

FEMIG WORKSHOP REPORT: ECUADOR

Building Feminist Migration
Policy for Gender Equality
from Grassroots to Global

Project funded by GIZ - 81311609

Project leader: Dr. Jenna Hennebry

Authored by: Cheryl Martens, Paola Cymant and Jenna
Hennebry

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

03

COUNTRY CONTEXT: GENDER AND MIGRATION

04

WORKSHOP DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

08

KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

10

RECOMMENDATIONS

09



INTRODUCTION AND WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

FeMig (Building a Feminist Migration Policy for Gender Equality, from Grassroots to Global) is an initiative led by the [Gender+Migration Hub](#) at the International Migration Research Centre, Wilfrid Laurier University, in partnership with the [Women in Migration Network](#) and the [International Detention Coalition \(IDC\)](#) and funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

The FeMig initiative responds to the reality that migration, when shaped by structural inequality, gendered labor markets, racial hierarchies, and restrictive governance regimes, does not automatically lead to empowerment or gender equality. Instead, women, gender-diverse, and racialized migrants, particularly those concentrated in feminized, undervalued, and informal sectors such as domestic and care work, are systematically exposed to precarity, violence, and rights violations across the migration cycle. These harms are not incidental, but are produced through policy choices, labor recruitment systems, border regimes, and social norms that devalue women's labor and constrain their mobility.

FeMig seeks to disrupt these dynamics by grounding migration governance in feminist, rights-based, and intersectional approaches developed from the lived experiences, organizing practices, and policy expertise of grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs). Central to FeMig is the recognition that civil society actors are not merely service providers or policy stakeholders, but key agents of migration governance. Working directly with migrant communities, CSOs document gender-based violence (GBV), labor exploitation, and systemic exclusion; provide legal, psychosocial, and humanitarian support; and advance advocacy and accountability efforts at local, national, regional, and global levels.

As part of this initiative, participatory workshops are being conducted in multiple countries, including Thailand, Mexico, Ethiopia, Colombia, Ecuador, Nepal and Albania.




COUNTRY CONTEXT: GENDER AND MIGRATION

During the last decade, Ecuador has shifted from being predominantly a country of emigration to becoming a key territory for destination, transit, and return migration. This transformation has occurred in a context marked by regional displacement—especially of Venezuelans—the reconfiguration of mobility regimes in Latin America, economic volatility, the COVID-19 pandemic, and an increase in internal insecurity. From a gender perspective, migration in Ecuador reveals how deeply rooted structural inequalities shape the experiences, opportunities, and risks faced by women and gender-diverse people. This analysis addresses regional and internal displacement, gender-based violence (GBV), care work dynamics, labour segmentation, access to health and psychosocial well-being, xenophobia, and the gaps between legal frameworks and their implementation, arguing that migration is intersected by power relations of gender, race, and class.

Since 2015, Ecuador has been significantly impacted by the Venezuelan displacement crisis, one of the largest forced mobility processes globally. The country hosts several hundred thousand Venezuelan refugees and migrants, approximately half of whom are women and girls (IOM, 2022; UNHCR, 2023). While Ecuador is not the region's primary receiving country, its institutional capacities and social protection systems have faced heavy pressure amid a weakening of state service provision. The Venezuelan population is mainly concentrated in cities like Quito, Guayaquil, Manta, and Cuenca, where there are greater opportunities in informal labour markets and access to humanitarian assistance. However, a significant proportion remains in an irregular administrative situation, increasing exposure to exploitation, exclusion, and violence. For migrant women, irregularity has particularly severe effects, limiting access to sexual and reproductive health, protection mechanisms against violence, and formal employment.

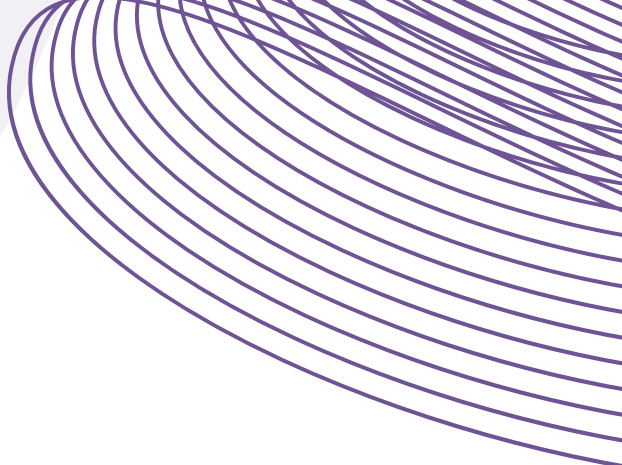
Research by Milán and Martens (2023) demonstrates that Venezuelan migration



in Ecuador must be understood through an intersectional lens and through the lens of socioeconomic vulnerability. Forced displacement, labour informality, and exclusion from social protection systems intersect to weaken the food security of migrant households, especially those headed by women responsible for care and food provision. Added to these dynamics is the increase in organized crime and armed violence in the country, which has generated internal displacement processes and intensified risks in precarious urban neighbourhoods. Migrant women living in these territories face higher probabilities of sexual violence, extortion, and forced displacement, with limited access to institutional protection mechanisms (UNHCR, 2024).

