

Impact of COVID-19 on Venezuelan refugees and migrants

The outbreak of COVID-19 in South America has strongly affected the situation of refugees and migrants from Venezuela. Colombia and Peru reported their first confirmed coronavirus case on the same day, 6 March. Both countries adopted preventative measures shortly after. On 15 March, the government of Peru declared a state of emergency, closed its borders and imposed mandatory self-isolation for the entire population starting from the following day. Colombia sealed its border with Venezuela on 14 March, while other border crossings followed suit, and declared a mandatory country-wide quarantine starting 25 March. Humanitarian actors in the region have been working to adapt their activities to the current situation and the data collected through this survey aims to inform their work.

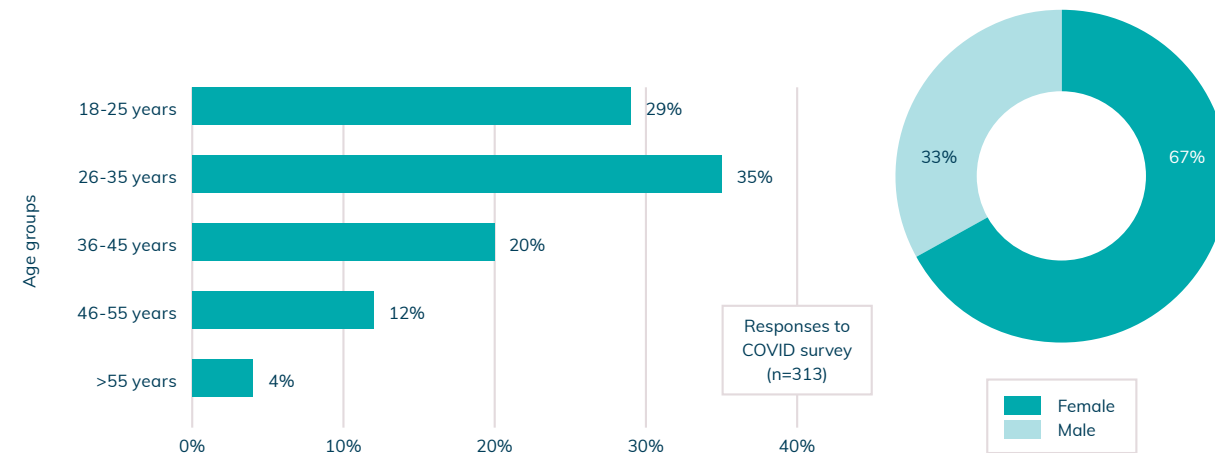
Recommendations

- Increase cash assistance to vulnerable refugees and migrants, to avoid negative coping mechanism due to loss of income.
- Create or strengthen programmes aimed at facilitating access to housing, either through cash assistance or other mechanisms.
- Minimise costs and barriers for sending money to family and friends in Venezuela by promoting the development and use of fast and low-cost remittance channels, including through new technologies such as mobile money transfers.

Profiles

This snapshot focuses on the impact that the current COVID-19 pandemic had on the journey and daily life of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Peru and Colombia. The analysis is based on 313 interviews conducted between 6 and 23 April 2020: 250 in Colombia and 63 in Peru. 67% of respondents were women and 33% men. The average age was 33.5 years old,

