

**Transnationalization of Violence in the Trajectory of Female  
Asylum Seekers in Mexico****Transnacionalización de la violencia en el trayecto de mujeres  
solicitantes de asilo en México**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article aims to analyze how the manifestations and effects caused by the exercise of violence do not disappear when women leave their country of origin but follows them during their transit and stay in the host country. Using a qualitative methodological design, this article analyzes testimonies from in-depth interviews with asylum-seeking women and lawyers who work in civil society organizations (CSOs). The findings highlight that, although asylum seekers left their country of origin fleeing violence, in Mexico they have found an occasionally more violent context where both governmental and organized crime actors intervene, promoting the transnationalization of violence. This implies seeing violence as a cycle that forces the authorities to generate comprehensive protection mechanisms for women in mobility.

*Keywords:* 1. transnationalization of violence, 2. migration, 3. recognition of refugee status, 4. Mexico, 5. Central America.

**RESUMEN**

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cómo las manifestaciones y los efectos generados por el ejercicio de la violencia no finalizan en el momento en el que las mujeres abandonan el lugar de origen, sino que les persiguen durante el tránsito y la estancia en el país de destino. Utilizando un diseño metodológico cualitativo, se analizan testimonios recabados a partir de entrevistas a profundidad realizadas tanto a mujeres solicitantes de asilo como a abogadas de organizaciones de la sociedad civil (OSC). Los hallazgos indican que, aunque las solicitantes de asilo salieron de su lugar de origen huyendo de la violencia, en México han encontrado un contexto ocasionalmente más violento donde intervienen actores tanto gubernamentales como de la delincuencia organizada, propiciando la transnacionalización de la violencia. Lo anterior implica ver la violencia como un ciclo que obliga a las autoridades a generar mecanismos de protección integral para las mujeres en movilidad.

*Palabras clave:* 1. transnacionalización de la violencia, 2. migración, 3. condición de persona refugiada, 4. México, 5. Centroamérica.

Received: December 6, 2021

Accepted: March 24, 2022

Available online: September 15, 2022

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## INTRODUCTION

Requests to obtain the recognition of refugee status in Mexico increased in a significant manner as a result of the violent context, political and economic crises, proliferation of criminal groups and the mass violation of human rights that take place in some Latin American and Caribbean countries. In this way, Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (Comar) [Mexican Commission for the Assistance of Refugees] reported that up to September 2021, the numbers multiplied and surpassed 90 000 requests in such year (Comar, 2021), with the particularity that these individuals are survivors of violence and/or are persecuted by gangs and criminal groups.

It is necessary to pinpoint that such increase has been constant and extremely fast. In this way, within a short time, asylum requests in Comar had a historic peak that reached 100 000 in October 2021 (Castañeda, 2021), this figure accounts for an increase of 119% (Aritsa, 2021). Haiti and Honduras are the main countries of origin of asylum seekers, which are followed by Cuba, El Salvador, Chile, Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Brazil, Colombia, and other unspecified countries (ContraRéplica, 2021). In spite of the increase, positive resolutions have not been issued accordingly, as only 29% of the rulings have favored the asylum seekers (Jiménez, 2021).

In Mexico, asylum requests have taken place in a context of crisis, in which the population that flees from their countries of origin not only faces the Mexican hostile terrain, a product of the widespread violence caused by criminal activities, but also State omissions that aggravate the vulnerability of people in mobility, triggering xenophobia, racism and discrimination, even from civil society.

Although the main purpose of asylum seekers is to protect their lives and live free from violence, the stress, fear, and anxiety produced by the violence of which they are victims do not disappear with the crossing of borders, but owing to various reasons and causalities of the transit or destination country, it is still part of their daily lives, on occasion even with greater intensity. This is because actors such as municipal police forces, migration authorities, Guardia Nacional [National Guard] agents, and members of organized crime are the systematic aggressors of people in mobility, particularly women who have to move, not only from other countries, but also domestically from state to state in Mexico, for the purpose of distancing from violence.

It is worth mentioning that, from an academic standpoint, violence is determined by actions whose purpose is to subject bodies (Montbrun, 2010); this, from the standpoint of Foucault (2002), is closely linked to the exercise of power (Infosegura, 2020) and the struggles associated with it (Menge, 2019). Other conceptualizations argue that violence prevents personal growth in economic, political and social terms, precisely because it is built and developed within the social structure (Parsons, 2007).