Gender-based violence constitutes one of the most persistent risks for migrant women and girls in Ecuador. This violence manifests before, during, and after the migration process, and includes sexual violence, intimate partner violence, human trafficking, labour exploitation, and harassment in public and private spaces (Amnesty International, 2022). Economic precariousness, housing insecurity, and lack of documentation increase exposure to these violences, while fear of deportation and institutional distrust act as barriers to reporting and accessing justice. LGBTQ+ migrants face additional vulnerabilities associated with hate crimes, institutional discrimination, and social exclusion.

Migrant women bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work within their homes and communities, often as single mothers or primary caregivers. This overload limits their possibilities for stable labour insertion, training, and social mobility (UN Women & IOM, 2023). At the same time, migrant women provide essential care work for the host society, especially in sectors such as domestic work, elderly care, and services. This work is usually performed under informal, low-paid conditions with scant labour protection, reproducing cycles of precariousness and exploitation.




The labour market entry of migrant women in Ecuador is marked by strong gender, race, and class segmentation. They are mostly concentrated in informal and low-income sectors, even when they possess high educational levels, facing processes of deskilling and downward occupational mobility. Structural barriers such as the lack of degree recognition, discrimination, and restrictions associated with migratory status deepen these inequalities (ILO, 2021). Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and racialized women face cumulative discrimination, while Venezuelan women have been the subject of stigmatizing narratives that influence hiring practices and public opinion.

Although the Ecuadorian legal framework formally guarantees access to emergency healthcare regardless of migratory status, significant barriers persist in practice related to administrative requirements, misinformation, discrimination, and fear of institutional contact. Access to sexual and reproductive health services remains unequal (PAHO, 2022). Likewise, migratory trauma, exposure to violence, family separation, and economic insecurity have profound impacts on the mental health of migrant women, resulting in high levels of anxiety, depression, and psychosocial distress—a situation that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic (IOM, 2022).

In recent years, migration has become increasingly politicized in Ecuador, with public discourse and media narratives presenting migrants as threats to security and employment. These dynamics fuel xenophobic practices that translate into harassment, housing and employment discrimination, and barriers to education. Women and girls are particularly affected, as xenophobia interacts with gender norms that intensify surveillance, control, and violence over their bodies (UN Women, 2022).

While Ecuador has one of the region's most progressive legal frameworks regarding human mobility and gender rights, substantive gaps remain between



the regulations and their implementation. Limited institutional capacity, underfunding of protection systems, and bureaucratic obstacles restrict effective access to rights, especially in areas such as GBV care, migratory regularization, and labor protection. In this context, addressing gender inequalities in migration requires intersectional and rights-based approaches that strengthen protection systems, combat xenophobia, and recognize migrant women not only as vulnerable subjects but also as active agents of Ecuadorian society and economy.



WORKSHOP DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

Within the framework of FeMig, a series of workshops are held in different countries to promote the meaningful participation of civil society in migration governance and mobilize shared knowledge. One of these workshops was held in Quito, Ecuador, on November 26, 2025 bringing together 39 participants from 27 Ecuadorian civil society organizations.

The event took place at the **Universidad San Francisco de Quito**, in coordination with the **Institute for Advanced Studies on Inequalities**.

Participants in the workshop came from 26 Ecuadorian civil society organizations, including organizations led by migrant women, Venezuelan organizations, humanitarian organizations, organizations working with LGBTQ+ populations, human rights organizations, academic networks, and trade unions.

Organizations that participated in the workshop include: AIMME Migrant Alliance, Migrant Alliance, Rainbow Rain Association, Rainbow Rain Civil Association, CEDEAL, CEPAM, CNIMH, Women's Advisory Council/National Council for Gender Equality, Diverse Dialogue. FITH, FUDELA, RTRA Foundation / PYDLOS-DIEP UCUENCA, Doña Milagros Foundation, María Amor Foundation, Our Youth Foundation, Manta River Foundation, Trans Fury, Dignity + Rights Working Group and Humanas Ecuador Corporation, Transgender Impact, MREMH, IOM, Women in Migration Network, RESAMA, Surkuna, USFQ, and UTEG.