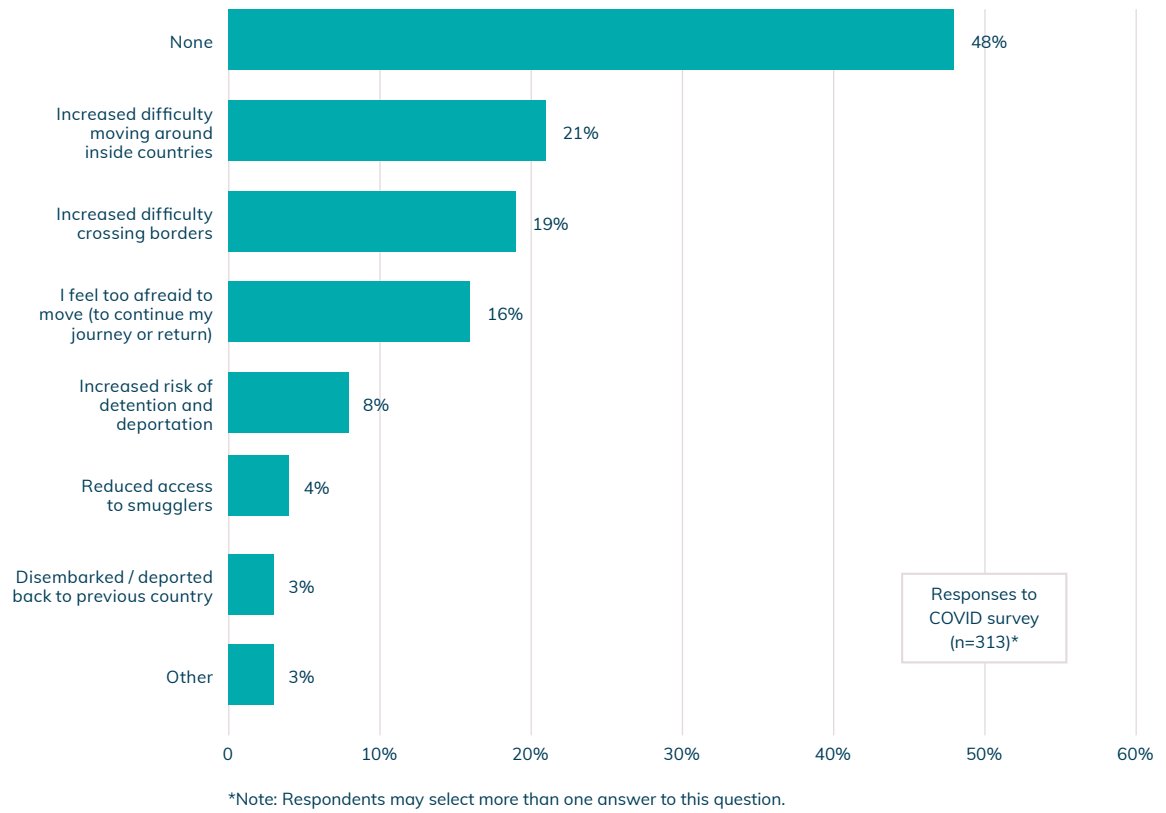
Figure 1. Age range and sex



The COVID-19 crisis did not have an impact on the journey of half of the respondents

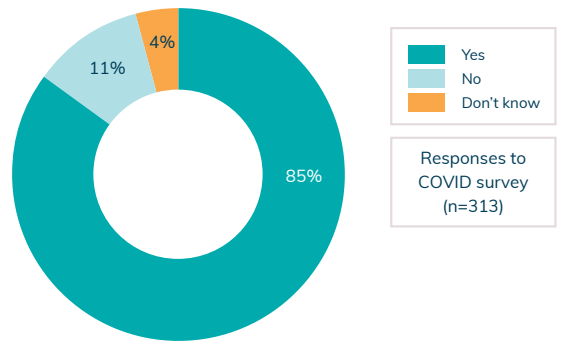
As Figure 2 shows, 48% of respondents reported that COVID-19 and the measures adopted in response to the pandemic did not have an impact on their migration journey. This trend is higher among respondents in Peru (57%) than in Colombia (46%).

Figure 2. What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on your migration journey?



At the same time, 21% of those interviewed indicated having faced increased difficulty moving around inside countries due to mandatory self-isolation and 19% found it more difficult to cross borders. Increased risk of detention and deportation was only indicated by 8% of interviewees. One reason for the relatively limited impact on migration journeys may be that most respondents (85%) interviewed in Colombia and Peru indicated having reached their final destination already. The impact of COVID-19 on the journey of refugees and migrants who are still on the move and in transit in Latin America is likely to be different. As the survey sample size grows, it might be possible for MMC to further explore the responses among those participants who have not reached their final destination yet.

