Research article

Irregular migrant women and 2030 Agenda

Mujeres migrantes irregulares y la Agenda 2030

Virginia Belén Subiris Moriel: Rey Juan Carlos University, Spain.

v.subiris.2021@alumnos.urjc.es

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Abstract:

Introduction: Currently, migration is recognized as a transversal phenomenon contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. However, there is a lack of data on migrant women, particularly those in irregular situations. This omission significantly exacerbates the existing gender gap in access to the labor market, knowledge assets, technological development and participation in decision-making process. **Methodology**: Our methodology involves exploratory-descriptive research conducted over the past decade, from 2015 to 2024. We employed content analysis of reports from 20 key organizations dedicated to migration. **Results:** reveal a substantial undervaluation of the human capital of irregular migrant women due to the rigid methodologies of the organizations. **Discussions:** Researchers have to take in consideration that definition, sources data and methodology will affect data invisibility. Since it does not exist, successful policies are not generated on the management of it to achieve the SDGs. **Conclusions**: This lead to misguided policies for vulnerable women. This paper calls for a commitment of the 2030 Agenda's motto, "leave no one behind", emphasizing the urgent and ongoing need for gender-disaggregated data in the digital era. To achieve this, women in irregular situations must be central to social and economic migration policies.

Keywords: migrants; irregular; gender; human capital; 2030 Agenda; SDGs; refugee; forced displacement.

Resumen:

Introducción: Actualmente, la migración es reconocida como un fenómeno transversal que contribuye al logro de la Agenda 2030. Sin embargo, faltan datos sobre las mujeres migrantes,

particularmente aquellas en situación irregular. Esta omisión exacerba significativamente la brecha de género existente en el acceso al mercado laboral, los activos de conocimiento, el desarrollo tecnológico y la participación en los procesos de toma de decisiones. **Metodología**: Hemos realizado una investigación exploratoria-descriptiva durante la última década, 2015 a 2024, mediante la técnica de análisis de contenido de informes de 20 organizaciones claves dedicadas a la migración. **Resultados:** revelan una brecha sustancial del capital humano de las mujeres migrantes irregulares debido a las rígidas metodologías de las organizaciones dedicadas a ello. **Discusión**: Los investigadores deben tener en cuenta que las definiciones, las fuentes de datos y la metodología afectan la invisibilidad de los datos. Al no existir, no se generan políticas exitosas en la gestación de la migración irregular por género para alcanzar los ODS. **Conclusiones**: El lema de la Agenda 2030, "no dejar a nadie atrás", enfatiza la necesidad urgente y continua de datos desglosados por género en la era digital. Para lograrlo, las mujeres en situación irregular deben ocupar un lugar central en las políticas de inmigración sociales y económicas.

Palabras clave: migrantes; irregulares; género; capital humano; Agenda 2030; ODS; refugiadas; desplazamientos forzosos.

1. Introducción

Human beings have historically been both sedentary and nomadic, driven by a constant search for resources necessary for their survival. For example, the colonization of North America involved predominantly English, Irish, and Italian settlers seeking a better quelite of life. Historical indicators show that migration has enabled individuals to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies, referred to as human capital by academies and professionals (Bove & Elia, 2017). This capital is transferable, passing from some individuals to others (relational capital), it is transformed (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2021) and remains within organizations (organizational capital), influencing both the economy and society (Garanina et al., 2021). These three forms of capital constitute what is known as intellectual capital, which is key to economic growth (Reed et al., 2006; Gowthorpe, 2009; Belluci et al., 2019) and sustainability (Serenko & Bontis, 2013).

Among these forms, human capital is considered the most significant due to its role as a driver of innovation (Martín, 2023). The mobility of people facilitates the transmission of this capital, enriching both companies and countries and establishing a dynamic economic flow (Carling & Østbø, 2020; Purkayastha et al., 2023). Base on these lines of argument, two well-defined aspects can be developed to analyze the human capital of people on the move:

First, regular migration, which has been widely studied, shows that countries are aware of human capital migration (brain drain) and talent loss, which can be detrimental to their economies. Human capital development policies are predominant in OECD countries, promoting innovation and technology to compete with China (Carling & Østbø, 2020) and the US (OECD, 2013). The European Union (EU) also focuses on retaining and attracting talent, promoting regular migration (UNESCO, 2009). Consequently, this capital is recognizes as valuable in both host countries and countries of origin, often in the form of remittances (OSCE, 2002) sent by diasporas or through circular migration.

Second, irregular migration presents challenges due to the inherent difficulty in studying this phenomenon (Arditti & Laczk, 2017). As a result, the human capital of irregular migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers has not been analyzed as thoroughly, with existing literature highlighting the complexity of obtaining reliable data. Alarmingly, there is a scarcity of research on the human capital of irregular migrants from a gender mainstreaming perspective, compared to regular migrant women. This gap undermines the 2030 Agenda proposition that

"no one will be left behind". Consequently, irregular migrant women are often seen as a problem to be solve rather than as an opportunity to promote sustainable economic development.

1.1. Migration concepts

The initial concerns regarding migratory phenomena were raised by Ernest Ravenstein at the end of the 19th century. In a presentation before the Statistical Society of London in 1885, Ravenstein argued that no single theory could fully define migrations, as they occur without defined laws. This assertion was made following his analysis of the English census of 1881 and was futre supported by his subsequent study of 20 additional countries eight years later (Arango, 2003). From this, we can derive the first distinction regarding migratory flows: they occur at any time without being governed by established laws.

