



Mexico: Rapid Needs Assessment October - November 2023

Key findings

People are unable to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families, particularly related to accessing secure accommodation and sufficient food. This is leaving families in a high state of vulnerability, facing health and safety risks.

Access to documentation and asylum presents a key challenge in accessing protection and a barrier to accessing services.

The lack of reliable and accessible information is a critical challenge in allowing people to make informed decisions about their futures.

More than 50% of those interviewed reported feeling insecure in Mexico. 39% reported being the victim of a crime in the past 15 days. Reports of violent crimes against displaced persons are increasing.

Data Collection: October 13th,
2023 – October 24th, 2023

Sectors: Basic Needs, Health,
Protection, Access to
Information

Context

Mexico has long been a critical point along the migration route to the United States, in recent years also becoming one of the highest recipient countries of asylum claims globally. This trend has continued in 2023, leaving the COMAR overwhelmed in Tapachula and Mexico City. By the end of October, the COMAR had 127,796 asylum claims registered, 17,463 having registered in October, an increase of 52% on the same month the previous year. That, coupled with a lack of access to alternative routes to migratory regularization, has created significant challenges in accessing protection and essential services.

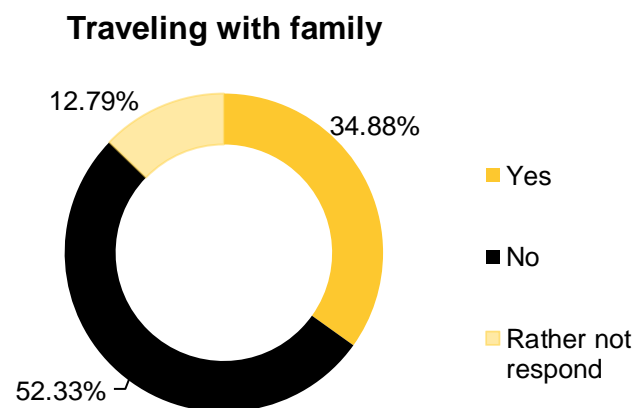
In October, COMAR offices in Tapachula were overwhelmed by receiving numbers of people seeking international protection that greatly exceeded their daily processing capacity. Many more displaced persons continued to pass through Mexico without seeking asylum. Comprehensive figures are hard to come by, however, at the end of September, the government calculated approximately 6,000 people crossing the southern border and 10,000 reaching the northern border daily.¹ A week later, WOLA reported approximately 8,000 a day approaching the northern border.² Frontline service providers reported being unable to meet the needs of the population, with particular challenges noted in accessing basic services in Tapachula and Mexico City.

In this context, the IRC implemented a Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) in October 2023 along the southern and northern borders, in Tapachula, Ciudad Juarez, Matamoros and Tijuana, as well as in the state of Veracruz and Mexico City. The purpose was to capture the primary challenges, needs, and barriers to assistance for displaced persons throughout the country, in light of the changes in context and increases in needs.

Demography

Of the 430 surveys, 56.98% of those interviewed were men, 42.79% were women, and 0.23% mentioned others. 34.88% were traveling with their families. Most respondents were young, or middle-aged, 42.56% were aged between 18 – 30, 36.75% were between 31– 40, and 15.82% were between 41 – 50. 15 nationalities were involved in the survey, the majority being Venezuelan (24.88%), followed by Honduran (18.37%), Haitian (15.81%), and Cuban (14.88%). While 42.79% stated their intention to travel onward to the United States, 18.14% stated the intention to remain in Mexico indefinitely, and 26.51% had yet to decide whether to remain in Mexico or continue onward to the United States.

Countries of origin	
Venezuela	24.88%
Honduras	18.37%
Haiti	15.81%
Cuba	14.88%
Guatemala	5.81%
Mexico	4.88%
Colombia	3.95%
Ecuador	2.79%
El Salvador	2.33%
Nicaragua	1.63%
Others ³	1.15%
Rather not respond	3.49%



¹<https://www.reuters.com/world/10000-migrants-reach-us-border-daily-highlighting-need-address-root-causes-2023-10-02/>

² <https://www.wola.org/2023/09/weekly-u-s-mexico-border-update-migration-rises-darien-gap-data-house-republicans-budget/>

³ Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Peru, Cameroon (0.23% each).

