclusion based on race and ethnicity” (Dotson, R. & Frydman, L., 2016: 4).

It is difficult to ascertain the numbers of indigenous women and girls who form part of population movements, in part because the Mexican and US governments only tracks migrants by nationality, as well as due to the fact that many indigenous women are unable to obtain visas to legally migrate and therefore join the ranks of undocumented migrants (Lopez, E. & Hastings, M., 2016; Speed, S. 2014). However, increased demand for interpreters for indigenous languages in American courts gives some indication that levels are proportionately high – for example, Mam and Quiche, languages spoken by indigenous people in Guatemala, ranked ninth and eleventh respectively of the languages used in US immigration court in 2015 (UW, 2017: 20).

Given the high risk of violence, some indigenous women take measures to disguise themselves before migration in order to avoid discrimination and abuse, including by not wearing traditional dress, or learning to speak Spanish with a Mexican accent (Lopez, E. & Hastings, M., 2016: 1117). Language barriers and illiteracy further complicate the migration experience; many indigenous migrants from the region speak limited Spanish, and have lower literacy rates than the general population (Lopez, E. & Hastings, M., 2016: 1117).

***Physical and Mental Health*** - Gender-based violence creates significant physical and mental health consequences. On the physical front, many women and girl migrants choose - or are forced by smugglers - to take contraceptives before migrating to avoid the risk of pregnancy as a result of rape; however, these measures do not protect women and girls from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV (Amnesty International, 2010). Data is limited but suggests that women and girl migrants, and particularly those who experience sexual violence, are especially at risk for HIV infection in this region, as is the case elsewhere in the world (Martinez, 2005; Willers, 2016).

In terms of mental health, levels of stigmatisation and shame attached to the experience of GBV before and during migration are high (Fleury, 2016). The migrant crisis in the region is characterised by extreme normalisation of sexual assault of women – as indicated by the slang ‘*cuerpomatico*’ and the widely accepted notion that women must ‘pay’ for passage with their bodies – with the likely result that many, including survivors themselves, may accept that violence is simply a part of the choice to migrate (Bonello and Siegal McIntyre, 2014). This may lead to some women seeing themselves as complicit in violence committed against them. Those who do report assault may face inappropriate responses by authorities, including disbelief, discrediting and further traumatisation (Falcon, 2017).

Psychosocial and mental health support services in particular are inadequate to respond to the high level of need of migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees; some reports indicate that the lack is particularly acute when it concerns support to deportees to help them “process the feelings they may have upon returning and any trauma they may have suffered along the journey” (Burgi-Palomino, 2017).

***Multiple Forms of Violence*** - While sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by smugglers, traffickers, and authorities receive much of the attention in the context mixed migration, it should be noted that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a pervasive reality for many women on the move around the world (IOM, 2018). In the context of Mexico and Central America, many women migrants are fleeing violent relationships, while others who flee with their partners continue to experience IPV during the journey and after arrival in the destination country (Parish, 2017). For many of the women asylum-seekers from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico interviewed by UNHCR (2015), violence from gangs occurred alongside ongoing violence perpetrated by partners. These women rarely experienced only a single incident of violence – rather, most were subject to multiple forms of violence at different stages of the journey (Fleury, 2016), in what Shannon Speed (2014: 78) refers to as a “dreadful mosaic” of violence that compounds trauma and may also increase vulnerability to further forms of exploitation and abuse.

## **Conclusion**

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Limited data is available on GBV perpetrated against women and girls on the move in Mexico and Central America’s Northern Triangle Countries. However, the available evidence – consisting of some larger-scale studies, interviews with individual women and girls, and grey literature – shows that women and girls are vulnerable to GBV both in their home countries and throughout the migration cycle (Fleury, 2016). The data that is available focuses on refugees, asylum-seekers and those who are detained and deported, as the remainder of irregular migration flows are difficult to track and GBV survivors are reluctant to report incidents or seek support. Some prevalence data is available on IPV and other forms of GBV in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, but comprehensive data on the experience of violence by migrant women and girls is lacking.