Despite agreeing with Ravenstein, migrants are "people" whose behaviors can be theorized, it is evident that migrations follow particular and general causes and exhibit specific characteristics, patterns, and risks. According to the International Organization for Migration[1] (IOM, 2022), there were a total of 281 million migrants worldwide in 2020. When broken down by continent, data revealed a considerable increase in migrant populations across all regions by mid-2020, excel for Russia, which remained stable.

Table 1

International migrants trends in the last 20 years.

Countries	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
United State	23.3	28.5	34.8	39.3	44.2	48.2	50.6
Germany	5.9	7.5	9	9.4	9.8	10.2	15.8
Saudi Arabia	5	5.1	5.3	6.5	8.4	10.8	13.5
Russia	11.5	11.9	11.9	11.7	11.2	11.6	11.6
United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	3.7	4.2	4.7	5.9	7.1	8.4	9.4
Spain	-	1	1.7	4.1	6.3	5.9	6.8

Source: author elaboration based on data from UN Department of Economical and Social Affairs (UN DESA, 2024).

In a general analysis, the characteristics, causes and risks can be determined, as set out below.

1.1.1. Characteristics of migration: Unpredictable and Insecurity

The primary characteristic of migration is its unpredictability. It is challenging to establish protective analyses on when and where migration may occur. For instance, in Afganistan, despite years of prolonged drought and political changes, it was the Taliban's takeover and implementation of their Sharia regime in 2021 that precipitated significant migration (Clark & Shapour, 2023). Similarly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was an unforeseeable international event. Recent earthquakes in Syria and Türkiye, and in Hokkaido, Japan in 2023,

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[1] Data referring to the stock of international migrants present in a given country in a period of time. Visited on April 9, 2024.

along with ongoing armed conflicts in central, eastern, and northeastern Africa (Raza & Sussman, 2024) such as the recent conflict in Sudan, Niger, Armenia, Azerbaijan in 2023, and Lebanon, Israel and Gaza in 2024, have also triggered mass displacements. These displaced individuals frequent cite the insecurity they feel in their countries of origin as the primary reason for migrating and their reluctance to return (UN Refugee Agency, 2022).

1.1.2. Causes and Risk of Migration

Migratory flows are driven by various causes, including conflicts, natural disasters, pandemics, climate change, and new migration polices developed through geopolitical treaties. These flows represent waves of people leaving their homes in search of a better present and future in other locations. A content analysis reveals diverse cause and associated risks when migrating, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Causes, results and risk of irregular migration by region.

		West and central Africa
Causes		Natural disasters: Droughts, desertification, deforestation, rising sea levels, coastal erosion and floods. Conflicts: in the Central African Republic, Côte d'lvoire, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.
Results		Unaccompanied children. The Sahel, Nigeria and Niger are seriously affected by terrorist acts. Destination countries: Europe or other regions of Africa: Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of the Congo and North Africa Difficult return.
Risks		Risk of abuse, exploitation and trafficking in human beings. Deteriorated security showing that Western and Central Africa is poorly prepared and equipped to handle this crisis.
		South Africa
Causes		Target region receives immigration mainly from Ethiopia and Somalia, due to its strong economy, mainly in South Africa, Botswana and Zambia for mining, manufacturing agriculture and in Angola for oil.
Results		Target country due to its strong economy on the continent. It is used as a bridge to Europe and America.
Risks		The majority manage to reach South Africa due to established human trafficking networks. Extortion, abandonment, sexual abuse, and all kinds of violence. Xenophobia, more stereotypes, negative social acceptance.
		East Africa and the Horn of Africa
Causes		Climate changes, armed conflicts such as in the Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan, plus economic and political crises. Chronification of conflicts.
Results		Kenya and Ethiopia are target countries, as well as Yemen, which becomes a transit country, especially Ethiopians to Saudi Arabia. Difficult return.

Risks	Kenya has at least 600.000 refugees, mainly from Somalia. They die at sea from Yemen to Saudi Arabia. In Yemen they are often prey to human trafficking mafias. Violence against women, abuse, exploitation, etc.
	North Central America and the Caribbean
Causes	Internal conflicts, low prosperity, insecurity and natural disasters.
Results	Target area is North America from Central America and Mexico.
Risks	Human trafficking, discrimination, sexual abuse, kidnapping and other crimes.

Middle East and North Africa

Causes	Demographic factors, armed conflicts and violence, Coming mainly from Syria, Iraq, occupied Palestine, Egypt and Morocco plus Israel and Gaza War. Chronification of conflicts.
Results	Destinations are: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Kubait and Lebanon. And those from North Africa usually go to Europe, Türkiye and Spain, mainly the Canary Island. It perpetuates the stay in refugee camps. The trend is to increase.
Risks	Human trafficking, discrimination, sexual and labor abuse. High mortality Mediterranean Sea, indeterminate data due to the disappearance of bodies.
	South America
Causes	It has two ways: internal looking for greater job opportunities and external to the United States, Spain and Italy.
Results	Target country are Argentina, Chile y Brazil, coming from the Andean countries and Paraguay.
Risks	Depletion of resources.
	Eastern Europe, Southeast and Central Asia
Causes	Long migration corridor due to wage differences, long-term conflicts such as in Syria, natural disasters: radical policies such as that of the Taliban, earthquakes and floods. Conflict chronification.
Results	Sea route from Turkey to Greece (Eastern Mediterranean route). From North Africa to Italy and Spain (Central Mediterranean route). Also, to countries that do not belong to the EU such as the UK, for example from France crossing the English Channel, coming from Iran, Iraq, Eritrea or Syria. (Home Office, 2022). They perpetuate the stay in refugee camps. Collapse.
Risks	Lack of reliable data. Deaths at sea are not counted. Bodies disappearing in deserts. Once they reach the EU, they move through the States. Remember the recently death of 18 people, Afghan nationals, found along with 34 survivors, including minors, in a critical situation, in an abandoned truck in Bulgaria on February 17, 2023. The deaths are not only due to lack of shelter, food, health care they are also caused by suffocation in means of transport and by being run over.
	North America and Canada
Causes	Economic crisis makes them return and it is a continuous return of migrants. However, they receive bank transfers and remittances to the countries of origin, an economic flow, by migrants who send money to their families such as Honduras, El Salvador and Haiti. The economic crisis causes them to return, and the constant return of immigrants is a constant.

