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5 February 2020

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Mexico: Situation of single women and of women who head their own households without male support, including access to employment, housing and support services, particularly in Mexico City and Mérida (Yucatán) (2017-October 2019)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

A 2017 housing survey by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI) [1] indicates that in Mexico, 28.5 percent of surveyed houses are headed by women; in Mexico City, the percentage is 37.8 and in Yucatán, 30.8 (Mexico 28 May 2018, 9, 11). According to the Mexico City Statistical Yearbook for 2017, citing data from a 2015 survey, women in Mexico City identified as either single (34.91 percent), separated (6.81 percent), divorced (3.39 percent), or widowed (8.4 percent) (Mexico 2017a, Table 3.3).

According to the 2019 Rules of Operation for the Comprehensive Assistance Program for Single Mothers in Mexico City (*Reglas de Operación del Programa Apoyo Integral a Madres Solas Residentes de la Ciudad de México*), low-income single mothers with children under 15 years of age [translation] "face limited access and enjoyment of the right to food, as well as economic, social and cultural rights" due to, among others, the "vulnerable income status in which they find themselves, the discrimination they have suffered in different sectors such as social, labour and family, unequal access to employment opportunities, as well as low-paid jobs" (Mexico City [2019]a, Sec. III.2).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor specializing in research on violence against women with the Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research housed at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM) stated that

[translation]

[w]omen who leave abusive partners face numerous difficulties in obtaining employment, since they usually have fewer resources than women who have not suffered a situation of partner violence. The support that women can receive in [Mérida, Cancún and La Paz] is not different from that of other cities in the Mexican Republic. There are no public services to promote the employment of women seeking to leave a violent relationship. (Professor 18 Sept. 2019)

A study on the impact of intimate partner violence on employment for low income women in Mexico City, based on a sample of 947 women between 18 and 44 years old who experienced sexual or physical violence within the last year, indicates that "[o]ne in four women reported either having to change jobs, miss work or school, or losing their job due to the abuse they were experiencing" (Gupta, et al. 7 Mar. 2018, 605-608). A press release by INEGI, citing information from the 2016 National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares, ENDIREH) [2], provides the following statistics on the [translation] "severity of physical harm due to intimate violence" [3]:

	Prevalence of intimate violence	No harm	Moderate	Severe or very severe
Total	43.9	79.3	8.4	9.6
Married or common-law	41.8	81.2	7.4	7.3
Separated, divorced or widowed	59.4	67.4	14.1	18.5
Single	35.1	92.9	2.4	3.2

(Mexico 22 Nov. 2018, 8)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Employment

According to INEGI statistics on employment for the second quarter of 2019, of the close to 10 million female heads of households in Mexico, about 5.23 million are employed (Mexico 14 Aug. 2019). According to the Mexico City 2017 Statistical Yearbook, citing INEGI statistics, in June 2017 there were 107,531 unemployed [translation] "economically active" [4] women in Mexico City out of a total of 212,968 economically active unemployed persons (Mexico 2017a, Table 10.3).

The UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for Mexico states that, according to UN Women, the gender wage gap in Mexico is between 15 and 20 percent (UN 3 Sept. 2018, para. 51). The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) indicates that the gender pay gap was 5.8 percent in 2017 (UN 25 July 2018, para. 39). The World Bank's *Gender Assessment* report for Mexico indicates that in 2016, the male-female wage gap in Mexico was 9.6 percent (World Bank 2019, 45).

According to INEGI statistics on employment for the second quarter of 2019, 7.05 million persons who are heads of households work in the informal sector, of which 1.677 million are women (Mexico 14 Aug. 2019). The UPR for Mexico indicates that, according to UN Women, 99 percent of female domestic workers are employed informally (UN 3 Sept. 2018, para. 50). Sources indicate that domestic workers often lack access to health benefits (Mexico n.d.a, 28; UN 25 July 2018, para. 39) and have reported poor working conditions (Mexico n.d.a, 31). The CEDAW report indicates that women domestic workers "on average, earn less than half the minimum wage [5], [and] are unable to gain access to social security or health benefits and are not covered by the legal protections provided under the [Federal Labour] Act" (UN 25 July 2018, para. 39).

Sources indicate that household labour is a barrier for women's employment (OECD 7 Dec. 2018, 8; World Bank 2019, 39), or forces them into low-income, part-time and informal employment (UN 25 July 2018, para. 39).

2.1 Discrimination

According to the UPR for Mexico, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stated that women face "difficulties and discriminatory practices ... when attempting to enter the labour market" (UN 3 Sept. 2018, para. 50). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018* for Mexico similarly states that women are "more likely to experience discrimination in wages, working hours, and benefits" (US 13 Mar. 2019, 26). Sources report that some women were required to take pregnancy tests before being hired (UN 3 Sept. 2018, para. 50; Council on Hemispheric Affairs 19 June 2017, 4).

US *Country Reports 2018* indicates that the government did not "effectively enforce the law or regulations" on employment discrimination (US 13 Mar. 2019, 34). According to a shadow report on employment discrimination against women presented to the CEDAW by the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, CIDE), a think-tank based in Mexico that undertakes research on public administration, economics, law and policy (CIDE n.d.), the Federal Labour Law provides that a company can be fined for up to US\$20,000 for discrimination or sexual harassment (Art. 994) or for discrimination based on pregnancy (Art. 995) (CIDE June 2018, 6). The same source indicates that employment discrimination is "rarely actually punished," and that between 2013 and 2017 no employers were fined for employment discrimination or harassment, while 16 companies were fined for violating "women's and children's rights" (CIDE June 2018, 6). US *Country Reports 2018* states the government penalties for workplace discrimination were insufficient to deter future violations (US 13 Mar. 2019, 35).

2.2 Family Responsibilities

The World Bank indicates that the reliability of childcare in Mexico has an impact on female labour force participation given the "lack of trust in childcare services" (World Bank 2019, 40). The website of the Secretariat of Social Welfare (Secretaría de Bienestar) indicates that the government provides financial subsidies through the Child Care Program to Support Working Mothers (Programa de Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras) to cover the cost of daycare with a certified provider or centre, in an effort to support mothers and single parents seeking employment or schooling (Mexico 30 Nov. 2015). The program provides a subsidy of 900 Mexican pesos (MXN) [C\$62.80] per month for each child aged 1 year to 3 years and 11 months, and 1,800 MXN [C\$125.50] per month for each child with a medically certified disability aged 1 year to 5 years and 11 months (Mexico 30 Nov. 2015). The World Bank, based on a government evaluation of the program in 2015, indicates that "[b]ecause of this program, childcare availability doubled between 2007 and 2010" (World Bank 2019, 41). The website of the Secretariat of Social Welfare indicates that as of December 2018, there were 9,566 childcare centres operating under the program and 313,550 beneficiaries (Mexico 30 Nov. 2015). The same source indicates that out of the 9,566 childcare centres, 504 operate in Mexico City and 211 in Yucatán (Mexico Dec. 2018), 109 of which are located in Mérida (Mexico n.d.b, 194-195).

In a report on the work-life balance of parents in Mexico, the Information Group on Reproductive Choice (Grupo de Información en Reproducción Elegida, GIRE), a Mexican NGO that advocates for and researches issues related to reproductive rights (GIRE n.d.), notes that

the majority of laborers in Mexico do not have access to the services provided by [childcare] agencies, as they are employed in the informal economy and must find alternative childcare options, which often requires investing significant time and money, particularly for women. (GIRE Aug. 2019, 30)

However, the Rules of Operation for the Childcare Program to Support Working Mothers (*Reglas de Operación del Programa de Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras*) states that its target population includes those employed in the informal and formal sectors, particularly single parents who are unemployed or do not have access to social security or childcare services through their employer (Mexico 2017b, Sec. 1). Information on the implementation of the Rules of Operation for the Childcare Program to Support Working Mothers could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.3 Employment Services and Programs

2.3.1 Mexico City

The government of Mexico City, through its program Promotion of Decent Work (Fomento al Trabajo Digno), provides residents over 16 years of age with economic support, job training, temporary employment placements, and assistance with self-employment projects (Mexico City n.d.a). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.3.2 Yucatán

The website of the government of Yucatán indicates that the Services for the Inclusion of Women in the Workplace (Servicios para la Inclusión de las Mujeres al Ámbito Laboral) is a free service that supports women in obtaining employment through a job bank with participating public and private organizations; accessing training, accompaniment and support to integrate into the workplace; and advice on self-employment (Yucatán 24 Sept. 2019). To apply, women must be over 18 years of age, have an official ID such as a voter's card or Unique Population Registry Code (Clave Única de Registro de Población, CURP), and fill out a form (Yucatán 24 Sept. 2019). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The website of the government of Yucatán also provides information on a line of credit to support low income families who lack the capital to start a small business (Yucatán 19 Apr. 2018). The requirements for applying for this program include a voter's card, CURP, proof of address, and an economic feasibility study (Yucatán 19 Apr. 2018). According to the program's webpage, applicants could be refused based on their economic situation, the feasibility of the

activity, or the availability of resources to grant the credit (Yucatán 19 Apr. 2018). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Housing

Information on the ability of women who head their own households to obtain housing could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the 2017 National Household Study, of those women whose household is under their name, in Mexico City 50.5 percent own their house and 41.4 percent rent, while in Yucatán, 69.1 percent own their house and 26.1 percent rent (Mexico 28 May 2018, Table 1.4).

4. Support Services

4.1 National Programs

An Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) report indicates that, according to the Secretariat for Social Development (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, SEDESOL), Prospera is a government-run conditional cash transfer program for low income families to "better develop their capacity in terms of access to food, healthcare and education" (IDB Apr. 2016, 7). The SEDESOL website indicates that the maximum monthly benefit amount under Prospera for the first half of 2017 was 1,825 MXN [C\$127.60] for families with children in elementary or secondary school, and 2,945 MXN [C\$205.90] for families with children in elementary, secondary or post-secondary education (Mexico 31 Mar. 2017). The website of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) indicates that in 2018, there were approximately 6.5 million households enrolled in the program (UN n.d.).

Sources report that the program was phased out [in January 2019 (*La Jornada* 30 Jan. 2019)] and replaced with a scholarship program called Benito Juárez Scholarships (*Americas Quarterly* 26 Feb. 2019; *La Jornada* 30 Jan. 2019). A government website indicates that Benito Juárez Scholarships consist of a monthly payment of 800 MXN [C\$54] per month to low income families with children under the age of 18 (Mexico 5 Apr. 2019).

4.2 Mexico City

The website of the System for Integral Family Development (Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, DIF) of Mexico City indicates that the Integral Support Program for Single Mother Residents of Mexico City (Programa Apoyo Integral a Madres Solas Residentes de la Ciudad de México) provides food, medical, psychological, and legal assistance, as well

as recreational and cultural care services for single mothers or their children under 15 years old (Mexico City n.d.b). The same source indicates that applicants must provide an official ID, proof of residency, the mother's birth certificate and CURP, a document proving single status (such as a record of divorce, or proof of non-existence in the marriage registry), completed application form, and the birth certificate and CURP of the child (Mexico City n.d.b). According to the 2019 Rules of Operation for the Comprehensive Assistance Program for Single Mothers in Mexico City, applications were to be submitted during the pre-registration period in March 2019; once the number of applications reaches the limit for the fiscal year, additional applications are added to a wait list (Mexico City [2019]a, Sec. VII). The DIF website indicates that in 2018, there were 2,387 beneficiaries who each received 292.16 MXN [C\$20.40] per month (Mexico City n.d.c). The 2019 Rules of Operation for the Comprehensive Assistance Program for Single Mothers in Mexico City indicates that it seeks to [translation] "support up to 2,387 [low income] single mothers residing in Mexico City" (Mexico City [2019]a, Sec. III.3). The same source indicates, however, that there are 188,320 single mothers with children under 15 years old that fit the program target (Mexico City [2019]a, Sec. III.3). According to an internal evaluation of the program conducted in 2016, the program reached 0.91 percent of the target population in 2016 (Mexico City 2017a, 32). The same source indicates that 80.5 percent of beneficiaries responded that the amount of support is [translation] "insufficient," with 10 percent indicating that the acceptance in stores of the electronic assistance card is "limited" (Mexico City 2017a, 38).

Mexico City's Safe Baby Program (Programa Bebé Seguro CDMX) is a cash transfer program to assist with nutrition for children aged 0 to 12 months (Mexico City n.d.d). The DIF website indicates that eligibility requirements for the program include: birth certificate and CURP of the child, proof of residency in Mexico City for no less than three months at the time of application and official photograph ID and CURP of the parent or guardian, telephone number and email address (Mexico City n.d.e). The 2019 Rules of Operation for the Safe Baby Program (*Reglas de Operación del Programa Bebé Seguro*) indicate that only those who were already enrolled in the program for the previous year would have access to the benefit in 2019 (Mexico City [2019]b, 9). According to the DIF, there were 9,303 beneficiaries in 2018, each receiving 400 MXN [C\$27.90] per month via an electronic card to purchase food (Mexico City n.d.d). According to an internal evaluation of the program conducted in 2016, [translation] "one of the recurring criticisms of the program is the amount of requirements to have access to it"; however, 99 percent of respondents said they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the program (Mexico City 2017b, 97-98).

The Food Delivery Program (Food Support) to Populations in Vulnerable Conditions (Programa de Entrega de Despensas (Apoyos Alimentarios) a Población en Condiciones de Vulnerabilidad) provides access to food for persons living in poverty or without access to food (Mexico City n.d.f). According to an internal evaluation of the program conducted in 2016,

various subprograms include a special program for children up to six years of age with malnutrition, and a program for vulnerable families who can apply by providing a brief description of their socio-economic situation (Mexico City 2017c, 32). Both programs require the presentation of, among other documents, a government-issued ID, a copy of the CURP, and proof of address (Mexico City 2017c, 32). The DIF website indicates that there were 16,010 beneficiaries in 2018 (Mexico City n.d.g). According to the internal evaluation of the program, 82.2 percent of recipients were women (Mexico City 2017c, 16).

4.3 Mérida, Yucatán

The website of the government of Yucatán indicates that the Specialized State Services for Violence Against Women (Servicios Especializados de Atención a la Violencia contra las Mujeres en el Estado) provides free and confidential social, psychological and legal services as well as support groups and access to social workers to women who have experienced gender-based violence (Yucatán 1 Oct. 2019). Women over 18 who have official ID or a CURP, if not in possession of other identification documents, can request services directly from any Municipal Centres for Violence Against Women (Centros Municipales de Atención a la Violencia contra las Mujeres, CMAVM) in the state of Yucatán (Yucatán 1 Oct. 2019). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Municipal Women's Institute (Instituto Municipal de la Mujer) of Mérida offers support groups on self-esteem, gender violence and legal issues, as well as support to find work and access to a psychologist (Mérida n.d.). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI) is an autonomous public body responsible for capturing and disseminating statistical information about Mexico, including resources, population and economy (Mexico n.d.c).

[2] The survey included women aged 15 and over, from 142,363 households (Mexico 18 Aug. 2017, 2-5).


[3] INEGI provides the following definitions: [translation] "moderate" includes "women who experienced sporadic violence who reported moderate physical and/or emotional damage (bruising, bleeding or vaginal burning, loss or increased appetite)"; "severe" includes "women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence occasionally, with severe physical and/or emotional damage (cuts, burns or loss of teeth, hemorrhaging or bleeding nervous problems, distress or fear, sadness, affliction or depression and insomnia)"; and "very severe" includes "those who reported being victims of violence repeatedly, with physical and emotional damage that threaten their physical integrity, such as fractures, abortions or premature births, some sexually transmitted disease[s], loss of motor skills, suicidal thoughts and attempting suicide" (Mexico 22 Nov. 2018, 9).

[4] "[E]conomically active" is defined as "[i]ndividuals aged 15 and above who had some connection to economic activity or who sought it in the week of reference, whether they were employed or unemployed" (Mexico 2017a, 502).


[5] According to the US Social Security Administration's report *Social Security Programs Throughout the World*, the daily minimum wage in Mexico was 88.36 Mexican pesos (MXN) [C\$6.15] as of December 2017 (US Mar. 2018, 1).


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Oral sources: Mérida – Instituto de la Mujer; Mexico City – Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia; Red Nacional de Refugios; Yucatán – Departamento de Vinculación de la Dirección de Autonomía y Empoderamiento de las Mujeres, Instituto para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en Yucatán.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Data Cívica; Human Rights Watch; Mexico – Comisión Nacional para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia Contra las Mujeres, Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres; *Mexico News Daily*; Open Society Foundations; UN – Refworld, Women; *The Yucatan Times*.

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