

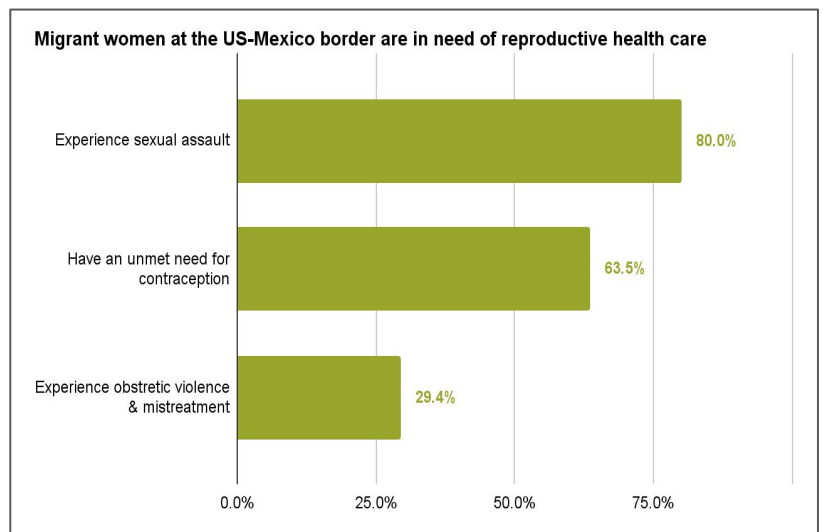
Migrant Women's Access to Sexual & Reproductive Health Care

Overview

Migrant women, including refugees, asylum seekers, and those with precarious status, face significant barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health care.^{1,2,3}

The Southern US Border

At the Mexico-U.S. border, our research indicates that **migrant women face high levels of sexual violence³ and reproductive injustice⁴**, including obstetric violence and mistreatment (29.4%),⁵ and have severe unmet needs for contraception (63.5%).⁵ According to a study by Amnesty International, up to 80% of women and girls traveling through Central America and Mexico experience **sexual assault**.⁶ They also confront **verbal and physical harassment** from Customs and Border Protection officials, as detailed in our study⁴ and a quote below.



“They grabbed me very hard, from the neck. And he threw me against the floor, against the ground ... I put up my hands so as not to fall on my stomach. He saw that I was pregnant ... [At the detention facility], I requested [medical] assistance because I said one of their men had beaten me, I needed a doctor to check me because I was in a lot of pain. Then they told me that I was causing drama and that I just wanted my son to be born [in the U.S.] ... they didn't take me to a doctor ... they didn't believe me.” - migrant from El Salvador, age 28

ICE Detention

There have been reports of violence against women, including those who are pregnant, in custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the form of **nonconsensual, medically unnecessary gynecological procedures and sexual abuse**.⁷ There is also growing evidence of **medical neglect**, for example, inadequate care during and after miscarriage, lack of prenatal care, and lack of attention from staff during health emergencies, including while they were experiencing severe bleeding and pain.^{8,9} Trauma from detention and mistreatment coupled with inadequate medical care for pregnant women exacerbates health risks, including increased risk for miscarriages and life-threatening conditions.⁷

Inside the U.S.

Migrant women face **multiple and complex barriers** to obtaining sexual and reproductive health care, including perinatal care. These obstacles are a result of state health insurance policies, structural racism and xenophobia, inadequate interpretation services, high cost of services, lack of healthcare navigation support, and loss of bodily autonomy.^{4,10} Access to sexual and reproductive health has been further diminished due to the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, particularly for migrant women.¹¹ As of June 2024, it is estimated that **at least 1.9 million undocumented women live in a state either with an abortion ban or abortion restriction**.¹² The *Dobbs* decision has forced obstetric units to close, creating **more maternity care deserts**, which are counties that lack maternity care resources.¹³ This is especially challenging for **migrant women, who often lack access to reliable transportation**. Additionally, the criminalization of abortion and immigration has made migrants extremely vulnerable to arrest and deportation.¹³

Spotlight on Texas

In 2024, more than 28,000 Texans traveled out-of-state to access abortion care. This option is largely inaccessible for migrants because of CBP checkpoints. For example, a person traveling from Laredo, TX to the closest abortion clinic in Las Cruces, NM would have to cross at least 6 CBP checkpoints.¹⁴

References

1. Velarde M, Hassan A. Integrating Reproductive Justice in Public Health Practice, Research, and Advocacy: An Imperative to Advance Health Equity. *Am J Public Health*. 2025;115(7):1003-1007. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2025.308060
2. Stirling-Cameron E, Almukhaini S, Dol J, et al. Access and use of sexual and reproductive health services among asylum-seeking and refugee women in high-income countries: A scoping review. *PLoS One*. 2024;19(11):e0312746. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0312746
3. Messing AJ, Fabi RE, Rosen JD. Reproductive Injustice at the US Border. *Am J Public Health*. 2020;110(3):339-344. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2019.305466
4. Ramage K, Stirling-Cameron E, Ramos NE, et al. "When you leave your country, this is what you're in for": experiences of structural, legal, and gender-based violence among asylum-seeking women at the Mexico-U.S. border. *BMC Public Health*. 2023;23(1):1699. doi:10.1186/s12889-023-16538-2
5. Ramage K, Stirling-Cameron E, Ramos N, SanRoman IM, Spata A, Goldenberg S. "In the end ... I got pregnant. And that wasn't what the plans were": Threats to reproductive health and rights for migrant women intending to seek safety in the U.S. *SSM - Qual Res Health*. 2025;7:100553. doi:10.1016/j.ssmqr.2025.100553
6. Parish A. Gender-Based Violence against Women: Both Cause for Migration and Risk along the Journey. *migrationpolicy.org*. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/gender-based-violence-against-women-both-cause-migration-and-risk-along-journey>
7. Preventing Violations of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Immigration Detention. <https://www.apha.org/policy-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-briefs/policy-database/2022/01/07/preventing-violations-of-sexual-and-reproductive-health-rights-in-immigration-detention>
8. Vásquez T. CBP subjects migrants to grave reproductive injustices. *Prism*. June 6, 2023. <https://prismreports.org/2023/06/06/customs-border-protection-grave-reproductive-injustices/>
9. Butera E, Obser K. *Prison for Survivors: The Detention of Women Seeking Asylum in the United States*. Women's Refugee Commission; 2017. <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Prison-for-Survivors-REPORT-FINAL.pdf>
10. Desai S, Samari G. COVID-19 and Immigrants' Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in the United States. *Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 2020;52(2):69-73.
11. Velarde MK. *Mind the (Widening) Gap: A Multi-Method Study of the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Dobbs Decision on Abortion Access*. Ph.D. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; 2025. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/mind-widening-gap-multi-method-study-impact-covid/docview/3205837811/se-2>
12. Arvallo L, Liu H, Setty S, Pandey P. *Deepening the Divide: Abortion Bans Further Harm Immigrant Communities*. National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice, The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP); 2023. https://www.latinainstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Deepening-the-Divide_Abortion-Bans-Further-Harm-Immigrant-Communities.pdf
13. Stoneburner A, Lucas R, Fontenot J, Brigance C, Jones E, DeMaria AL. Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts Across the US. (Report No 4). March of Dimes. 2024. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/maternity-care-deserts-report>
14. Trapped in Texas: How Federal - and Now State - Immigration Enforcement Traps People Trying to Escape Texas' Abortion Ban. ACLU; 2024. https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/2024/09/Trapped-in-Texas-How-Federal-and-Now-State-Immigration-Enforcement-Traps-People-Trying-to-Escape-Texas-Abortion-Ban_FINAL.pdf