Results	The US is considered the main target country in the world, as well as Canada in part. Therefore, the main emissary of remittances throughout the world. They tend to be Mexicans, Venezuelans. The number of asylum seekers has increased. For example, from Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador, they also request it in Canada, the latter is welcoming the Afghan population.
Risks	Sexual exploitation, Human trafficking and Labor exploitation. Continuous deportations. Smuggling.
	Asia and the Pacific
Causes	Long migration corridor due to wage differences, conflicts, natural disasters: hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions.
Results	They are usually people without qualifications. It is estimated that approximately 2.7 million Afghans live irregularly in Pakistan and 2.5 million irregular Afghans in Iran. Taleban expelled at least 2,800 Hazara in Daikundi and Uruzgan. Serious attacks on Hazara Shia and other Shia Muslims, Sikhs and Sufis. Malaysia and Thailand, especially in the latter, Cambodians, from Myanmar and Laos, tend to be the target countries of irregular migration in Southeastern Asia.
Risks	Modern slavery, as undocumented workers are considered. Sexual tourism, agriculture, construction and fishermen. Human trafficking. The Hazaras who cannot flee in Afghanistan suffer mass expulsions, humiliation and physical aggression. They usually educate their daughters therefore they are murdered by the Taleban.

Source: author elaboration based on: UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR); UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA); Shapour & Europe Council (2024).

1.2. Gender and Migration

The causes for migration are similar (Table 2), but migrants themselves are diverse in terms of culture, demographics, gender, educational level, age, and more. Women and girls due to their inherent vulnerability, face greater difficulties in obtaining resources and are at higher risk of sexual abuse (UN Women, 2023). In 2018, women constituted 81% of trafficking victims (Mosler, 2021).

Women migrate independently in search of new opportunities, a trend referred to as the "feminization of migration" (IOM, 2021). Global data on international female migration highlights this trend, with 135 million women migrating internationally, representing 3,5% of the global female population (UN DESA, 2021). Studies reveal that over the last 30 years, "gender" has gained significance on national agendas, especially concerning women's roles as caregivers, domestic workers, and their work-life balance and family care responsibilities. It is estimated that 1.5 million Asian women work outside their home countries, primarily in hospitality, domestic work, entertainment (often including prostitution), and in textile and electronics industries (UNICEF, 2009). These studies consistently demonstrate the relationship between gender and migration. However, the intersection of irregular migration and gender often remains overlooked.

1.2.1. Women and Irregular Migration

Gender significantly impacts irregular migrant women, refugees, and asylum seekers. Discrimination and the loss of fundamental rights solely due to being female are among the main factors driving this assertion (UN, 2023). For example, women and girls who arrive in Europe on small "patera" boats often have histories of violence and sexual assault, which motivate their escape (Jimenez-Lasserrotte et al., 2020). The rights that are frequently violated and prompt women to migrate include protection from harassment, violence, exploitation, non-consensual marriages, and restrictions on their movements, such as limited access to public spaces and education (Filipović-Hadžiabdić, 2021). These women predominantly come from countries with the lowest rankings in gender equality, such as Afghanistan (146), Pakistan (145), the Democratic Republic of Congo (144), Iran (143), Chad (142), Mili (141), and Algeria (140) (Word Economic Forum, 2022). This phenomenon impacts not only the women and their families but also has significant implications for the global economy.

1.3. Gender irregular Migration, and the Economy

Globally, there has been an upward trend in irregular female migration to Europe through transit countries. For instance, the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan has not only affected global social consciences (Clark & Shapour, 2023) but also economic funding (Bargués, 2021). Afghanistan, with a Human Development Index of 169, is one of the lowest ranked countries in the world and it is ranking 114 at Global Hunger Index (Gaza & Ndlovu, 2023). Its direct influence on the global economy is evident, as 45% of its population is at high risk of food insecurity (Global Health Observatory, 2022). Rejecting on the international investment made to transform Afghanistan at the end of the 2000s (Bargués, 2021), it is estimated that 28. 3 million out of 43.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, requiring 4.6 billion dollars in aid, as established in the Humanitarian Response Plan (2023). However, countries contributing to Afghanistan's economic aid have restricted sending assistance due to non-recognition of the Taliban government, further increasing poverty and the necessity for women to migrate (Clark, 2003; Samin & Jackson, 2023).

Afghanistan is not the only country where women are in precarious conditions. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, similar situations exist, particularly in Syria. There, women have become the primary supporters of their families due to the loss of husbands, fathers, and brothers from six years of continuous war. Despite being the majority, these female-headed households have greater food needs compared to those headed by men (GHO, 2023). The main cause is a lack of financial resources, as it is often impossible for women to work outside the home. This situation has a significant global impact, with over 14 million internally displaced people and 40 million migrants due to man-made conflicts and natural disasters. Consequently, it is estimated that 15.3 million people in Syria are in need of aid, requiring 4.4. billion dollars.

