



REASONS FOR WOMEN'S MIGRATION

The situation in Mexico



World Union of
Catholic Women's
Organisations





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Introduction

In recent decades, global migratory movements have reached unprecedented proportions, causing humanitarian crises at various borders. Latin America has not been spared from these phenomena and is characterised as a region of intense intra-regional migratory flows. Structural factors such as economic inequality, lack of employment, limited access to basic services, widespread violence and the effects of climate change are among the main causes of this massive displacement (Pedemonte Rojas et al., 2021; IOM, 2020). However, the experience of migrant women in this context presents specific dynamics that require special analysis.

The feminisation of migration flows in Latin America and the Caribbean is a recent phenomenon that deserves greater academic and policy attention. According to global data, women represent approximately 48% of the international migrant population (DESA, 2021), a proportion that, despite its relevance, has not been adequately addressed in terms of migration research and governance. In this context, women face multiple forms of structural, symbolic and daily violence during the migration process, exacerbated by their gender and migrant status. This violence is closely linked to the dynamics of economic and social inequality that affect countries of origin as well as transit and destination countries (IDB-OECD, 2021; Vidal, 2021).

There are important gaps in the data on migration, in particular with regard to the gender of the individuals concerned. Gender is an important factor at all stages of the migration experience: from the decision to migrate and crossing borders, to working or settling in the destination country. The lack of data has implications for global migration governance and for migrant women themselves, while also making it difficult to achieve the 2030 Agenda's goal of *leaving no one behind*.

The decision to migrate is rarely a spontaneous act; it is often rooted in a complex interplay of structural and personal factors. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, women's migration has gained visibility in recent decades, highlighting the relevance of factors such as structural violence, economic precariousness and the search for better employment and educational opportunities. In addition, women often face greater vulnerabilities in their migration process, stemming from gender discrimination and gender-based violence, which also motivates their departure in search of greater security and autonomy (Armijos-Orellana et al, 2022; Martínez Pizarro & Orrego Rivera, 2016).

Similarly, the recurrent economic crises in several countries in the region, such as Venezuela and Central America, have led to an increase in female emigration, often involving women who are the heads of their households and are trying to ensure the survival of their families. However, the focus on economic motives should not overshadow other dynamics, such as flight from conflict contexts, among others.

The violence, injustice and social precariousness faced by migrants in the region - especially women - is not a central issue on the public agenda, and the problem tends to go unnoticed, silenced and made invisible by the political, economic and social elites. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), both secular and religious, play a fundamental role in caring for this population. These entities not only provide immediate assistance, but they also document the experiences and needs of migrant women, generating valuable knowledge that helps to make their realities visible.

Therefore, studying the phenomenon through the efforts of these organisations allows a privileged approach to the vulnerabilities, demands and most urgent needs of migrant women in the region. With this objective in mind, this study contacted and interviewed 234 migrant women (167 international and 67 internal) who are assisted by these organisations, in order to provide a specific account of the migratory experiences of women arriving in or moving within Mexican territory.

The data presented in this study come from a self-administered survey carried out by the World Women's Observatory (WWO) of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO) among international migrant women or women residing in Mexico who are moving within the country, examining issues related to the reasons for the decision to migrate and access to justice during the migration journey.

Accordingly, the results presented in this report reflect the responses of the migrant women surveyed, without necessarily constituting a representative sample of all migrant women at the regional level. The contribution of this research is to provide a first approach to the phenomenon under study, and to a population group that is invisible in terms of migration, constituting a first starting point for future studies.

All of this is analysed according to topics of interest, mainly according to their origin, age, ethnic descent, and those with whom the migration process took place.

Methodology and sample

In order to investigate the reasons for migration and access to justice, both for women who arrive in Mexico from different countries on the Latin American continent, as well as for Mexican or foreign citizens residing in the country who move around the territory, this study uses a quantitative methodology for the collection of information. The technique used was an online questionnaire provided by the Google Forms platform.

The questionnaire was applied during four months, from May to August 2024, to migrant women from Latin America and the Caribbean residing in Mexico and to internal migrants. Contact with them was achieved through the network of correspondent women social leaders built by WUCWO in 2023 linked to this phenomenon, the support of fellow organisations and the generosity of 18 shelters, which selflessly opened their doors so that we could meet face to face with migrant women and hear them first-hand.

A total of 234 migrant women responded to the survey (167 international and 67 internal). Therefore, the results presented in this report are not representative of the experiences of all Latin American migrant women, nor of the relative weight of this population in the countries that comprise it, but only express the findings and percentages of different indicators of women's responses.

The countries of origin of the migrant women who participated are: Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.

1. Description of the sample of migrant women surveyed from Latin America and the Caribbean

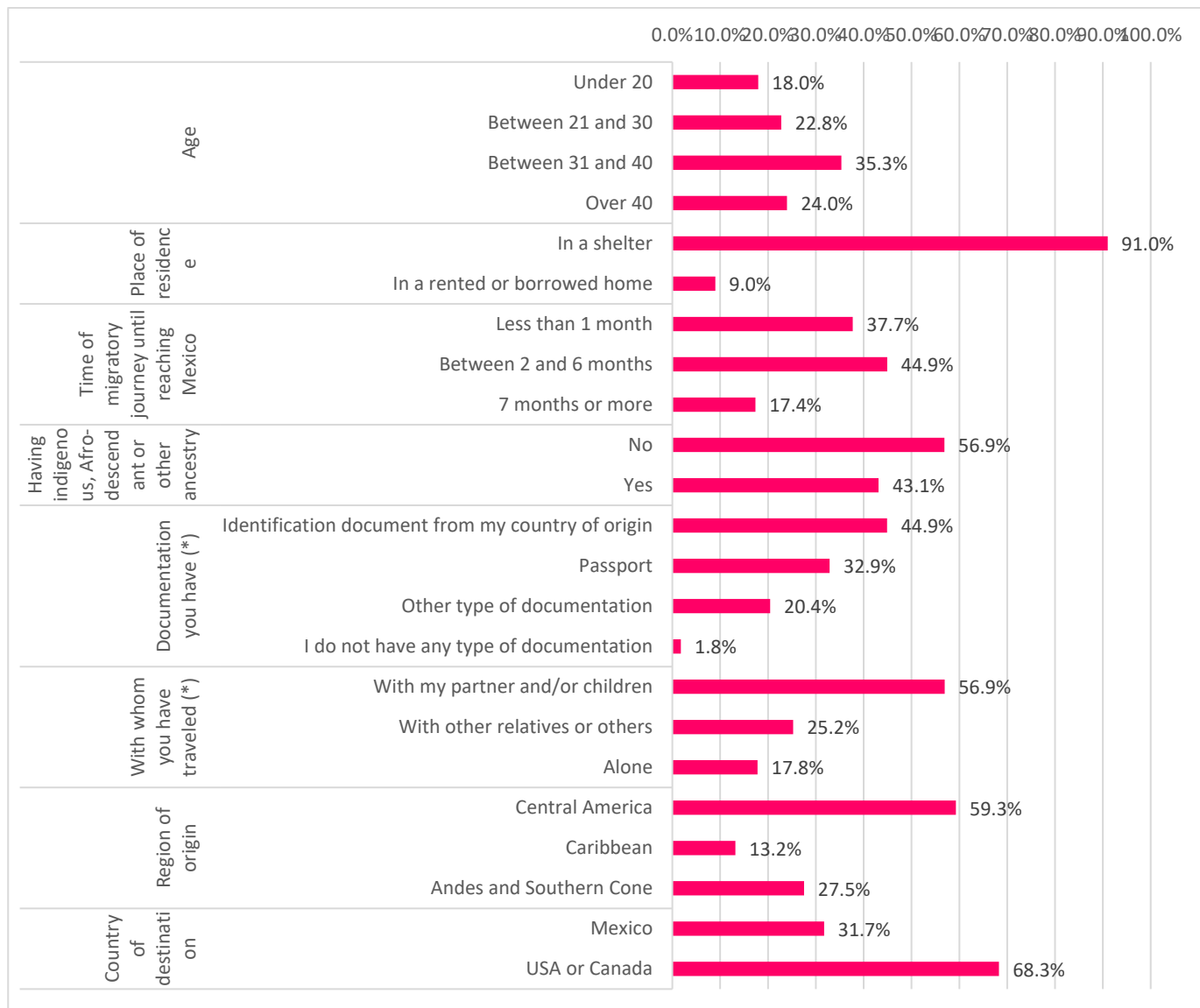
1.1. International migrants

First, an analysis is presented of the population of migrant women arriving in Mexico from different Latin American and Caribbean countries, which we will refer to as **international migrant women**. It is observed that:

- The sample of international migrant women over the age of 18 arriving in Mexico has a diverse age distribution. 35.5% of respondents are between 31 and 40 years old, followed by those over 40 (24.0%).
- Regarding the conditions of residence upon arrival in Mexico, the majority of the international women surveyed (91.0%) live in shelters, while only a minority of them (9.0%) have access to rented or borrowed accommodation. This suggests a situation of predominant vulnerability, with the majority relying on temporary assistance structures.
- The time spent on the migration journey varies considerably, but 44.9% of international women migrants take between 2 and 6 months to reach Mexico, followed by 37.7% of international respondents who arrive in less than a month.
- A significant proportion of international migrant women are of indigenous, Afro-descendant or other descent (43.1%), while 56.9% do not identify with these categories.
- In terms of documentation with which they arrive, the majority of international migrant respondents have some form of identification from their country of origin (44.9%), while 32.9% of their responses indicate that they have a passport. Only 1.8% of the responses they gave showed that they lacked any kind of documentation.
- Regarding company during the journey, more than half of the international migrant women surveyed (56.9%) reported travelling with their partner and/or children, reflecting a family migration dynamic. Some 25.2% do so with other family members or companions, and only 17.8% undertake the journey alone, which could indicate greater risks for the latter.
- In relation to region of origin, the majority of international migrant women who participated in the survey come from Central America (59.3%), followed by women from the Andes and the Southern Cone (27.5%) and the Caribbean (13.2%). This shows the importance of intra-regional migration flows to Mexico.
- Finally, the desired destination for most international migrant women is not Mexico, with 68.3% aiming to reach the United States or Canada. Only 31.7% plan to settle in Mexico, which could imply that the country is seen more as a transit point than as a final destination.

Figure 1. International migrants: Composition of the sample of migrant women according to variables of interest.

In percentages of the sample of international migrant women and responses (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

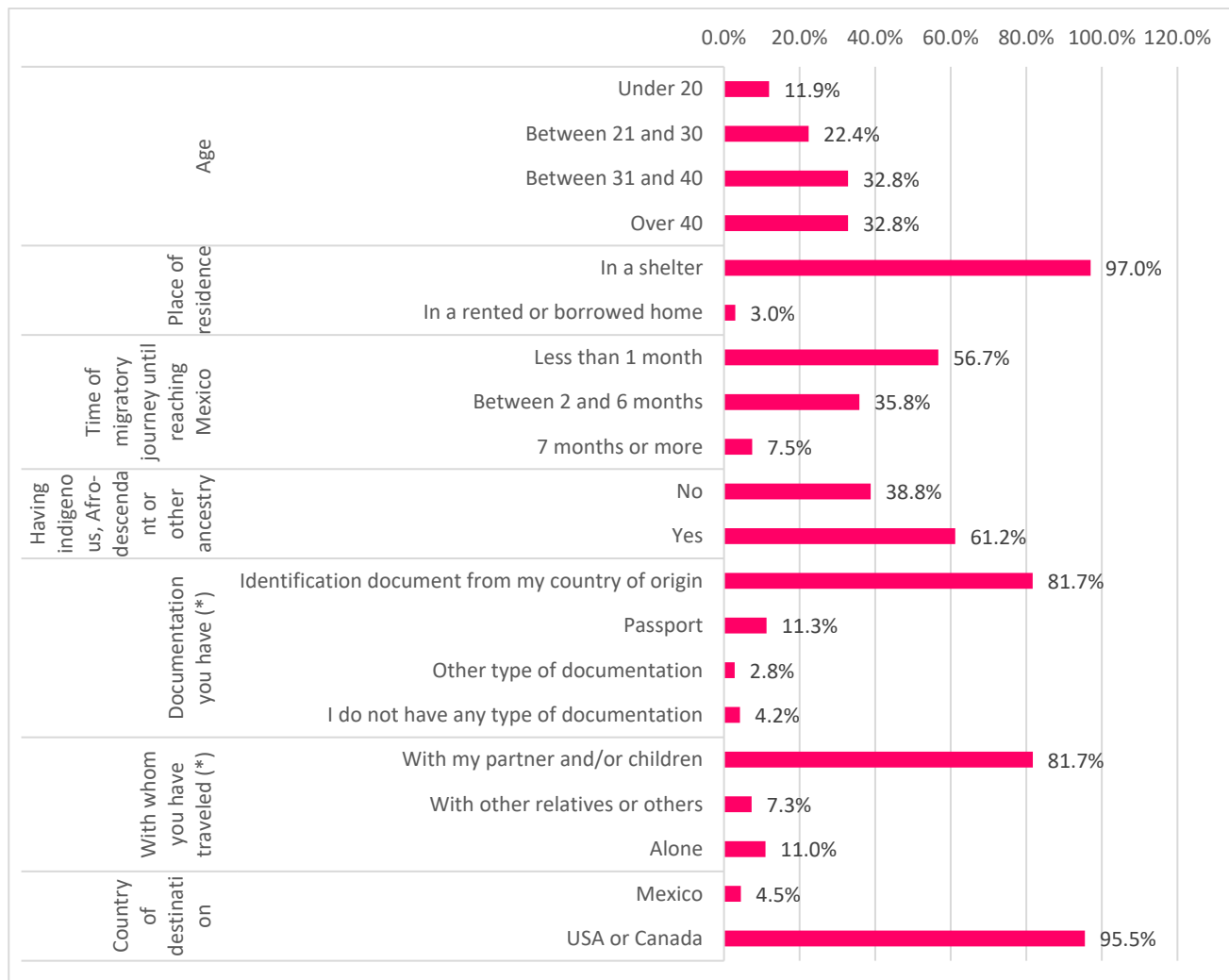
1.2. Internal migrants

And now the analysis continues with migrant women with Mexican citizenship or residence who move within the territory, which we will call **internal migrant women**. It is observed that:

- The majority of the internal migrant women surveyed are over 30 years old. Of these, 32.8% are between 30 and 40 years old, and 32.8% are over 40 years old. Those under 20 years of age represent 11.9%, while 22.4% are between 20 and 30 years of age.
- 97% of internal migrant women live in shelters, while 3% live in rented or borrowed housing. This indicates that shelters are the main refuge during the migration process.
- More than half (56.7%) of the women reported having migrated internally less than one month ago. Of these, 35.8% reported journeys of two to six months, and 7.5% migrated seven months or more ago.
- 61.2% of internal migrant women have indigenous, Afro-descendant or other descent, while 38.8% do not.
- The majority of internal migrants (81.7%) have an identity document. Only 11.3% of them have a passport, 2.8% have another type of documentation, and a worrying 4.2% lack any type of document. The latter is particularly relevant if their final destination is not Mexico.
- According to the responses of the internal migrant women surveyed, the majority (81.7%) travelled with their partner and/or children. 11% of the responses indicate that they travelled alone.
- 95.5% of female internal migrants have the United States or Canada as their final destination. Only 4.5% plan to remain in Mexico.

Figure 2. Internal migrants: Composition of the sample of female migrants according to variables of interest.

In percentages of the sample of internal migrant women and responses (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

2. Main reasons for migration

In this section, we present the results on the main reasons why women make the decision to migrate from their places of origin and in this case arrive or transit through Mexico.

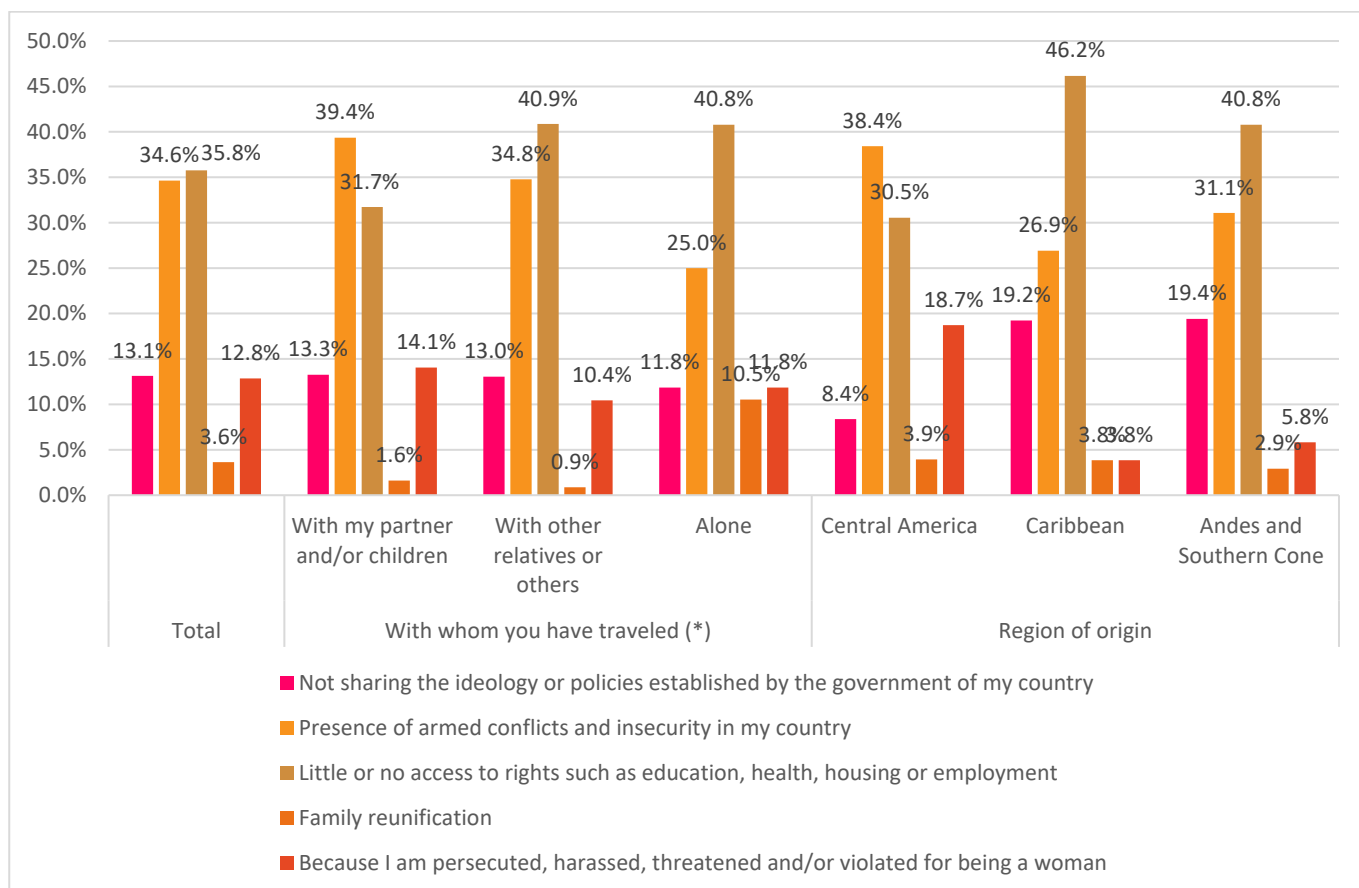
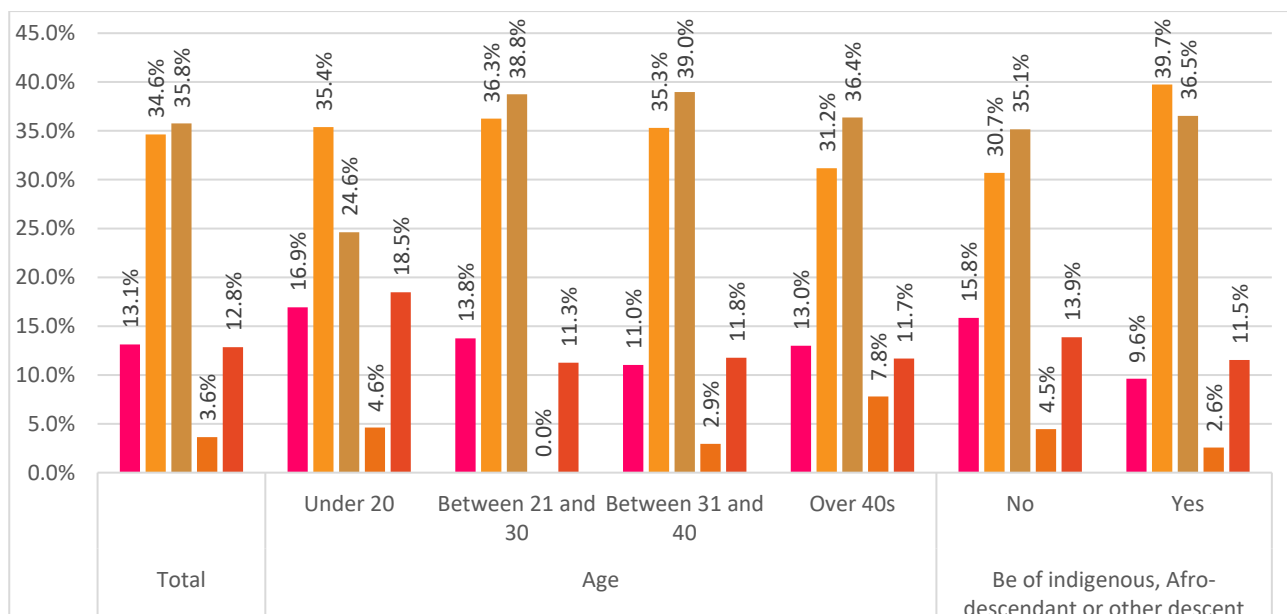
2.1. International migrants

With regard to the main motivations of international migrant women, the following can be observed:

- In general, the reasons for migration of international migrant women arriving in Mexico from Latin America and the Caribbean are diverse and spread over several reasons, including poor access to rights such as education, health, housing, or employment (35.8%), the presence of armed conflict and insecurity (34.6%) and opposition to government policies (13.1%).
- Younger women (under 30) seem to be more likely to migrate due to the presence of armed conflict and insecurity in their countries of origin and lack of access to basic rights such as education and/or health. On the other hand, women over 30 years of age mostly mention that limited access to rights (39.0%) is the main reason that led them to migrate from their countries, which could reflect a search for better living conditions.
- Women of indigenous or Afro-descendant descent more frequently report the presence of armed conflict and insecurity (39.7%) and lack of access to rights such as health, education, housing or employment (36.5%), which could indicate that they are more vulnerable to these problems in their countries of origin. On the other hand, women without indigenous or Afro-descendant descent report a higher percentage of migration due to lack of access to basic services.
- Women who travelled with their partner and children tend to mention the presence of armed conflict and insecurity as the main reason for migration. While those who travelled on their own or with other family members or other people, report that the main reason is little or no access to rights such as health, education, housing, or employment.
- Responses from international migrant women from the Caribbean (19.2%) and the Andes and Southern Cone (19.4%) are the most likely to mention opposition to government policies in their countries of origin. This could be linked to political instability and repressive policies in these regions. In terms of security, women from Central America (38.4%) report the presence of armed conflict and insecurity as one of the main reasons for their migration, reflecting the political and social tensions in countries such as Honduras and El Salvador. On the other hand, women from the Caribbean and the Andes and Southern Cone seem to be more affected by the lack of access to rights (46.2% and 40.8%, respectively), which could be linked to the socio-economic inequality in their countries of origin.

● **Figure 3. International migrants: Main reasons for migration by age group, ethnic origin, who they travelled with and region of origin.**

In percentages of the sample of international migrant women and responses (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

2.2. Internal migrants

On the other hand, we found that the motives of women internal migrants are related to the following:

- In general terms, on the one hand, the perception of insecurity and the presence of armed conflict, which affect a significant proportion of women (47.3%), and, on the other hand, limited access to basic rights (23.7%) and gender-based violence (19.1%).
- Across all age groups, there is a clear difference in the causes, with armed conflict and insecurity in their country being the first cause (47.3%). A higher percentage of women under 20 (55.6%) choose this option, very similar to women between 31 and 40 (54.5%). This is followed by women between 21 and 30 years of age (46.2%), and finally the group over 40 years old (37.2%). This may reflect the greater exposure of young women to situations of violence or conflict in their communities, forcing them to move in search of safety.
- On the other hand, internal migrant women over 40 years of age mentioned in second place (32.6%) the lack of access to basic rights (such as education, health and employment) as a relevant reason for migration.
- Indigenous or Afro-descendant descent also influences the reasons for migration. Internal migrant women surveyed who belong to indigenous or Afro-descendant communities more frequently report reasons such as insecurity (49.4% compared to 44.2% of non-indigenous women) and lack of access to rights (25.3% compared to 21.2% of non-indigenous women). This suggests that women from these ethnic groups face additional barriers to accessing basic services and security in their regions of origin, prompting them to migrate in search of more favourable conditions.
- In addition, non-indigenous or Afro-descendant women are also more likely to migrate because of gender-based violence (23.1%). This factor is less frequently mentioned among indigenous or Afro-descendant women (16.5%).
- Women respondents who migrate with other family members or others are the most likely to cite being persecuted, harassed or abused for being a woman as a reason for migration (28.6%). In contrast, women who migrate with their partner and children are less likely to cite gender-based violence as a reason. This group also has a higher proportion of migration due to insecurity and armed conflict (51.5%).

Figure 4. Internal migrants: Main reasons for migration by age group, ethnicity, who they travelled with and region of origin.

In percentages of the sample of internal migrant women and responses (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

3. Presence of environmental factors among the reasons for migration

The focus of this section is on the environmental factors present in the women's home environments as possible motivations and causes for their migration.

3.1. International migrants

Starting with reports from international migrant women:

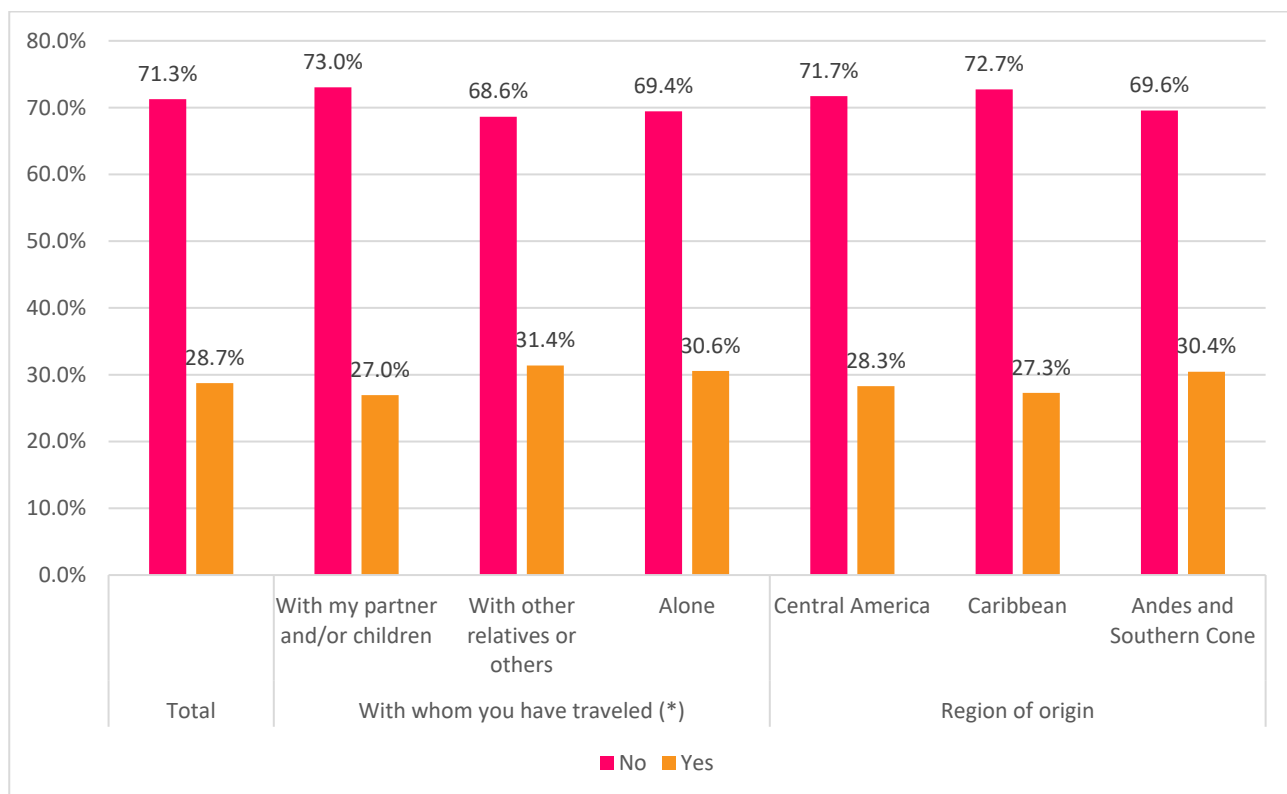
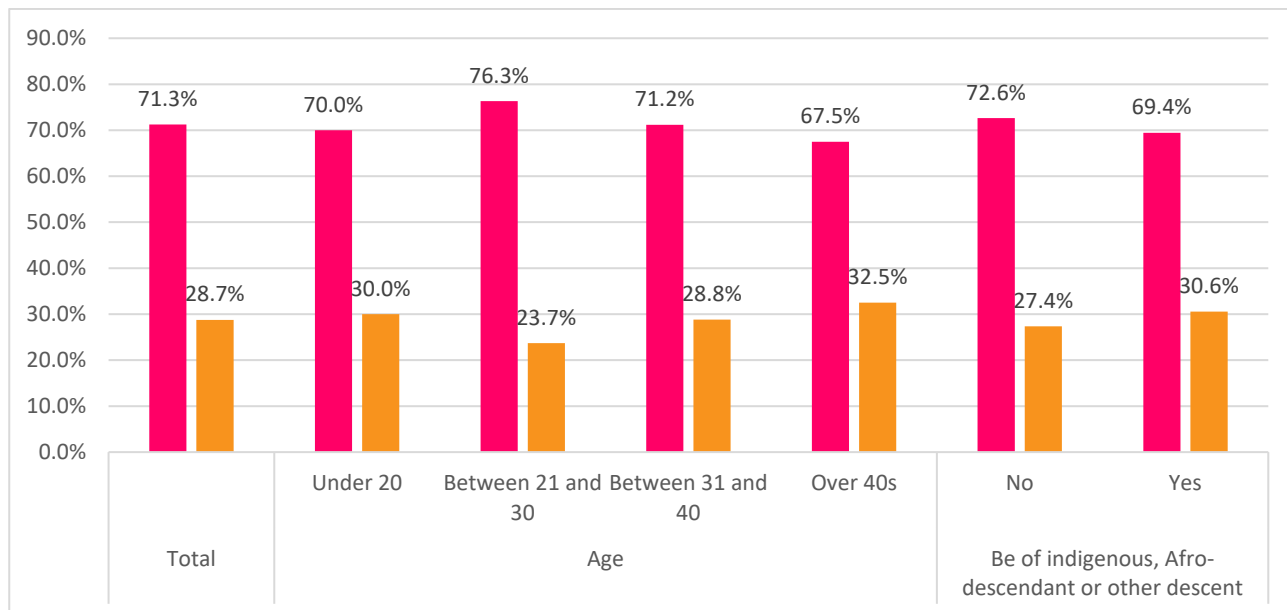
- 28.7% of international migrant women who arrived in Mexico mentioned that environmental factors played a relevant role in their decision to migrate. The majority, 71.3%, do not consider these factors as conditioning factors in their migration process.
- Female migrants aged 21-30 appear to be somewhat less influenced by environmental factors in their decision to migrate. The percentage of women under 20 years of age mentioning environmental factors is 30.0%, and 32.5% of women over 40 years of age indicate that environmental factors were important in their decision to migrate.
- The analysis according to indigenous or Afro-descendant descent shows a slight difference, although not very marked. 27.4% of women of neither indigenous nor Afro-descendant descent report the influence of environmental factors on their decision to migrate, while women of indigenous or Afro-descendant descent report 30.6%. This small increase suggests that women with an indigenous or Afro-descendant identity may be more exposed to or aware of environmental impacts in their countries of origin, although there is no significant difference indicating that this variable is determinant in their decision to migrate.
- Analysis of the variable "with whom she travelled" shows that women who travelled with other family members or alone are slightly more likely to mention environmental factors in their decision to migrate, with 31.4% and 30.6% respectively.
- Finally, the region of origin does not show large variations in the perception of environmental factors. Women coming from Central America mention environmental factors in 28.3% as influential in their migration decision, and women coming from the Andes and the Southern Cone do so in 30.4%.
- Of the respondents who stated that environmental factors influenced them to migrate, 37.7% of their responses indicated that it was due to problems accessing water and food and 24.1% due to damage to their homes, workplace, paths, roads, schools, and/or hospitals. This impact is particularly severe in regions where infrastructure is vulnerable to natural disasters, and shows how extreme weather events can destroy what people consider fundamental to their stability.
- On the other hand, 16.7% of the responses given by women indicate that environmental factors have harmed them economically, as they have lost their source of income or are at risk of losing it. This phenomenon is directly related to the loss of livelihoods in sectors such as agriculture or

fishing, which are particularly susceptible to severe climate change. In many cases, migrant women face the loss of their jobs and the impossibility of supporting their families due to adverse weather conditions.

- In terms of environmental factors that influenced the decision to migrate, several extreme weather events are frequently mentioned. The most frequently mentioned was rains and floods (25.4%), followed by heat waves (22%) as a factor contributing to their decision to migrate. Extreme heat waves, especially when prolonged over long periods, affect both human health and agricultural productivity, which can lead to unsustainable conditions for daily life, forcing people to migrate in search of more favourable conditions. Drought, related to land erosion, was cited by 18.6% of women.

Figure 5. International migrants: Presence of environmental factors as a reason for migration by age group, ethnicity, who they travelled with and region of origin.

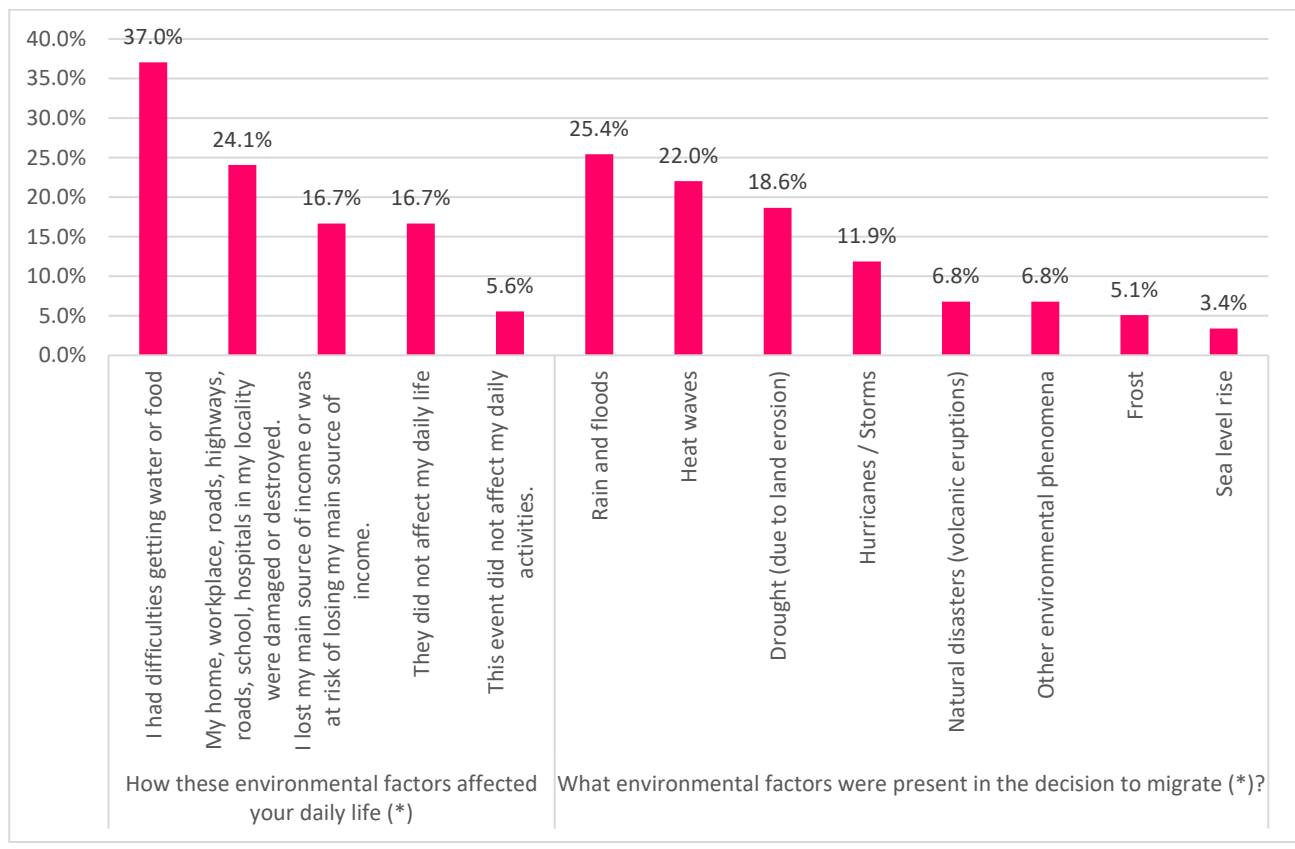
In percentages of the sample of international migrant women who were influenced by environmental and response factors (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

Figure 6. International migrants: How environmental factors affected their daily lives and type of environmental factor present by age group, ethnic descent, who they travelled with and region of origin.

In percentages of the sample of international migrant women who were influenced by environmental and response factors (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

roads, highways, roads

3.2. Internal migrants

Analysing the environmental factors in internal migrants, we find:

- 37.3% of female internal migrants surveyed reported that environmental factors played a role in their decision to migrate, while 62.7% stated that such factors were not determinant. This shows that, although environmental factors may be relevant for a significant proportion of female internal migrants, they are not the main reason for migration in general.

- Women over 40 years old, with 45.5%, are the most likely to say that environmental factors did influence their decision. This could indicate that as women age, environmental factors (such as climate change or natural disasters) have a more significant impact on their migration. Next, with 37.5% are those under 20 years old and the trend decreases for the groups between 21 and 30 years old (33.3%) and between 31 and 40 years old (31.8%).
- Women of indigenous, Afro-descendant or other descent show a higher proportion (46.3%) of environmental factors influencing their decision to migrate, compared to women of non-indigenous descent (23.1%). This finding suggests that indigenous or Afro-descendant women may be more exposed to adverse environmental conditions, leading them to make the decision to migrate.
- Women who have migrated alone show a lower percentage of influence of environmental factors on their decision (22.2%). On the other hand, those who have migrated with their partner and children (37.3%) or with other family members (33.3%) seem to be more influenced by environmental factors, possibly due to the need to make collective decisions or the search for a better environment for their families.
- With regard to the way in which environmental factors affected the daily lives of internal migrant women, 35.7% of internal migrant women reported that environmental factors directly affected their daily lives, either through the destruction of their homes, workplaces, or basic infrastructure such as roads, highways, schools and hospitals. This percentage is significant and reflects how the deterioration of the physical environment due to severe environmental phenomena has generated a tangible alteration in the daily lives of internal migrant women. The destruction of infrastructure represents one of the most devastating consequences, hindering access to basic services and increasing the daily hardship for women and their families.
- In addition, 25% of them indicated that they lost their main source of income or were at risk of losing it due to these factors, underlining how natural disasters or climate change affect not only the physical environment, but also the economic stability of migrants.
- And, 21.4% stated that environmental factors did not affect their daily lives, which may suggest that migration was influenced by factors other than natural disasters or environmental problems.
- In terms of the specific environmental phenomena that influenced the decision to migrate, it is observed that rains and floods were the most frequently mentioned causes, with 22.2% of women identifying these phenomena as a reason for migrating. This phenomenon may have displaced many women from their homes due to the risks associated with flooding, which destroys living accommodations and disrupts living conditions in the affected regions. Drought is another key factor, mentioned by 14.8% of women. Hurricanes and storms were also cited by 14.8% of women as a factor in migration.

Figure 7. Internal migrants: Presence of environmental factors as a reason for migration by age group, ethnic descent, who they travelled with and region of origin.

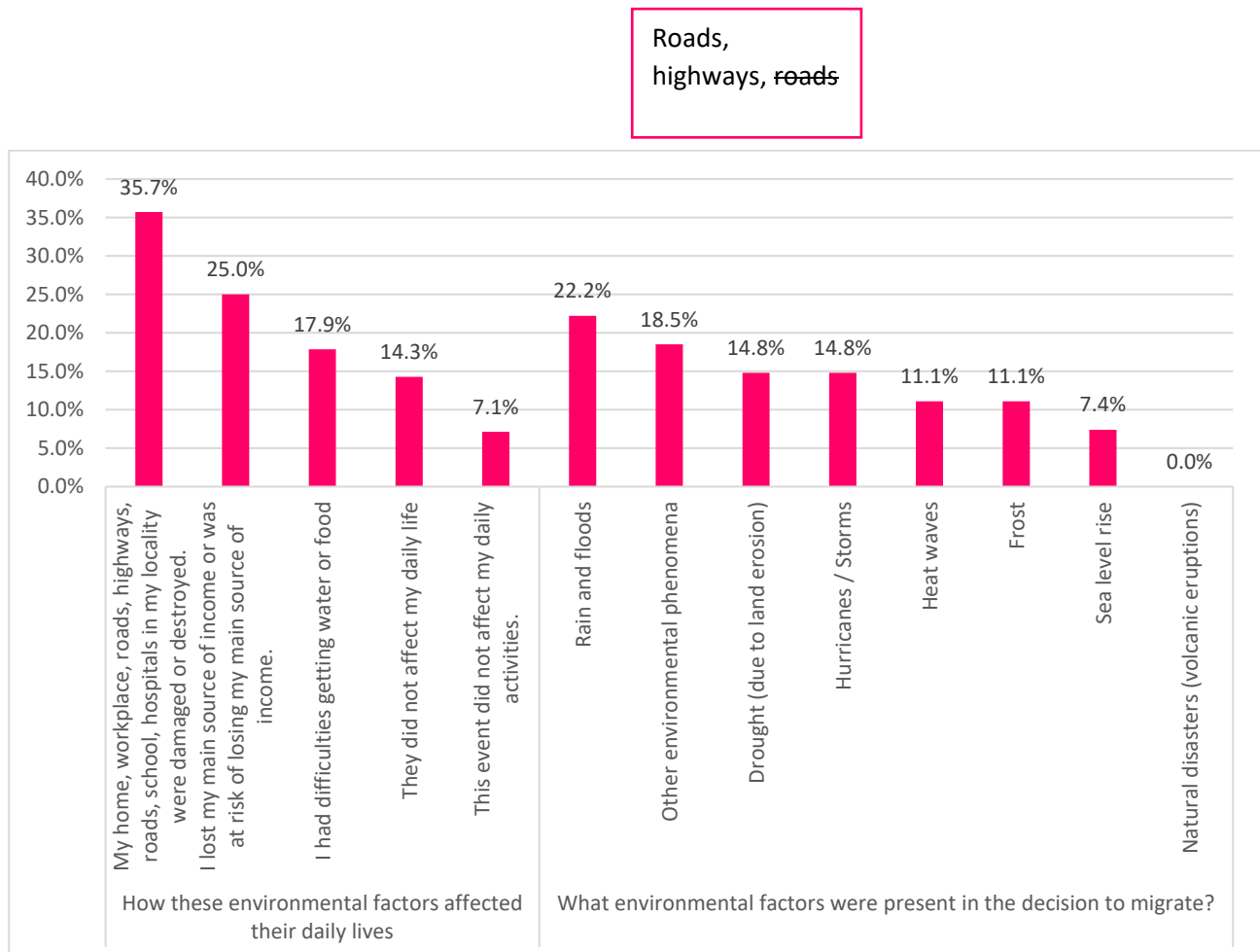
In percentages of the sample of internal migrant women who were influenced by environmental and response factors (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

Figure 8. Internal migrants: How environmental factors affected their daily lives and type of environmental factor present by age group, ethnic descent, who they travelled with and region of origin.

