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# MIGRATING FOR SURVIVAL: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN WOMEN FROM GUATEMALA, HONDURAS AND MEXICO

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*“Whether they stay, or are in transit, or have managed to reach their destination, women pay the price for holding a certain place in society. But they are always active political actors and agents of change.”*

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When we talk about migrant women, the first challenge is to render them visible, understand their motives, the risks they face, and their circumstances. If we wish to fully understand the situation that migrant women from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras confront, the first obstacle we need to face is the lack of gender-disaggregated data. However, through a systematic analysis of the factors which have led to a rise in migration in the region, we can identify several causes that go from socio-economic situations, and threats to security and physical integrity, to adverse climate conditions. All of these cases have something in common: the persons who decide to migrate endure living conditions in their place of origin that are too harsh for them to have sustainable access to adequate food.<sup>1</sup>

This article sets out to address the challenges faced by both migrant women, and women who choose to stay, and to show that these women are beacons of daily resistance, and in many cases, of organized resistance. The first objective is to discuss the structural causes that affect migrants overall, and in particular, those that negatively impact women. Second, the article analyzes the challenges faced by women who decide to stay, and how they cope in their lives when the family head migrates. Third, specific risks of transit and migration abroad are highlighted, including when the migrants finally settle down in their country of arrival. Lastly, the article demonstrates how migration has a harmful impact on women's food and nutrition in each stage and place, which limits their possibilities to enjoy diverse, healthy and sustainable diets.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). *Food Security and Emigration. Why people flee and the impact on family members left behind in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras*. Rome: WFP, 2017. Available in Spanish at: [es1.wfp.org/publicaciones/seguridad-alimentaria-y-emigracion-por-que-la-gente-huye-y-el-impacto-que-es-to-tiene](https://es1.wfp.org/publicaciones/seguridad-alimentaria-y-emigracion-por-que-la-gente-huye-y-el-impacto-que-es-to-tiene).

<sup>2</sup> Sassen, Saskia. *Contrageografías de la globalización. Género y ciudadanía en los circuitos transfronterizos*. Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2003. p. 62.

## THE FEMINIZATION OF MIGRATION

Mass media stigmatizes migrants, and yet silences the reasons why they have to migrate. The reality is that free trade agreements have destroyed local economies, and the structural adjustment programs and loans that were launched by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) in the 80s and 90s, negatively impacted state programs, especially those targeting women and children, and the political economy overall.<sup>2</sup> Added to this, extractive policies, expansion of monocultures that leads to the loss of crops that feed families, dispossession of land by multinationals and capital, and corporate concentration of land ownership, have all been harmful.<sup>3</sup> For example, in Guatemala, 92% of small-scale producers utilize 22% of land, whilst 2% of commercial producers use 57%.<sup>4</sup>

The causes of migration are closely linked to the prevailing socio-economic model, and to different forms of violence. In Guatemala, according to the Migrant Commission, 97.4% of migrants leave for the USA. They leave because there is neither state investment nor public policies in their home region that generate decent work. Additionally, the minimum wage does not cover the cost of a basic food basket.<sup>5</sup> In Honduras, land dispossession from peasant, indigenous and Garifuna communities results from of a food and agricultural legal and policy framework that facilitates the privatization of the commons for the extractive industry (mining, energy, and monocultures). This destroys agrifood systems such as small-scale family farming, forcing women and girls to live in poverty and exclusion.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the region is currently witnessing the feminization of both poverty and migration. Women in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala find themselves having to leave alone, or with their children. According to the 2017 Mexican Yearbook of Migration and Remittances, most foreigners at migrant detention centers are from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Although the data are not gender-disaggregated, given the feminization of migration, it is inferred that it includes women from Central America. Indeed, the yearbook confirms that there has been an increase in migrant Mexican women over the last ten years.<sup>7</sup>

In most statistics on migration, the specific motives and features of the female migrant population remain invisible. And yet there is no doubt that women see gender-based violence as one of the main reasons for migrating, along with the disabling socio-economic model. In Mexico, the National Survey on the Dynamics of Domestic Relations (Endireh) demonstrated that 43.9% of teenagers over 15 years of age and women have been victims of violence by their partners at some point of their current or past relationships.<sup>8</sup> In cases like these, fleeing is often the only option they have to protect their lives.<sup>9</sup>