1.4. Omission of Human Capital Data for Irregular Migrant Women

Human capital is considered one of the key components of intellectual capital (Sveiby, 1997; Public, 2005; Dumay & Garanina, 2013). Its interaction with other forms of capital, such as structural and relational capital (Chung-Jen et al., 2009; Mura & Longo, 2013), constitutes intellectual capital. This capital directly influences the global economy (Haskel & Westlake, 2007) and affects business productivity (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997; Bontis, 1998). The consolidation of human capital as a critical factor occurred at the beginning of the 21st century in so-called knowledge societies (Marr et al., 2002). It is considered the engine of innovation (Wang & Chang, 2005), and its importance lies in its significant contribution to economies,

accounting for between two-third and three-quarters of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Therefore, it directly influences economic growth (Pérez & Benegas, 2012).

Figure 1.

Research model and hypothesis.
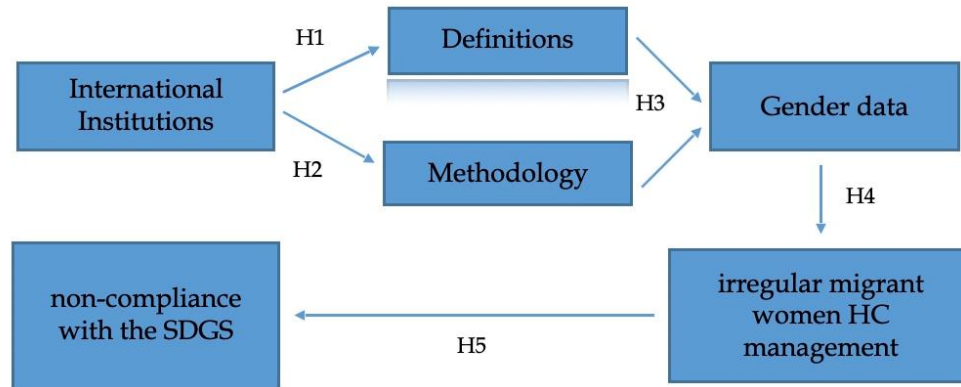
Source: Author elaboration.

However, there is a notable lack of data disaggregated by gender (Szekely, 2024) concerning the human capital of women in irregular situations in migration statistics and reports. Information on their skills, education, experiences, and entrepreneurship is largely absent.

2. Methodology

Following this line of argument, we present the research model (Figure 1) and propose the following hypothesis of this study.

To achieve the research hypothesis, we first conducted a literature review using scientific database. We used SCOPUS and Web of Science to research and analysis social communications about our topic (Codina et al., 2020). The searches returned 73 articles from WoS database and 68 articles from the SCOPUS database, totaling 141 articles covering the past 10 years. However, when focusing on the breakdown of data on migration by gender and skills of irregular migrant women, only 15 articles were found. These figures highlight the scarcity of scientific papers and research on our topic. Consequently, our research data have been obtained from global data on migratory flows, refugees, asylum seekers, and other databases dedicated to the migration phenomenon.

Content analysis is considered a method based on descriptive aspects of objective, systematic and quantitative communications (Cáceres, 2003; López, 2022). It is used in the classical positivist paradigm, and it is an appropriate to test hypotheses which have been stated before deductively (Bini & Giunta, 2021). This exploratory-descriptive research has been applied in similar studies, such as those by Martín et al. (2022) and Cáceres (2003). We used the IOM Migration Analysis Center's interactive matrix data portal (GMAC) to verify data. Thus, through a hypothetical-deductive method, we address the research hypothesis.

Content analysis corpus have been done from major international organizations' scientific databases dedicated to migration: UN; OIM; UNCHR; Refugee Indicator (GCR); UN Statistical

Division (UNSAT); Evidence Data Gender Equality (EDGC); Office Coordination Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA UN); Department Economic Social Affairs (DESA) and Statistical Office EU (EUROSTAT) (Table 3).

Our methodology includes both qualitative and qualitative analyses. The quantitative and qualitative analysis involves representing data on irregular migrant women human capital from reports, projects, and 2030 Agenda indicators, in order to increase credibility and reliability (Gustafson, 1998). Those are useful tools used by organizations to communicate on it to stakeholders what are considered important (Cheng et al., 2014; Flower, 2015; Dumay et al., 2016; Maniora, 2017) omitting what they do not give important to (Guthrie & Abeysekera, 2006). Guthrie (2014) suggested that content analysis are well-grounded to finding something hidden within reports (Bini & Giunta, 2021).

Systematic analysis of report, project, and conference have been done from content analysis corpus from 2015 to 2024. The methodology is centered on the framework concept generation through analysis and conceptualization directly from the data, following grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). A meaning-oriented content analysis was performed (Campbell & Rahman, 2010) whereby text unit were analysed (Abhayawansa & Guthrie, 2014; Moreiro et al., 2006). The unit analysis corpus elements indicated the presence or absence of the most relevant units of analysis (Bardin in Cáceres, 1996) (Table 3).

Table 3.

Analysis Corpus.