In this line, violence exercised against women in Mexico made it necessary to legislate in this regard, since violent practices and dynamics are varied. In this way, for the purposes of the present article, it is relevant to approach the problem from this conceptualization, produced from *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*, LGAMVLV [General Law on the Access of Women to a Life Free from Violence] published in *Diario Oficial de la Federación*

[Official Journal of the Federation] in 2007, which considered various types and modalities of violence in the Mexican context.

It is necessary to underscore that, from the dispositions established in LGAMVLV, the *Modelo Ecológico para una Vida Libre de Violencia* [Ecological Model for Violence-free Life] is put forward; it defines violence particularly on the basis of gender “as a complex multicausal phenomenon that affects people due to reasons derived from the structure and functioning of the gendered social order” (Olivares Ferreto & Incháustegui Romero, 2011, p. 32), as well it considers “a necessary link between the various levels and spheres of social action to prevent, assist, punish and eradicate gender-based violence” (Olivares Ferreto & Incháustegui Romero, 2011, p. 33).

This model points out that any public intervention has to focus on addressing the risk factors in the social context, considering the various forms of violence, levels and social contexts. Likewise, this intervention model stresses the importance of carrying out any possible action to suppress violence from a preemptive assistance-based standpoint, by means of actions related to justice and reinforcing the conditions of security for women and vulnerable groups (Olivares Ferreto & Incháustegui Romero, 2011).

Concurring with the above, the academy has pointed out the pressing need to incorporate gender perspective into migration studies via intersectionality (Gissi Barbieri & Martínez Ruiz, 2018; Lube Guizardi, González Torralbo, & Stefoni, 2018), mainly to approach the complexities of violent scenarios, which mainly affect women (Silva-Martínez, 2012), as well as the efforts to improve attention for this population sector (Ortiz Alavez & Rocha Romero, 2019).

Owing to this, the goal of the present article is to analyze the way manifestations and the effects of the exercise of violence in its various forms and modalities do not cease when women leave their places of origin, but follow them in their transit and stay in the destination, causing problems for their migration regularization, emotional wellbeing, and social integration. The above will allow systematically understanding migrant women (Lube Guizardi & González Torralbo, 2019) whose destination is the Mexican territory. The question linked to the foregoing and which we intend to answer by means of the analysis is: What factors concur for female asylum seekers to continue being victims of violence once they settle in Mexico?

In this way, the contribution of this article is dual: on one side, show the way civil society organizations (CSOs) have become key actors to assist asylum-seeking population in the face of the limitations of the governmental structure; while on the other, contribute to the conceptual development of the transnationalization of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean in the Mexican context of political, social and economic change. This will indubitably favor the work carried out by the organized civil society, in a context where it has become an important ally for the population that seeks asylum in Mexico.

Then, the article presents a description of the figure of asylum in Mexico from the current legislation (regulations and international agreements) the country adheres to. Following, the methodological strategy to obtain and analyze the data is presented. Finally, the article closes with the main findings and conclusions.

## RIGHT TO ASYLUM IN MEXICO

Over recent decades, governments, mainly in North America, have designed and implemented various sorts of strategies to stop the increase of migration flows, which is noticed in deportations, violations of human rights and widespread violence at the borders (De León, 2015; Goodman, 2020). Such is the scenario for people who owing to persecution and various sorts of violence in their countries of origin seek asylum in Mexico to move away from fear, anxiety and stress.

To locate the figure of refugee in Mexico's legal framework, it is relevant to point out that this status will be granted to aliens in the country under the supposition of well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, gender, belonging to a social group or having a determinate political opinion; it will also be granted when their lives are threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, mass violation of human rights or other circumstances that gravely affect public order (Kerwin, Plata, González Flores, & Romero Cárdenas, 2021).

In this sense, *Ley sobre Refugiados, Protección Complementaria y Asilo Político*, LRPCAP [Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection and Political Asylum] (2011) which was passed in 2011, incorporates two definitions for the status of refugee. The first comes from the 1951 Refugee Convention (conventional definition) (ONU, 1951), and the second from the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (broadened definition for Latin America) (Instrumentos Regionales sobre Refugiados y temas relacionados, 1984). In the first one, gender reasons were added.