Additionally, two local representatives from GIZ, Camila Cabrera and Milena Vucinic, took part in the event.



KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The participating civil society organizations analyzed how gender affects every moment of the migratory cycle. They concluded that gender cuts across all stages of migration and profoundly conditions the opportunities, vulnerabilities, and decisions people can make at each phase. Based on the testimonies gathered, we can trace a narrative revealing how gender transforms the journey into a radically different experience for women and LGBTQ+ people.

- **Root causes:** The decision to migrate is rarely purely economic for women or gender-diverse individuals. Testimonies agree that gender is, in itself, a driving force. Many women flee deep-rooted GBV in their homes, while for LGBTQ+ people, migration is a response to persecution and the need to escape societies that criminalize their existence.
- **Transit:** This is where vulnerability materializes most harshly. Organizations described a "continuum of violence" that worsens in irregular contexts. On unofficial routes, women and diverse identities face specific risks such as rape and trafficking. This is exacerbated in Latin America by the rise of organized crime, which has established extreme forms of violence where the female body becomes a "war territory." LGBTQ+ individuals face a "double vulnerability": the dangers of the road and rejection in cisheteronormative shelters.
- **Care work:** A constant theme is the inequitable distribution of care work. Women do not just migrate as individuals, but as pillars of family systems, carrying a triple burden: the economic, physical, and emotional responsibility of care from origin to destination.
- **Destination country:** Gender remains a structural barrier to integration. There is labor discrimination due to a lack of recognition of professional qualifications, with women often segregated into precarious labor niches (cleaning, care) regardless of their previous skills and qualifications.
- **Return:** Even when returning to the country of origin, female returnees face greater stigmas and reintegration difficulties than men due to unfulfilled social gender expectations.



Characteristics of a Feminist Migration Policy

The workshop debated how migration policies can be feminist and contribute to gender equality. Proposed characteristics include:

- **Centering Care and Autonomy:** Putting the care, autonomy, and rights of women at the center of the process.
- **Direct consultation:** Validating policies with the women and diverse populations who live through migration in all its intersectionality.
- **Gender-Sensitive assessments:** Performing formal assessments through a gender lens.
- **Intersectionality:** Ensuring policies address overlapping identities.
- **Institutional strengthening:** Bolstering services specialized in gender and the institutions responsible for protecting rights.
- **Safe reporting routes:** Regarding GBV, ensuring migrant populations can report violence without compromising their migratory status.
- **LGBTQ+ inclusion:** Incorporating approaches so they can access safe shelters, differentiated health care, and inclusion policies.

Contributions of Civil Society

Ecuadorian civil society plays a critical role through direct care and the creation of safe infrastructures designed specifically for women and LGBTQ+ people.

- **Specialized shelters:** Providing refuge from violence that often excludes them from general shelters, offering psychosocial support, medical care, and legal advice for asylum claims based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).
- **Economic empowerment:** Complementing immediate responses with economic programs and childcare services.
- **Political advocacy:** Elevating grassroots demands to decision-making spaces, such as promoting ILO Conventions 189 and 190 (protecting domestic workers and combating workplace harassment).
- **Narrative transformation:** Combating transfobia, GBV, and xenophobia through awareness campaigns and human rights training.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve a Feminist Migration Policy, the following recommendations were highlighted:

1. **Institutional strengthening and mainstreaming constitutional compliance:** Strengthen the National Council for Gender Equality as the governing body.
 - **Integrating gender perspective:** National migration policy must stop being "gender-neutral" and actively recognize that women and LGBTQ+ people experience migration differently.
 - **Internal displacement recognition:** Officially recognize the forced internal displacement of Ecuadorian citizens due to internal violence to activate currently non-existent protection mechanisms.
2. **Data management of official statistics:** Urgently generate disaggregated data to reveal the magnitude of gender inequality.
 - **Gap identification:** Conduct deep assessments identifying inequalities in safety, climate change impact, and institutional weakness.
3. **Specialized protection and access to justice:** Create a specific visa mechanism for victims of Gender-Based Violence so survivors can regularize their status without depending on their abusers or labor quotas.
 - **Specialized services:** Strengthen protection for victims of violence and create secure, confidential reporting channels to combat trafficking and exploitation.
4. **Financial sustainability and equality budget:** Allocate sufficient public resources to close historical inequality gaps.
 - **Civil society funding:** Commit long-term state budgets to sustain civil society organizations, recognizing they often provide the primary protection that the State fails to cover.



Contact Us



<https://gendermigrationhub.org/>



imrc.wlu@gmail.com



Balsillie School of International Affairs, Canada



Gender + Migration HUB