Data (quantitative)	Who is a migrant? (qualitative)	Link
United Nations (UN)		
Not disaggregated, they categorize all people on the move in same data.	An international migrant is any person who changes their country of residence, whether they are in a regular or irregular situation.	https://acortar.link/2YvEsi
International Organisation for Migration (IOM)		
Not disaggregated, they categorize all people on the move in same data.	Under migrant term: internal and external displacements. Therefore, refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people, regular migration and irregular migration.	https://acortar.link/WiDv4n
United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)		
Not disaggregated, they categorize all people on the move in same data.	They categorize in the same data information on refugees or other people in the same condition as them, asylum seekers and returnees.	https://acortar.link/a4LzYh https://acortar.link/og19Kp https://acortar.link/cAJHbC
Global Trends Forced Displacement		
They are not broken down. They follow the same UN methodology. UNHCR Statistical Publication.	They categorize in the same data information on refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, forcibly displaced persons and all refugees who have returned home.	https://acortar.link/P3WvrG

Statistical yearbook (2023 edition)		
The data is not disaggregated as it follows the methodology of the UN Department of Economy and Social Affairs.	They categorize all displaced people equally.	https://acortar.link/DASoOL
Global Compact on Refugee Indicator Report (GCR)		
Supported by data and therefore on the structured methodology of the GRI indicators for the year 2023.	Refugees; people with temporary protection; people needed international protection.	https://acortar.link/H25dJA
Global Compact on Refugees-Indicator Framework 2022		
They are not broken down. In their methodology (p 14). They group together refugees and people who find themselves in the same situation as refugees.	Refugees, people with protection, temporary; need international protection.	https://acortar.link/bUAJTj
United Nations Statistical Division (UNSAT)		
Make distinctions between immigrants and emigrants. However, for statistical purposes, the person's citizenship or the person's purposes for entering the country do not matter.	For statistical purposes, the term "international migrant", whether the migrant is an immigrant or an emigrant, is defined in terms of the change of country, the absence from it and the stay in absence from the country.	https://acortar.link/YmdUsg https://acortar.link/hAaWfY
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)		
Not disaggregated, they categorize all migrant and displaced children.	People in motion	https://acortar.link/2Sge0u
Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)		
Not disaggregated, all data on migration and displaced population is disseminated to organizations. In addition, it also includes all migrants who care for and reside in a country temporarily or permanently. Provides statistical information on "population groups immersed in mobility."	They quantify groups of people, both internally displaced, stranded migrants, migrants in transit places, and other populations of interest (p. 6).	https://acortar.link/tBZowG https://acortar.link/wvAJ9P
World Data Institute (GDI), DTM, IOM		
Methodological Framework to quantify displacement and mobility in displacement tracking matrix (DTM) operations.	Direct data collection by area: the individuals to be categorized are forcibly displaced, migrants or repatriated (p.6). When it is done by subgroups, they are internal displacement, migrants or repatriates. When multi-sectoral are counted in the site: internally displaced persons, migrants or refugees.	https://acortar.link/U4VPSr
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) UN		

Differentiation between refugees and migrants. It underlines the importance of the increase in asylum seekers and irregular migrants to Europe and warns against the recommendation of using only censuses as data collection because it omits irregular migrants.	All migrants. For example, in its latest publication: Statistical Yearbook 2023, Sixty-sixth issue.	https://www.un.org/es/desa https://acortar.link/SqDI2p
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)		
Global data on internal displacements.	All displaced people. Broken down by continent and age.	https://acortar.link/8orsMc
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, UN)		
Humanitarian actions for all types of people in need.	Being located within the United Nations Secretariat, it follows the same methodology.	https://www.unocha.org/ https://acortar.link/icBpOr
Evidence Data Gender Equality (EDGC)		
Indicators for all women, based on the Beijing conference. Based on UN and UN women statistics.	All migrants women.	https://acortar.link/FSC7Mu
Mixed Migration Center (MMC)		
Mixed migration: refugees and migrants along similar routes, often irregularly partially or totally assisted by migrant smugglers. Advocates for their independence in obtaining data on mixed migration. It has regional centers in the office of the Danish Refugee Council (DCR) in Africa, Europe, the Pacific and Asia, Latin America. Its global headquarters are in Geneva and Brussels.	Mixed migration: People move due to a multitude of factors, variety of legal statuses and vulnerabilities.	https://acortar.link/u3H39J https://mixedmigration.org/
4Mi.		
Belonging to the MMC. It is an Interactive Matrix.	They categorize refugees and migrants regardless of their status.	https://acortar.link/JkMULI https://acortar.link/94tJnC
The Mixed Migration Review (MMR)		
It belongs to the MMC and is its annual reports.	They categorize refugees and migrants regardless of their status.	https://acortar.link/AVOS7G
EUROSTAT		
No disaggregated.	Migration and immigration by sex, age, country development.	https://acortar.link/bFHOIi https://acortar.link/By6QLL

Source: Author creation (2024).

3. Results

International institutions have different definitions for irregular migrants. Among the internationally recognized organizations dedicated to migration, the primary sources identified include the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and its statistical department (UNSTAT).

- The IOM (2023) defines irregular migration as "movement that is outside those included in the regulatory standard of the country of origin, receiving country or country of transit". This organization considers the term "irregular" to refer to the situation of the person at a specific time, not to the person themselves. Therefore, migrants can be regular because they are legally documented in a country, but when their visas and/ or permits expire, they become irregular. Additionally, due to changing administrative immigration policies, people established in a country can move from documented to undocumented status or vice versa. An example of this is the change in criteria for family reunification, where some relatives cannot renew their permits when they expire, leaving them in an irregular situation.

  On the other hand, migrants who leave their home due to conflict or persecution and seek protection in another country initially have the status of irregular migrants but are counted as regular migrants once they request asylum (IOM, 2017). This approach categorizes refugees and asylum seekers under the term "migrant." The IOM justifies this by defining the "inclusivist "approach, moving away from the "residuals" approach. The inclusivist approach includes people fleeing from war or persecution under the generic term "migrant" because their situation are considered migratory. According to the IOM, all refugees are migrants (Swing, 2018).