In concurrence with the 1951 Refugee Convention (and its 1967 Protocol) (ONU, 1967), LRPCAP defines a refugee as an individual who, owing to well-founded fears of being persecuted because of race, religion, nationality, gender, belonging to a certain social group or expressing political opinions, being outside their country of nationality and cannot or, due to such fears, does not want to receive protection in such country; or who, lacking nationality and being because of such events outside the country where they had usual residence cannot or does not want to return to such place owing to such fears; or who, owing to circumstances in their country of origin or as the result of activities carried out over their stay in the national territory have well-founded fears of being persecuted due to race, religion, nationality, gender, belonging to a certain social group or having political opinions, or because their life, security or freedom might be threatened by widespread violence, foreign aggressions, internal conflicts, mass violation of human rights or other circumstances that gravely alter public order.

Following the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, LRPCAP defines as refugees those who fled from their country of origin because their life, security or liberty have been threatened by widespread violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, mass violation of human rights or other circumstances that gravely alter public order. In this regard, the Protocol dissociates the reasons for the appearance of the Convention, which are related to the effects generated by WWII so that their application was also effective not only in Europe, but in other territories.

Due to the above, it may be concluded that gendered persecution is a reason to seek asylum in Mexico; however, there is no differenced treatment for women who request asylum under this

modality in the integration of the causal link. A request in Mexico is presented at Comar, which is a decentralized agency of Secretaría de Gobernación (Segob) [Secretariat of the Interior], whose responsibility is to conduct policies regarding refugees and complementary protection in the country.

Such request has to be carried out in the offices of Comar, or else Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) [National Migration Institute] in the case the former cannot be reached within the first 30 working days after the individual entered the country. Comar receives requests and delivers a questionnaire by means of which the most information about the person is obtained, including the reasons to leave their places of origin, the domestic alternative escape and effective protection in their countries.

Later on, a proof of the proceeding is issued; it enables them to access the regularization of their migration status by means of a Visitor Card due to Humanitarian Reasons. Over the asylum process, Comar will hold two interviews: the first is for assistance, whose purpose is to identify pressing needs and facilitate access to rights; the second is an eligibility interview in which it is sought to find out the reasons of the requester to leave their country, narrating all possible details.

With all this information, Comar issues a well-founded and motivated resolution in which the reasons for the recognition of the individual as a refugee or not are clearly stated. It is worth pointing out that the law establishes that, from the moment the request is received, Comar has 45 working days to issue a resolution and 10 additional days to notify the result. However, as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, deadlines and conditions for resolution (up to the closure of this article) are suspended; that is to say, the cases are paused for as long as essential governmental activities are not regularized. It is noted that these definitions are analyzed together with complementary protection.

Finally, it is relevant to underline that despite the law and international organisms, “most of the people who flee from their countries of origin due to persecution or widespread violence has not been able to be benefitted from this country’s protection mechanisms” (Torre Cantalapedra, París Pombo, & Gutiérrez López, 2021, p. 6), as illustrated by the fieldwork whose analysis is presented in the following sections.

## METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The methodological design, of qualitative nature (Harrison, Reilly, & Creswell, 2020; Kuckartz, 2014), has as a main purpose to analyze the testimonies and experiences of the migrant women who appear in this article, linked to a review of numerical data obtained from Comar statistics. In this regard, the in-depth interview was the main technique utilized to obtain qualitative data, whose exceptionality due to the Covid-19 lockdown in Mexico forced us not to physically interact (Hidalgo & Khan, 2020), and made us resort to digital tools.<sup>6</sup> This was beneficial for data obtaining

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<sup>6</sup> The applications Zoom and WhatsApp were used for videocalls with female lawyers with the civil society organizations.

since by means of digital interactions, we were able to include information of what takes place in both borders (North and South) and in the center of the country.

Likewise, the registration of data from a non-probabilistic sample of 90 cases assisted by Clínica Jurídica del Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración A. C. (IMUMI),<sup>7</sup> [Legal Clinic of Institute for Women in Migration, Civil Society] in 2020-2021, where the main criterion to choose the respondents was being survivors of at least one sort of violence (physical, psychological, sexual, patrimonial, economic). The countries of origin of the users in the analyzed sample are: Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, and Colombia. Moreover, six in-depth interviews were held (Ariza & Velasco, 2015) with female attorneys with SCOs in Mexico City, Tijuana and Tapachula, who have focused their efforts on accompanying asylum requests before Comar, and INM. It is worth pointing out that the approximate duration of these conversations was 40 minutes and were audio and video recorded.