In all three countries, daily cases of femicide, reports of gender-based violence, and intrafamily violence reflect patriarchal societies that women find themselves having to escape. As Marcela Lagarde says, patriarchy is historically a space of masculine power that becomes embedded in the most diverse of social formations,<sup>10</sup> where gender-based violence and corporate- and state-led structural violence clearly interact. Women therefore are constrained when it comes to producing, accessing means of production, and controlling food production.<sup>11</sup>

In reality, the situation described above is mirrored in the legal frameworks of some countries: Under criminal law, women are punished and denied their autonomy to control and decide over their bodies. This negatively affects women's sexual and re-

- 3 FAO. *Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the greatest inequality in the distribution of land*. Santiago de Chile, April 5, 2017. Available at: [www.fao.org/americas/noticias/ver/en/c/878998/](http://www.fao.org/americas/noticias/ver/en/c/878998/).
- 4 Guereña, Arantxa. *Desterrados: Tierra, poder y desigualdad en América Latina*. Oxfam, 2016. p. 29. Available in Spanish at: [209.177.156.169/libreria\\_cm/archivos/pdf\\_1485.pdf](https://209.177.156.169/libreria_cm/archivos/pdf_1485.pdf).
- 5 Bornschein, Dick. *Antecedentes: el caso de las migraciones en Guatemala, causas y cifras*. FLACSO, 2017. Available in Spanish at: [www.flacso.edu.gt/dialogo/?p=1826](http://www.flacso.edu.gt/dialogo/?p=1826).
- 6 Information from Sayda Tábora, territorial facilitator of FIAN Honduras, February 18 and March 7, 2019.
- 7 BBVA Bancomer Foundation, A.C. and National Population Secretariat. *Anuario de Migración y Remesas México*. Mexico: Fundación BBVA Bancomer, A.C. and SEGOB, 2018. Available in Spanish at: [www.bbvaresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809-AnuarioMigracionRemesas\\_2018.pdf](http://www.bbvaresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809-AnuarioMigracionRemesas_2018.pdf).
- 8 National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). *Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de Relaciones en los Hogares. Principales Resultados*. Mexico: INEGI, 2016. Available in Spanish at: [www.beta.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/endireh/2016/doc/endireh2016\\_presentacion\\_ejecutiva.pdf](http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/endireh/2016/doc/endireh2016_presentacion_ejecutiva.pdf).
- 9 According to the UNHCR, the North Triangle region and Mexico are the most violent regions for women: Most report that they have been victims of extortion, sexual harassment, and rape. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Mujeres en Fuga. Relatos de primera mano de refugiados que huyen de Guatemala, México, El Salvador y Honduras*. 2015. Available in Spanish at: [www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2016/10666.pdf](http://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2016/10666.pdf).
- 10 International Development Research Centre (IDRC). *Violencia contra las mujeres en contexto de migración*. 2016. p.13. Available in Spanish at: [idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/55953/IDL-55953.pdf](http://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/55953/IDL-55953.pdf).
- 11 Haiven, Max. "Silvia Federici, On capitalism, colonialism, women and food politics". *Politics and Culture*, November 3, 2009. Available at: [politicsandculture.org/2009/11/03/silvia-federici-on-capitalism-colonialism-women-and-food-politics/](http://politicsandculture.org/2009/11/03/silvia-federici-on-capitalism-colonialism-women-and-food-politics/); and Asakura, Hiroko. *Migración femenina centroamericana y violencia de género: pesadilla sin límites*. 2014. Available in Spanish at:



<sup>12</sup> In Guatemala, official data from the Food Security Secretariat (SES-AN) indicate chronic malnutrition in 46.5% of children aged between 0 and 5 years of age. Civil society calculates that the percentage stands at 60-70% in largely indigenous municipalities (Quiché, Totonicapán y Huehuetenango). See map of chronic malnutrition in each department, prepared by SES-AN. Available in Spanish at: [www.siinsan.gob.gt/siinsan/ensmi/#](http://www.siinsan.gob.gt/siinsan/ensmi/#).

<sup>13</sup> Córdova Montes, Denisse, and Flavio Luiz Schieck Valente. "Interdependent and Indivisible: The Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition and Women's Sexual and Reproductive Rights". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2014):32. Available at: [www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R\\_t\\_F\\_a\\_N\\_Watch\\_2014\\_eng.pdf](http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/files/R_t_F_a_N_Watch_2014_eng.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> These women, girls and teenagers stay behind and allow for the mother, head of the household, to migrate. For more information, please see: Asier, Vera. "Historias de las mujeres del éxodo centroamericano". *Revista La Cuerda Guatemala*, No 208, August-September, 2018. Available in Spanish at: [www.lacuerdaguatemala.org/archivo-pdf](http://www.lacuerdaguatemala.org/archivo-pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Information from Marcos Arana Cedeño. Email exchange on his "Reflections on migration and the right to food and nutrition", February 1, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> BBVA Bancomer Foundation, A.C. and National Population Secretariat. *Supra* note 7.