- The second organization, the UNHCR, established clear differences, clarifying that the terms "migrants" and "refugees" are not interchangeable. For this organization, migrants move to improve their lives for various reason, such as work, eduction, or family, and can return to their country without impediments. However, for refugee, returning is difficult as it puts their lives in danger (Curtis, 2015). While UNHCR recognizes that other individuals need international protection due to forced displacement, it emphasizes that although all refugees are migrants, not all migrants are refugees.

- The third organization, UN DESA, also establishes terminological distinctions between the terms. According to UN DESA, an international migrant is "a person who changes their country of residence regardless of the reasons or their legal status," while a refugee is " a person who is outside their country of origin due to well-founded fears of generalized violence, threats to life, or other circumstances that have altered public life and require international protection."

Based on the above, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: The primary source chosen for analyzing the phenomenon of irregular migration influences the definition used in research.

Different organizations have different definitions of migrants and refugees but ultimately use the same methodology to classify them into the same group. The IOM, serving as a primary source of data for numerous organizations and governments, defines migration as "an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common understanding of a person who moves away from their place of usual residence, whether within a country or

across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons." (Sinoni et al., 2019; IOM, 2023).

This definition includes nationals of a country in both external and internal migration, which can be temporary or permanent, including movements from rural to urban areas. The term encompasses both nationals and non-nationals moving for various reasons, with the only commonality being the abandonment of their habitual residence. Therefore, the IOM's methodology, in defining migration as an umbrella term, refers equally to both national and international migration, whether regular or irregular, and includes refugee and asylum seekers. As well, it is independent of the country where the IOM is operating. The same methodology is applied universally in all countries managed by them. They even provide their "definitional glossary" to external researchers interested in their methodological terminology (Subiris, 2023). Furthermore, being a primary data source, the IOM influences the methodology of all reports, statistics, and projects carried out, as well as the transit centers they manage around the world.

Similarly, as we will see below, organizations that make clear definitional distinctions between refugees and migrants, such as those mentioned above, often combine these groups indiscriminately in the same category when using their methodology to obtain data on migrants. For instance, the UNHCR, a globally recognized international organization for refugee management, establishes differences between the situations of people who migrate. However, in its methodology for counting refugee data, the UNCHR adopts the same position as the IOM, exchanging the term "refugee" for "migrant." Consequently, it counts refugees, asylum seekers, people forced to leave their homes due to conflict or persecution. Individuals comparable to refugees, returnees, and the stateless[2] under the umbrella term "refugee."

If we analyze this definition of refugee, we find an umbrella term as well for refugee as migrant. Table 4, highlight refugees indicators used to meet SDGs, through people situations.

Tabla 4.

SDGs Indicators 10.7.4: Concepts and definitions of refugees.

Refugees recognized by UNHCR
a) Persons recognized as refugees by Governments being ratified by the 1951 UN Convention relating to the situation of refugees, and/or the 1967 Protocol.
b) Persons recognized as refugees under the Organization of African Unity (OAU) of 1969, in the Convention on Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.
c) Those people recognized in accordance with the principles established in the Cartagena Declaration.
d) All those people recognized by UNCH as refugees under its Statute and/or mandate.
e) Those people have been granted complementary protection (non-conventional).
f) People who have temporary protection collectively.

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[2] Concepts included in the Guide "Leave no migrant behind in the 2030 Agenda and the breakdown of data" (IOM, 2021), based on data issued by UNHCR.

Refugees recognized by UNHCR
Note: Other people in a situation similar to refugees will be those who are outside their territory of origin and run the same risks, needing protection as refugees but who for practical reasons, or any other, are not formally recognized or issued the relevant documentation.
Note: Other people in international need of protection are defined as people who are outside their country or territory of origin, forcibly displaced across international borders and who have not been categorized as: asylum seekers, refugees, people in a situation of refuge, and are in need of international protection, including protection from forced return, as well as access to basic services either temporarily or long-term.

Source: Author creation base on the concepts of General Assembly Economic and Social Council. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. **A/79/79-E/2024/54** (2024).

In line with the United Nations International Children's Fund (2023), their methodology for statistical purpose references migration by quantifying people born abroad, regardless of their reasons for migrating, alongside refugees and asylum seekers. Our findings indicate that relevant data are often not found due to their inclusion under an umbrella term.

Furthermore, there are other terminological mutations worth noting, complicating researcher' ability to establish trends about irregular migrant women. Major organization have renamed existing categories with new terms.

One such mutation is from "mixed migration" to "forced displacement." This change encompasses data for all individuals crossing borders or moving within the same country, whether voluntarily or under duress. The IOM has utilized terms like "mixed migration," "mixed movement," or "mixed flow" in recent decades to interconnect the various reasons and situations prompting people to move. Consequently, obtaining disaggregated data on international irregular migration, the numbers of international refugees, and international asylum seekers becomes challenging, as these categories have evolved into "forced displacement" (IOM glossary, 2023), highlighting the lack of standardized language in migration discussions.

Similarly, the Mixed Migration Center (MMC), dedicated to managing international migration, provides data on irregular migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers under the general term "mixed migration flows." Their approach avoids the debate between "migrant" and "refugee," emphasizing the human rights perspective of individuals using similar migration routes and their neutrality in analysis. The MMC argues that while migrants and refugees may have different motivations, they often face similar risk when traveling together along common routes.

Thus, based on these observations, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: The methodology of the chosen international organization significantly impacts the data obtained.

In this article, we argue for the inclusion of "gender" as a critical determinant of migration. From our review of specialized literature on migration, we find that women migrate not only due to economic factors or family reunification (IOM, 2024) but also because their fundamental rights are often diminished (Consonant, 2022; UNCHR, 2023a). Despite this, gender is not

categorized as a distinct type of migration in global organizations and institutions dedicated to migration. This oversight underscores the necessity to reformulate categorical generalizations, disaggregate gender-sensitive data across all categories, and acknowledge the theory of intersectionality, particularly in understanding the experiences of irregular migrant women.