Data analysis was carried out at once; IMUMI and interviews with CSO staff were worked in a synchronous manner for the purpose of accomplishing integration (Harrison et al., 2020). This took place in a context of change in the studies on international migration, where beyond the diversity of analytical approaches, what is sought is to integrate information (Åkerblad, Seppänen-Järvelä, & Haapakoski, 2021; Horvath & Latcheva, 2019) using the analysis software MAXQDA 2020 (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019, Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020). In this, a code system was devised to analyze qualitative text (Kuckartz, 2014) with a view to finding relationships between testimonies of users of the Legal Clinic of IMUMI and data provided by SCOs.

## MAIN FINDINGS

The violent practices of which women in this article were victims in their countries of origin now are embedded and reproduced in the Mexican context. In this country, over the last two decades, there have been numerous incidents in which migrant population has been assaulted, murdered, kidnapped and denigrated by a series of actors in society and in the governmental structure. In this way, the purpose of distancing from violence by means of crossing borders blurs because of the international scope criminal groups have, e.g., Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), police and migration agents and even relatives, who are the main aggressors of the women assisted in the Legal Clinic of IMUMI over the previously stated term.

Additionally, it is important to underscore that in this scenario, violence concurs with difficulties generated by poverty, though not only economic, social capital is also affected, as evinced by the absence of supportive networks (Landeros Jaime, 2020). In this way, the main problems faced by women in mobility are lengthy waiting times, the absence of protection protocols with gender perspective and the centralization of migration policies, all of which generates the transnationalization of violence in migration in Mexico. It is important to mention that the

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<sup>7</sup> The total population the IMUMI Legal Clinic assisted over the same period reaches slightly more than 500 migrant women from various Latin American and Caribbean countries. While the conversations were held, the information was recorded in what the organization calls “datasheet and logbook”.

consulates of their respective countries do not always have resources to support them; and in like manner, in the social imagination of women in mobility, these are not fully reliable.

### *Time Factor and the Risk of the Wait*

The main motivation for #41<sup>8</sup> to carry on with the migration project is her daughter. She made the decision to leave Honduras after her former partner, imprisoned for rape and previously for drug-related crimes, beat her almost to death. The case of #84 is similar, in Guatemala she experienced various types of violence for more than two years from her former partner; blows, insults, death threats were constant up to the moment she decided to cross Mexico's southern border to become a victim of human trafficking in Tapachula, Chiapas.

In this border city, #43, from El Salvador, suffered sexual violence on various occasions, which made her move from the southern border toward the center of the country for fears of being found by her ex-partner and members of Mara Salvatrucha, who have repeatedly followed and threatened her and whose international scope propitiates migrant women live in uncertainty and fear. Owing to this, this mother has the plan to move with her three children toward the norther border.

Most of the stories of migrant women who survive gender violence, in their countries of origin and in Mexico, has these characteristics, which disclose that time is a determining factor for people to displace to a safe place. Nevertheless, Mexican authorities force them to remain in the place where they started their request; this puts them in a vulnerable position since the probability of being intercepted and attacked once again significantly increases, disregarding that the very fact of being in Mexico, given the conditions of insecurity in the country, is itself a risk.

It is worth underscoring that with the increase of asylum requests presented at Comar, the time to issue a resolution increased accordingly, which was a concern for the SCOs that in recent decades have offered assistance and support for migrant population in order to ensure their wellbeing and decrease the risks generated by the displacement.

This waiting time that was prolonged for more than five months forced #06 to look for alternatives after realizing there were Mara Salvatrucha members in Comar offices in Tapachula, Chiapas, who, just like her, were processing their asylum requests. In this way, facing the risk of being identified once again by the gang, she decided to move away from the southern border due to the latent danger of waiting for the resolution of her request. It is worth mentioning that before all this, #06 had been deprived of her liberty in a Migration Station.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, #28 has moved over several Mexican states due to the fear, stress and anxiety posed by the possibility of being deported. In this journey, whose purpose is to remain unnoticed for

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<sup>8</sup> The actual names of the asylum-seeking women assisted by the IMUMI Legal Clinic were changed due to security reasons, considering that up the closing of this article some of them were still pursued by their aggressors, or else they had not regularized their migration status in Mexico.