In percentages of the sample of international migrant women who were influenced by environmental and response factors (*) from Latin America and the Caribbean. Year 2024.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the survey "Consultation questionnaire on migrant women in LAC" of the World Women's Observatory.

Conclusions

From the data collected, it is possible to identify common patterns that cut across these experiences, as well as key differences that reflect the complexity of the migration phenomenon of women arriving in or moving from within Mexico. This analysis not only makes visible the reasons for their migration, but also highlights the most urgent needs to be addressed in order to guarantee their access to fundamental rights and promote their well-being during the migration process.

Among international women migrants, the main reasons for migration are limited access to basic rights (35.8%) and insecurity and armed conflict (34.6%). These reasons are influenced by factors such as age, ethnic descent, and who they travelled with during the journey. For example, young women more frequently report insecurity as a reason, while older women tend to mention lack of access to rights. Internal migrant women, on the other hand, are more likely to mention the presence of armed conflict along with insecurity (47.3%) and little or no access to basic rights (23.7%). This suggests that internal migrant women face particular problems related to the Mexican socio-political context.

Environmental factors play a limited role in the migration decisions of both international and internal women. 28.7% of international and 37% of internal women mentioned that these factors influenced their decision. Although environmental factors are not determinant in most cases, their relevance may increase in specific regions affected by natural disasters or environmental degradation.

The findings highlight the need for a differentiated approach in support and assistance policies for migrant women. For international women migrants, there is a need to strengthen shelters and transit services. For internal migrant women, it is crucial to address gender-based violence and improve access to basic rights in their communities of origin, which could reduce the need for migration due to insecurity. In addition, while environmental factors are not predominant, it is crucial to monitor their impact in the future as climate change progresses.

In short, understanding the dynamics and motivations of each group allows us to make visible the inequalities they face and to design more effective strategies to mitigate their vulnerability. Women's migration, whether internal or international, is deeply influenced by specific socio-economic and cultural contexts, which require comprehensive responses that are sensitive to regional and ethnic differences.

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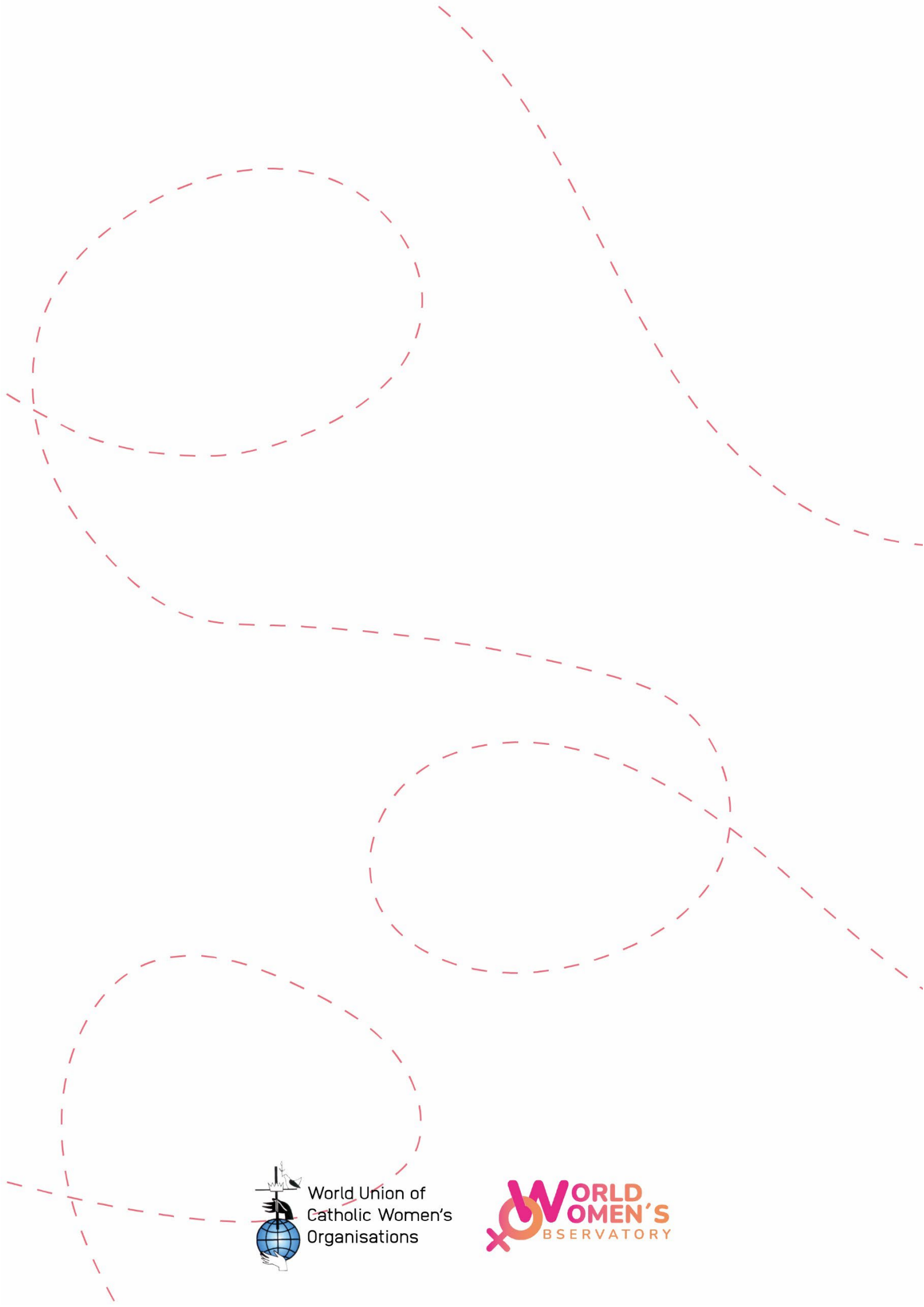
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