Based on our analysis of UN resolutions, global reports such as the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2022), the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda, and other relevant documents, we observe a consistent omission of data on irregular migrant women. This gap persists even in quantitative data and statistics used to shape policies addressing the phenomenon of irregular migration. Data or metadata concerning irregular migrant women, refugees, and asylum seekers are often lumped together with other groups needing international protection and regular migrant women.

An illustrative example of this omission can be seen in the latest report on "Global Forced Displacement Trends 2022" prepared by the UNHCR (2022). Despite women constituting half of the world's population, The report indicates that 50% of forced migrants are women. However, upon analyzing their data collection methodology for displaced women, we note that data is sourced from various entities including governments, NGOs, and the UNHCR, each with different methodologies (UN Economic Commission for Europe, 2022). The term "forced displacement" encompasses all affected individuals and is collected through censuses regardless of their specific situations and needs. This category includes internal displacement within a country, refugees who have received UNHCR support, and even stateless individuals, regardless of whether they were forcibly displaced according to UNHCR statistics (UNHCR, 2024).

H3: The definitions and methodologies of selected international organizations affect the invisibility of data on irregular women.

3.1. Irregular Migrants Women's Human Capital Data Limitation

It is crucial to highlight the interconnectedness between organizations, methodologies, data, and migration policies in developing human capital (HC) frameworks for irregular migrant women. HC refers to individual knowledge and skills essential for job performance. When HC is deficient, companies must invest resources in training, thereby reducing economic efficiency (Sander, 2024). Our research reveal significant limitations in indicators for measuring HC, complicating sustainable development under the 2030 Agenda.

The United Nations General Assembly's Resolution 71/73 emphasizes the need to enhance migration data for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This influential organization shapes economic policies and strategies globally, serving as a primary data source for advising countries (DAES, 2017). Expert Group meeting, such as those for the "Leave No One Behind" report on SDGs, advocate for a comprehensive approach (UN Economic Commission for Europe, 2022). However, categorical transformations, such as renaming "migrants" and "refugees" to "forced displacement," persist over decades, overlooking irregular migrants' socioeconomic challenges.

H4: The definitions, data sources, and methodologies employed by various organizations to study irregular migrant women's HC will impact its visibility.

3.2. Migrant Women's Human Capital in Irregular Situations and SDGs Compliance

Under SDG Goal 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," there is a critical absence of disaggregated data between irregular and regular migrant women. This gap impedes achieving Target 5.1 to end discrimination against women and girls (IAEG-SDGs, 2016). Furthermore, indicator 5.5.1 focuses on women's participation in decision-making roles without accounting for intersectional issues faced by irregular migrant women.

Indicator 5.b.1, which measures mobile phone ownership by gender, fails to consider the challenges irregular migrant women encounter in accessing and maintaining such technology. This illustrates a broader oversight within Goal 5 regarding the measurement of irregular migrant women.

Moving to SDG Goal 8, "Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all," irregular female migration is overlooked due to the absence of specific indicators for its measurement and management. Indicator proposals, such as 8.7.1 on child labor and 8.8 on migrant labor rights, predominantly use "migrant" as an umbrella term, further obscuring the unique challenges of irregular migrant women.

Goal 10, "Reduce inequality within and among countries," includes Target 10.7 focusing on migration but continues to use "migrant" broadly without differentiation between regular and irregular migration. This oversight perpetuates invisibility in policy and programming for irregular migrant women.

4. Discussion

The polices set forth by the United Nations (UN) exert a global influence on strategies implemented by organizations and institutions dedicated to migration. These policies shape projects, strategies, and funding allocations on both international and national levels. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), aligning migration issues with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), published the report "Leaving No Migrants Behind in the 2030 Agenda and Data Disaggregation" (IOM, 2021). This report underscores the critical need for high-quality, disaggregated data to enhance migration policies.

However, under SDG Goal 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" there is a notable absence of disaggregated data distinguishing between women in irregular versus regular situations. Indicators assessing progress toward this Goal, such a rate of violence against women or women in management position (Target 5.2.2), fail to account for the intersectional challenges faced by irregular migrant women.

Similarly, within SDG Goal 8, "Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all," data breakdowns still use "migrant" as an umbrella term. This generalization hampers the development of effective policies, particularly concerning SDG Goal 4, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." In conflict zones, where 90% of girls and adolescents are estimated to drop out of school compared to non-conflict areas, these individuals are often pushed into precarious work situations, in stark violation of SDG Goals 8 and 5, while also undermining SDG Goal 4 on education quality (MMC, 2023).

Our research findings highlight that the absence of specific indicators for irregular migrant women within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as their exclusion from

initiers like "Evidence and Data for Gender Equality" (EDGE), exacerbates social exclusion and poverty among these vulnerable groups (UN, 2023).

H5: Definitions, data sources, and methodologies chosen by various organizations to study irregular women's human capital will impact data invisibility, hindering effective policy formulation to achieve the SDGs.

This study asserts that broad definitions and non-disaggregated global categorizations negatively influence data quality due to methodological inconsistencies across primary data sources. Despite international efforts to allocate resources towards understanding irregular migration and empowering vulnerable women, the effectiveness of these initiatives is compromised by imprecise and fragmenten data from multiple organizations.