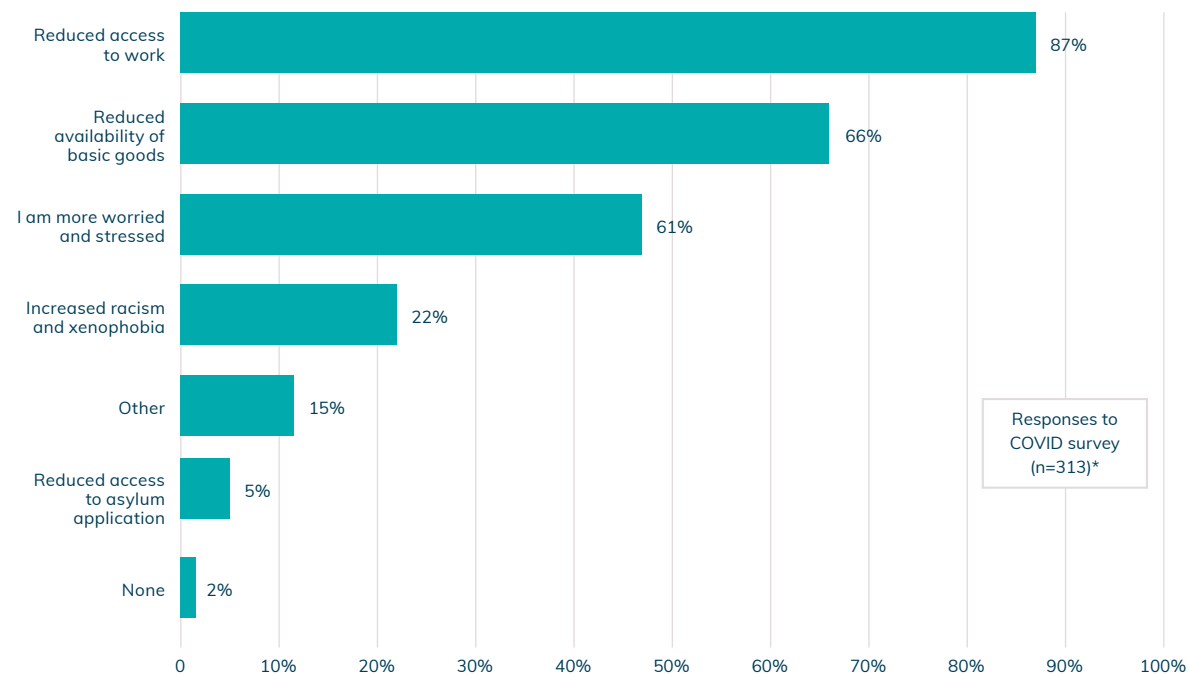
Figure 3. Have you reached the end of your journey?



87% of respondents reported reduced access to work due to the pandemic

87% of respondents indicated that COVID-19 and the measures adopted by national and local authorities to prevent the spread of the pandemic have reduced their access to work (see Figure 4). Most Venezuelans in both Colombia and Peru make a living as street sellers, construction workers or recycling garbage, all informal jobs. Staying at home in compliance with mandatory self-isolation implies losing their daily income. More than half of those interviewed also reported a reduced availability of basic goods as well as feeling more worried and stressed than usual (66% and 61% respectively). 22% of respondents also noticed an increase in racism and xenophobia since the COVID-19 outbreak started. Very few interviewees reported reduced access to asylum (5%).

Figure 4. What impact has the crisis had on your day-to-day life?

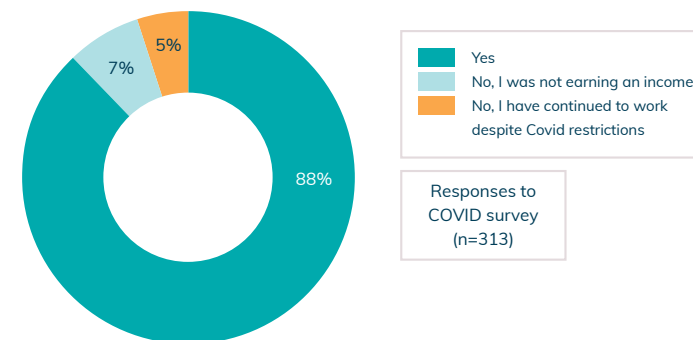


*Note: Respondents may select more than one answer to this question.