<sup>17</sup> Bornschein. *Supra* note 5.

<sup>18</sup> For more information, please see: Gutiérrez Escobar, Laura and German Vélez. "The Struggles for Peoples' Free Seeds in Latin America: Experiences from Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras and Guatemala". *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch* (2016): 78. Available at: [www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/watch-2016](http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/watch-2016).

<sup>19</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). *Expertos de la ONU piden a México contrarrestar la campaña de desprestigio y respaldar a los defensores de derechos humanos*. OHCHR, 2016. Available in Spanish at: [www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19784&LangID=S](http://www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19784&LangID=S).

productive health, as well as their nutritional wellbeing. Worth noting are the high levels of teenage pregnancies, bans on the contraceptive pill, and the criminalization of abortion. Often, girls and teenagers suffer from stunted growth as a result of undernutrition, and in turn, their babies also suffer the same effect.<sup>12</sup> And yet, ideas and practices that subjugate women usually place them in positions of responsibility for the social reproduction of work, which includes taking care of household chores, caring for and feeding their families and dependents.<sup>13</sup>

## THE FACE OF RURAL AND URBAN MIGRATION

When the subject of migration comes up, the role of women who are left behind – and usually bear the responsibility of providing and caring for their families – is habitually forgotten.<sup>14</sup> It is worth highlighting that for every man that migrates, there is at least one woman who assumes the work and social role of the migrant.<sup>15</sup> The women who stay behind have to guarantee their own food, as well as that of their daughters and sons. The migrant, it should be recalled, is in transit, and whilst the woman waits for the first remittance, she must maintain the family. Should the remittance not arrive and/or the migrant not contact them, the situation is even more precarious. According to the Mexican Yearbook of Migration and Remittances,<sup>16</sup> only about 5% of migrants send remittances to their families. What's more, many families take the risk of selling their land and become indebted in order to obtain the money that will enable them to migrate.<sup>17</sup> This is why those who stay behind are not able to continue growing their own food. The burden they carry is not only social and economic in nature; the women who are left behind also suffer from the emotional and psychological consequences from separation, and the uncertainty of knowing whether the departing relative will achieve his objectives.

On many occasions, the women who stay behind take up the struggle, and create movements to counteract the structural causes of migration.<sup>18</sup> They become agents of change and political actors vigorously defending food sovereignty, the human right to adequate food and nutrition, and other human rights. Though this aspect is positive, and their struggles are crucial, these women human rights defenders – from Mexico,<sup>19</sup> Honduras, and Guatemala<sup>20</sup> – face the difficulty of combining their struggles with traditional gender roles, as well as threats, attacks and other menaces for raising their voices. Women are also targets for gender-specific attacks, such as sexual violence and harassment. According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, in Honduras a total of 2,137 assaults against women defenders were reported between 2016 and 2017, including serious attacks against life and physical integrity, a large amount of smear campaigns, discrediting, and criminalization, as well as numerous threats and intimidating acts. The most attacked are women who defend land and the rights of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, women's rights defenders who accompany victims of domestic violence in complaints procedures and judicial processes in Honduras are regularly threatened with death and sexual violence.<sup>21</sup>

Statistical data is scarce, and they are not disaggregated, but it can be affirmed that internal migrants in Mexico,<sup>22</sup> Guatemala and Honduras mostly come from rural areas and live under the poverty line or in extreme poverty. They migrate with the hope of improving their living conditions, and they move to the cities with the most rapid economic growth.<sup>23</sup> Both men and women become *maquila* workers, farm workers, and service workers. If they don't get a job, the only other option for them to get by is to become underemployed in the informal economy.<sup>24</sup> In the case of rural, indigenous and peasant women, the large majority moves to the cities to take

on badly paid or non-remunerated jobs in care, thus maintaining the gender roles assigned to them.<sup>25</sup> Women migrating internally play an essential role in enabling urban women to access the labor market jointly with men, as they carry out the domestic work and care that would otherwise limit their employer's access to work.