<sup>9</sup> These are places established or set up by Secretaría de Gobernación via Instituto Nacional de Migración to temporary shelter people in contexts of migration who are unable to demonstrate their regular migration status in Mexico (CNDH, 2019).

migration authorities, she reached Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, where she settled for some time. Despite that such city has been considered for decades one of the most insecure and dangerous places in the world, particularly for women, #28 took up the risks it implicated for her plan is to displace along the northern border to reach Tijuana, Baja California.

This case allows displaying how, because of the waiting time, asylum-requesting women have to deal with the costs of moving over Mexico in irregular conditions, as the installation of checkpoints of Mexican authorities is common practice for the purpose of identifying people who travel the country without migration documents. In these cases, delays, irregularities or unfulfillment of requests by the authorities are usual: “Anything is an excuse not to timely and duly deliver” (CSO5,<sup>10</sup> personal communication, October 2021).

In the South American context, particularly in Chile and Argentina, time is utilized by governments as a control mechanism that produces desperation in the migrant population, forcing it to give up their regularization or accessing some public services (Auyero, 2011; Landeros Jaime, 2020). Likewise, linked to this same factor, the racial element has particularly affected Haitian migrants, for whom proceedings to receive a legal migration status surpass four years of waiting (Torrado, Montes, & Arroyo, 2021). All of this becomes relevant due to the contention policies adopted by the Mexican government in recent years, as they directly affect the asylum-seeking women in the present article.

In this way, the Mexican government has adopted practices that in other places in the continent have hindered migration. However, for women victims of violence not only does this generate a late resolution regarding the advance and outcome of their migration proceedings with the authorities, but also maximizes gender violence given the few possibilities to gain access to health care, education, employment and, in general, sociocultural interaction in the recipient place. This was expressed in an interview by one of the civil organizations that offers attention to asylum seekers at the northern border:

The treatment by authorities is despise, as though they didn't have the right. They discriminate them as if these women were worthless. Such is the treatment they receive just because they are Central American migrants. The legal framework allows for a lot of things that are not carried out (CSO3, personal communication, October 2021).

It is worth underscoring that over the waiting time, violence is not only exercised against women leading migration projects, but also against their children who suffer the consequences of migration policies. In the Mexican case, for some time now, such policies have been outweighed by the actual needs of people in mobility. In this way, CSOs have served as a counterbalance to the lack of governmental protocols to systematically protect the migrant population with gender perspective and ensure safe mobility respecting human rights.

A consequence of this is the sexual assault experienced by the daughter of #41 in Tapachula, Chiapas. From the record of the interview with the staff of IMUMI Legal Clinic, it is told that:

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<sup>10</sup> The names of the female attorneys who participate in this study are omitted due to security reasons.

The user was assaulted by a man in Tapachula, who raped her daughter, so she moved to another city. She's had problems with authorities, particularly with municipal police in Tijuana, where she had moved due to fear of persecution. She had to stop her proceeding (with Comar) due to insecurity; she has moved because of fear; she fears for her life (logbook of case #41).

It was a similar case for #18, who comes from Cuba and left her country of origin after being victim of various sorts of violence:

The user reported being victim of rape in her country of origin, so she can't return. She was sexually assaulted by Cuban police officers, moreover, she reported having experienced the same sort of violence in Mexico (logbook of case #18).

From the cases and testimonies documented by CSOs, it is possible to argue that waiting time for asylum-seeking women in Mexico is a factor that increases the possibility of experiencing some sort of violence in a context where gender is far from being substantially relevant for Mexican authorities.

#### *Absence of Gender Perspective in Protection Protocols*

The CSOs that appear in this study agree on the need to incorporate gender as a category, not only for the analysis of cases, but also for the direct attention of migrant population. To accomplish this, it is needed that key actors, mainly INM, are trained immediately to lessen risks for women. In this way, among the main aggressors in the various Mexican states one finds municipal police forces and Guardia Nacional agents. This is noticed in the documents produced from the testimonies of women survivors of violence:

[User #32] had problems with Tijuana's municipal police. The authorities claim that it was because an alleged drug sale in the place she lived. She was interrogated by the police, the agents even told her she got what she deserved for leaving her country (logbook case #32).

Even if these problems faced by women who request asylum in Mexico start when they are in their places of origin, gender is not a determining factor to accomplish a favorable resolution by the corresponding authorities. Some of the analyzed cases indicate that women have lived violence in their places of origin, over transit and in their destinations, as told by #44 in the Legal Clinic. Records indicate that this woman has been raped by her partner, municipal police officers and INM agents.

In this regard, the absence of gender perspective in the tasks of authorities has made the process to receive a favorable resolution with certainty more complex, which is an important factor for migrant women to be actually able to distance from the violence, persecution and harassment they have been victims of in their countries of origin, over their displacements and in their destinations. When wondering whether gender is a crucial factor in the attention to asylum-seeking women in Mexico, CSOs positively concurred on pointing out the emergency of setting up specific protocols in this regard:

Totally. We have received resolutions that state that a woman may be recognized as a refugee, though the reason is that her persecuting agent belongs to a determinate social group. Woman should be better protected, but this doesn't happen. Frequently, women run away because of the same reasons as men. But also, most of the times they are more persecuted and lose their political, socioeconomic rights... there is structural disadvantage regarding the role of women (CSO1, personal communication, October 2021).

There should be a protocol to identify gender violence (familial and domestic). This is very determining over the process. Women can't start anything if there is unresolved violence. There should be something to detect and address it. We have 20 thousand registrations, if we checked them we'd find many women victims of violence. It is a sizable percentage. They also come from a machista culture, maybe they're not with their aggressor anymore, but they reproduce the patterns here because they haven't healed (CSO3, personal communication, October 2021).

All of the above illustrates that the problem linked to violence against asylum-seeking women in Mexico is not a new social phenomenon. However, in recent years, the situation of this population sector has aggravated to such an extent that it is urgent to set protective migration policies into motion for the main purpose of integrally safekeeping women in mobility. Likewise, the machista culture that prevails in certain demographic sectors in Mexico increases the negative effects for women, girls and female adolescents.

Adding to the foregoing, the practices that criminalize asylum-seeking women are rooted in the key actors, which reproduces the imagination shared by certain social sectors that reject the presence of aliens in their localities. Civil organizations mainly at the northern border expressed concerns about this situation.

There is an erroneous notion of migration in general, and in particular, of migrant women. The part of human rights and dignity are not being approached by incumbent authorities. For example, [there was] a girl who was raped by an INM agent, [then] she was aggravated again by the medical examiner in the same process. Though not everyone has been treated this way, there is indeed criminalization against women (CSO4, personal communication, October 2021).

In this respect, one of the main recommendations from the work carried out by CSOs in Mexico on the basis of the daily attention for asylum-seeking women in Mexico is the immediate implementation of training in gender perspective for every actor involved in migration in the country, including those who offer health care, education and guidance to accomplish social interaction.

Furthermore, an additional aspect frequently repeated in the interviews and case analysis from documents is the complexity generated by the centralization of policies and processes, particularly for asylum requests, which propitiates an increase in time in a violent stage that affects women who expect a favorable resolution.

### *Centralization of Migration Policies*

Addressing asylum-seeking women in Mexico has turned in a highly complex process for CSOs, particularly those who focus on spaces where Comar does not have ideal infrastructure. From this, distinguishable are the differences in the needs of asylum seekers depending on the place where they are. On one side, for those who reach some of the Mexican states bordering the U.S., it is more recurrent they need to resume their proceeding since because of security reasons they had to move inside the country halting the process.

There is a heavily centralized topic as regards Comar decisions. This makes processes lengthy, which affects women more. Thus, we have resolved individual cases. We communicate with the responsible, state the situation and he has been open as regard the events and how to solve them (CSO3, personal communication, October 2021).

What we do the most is resuming processes. Most of the people who arrive with us already started a proceeding in Tapachula and leave without a transfer permit, then they arrive and we help them. In these last two years, it has been due to gender violence. Since the Tijuana office is two years, it has few personnel and everything is centralized. All the information here has to go to Mexico City and return. This makes the processes lengthy, so people are irregular (CSO4, personal communication, October 2021).

The centralization and the long waiting times it causes have unleashed a series of violations of human rights of people in mobility, mainly by the authorities who according to the legislation do not have a say as regards migration, as told by the responsible of the legal area with one of the civil organizations: “They ask for the proceeding certificate which sometimes does not arrive or takes a very long time. They are harassed by municipal police and this becomes a series of situations. There is also lack of information on times and processes” (CSO4, personal communication, October 2021).