Furthermore, discrepancies in methodological criteria among countries along migratory routes further complicate data collection efforts (European Court of Auditors, 2021). For instance, the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) plays a pivotal role in global data analysis, feeding insights to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) and guiding operational responses in conflict zones (DTM, 2021).

Data collected by major international organizations following their methodologies significantly impacts global statistics. The Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE), which aims to integrate gender-focused perspective into official statistics for enhanced policy-making, aligns its methodology with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) division. These entities disseminate data to national statistical offices, regional commissions, and international agencies, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), African Development Bank (ADB), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, International Labour Organization (ILO), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank.

Despite efforts to underscore the importance of disaggregating migrant data, various reports, projects, and international expert meetings such as the New York Declaration and initiatives focusing on Age, Gender, and Development (AGD), including the recent 9th UN World Gender Statistics Forum (2023), may overlook comprehensive disaggregation. Without revising their methodologies to include intersectional perspective encompassing women in irregular migrant situations, refugees, and asylum seekers, crucial indicators remain omitted. Consequently, these data fail to accurately reflect the current realities and contributions of irregular migrant women and other vulnerable groups to society and the economy. This omission risks misguiding migration policies, contravening reports like the Executive Council of UN-Women on the UN-Women Strategic Plan (2022-2025) and its alignment with Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda. As the physicist Thomson Kelvin asserted, "What is not defined cannot be measured. What is not measured cannot be improved. What is not improves is always degraded."

5. Conclusions

International organization dedicated to addressing migration are currently engaged in various ongoing projects aimed at disaggregating data by age, gender, and development (AGD). However, without fundamental changes to their methodologies, category breakdowns, indicator revisions for irregular migrant women, and interpretation methods, the data they produce will fail to accurately represent the current realities. This oversight misguides policy formulations, detrimentally affecting irregular migrants, transit countries, and the socio-economic dynamics of the EU and globally (FRONTEX, 2023). For instance, the UN has

allocated USD 500 billion towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscoring the critical need for comprehensive and inclusive data (UNCHR, 2023b).

Despite acknowledgments of the importance of disaggregated migration data in reports, projects, and expert meetings, such as the "New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants" and the "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration," there remains a persistent reliance on broad categorizations that obscure critical distinctions among migrant populations (International Recruitment Integrity System, 2021). Without such distinctions, global trends in irregular migration, gender issues, and the societal contributions of irregular migrant women and other marginalized groups cannot be accurately assessed, undermining equality policies embedded within the SDGs.

Regarding SDGs implementation, while there has been progress in breaking down indicators by migration status, such as in Goal 8 on "decent work and economic development" (Mosler, 2021), data from the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group indicates significant gasps. For instance, only a fraction of countries have effectively disaggregated data according to immigration status, highlighting systemic challenges in achieving comprehensive SDG targets.

An illustrative example is the "No Nation Fashion" project by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina, recognized for its contributions to social inclusion and gender diversity but not specifically focused on irregular migrant women. Those women in this situation who participated in this project could not be offered any salary due to their irregular situation or a "real" inclusion in society, since their work was carried out in the workshops of the transit centers as "therapeutic houses of sewing or design." As the IOM head of mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a migrant woman in a host country if we compare her situation of being a regular migrant woman with the irregular migrant she manages, it are not the same. Joining OIM, the UNCHR offer five day of therapeutic sewing courses to seven migrant women in Sarajevo without assessing their real human capital. Even worse is, when some of these women become an irregular situation because their freedom of movement is limited, including taking a national and international plane if not in the company of a man (James et al., 2022) or due to be in a site in a long war time, failing to comply with SDG Goal 16 "Peace, Justice and Solid Institutions." Others migrate trying to feed their children, it is estimated based on UNICEF data that there are 3.2 million children under five years of age suffering from malnutrition and that about 167 die every day (Foschini & Soursh, 2023).

Such initiatives underscore the need for nuanced approaches that consider the unique circumstances of irregular migrant women, who often face economic and social marginalization due to their legal status.

Furthermore, reports like the UNHCR's "Global Trends" on forced displacement illustrate the complexities of estimating refugee populations based on national population registries rather than direct refugee counts, thereby complicating accurate assessments of displacement trends (UNHCR, 2022). Moreover, barriers such as digital exclusion persist for irregular migrant women in accessing technologies essential for achieving SDG Goal 17 on universal connectivity and broader digital inclusion efforts (UN DESA, 2023). This digital divide exacerbates their situational limbo and undermines efforts towards achieving Goals 1 and 2 on poverty eradication and zero hunger.

In conclusion, the SDG imperative to "leave no one behind" underscores the necessity of integrating irregular migration and refugee issues through a gender lens within sustainable

development frameworks. Achieving this mandate requires not only robust data collection but also a critical reflection on methodologies that perpetuate inequalities and hierarchies within global policy agendas, despite decades of advocacy and commitments to gender equality.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS, FINANCING AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AUTHOR:
Virginia Belén Subiris Moriel
Rey Juan Carlos University, Spain.

Degree in Organizational Psychology from UNED. Spain. Postgraduate degree in International Human Resources Management from the University of Bedfordshire, UK. Doctoral candidate in the Social and Legal Sciences program, business branch, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos.

She belongs to the Public Administration Sector where she has worked for 35 years, between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His field of research and application is Human Resources aligned to business strategy. Internationally, she worked with the United Nations as a consultant at the Police Academy after the war in the former Yugoslavia in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this country during the last three years (2021-2023) she carried out voluntary work with irregular migrant women. With the Spanish Consulate in the United Kingdom, she created a novel project to help the most vulnerable Spaniards with the creation of a network of volunteer psychologists in 2013.
v.subiris.2021@alumnos.urjc.es

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2569-3710