Methodology

Tools and Sampling

This multi-sector assessment included a sample of **430 household surveys, representing 1221 individuals, 11 focus groups with household leaders, and 16 interviews with key service providers.**

The primary focus was on Tapachula and its surrounding areas due to the large number of arrivals and high concentration of displaced people. In addition, information was gathered in Acayucan, Minatitlan, Mexico City, Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez, and Matamoros.

The IRC teams visited a variety of spaces, including shelters, community kitchens, informal camps, bus stations, parks, and service centers where people on the move congregate to ensure different profiles and nationalities were considered.

Ethical Considerations

Information services, orientation, and psychological first aid were provided during the interviews for those who needed it. In addition, interpretation support in Creole, French, and English was considered to ensure that the voices of different nationalities were reflected. The IRC teams explained the data collection objectives to participants and asked for their informed consent.

Key Findings

Basic needs

Those interviewed were struggling to meet their basic needs. Among the top needs identified were food, accommodation, and access to income-generating activities. While **31.63% of those interviewed were staying at shelters, 25.12% were renting, 17% were in a camp or other informal accommodation arrangement, and 25.12% were living in the street.** For those unable to access shelters, this presented a challenge not only for accommodation but in accessing other essential services available at those locations. Respondents mentioned high levels of insecurity due to their precarious living conditions as well as exploitation and abuse at the hands of landlords.

38.73% of respondents said that their families had survived on one meal a day in the past weeks. 34.5% responded that they had no means of income, while those who did reported informal work 19.3% and remittances 13.76%. Additional unmet needs include access to water and personal hygiene items, clothing, reliable information and legal support, health services, and medication.

45.92% mentioned economic resources as the key barrier to satisfying basic needs, this was followed by lack of information on services and how to access them, lack of confidence in approaching service providers, discrimination, documentation, and the language barrier. **29.77% of those interviewed said they had been denied services due to lack of documentation in the last 30 days.**

Health

Health services and accurate information about them were identified as a priority need; **70.69% of survey respondents stated they did not know where to access health services;** within that percentage, 37.17% had a medical issue in the last 15 days. Besides, **41.27% of the respondents said they, or someone in their group, had a medical condition that prevented them from continuing their journey,** such as high-risk pregnancy, respiratory diseases, or stomach diseases. Additionally, of the 29.31% who knew where to access health services, 24.88% encountered different challenges; for instance, some mentioned the health services provided were insufficient, were not specialized for children, adolescents and young adults or some service providers did not explain the medical conditions.

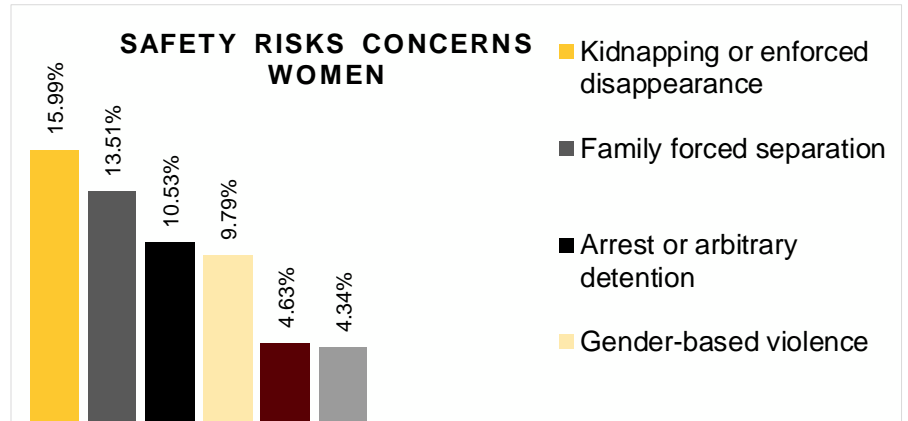
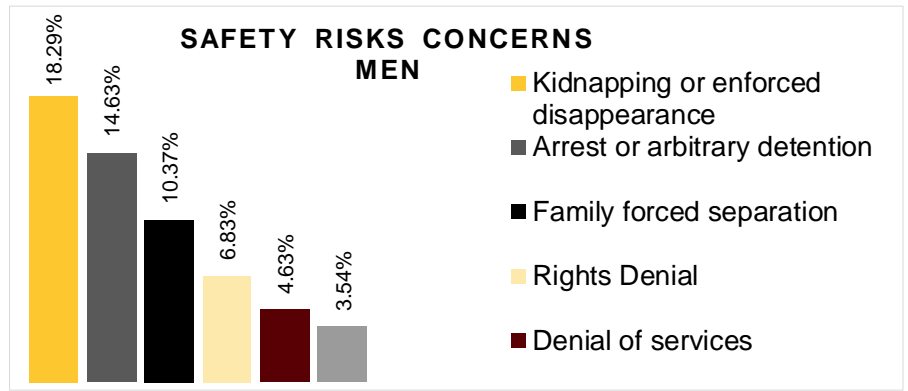
Service providers identified mental health services and medical attention (both primary and secondary) as some of the most urgent needs for displaced persons.