In a context in which seeking asylum in Mexico increases at a fast pace, it is urgent to develop strategies to improve access to information by means of effective communication. In words of the same organizations:

People who start in Tapachula, Chiapas, [lack] information on their departure without a displacement permit. People do not know they have to ask for a transfer to move to another place. Lack of information is an instance. It is indispensable for people who leave because they have no idea of what is implied in the closing of their cases, if they find any agent on the road they may be returned; we’ve even had individuals who were deported. All this necessary information is not provided (CSO4, personal communication, October 2021).

Such lack of information is an important factor that reproduces gender violence against asylum-seeking women in Mexico, enabling the intervention of new actors who make the panorama for asylum seekers in the country even more complex. According to testimonies of the legal units of each civil organization mentioned in this article, linked to the experiences registered in IMUMI Legal Clinic, it is relevant to underscore that the life trajectories of women who leave their places of origin due to persecution, gender violence, and harassment do not change with the crossing of the border, but occasionally all of this aggravates and produces a physical and mental impact on

people's health as pinpointed by work reports from civil society (Kerwin et al., 2021; Landeros Jaime, 2021). The above is conceptualized on the grounds of empirical data such as the transnationalization of violence, which is explained in the following section.

### *The Transnationalization of Violence in Migration*

On July 23, 2020, two women from Guatemala entered Mexico after leaving their places of origin as a result of the aggressions and death threats by the husband of one of them, who is a drug addict, likely a member of organized crime. Fear and uncertainty increased in their households, for at all times the man carried a gun, making #89, the aggressor's sister help #88, his wife, at a time when violence had escalated to levels that not only put their lives at risk but also a child's.

These asylum-requesting women looked for help at Comar to move out of the city for violence reached them ever since their aggressor entered Mexico as a member of one of the migrant caravans; in this same context, there was a shooting between people accompanying the husband of #88. The purpose was to distance from the southern border for fears of the attacker finding them. Albeit, lack of information and the mobility restriction requested by Mexican migration authorities forced them to remain in the place where they were.

Furthermore, the story of #70 in Mexico starts in 2018, when she entered the country irregularly accompanied by a female relative; she asked for a humanitarian visa, but she never received it. She remained in Tijuana for several months, though. In her story, the woman from Honduras, stated that in her country of origin she was kidnapped by the Mara Salvatrucha, who beat her heavily causing her severe harm to the head; this was the main reason to leave her country. However, along her forced displacement over various Mexican states after crossing the border, she was intercepted by INM agents and taken to the Migration Station in Oaxaca, where she remained for two weeks. Over this journey, where human rights violations and gender violence are constant, she told she was raped by Mexican municipal police and repeatedly experienced mugging in the public transport.

These cases make it clear violence is a problem that severely affects the life trajectories of asylum seekers in Mexico, and also that violent practices and power exercises against them does not end by crossing the southern border, neither with the displacement inside the country that on occasion takes women to the northern border. Violence in migration aggravates, transforms, generates new practices and representations, adds new actors, takes place relationally; that is to say, one type of violence is always embedded into another. For example, asylum-seeking women who were assisted by IMUMI during the period of interest (2020-2021) mentioned physical violence as the most frequent and also expressed psychological, economic, and patrimonial aspects linked to violence.

In this regard, the CSOs that offer assistance for migrants recurrently point out this sort of problems:

One person said she had been kidnaped and raped in Mexico and that she had decided to give up asylum in the country. She came from a context of violence to enter into another. We

noticed that many women were afraid to go to the streets, they perceive danger everywhere. They decide to leave in order to prevent people who threaten them from harming them. There is no one to address these social integration needs in various parts of the country. [Women experience] uncertainty, fear, dread, stress, anxiety (CSO2, personal communication, October 2021).

It is the fear of returning to their country. That's women's greatest fear. They don't want to return to their countries and neither do they want to remain in Tapachula because they know it's the border and are close. This is the greatest fear they have when they cross. Stress, depression, anxiety; maybe some are not fully aware of them in the interview yet. Some of them are, some aren't; you have to make them realize so that they can answer and do it well in the interview (CSO5, personal communication, October 2021).