## BODIES IN MOVEMENT

In this context, we are assisting not only a surge in migration and its feminization, but also emerging new forms of migrating from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. One of the most striking – and a turning point – is the migrant caravans from Central America to the USA. They started leaving Honduras in October 2018, and are an ongoing reality in 2019. One of the reasons why migrants decide to travel in groups is to potentially lower the dangers of organized crime, which beleaguered migrants travelling alone or in small groups.

Nevertheless, over the last few months there have been reports of missing migrants who were travelling in a caravan to the USA. In one case, according to the media, 22 persons travelling by bus disappeared.<sup>26</sup> In another similar case, 25 persons disappeared. There are no specific data on how many women disappeared. Nonetheless, Central American women who migrate face enormous risks on the road. They are frequently victims of theft, extortion, and because of their gender, sexual abuse. Six out of every ten women are raped, which is why some women take contraceptives weeks before they leave in order to avoid getting pregnant.<sup>27</sup>

On the journey north, women tend to assume the classic roles of care. They continue being mothers, they cook and look for food, as well as a place to sleep for them and their children.<sup>28</sup> Access to food and drinks is generally limited, and women usually eat less in order to put their children first. It is not only those who stay or are in transit that face insurmountable hurdles to guarantee their right to food and nutrition, and their other human rights. When they reach their destiny, some women take on the 'appropriate' gender roles and care jobs, whilst others find employment in agriculture or factories. Support networks for migrants, networks of relatives or 'fellow countrywomen' are just as important as getting a job. For instance, indigenous communities from Guatemala tend to move to 'neighborhoods' or cities where they know for sure that they will find members from their communities back home.<sup>29</sup> This is how different ethnic groups can come together in their new homes. This can be observed all the more so amongst indigenous communities than in non-indigenous ethnic groups, because when they arrive they often face the barrier of not speaking Spanish or English.

These networks are the first in helping women and men migrants to access food whilst they seek employment. The realization of the human rights, including the right to food and nutrition, of those who migrate without any support networks is much harder.

## 'TELL ME WHERE YOU MIGRATE TO, AND I'LL TELL YOU WHAT YOU EAT'

The migration phenomenon has numerous impacts on diets. When people migrate from rural to urban areas, the rapid pace of life and the cost of living in the city forces them to spend their income on ultra-processed, instant soups, canned food, fried food, ready-made meals, and soda. On their regular visits to their communities, they take with them these new consumption patterns, which are perceived to be a sign of success, leading thereby to a devaluing of local and traditional foods.

20 For more information, please see: "Tendencia devastadora de crímenes contra defensores de derechos humanos en Guatemala: 18 este año, indica organización WOLA". Available in Spanish at: [elperiodico.com.gt/nacion/2018/08/01/tendencia-devastadora-de-crimenes-contra-defensores-de-derechos-humanos-en-guatemala-18-este-año-indica-organizacion-wola/](http://elperiodico.com.gt/nacion/2018/08/01/tendencia-devastadora-de-crimenes-contra-defensores-de-derechos-humanos-en-guatemala-18-este-año-indica-organizacion-wola/).

21 UN Special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. *Visita a Honduras*. January 11, 2019. pp. 10-13. Available in Spanish at: [www.refworld.org/es/pdfid/5c63170d4.pdf](http://www.refworld.org/es/pdfid/5c63170d4.pdf).

22 According to the Yearbook of Migration and Remittances of Mexico: 5.2% of Mexicans who migrate to the USA – of which 3.2% are women – work in the primary sector (agriculture). 33.2% – 15.1% are women – work in the secondary sector (industry and manufacturing). The majority, 61.5% – of which 81.7% are women – work in the tertiary sector. See BBVA Bancomer Foundation, A.C. and National Population Secretariat. *Supra* Note 16.

23 In Honduras 48.7% are men and 51.3% are women, according to municipal and departmental population projections by the National Institute of Statistics (2014), and a study on internal displacement by the Interinstitutional Commission for the protection of persons displaced by violence.

24 Information from Sayda Tabora.\* *Supra* note 6.

25 Information from Anna Isern Sabrià.\* February 18 and March 7, 2019.

26 Urrutia, Alonso and Néstor Jiménez. "Ya van dos autobuses secuestrados como el de Tamaulipas: AMLO". *La Jornada*, May 13, 2019. Available in Spanish at: [www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/2019/03/12/se-indaga-caso-de-autobus-de-tamaulipas-con-eu-y-centroamerica-amlo-5261.html](http://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/2019/03/12/se-indaga-caso-de-autobus-de-tamaulipas-con-eu-y-centroamerica-amlo-5261.html).

27 Information from Anna Isern Sabrià.\* *Supra* note 25.

28 Information from Marcos Arana Cedeño.\* *Supra* note 15.

29 Information from Anna Isern Sabrià.\* *Supra* note 25.

30 Information from Anna Isern Sabrià.\* *Supra* note 25..

31 Mexican women who live in the United States of America are prone to developing cardiovascular disease, linked to several risk factors, such as: a high intake of saturated

fats, hypertension and diabetes, amongst others. This is due to the intake of energy-dense foods (concentrated sugars and fat). See Arenas-Monreal, Luz et al. "Cambios alimenticios en mujeres morelenses migrantes a Estados Unidos". *Salud Pública de México* v. 55 n. 1 (2013): 35-42. Available in Spanish at: [www.saludpublica.mx/index.php/spm/article/view/7186/9341](http://www.saludpublica.mx/index.php/spm/article/view/7186/9341).

32 Migrants need medical attention mainly for physical pain and queasiness, headaches, recurring migraine, stomach ache, intestinal discomfort, hypertension, vomiting, muscular pain, amenorrhea, ulcers, dermatitis, hair loss, chronic fatigue. Other food-related health problems are diabetes and obesity. See Ceja Fernández, et al. "Salud y enfermedad en los migrantes internacionales México-Estados Unidos". *Ra Ximhai*, 10. January-June 2014. Available in Spanish at: [redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=46129579013](http://redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=46129579013).

33 Domínguez, Ana Sofía, Eduardo Olmedo, and Mariano Rayo. "Migración y Remesas. Incidencia en las condiciones de vida en cuatro departamentos: San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango y Zacapa. Aproximación cuantitativa y cualitativa de la incidencia del uso de remesas familiares en los hogares receptores". *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, ASIES, Iniciativa Think Thank*, Guatemala (2018). Available in Spanish at: [s3.amazonaws.com/asies-books/books/2018\\_%20Migracion\\_y\\_Remesas.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/asies-books/books/2018_%20Migracion_y_Remesas.pdf); and Canales Cerón and I. Alejandro. "Remesas y desarrollo en América Latina: Una relación en busca de teoría". *Revista electrónica Migración y Desarrollo* 1 (2018): 5-30. Available in Spanish at: [http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1870-75992008000200001&lng=es&tlng=es](http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1870-75992008000200001&lng=es&tlng=es).

34 According to the 2018 Global Hunger Index, which measures hunger and undernutrition, Honduras is in position 59 and Guatemala in position 70 out of 119 countries. Available at: [www.globalhungerindex.org/results/](http://www.globalhungerindex.org/results/).

35 See Global Hunger Index. *The inequalities of hunger*. International Food Policy Research Institute, Concern Worldwide, Welthungerhilfe. Washington, DC / Dublin / Bonn, 2017. Available at: [www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2017.pdf](http://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2017.pdf).

36 See Reyes Pedraza, María Eugenia, Janet García González and María Téllez Castilla. "Impacto de la publicidad en los hábitos alimenticios en los niños". *Revista Española de Comunicación en Salud*, Vol. 9 2 (2018): 116-126. Available

Those who migrate to large highly populated cities in North America become fully immersed in a new food context, where it is more common to frequent fast food establishments,<sup>30</sup> to eat only one meal a day, and to buy low-cost food items in order to be able to send monthly remittances back home. Several studies affirm that migrants' health deteriorates due to ultra-processed foods that are high in sugar and chemical additives. The most common health problems amongst migrants who have settled in the USA are cardiovascular disease,<sup>31</sup> diabetes, and obesity.<sup>32</sup>

The impact of migration on dietary patterns can be felt at the individual and family level. Some studies point out that remittances improve the standard of living of some families back in the home country,<sup>33</sup> but many other families stop working the land and growing their own food once they have enough purchasing power to buy foods considered a sign of 'prestige'. Thus, they go from suffering from hunger<sup>34</sup> to suffering from malnutrition,<sup>35</sup> as they increasingly consume ultra-processed foods, such as fortified cereals with vitamins and iron, but high in sugar. In this context, what seems to matter is the quantity, and the advertised added vitamins.

With higher incomes, families are increasingly exposed to services and technology; and the more technology there is, the more they are bombarded by the media.<sup>36</sup> According to several authors, this aspect is directly linked to eating habits,<sup>37</sup> especially amongst children, due to their daily exposure to advertising.

In this complex process that includes a higher purchasing power, the so-called 'palate-hijacking',<sup>38</sup> its repercussions,<sup>39</sup> and the bombardment with advertisements,<sup>40</sup> diet is more closely linked to the advertising industry,<sup>41</sup> and to free trade agreements,<sup>42</sup> than to the nutritional value of food. Adequate food and nutrition stop being a human right, and simply become a mere meaningless act of eating the advertised food.

Nevertheless, there are also acts of resistance to preserve the 'flavors from home' at the place of destination, despite the fact that migrants, be it in their own countries or abroad, change their eating habits in accordance to their income and support networks, and despite the fact that their new environment pushes them to eat industrially produced food. In many cases, migrant women abroad are nostalgic for their own food, from their land, and they are the ones who try to replicate them.<sup>43</sup> Both men and women who live in a foreign country agree that what they miss the most, after their families, is their traditional food. After all, food is a fundamental part of identity.

Regarding the impacts on families, several organizational initiatives are raising awareness and warning about the effects of a poor diet, and reclaiming the right to adequate food and nutrition.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, in the homes of families with migrant members – in their private sphere and everyday lives – women are generally the ones who are at the front line of all efforts towards good nutrition and food, and they are the ones resisting.

## WE MIGRATE IN SPECIFIC CONDITIONS; WE MIGRATE AS WOMEN

Many women migrate in order to be able to guarantee their right to a life free of violence, to realize the right to food and nutrition for themselves and their families. Women migrants want to be recognized as such (women who migrate),<sup>45</sup> seeking to achieve the rights that the neoliberal system denies them, and that states do not

protect. Migration is a way of resisting the multiple forms of violence that they are subjected to in their countries of origin.

Whether they stay, or are in transit, or have managed to reach their destination, women pay the price for holding a certain place in society. But they are always active political actors and agents of change. There is evidence of the different forms of resistance of Central American and Mexican women: they reorganize the household economic structure after the migration of a family head; they find ways to survive the dangerous journey to the USA, and the gender-based violence that torments them throughout.

Migration is, and has always been, a historical element of change in dietary patterns, which influences both the places of origin and of destination. Food is still linked to women's health and to their very identity. More statistical data and studies are necessary to analyze the specific conditions of women migrants: data need to be gathered and studied so as to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon overall. To this end, an exhaustive analysis must take into account the links between women's human rights, food sovereignty, the right to food and nutrition, and migration in the context of globalization, and must use a gender lens that allows for an intersectional and structural study of this issue.

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- 37 Menéndez García, R. A. and F. J. Franco Díez. "Publicidad y alimentación: influencia de los anuncios gráficos en las pautas alimentarias de infancia y adolescencia". *Nutrición Hospitalaria*, Vol.24 3, Madrid, May-June 2009. Available in Spanish at: [scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0212-16112009000300009](http://scielo.isciii.es/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0212-16112009000300009).
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### IN BRIEF

This article sets out to render visible the reality of a growing female population who migrates from Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico to the USA, and the relation between the feminization of migration, and the violation of the human right to adequate food and nutrition. It analyzes the specific conditions in which women migrate, and why. For women, gender-based violence is another fundamental reason to migrate, as well as the socio-economic model and structural violence. In this context, it is an uphill battle for women to access land and control food production. If the man migrates and the woman stays behind, she must guarantee food for herself and the family, in addition to assuming his social and family roles, and suffer the emotional and psychological impacts. If, on the contrary, the woman decides to migrate, she faces theft, extortion and sexual abuse on the road. Six out of every ten women who migrate are raped. Despite all these risks, women frequently assume the classic roles of care on the journey north; they fulfill their roles as mothers, cook, and seek food and a place to sleep with the children. Whether they stay or migrate, women are the first to feel the consequences of their rights being violated, including their right to food and nutrition. For this reason, it is often women who, in their private sphere and daily lives, are on the frontline of all efforts and acts of resistance for good food and nutrition.



### KEY CONCEPTS

- The feminization of migration is related to both the socio-economic model and gender-based violence.
- The human right to adequate food and nutrition is affected by an increase in purchasing power in the homes of migrant families, and the bombardment with advertisements.
- Migration is a historical element of dietary change.
- Migration, food and nutrition are part of human rights.
- Women's resistance for a right to migrate and to feed themselves.



### KEY WORDS

- Migration
- Women
- Food
- Migrant caravans
- Honduras
- Guatemala
- Mexico
- USA