Protection

The displaced population presents diverse challenges and protection risks across the country. **50.23% of people stated they do not feel safe in Mexico, and 39.22% mentioned they were victims of one or more crimes, amongst them, robbery, extortion, assault, and kidnapping stood out.**

In addition, during the focus group discussions, people mentioned they were afraid of organized crime and did not feel safe. In these discussions, people also mentioned they have experienced and/or are fearful of being harassed and extorted by Mexican authorities. Service providers also cited persecution by Mexican authorities as a safety concern.

Regarding the concerns expressed by the participants during their travels and stay in the country, kidnapping and arbitrary arrest or detention stand out, with Tamaulipas and Chihuahua being the entities where a greater percentage of people stated these concerns.



Of the respondents, 6.43% reported discrimination as a barrier to access to services, and 20.70% of the interviewed stated that they have had some incidents with the local population related to discrimination and/or exclusion. In addition, 7.84% mentioned they fear or distrust service providers.

When asked to identify the most significant safety risk for the displaced, 50% of the service providers mentioned kidnappings, and 37.5% mentioned forced recruitment by organized crime.

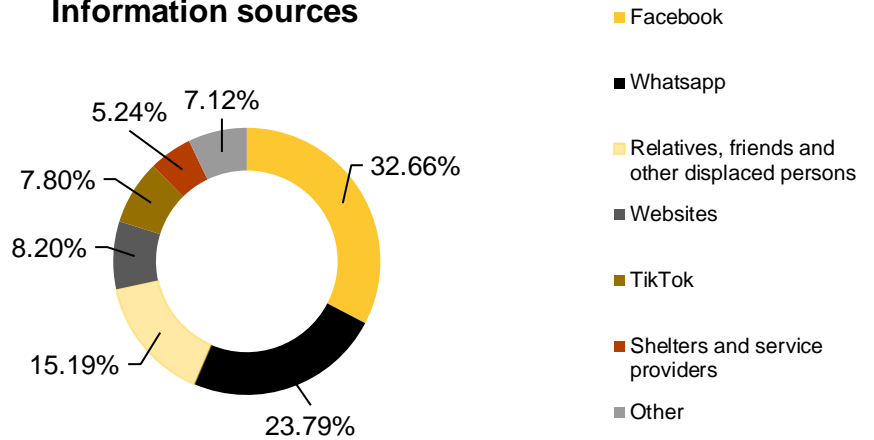
Protection risks are even higher for the most vulnerable groups; 6.28% of participants mentioned witnessing or meeting unaccompanied children and adolescents traveling alone or left behind by family members at some point along the route.

Service providers noted an increase in more vulnerable groups, more families traveling with children, and single-parent households. In addition, they noted an increase in reports of violent crime, specifically kidnapping, sexual assault, extortion, and other rights violations along the route. The overburdening of the state system and the resulting limitations on access to migratory regularization and documentation was mentioned by service providers throughout the country as a major concern and obstacle in accessing essential services, protection, and access to justice. Changes in policies in the US and Mexico, as well as deterrence measures to limit movement throughout the country and challenges around the CBP One app were listed as factors that were pushing people to follow riskier, more clandestine routes, as well as taking other ill-informed and risky decisions on next steps.

Access to information

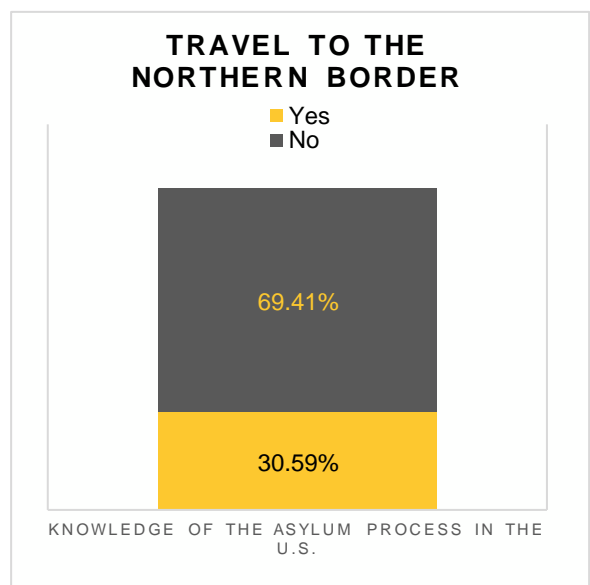
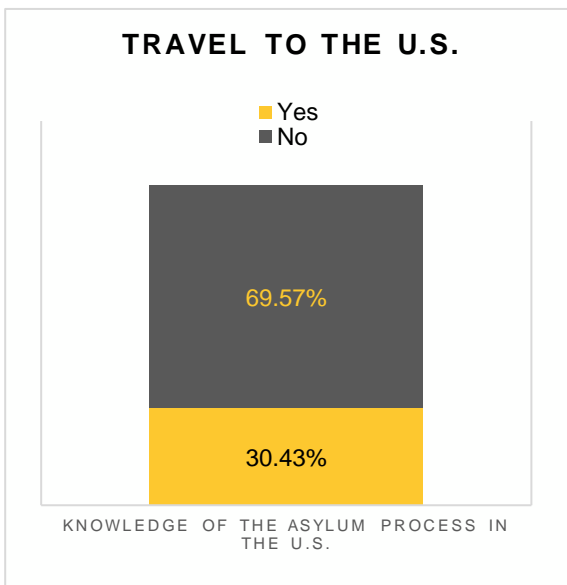
Regarding information access, 91.16% of the households interviewed reported owning at least one cell phone, and 87.92% stated having internet access. **Sources of information most frequently used are social media, with a predominance of Facebook (32.66%) and WhatsApp (23.79%).** In addition, 15.19% mentioned they stay informed by talking to other displaced persons. Service providers confirm this preference, and despite providing updated and verified information, only 5.24% of the displaced persons surveyed consider them as their primary source of information.

Information sources



Most frequent inquiries are about procedures and documentation related to asylum in the United States (32.78%) and refugee status in Mexico (21.26%), as well as relevant news on migration between the U.S. and Mexico (19%). In contrast to this data, **70.70% of the respondents stated that they did not know the asylum process in the U.S., and 68.14% had no knowledge of the process for requesting asylum in Mexico.**

During focus group discussions, asylum seekers expressed the need for useful and accessible information. In addition, service providers noted the need to provide legal orientation and information on the asylum processes for the population they assist. It becomes even more evident when **69.57% of the population that stated their travel plan was going to the U.S. does not have any knowledge of the asylum process in that country, and 34.18% of them do not know how to request an appointment in the CBP One app;** likewise, 69.41% of those who plan to travel to the northern border of Mexico do not know about the asylum process in the U.S. either.





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The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a global non-profit organization that helps people whose lives have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and rebuild.

Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 50 crisis-affected countries and communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

Additionally, the IRC operates 28 offices across the United States that support newly arrived refugees by providing immediate aid, including food, housing, medical attention, legal support, and other services that help refugees integrate into their new communities.

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