Most migrants and refugees are unable to afford basic goods due to loss of income

Most respondents (88%) reported having lost income due to the pandemic (see Figure 5), which relates to the loss of access to work mentioned above. Only 5% stated having continued to work despite COVID-19.

Figure 5. Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?



Responses to COVID survey (n=313)

This loss of income has had a dire impact on refugees and migrants: 86% of respondents indicated being now unable to afford basic goods – according to some 4Mi monitors, many respondents mentioned decreasing their daily meals from three to two – while 31% reported having lost their housing (see Figure 6). A 42-year-old woman interviewed in Lima, Peru, recounted: “We had a bad experience, due to lack of income we were evicted from the place where we were living, with a 17-month-old baby. We had to look for help to find a new place, we spent two days on the streets”. Additionally, even though they had not lost their housing at the time of the interview, 31 respondents stated not having been able to pay the rent and 15 could not pay their services bills. A 40-year-old man interviewed in Cúcuta, Colombia, stated: “I used to work as a street seller, I sell pastry, but I have not been able to work since self-isolation was imposed. My neighbours are helping me with food, but I am worried about the rent and my service bills”.

The mental health of refugees and migrants was also negatively impacted by the current situation, with 68% of respondents reporting increased concern and anxiety. Finally, 50% of those interviewed indicated not having been able to send remittances home – a trend that will affect those families in Venezuela who rely on remittances to be able to afford basic goods. Some estimates indicated remittances as the second biggest source of income in Venezuela in 2019, only second to oil¹.

Only 5% of respondents mentioned being unable to continue their journey due to the loss of income.

1 Moreno, J. (2019) Por miles, se multiplicó dependencia de los venezolanos a las remesas Voa Noticias. See also Ostos, E. (2019) Las remesas se han convertido en una tabla de salvación para millones de venezolanos Infobae

Figure 6. What impact has the loss of income had?