While the overall picture is incomplete, what is clear is that women and girls are vulnerable to GBV before, during and after migration; for many, it is a significant push factor in deciding to leave home, and it remains a continuous risk for women and girls throughout their journeys

and even after reaching their destination or returning home (UNHCR, 2015). Violence is perpetrated by partners, other migrants, smugglers, traffickers and authorities. Migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and trafficked women and girls face multiple layers of vulnerability, including because of socio-economic and legal status, ethnic background, age, disability and sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Many women and girl migrants who experience GBV in Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries are unable or choose not to report or seek services due to a variety of barriers and fears of arrest or deportation (Fleury, 2016). Even where violence is reported, levels of impunity remain high (Dotson, R. & Frydman, L, 2016).

## Key Resources

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The below outlines resources related to Gender/GBV and migration. The resources are divided into Guidelines, Training Materials and Other Resources, and are listed in alphabetical order under each category, along with a description of the resource, the source, publication year and access link. Other resources used in this document are included under references below.

### Guidelines

#### **Resource: Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action**

**Description:** The purpose of the Guidelines is to assist humanitarian actors and communities affected by armed conflict, natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies to coordinate, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate essential actions for the prevention and mitigation of GBV across all sectors of humanitarian response. Available in Spanish.

**Source:** Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015

**Access:** <http://gbvguidelines.org/en>

#### **Resource: Guidelines for Mobile and Remote Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Service Delivery**

**Description:** Guidelines for establishing mobile and remote GBV service delivery. These models have been designed to meet the needs of GBV survivors from vulnerable, displaced, out-of-camp populations, dispersed in urban and rural settings, who are often hidden, difficult to reach, isolated, and at heightened risk of violence. These materials are designed to address these gaps and provide guidance to support the development of GBV mobile and remote service delivery in acute and protracted crises.

See, for example, Part 4 on adapting case management and psychosocial support for settings where interactions with survivors may be limited.

**Source:** International Rescue Committee, 2018

**Access:** <https://gbvresponders.org/response/mobile-and-remote-gbv-service-delivery/>

### Training Materials

#### **Resource: Gender on the Move: Working on the migration-development nexus from a gender perspective**

**Description:** Aims to build the gender analysis capacity of those working in the field of migration and development to bring about a model of development that is centered on people, human rights, and on the principle of gender equality. The manual aims to provoke thinking and action around migration and development from a gender and rights-based perspective, bringing to the fore migration for care, the importance of putting the right to care on the development agenda, and migrant women's rights. The manual also offers a series of tools to help design

programmes and policies that strengthen the positive effects of migration in terms of development, both in origin and destination countries. The manual, which is available in English and Spanish, is divided into a facilitator's guide and four training guides, each of which has a self-directed learning section and an activities section for designing face-to-face trainings.

**Source:** UN Women, 2013.

**Access:** <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2013/12/gender-on-the-move>

**Resource: Gender, Migration and HIV, An Action Oriented Training Manual**

**Description:** A manual to build the capacity of individuals and organisations to address specific gender and HIV vulnerabilities within migrant settings. It can be used both as a train the trainer (ToT) tool and as "on-the-ground" tool for facilitators to use in different settings, both in workshop settings and also as a resource and facilitation guide for those working on issues of migration, gender, HIV, sexuality, health, violence, human rights and citizenship.

**Source:** International Organisation of Migration, Sonke Gender Justice, 2009

**Access:** <https://publications.iom.int/books/action-oriented-training-manual-gender-migration-and-hiv>

**Resource: Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Training Materials**

**Description:** This curriculum and the accompanying GBV Emergency Preparedness & Response Participant Handbook aim to equip field-based practitioners with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively and rapidly respond to GBV in emergencies. The content of this curriculum is designed to complement existing training materials and resources developed by other agencies and experts, and operationalize key guidelines, including those from the IASC.

**Source:** International Rescue Committee, 2017

**Access:** <https://gbvresponders.org/emergency-response-preparedness/emergency-response-and-preparedness-training/>

**Resource: Gender-Based Violence in Urban Humanitarian Settings Training Toolkit**

**Description:** Provides information, skills, and resources on addressing GBV in Urban Humanitarian settings. Slides and materials freely available online.

**Source:** Women's Refugee Committee, 2017.

**Access:** [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vw8txk82ej98ilw/AABht5gZBy41XYDv-DR1Ky8ma?dl=0&preview=01\\_Slides+for+Training+on+Urban+GBV.ppt#](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vw8txk82ej98ilw/AABht5gZBy41XYDv-DR1Ky8ma?dl=0&preview=01_Slides+for+Training+on+Urban+GBV.ppt#)

**Resource: Managing Gender-Based Violence Programmes in Emergencies: E-Learning Companion Guide**

**Description:** Companion Guide to UNFPA's E-learning Course, *Managing Gender-based Violence Programmes in Emergencies*: a supplementary tool through which learners could engage more fully with key course concepts. The free online course on "Managing Gender-Based Violence Programmes in Emergencies" targets new or emerging gender-based violence (GBV) specialists as well as humanitarian or development practitioners - and others - who want to increase their knowledge around GBV prevention and response in emergencies. The e-

learning course is designed to allow participants to learn new concepts and test their learning through quizzes and direct application of knowledge to case studies.

**Source:** United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2016

**Access:** <https://extranet.unfpa.org/Apps/GBVinEmergencies/index.html>

**Resource:** Violencia Basada en Género en Emergencias: Manual de Capacitation

**Description:** Training Manual on Gender-Based Violence in humanitarian settings, developed for use in Ecuador. Spanish language manual.

**Source:** Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, Ecuador, 2016

**Access:** <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/violencia-basada-en-g-nero-en-emergencias-manual-de-capacitaci-n>

Other Resources

**Resource:** Complementary Tools and Other Training Manual References

**Description:** Collection of training manuals and tools related to migration, with some focus on gender.

**Source:** Migration for Development, no date.

**Access:** [http://migration4development.org/sites/default/files/references\\_eng.pdf](http://migration4development.org/sites/default/files/references_eng.pdf)

**Resource:** GENDER and MIGRATION; Supporting Resources Collection

**Description:** Summaries of texts that provide overviews, case studies, tools and guidelines and other materials related to gender and migration. The summaries outline the key points in each resource and provide details of how to obtain copies or download the full texts. Summary is from 2005 so does not address more recent resources.

**Source:** Jolly, S - Bridge, 2005.

**Access:** <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/resources/international/gender-and-migration-supporting-resources-collection>

**Resource:** Migrant Women and Gender Violence: Strategies and Perspectives for Interventions

**Description:** Addresses social interventions with migrant women in the field of gender-based violence, that aims to provide the tools necessary for including a perspective of gender, human rights and inter-culturality in social interventions with migrant women in situations of violence. It has been adapted and translated into English from an original manual produced as a supporting tool for the training stages of the Promoting Human Rights of Migrants from a Gender Perspective project in Argentina. This manual can be used as a reference tool, as well as a practical instrument for training workshops. Its content covers a theoretical and

conceptual development of the topics and provides a series of exercises for group work in different learning activities.

**Source:** Pombo, G. Ministry for Social Development of the Government of the City of Buenos Aires, International Organisation for Migration. 2015.

**Access:** [http://www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/manual\\_oim-eng-web-23-11.pdf](http://www.migration4development.org/sites/default/files/manual_oim-eng-web-23-11.pdf)

**Resource: Gender-Based Violence in the Context of Migration**

**Description:** This Massive Open Online Course provides participants with knowledge, multiple perspectives and examples of practices that can help them develop and reinforce their critical understanding and effective action in a field that is at the crossroads of gender, migration and human rights studies. Currently closed for 2019.

**Source:** Massive Open Online Course, Global Campus of Human Rights, 2019.

**Access:** <http://www.migration4development.org/en/M4D/knowledge/blogs/mooc-gender-based-violence-context-migration>

**Resource: Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) & Migration Fact Sheet**

**Description:** Overview of key statistics on violence against women and girls in Central America's Northern Triangle Countries (El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala).

**Source:** Kids In Need of Defense (KIND), Latin American Working Group (LAWG), Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) - 2018

**Access:** <https://supportkind.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/SGBV-Fact-Sheet.-December-2018-new-1.pdf>

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### **The GBV AoR Help Desk**

The GBV AoR Helpdesk is a technical research, analysis, and advice service for humanitarian practitioners working on GBV prevention and response in emergencies at the global, regional and country level. GBV AoR Helpdesk services are provided by a roster of GBViE experts, with oversight from Social Development Direct. Efforts are made to ensure that Helpdesk queries are matched to individuals and networks with considerable experience in the query topic. However, views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect's Helpdesk roster.

### **Contact the Helpdesk**

You can contact the GBViE Helpdesk by emailing us: [enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk), and we will respond to you within 24 hours during weekdays.

The GBViE Helpdesk is available 09.30- 17.30 GMT, Monday to Friday.