In the absence of comprehensive programs to follow cases of gender violence against asylum-seeking women, "civil society organizations have taken up the responsibility and by doing so, the authority considers that society has to do it" (CSO2, personal communication, October 2021), and the possibility that women actually solve their needs in a comprehensive manner, ensuring their wellbeing in a broad sense is unattainable. "They only partially solve them" (CSO2, personal communication, October 2021). A consequence from the above noticed by the participant organizations of civil society is that "women do not make important decisions correctly in conditions like these. We have to emotionally level them so that they make sensible decisions (CSO3, personal communication, October 2021).

Data allow producing a conceptualization of the way the transnationalization of violence becomes visible from the experiences of asylum-seeking women in Mexico and the interviews with the CSO that assist such population. In such contexts, the attacks of their aggressors follow them regardless of the place or how many borders they cross to reach their destination. Violence remains and transforms into a dead end for those who experience it and over time, accumulate experiences fraught with pain, angst, sadness, which produce various health care problems, as indicated by empirical data.

Additionally, the transnationalization of violence makes female asylum seekers in Mexico move from one place to another regardless of the cost entailed, generating a cycle that will hardly ever finish due to the lack of governmental initiatives that actually solve the problem. Aid programs to solve this and accomplish broad social interaction are put forward by civil society. However, since they are violented women, it is crucial to include gender perspective in governmental tasks, trainings and approaches to assist women, considering that the trans-nationalization of violence will always entail the constant displacement of violented individuals. For the women in mobility assisted by IMUMI, the feeling of insecurity remains, adding difficulty to their migration status for in some situations, even if they had the corresponding migration document, they do not manage to access justice or equality-based attention.

Indubitably, the transnationalization of violence, from conceptual and practical levels, integrates into the factors mentioned in LGAMVLV, and into the ecological model oriented toward gender violence eradication, as it allows identifying not only new actors who produce and reproduce

violence, but also the various scenarios shared by Latin American countries, where aggressors continue harming women in mobility. All of this takes place in a context in which the resources of women, whose stories are narrated in the present article, are limited, mainly regarding health care and security. In this way, civil society organizations have been in charge of lessening the impacts, where optimizing the articulations between the actions developed by the State and CSOs as regards migrant population assistance is an opportunity that might boost a change in migration public policies mostly oriented to improve the current conditions of people in mobility.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented indicate that violence exercised against migrant women follows them along their journey from south to north and beyond borders. Such violence takes place in various modalities, which makes the process more complex for women to accomplish social, economic and cultural integration in Mexico, in a context where their human rights are violated and where they have restricted access to public health care and security services. Adding to this, the impact of the transnationalization of the violence of traumatic events lived in the country of origin; it seemed as though nowhere would they be able to find respect and dignity, which indubitably turns into despondency regarding their own situation. Even if the main aggressors are part of gangs with transnational presence and criminal groups in general, their relatives, municipal police officers, migration authorities are also among the main actors who violate the rights of the migrant population that is part of the present article.

It is noticeable that migration flows in Mexico are a topic with a lengthy history. However, in recent years, significant changes have taken place in such territory, which is no longer a transit place for migration toward the northern border to cross into the U.S., but is also considered a destination, due to restrictive migration policies and the increase in the dangerousness of entering illegally (De León, 2015), which is supported by the increment of asylum requests in Comar.

In this regard, it is worth underscoring that as the number of requests increases in Mexico, human rights violations of migrant women become visible. In this context, factors such as waiting time, absence of gender perspective and centralization of migration policies propitiate the transnationalization of violence that generates severe health care damage, mainly associated with emotional stability. Programs to address complications like these are inexistent, so civil organizations have served as a counterbalance in the face of the inefficiency of the State to assist migrant population.

In this way, work carried out by civil society regarding attention to migrant women may define the pattern for the development of projects from the standpoint of gender, so that they are particularly oriented toward women, children and adolescents, who, owing to insecurity and violence left their country of origin. It is important to bear this broad experience in mind as regards migrant population that organizations have, which has been exercised even in contexts of limited economic capital, attaining important influence on the life trajectory of these women, as shown in this article.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that after the present analysis, there is a line of work linked to the urgency of producing international protection protocols on the basis of mobility, which thus far has not been accomplished by Mexican migration authorities. In like manner, an additional research line remains open to explore practices of racism, xenophobia, and homophobia which female asylum seekers experience, whose patterns can be marked by the histories and testimonies here included.

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