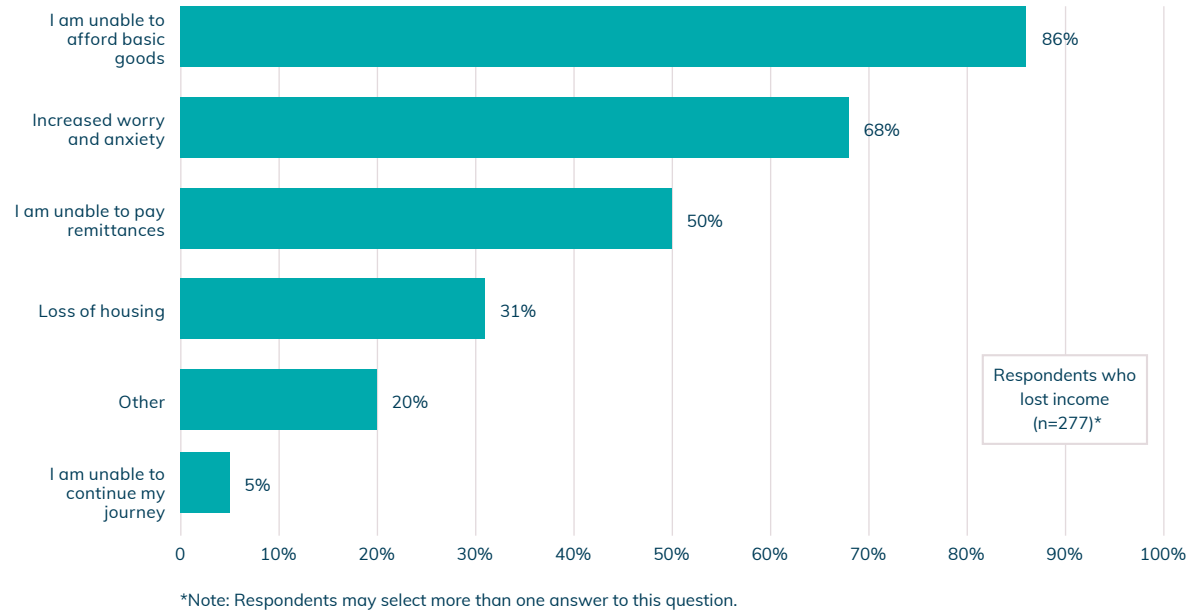
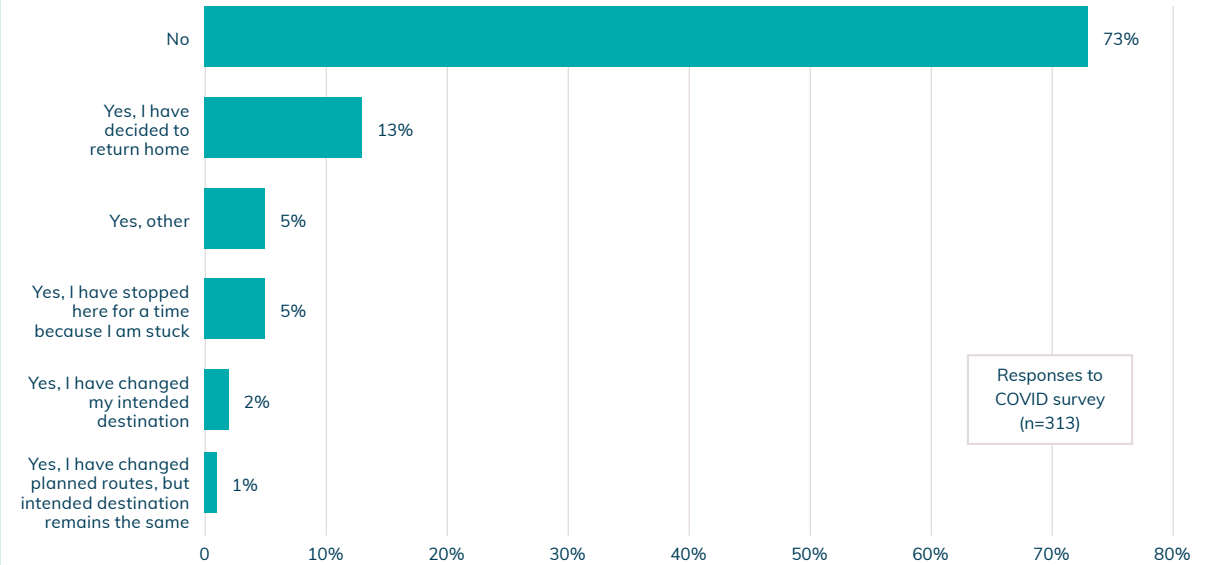
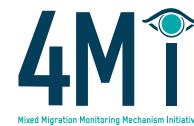


Figure 7. Have you changed your plans as a result of the coronavirus outbreak?



13% of respondents decided to return to Venezuela as a result of the coronavirus outbreak

While 73% of those interviewed for this survey reported not having changed their plans due to COVID-19, 13% had decided to return to Venezuela (see Figure 7). According to 4Mi monitors, several respondents stated that they had not decided to return yet, but if the mandatory self-isolation continues, they believe they will have no other option. 5% of respondents were stuck somewhere along their migration route, while only 2% stated having changed their intended final destination.



The [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative](#) (4Mi) is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements. Normally, the recruitment of respondents and interviews take place face-to-face. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face recruitment and data collection has been suspended in all countries.

MMC has responded to the COVID-19 crisis by changing the data it collects and the way it collects it. Respondents are recruited through a number of remote or third-party mechanisms; sampling is through a mixture of purposive and snowball approaches. A new survey focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants, and the surveys are administered by telephone, by the 4Mi monitors in West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, Asia and Latin America. Findings derived from the surveyed sample should not be used to make inferences about the total population of refugees and migrants, as the sample is not representative. The switch to remote recruitment and data collection results in additional potential bias and risks, which cannot be completely avoided. Further measures have been put in place to check and – to the extent possible – control for bias and to protect personal data. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi