



# PROTECTION RISKS ON THE MIGRATION ROUTES

# Protection risks on the migration routes in the North of Central America and Mexico

A range of different people on the move transit through the North of Central America (NCA) and Mexico every year: migrants from Central America travelling irregularly, asylum seekers, people with protection needs and migrants from outside the region (or 'extra-regional migrants'). People migrate and are displaced from the North of Central America due to a range of different and multi-causal triggers, including poverty, inequality, lack of opportunities, family reunification and generalised violence. While their chosen destination is most often the United States, in recent years, due to the difficulties in reaching U.S. territory, Mexico has also become not just a transit country but a destination country.

The choice of which migration route to take from the North of Central America to Mexico and the United States is based on a range of different parameters, ranging from a lack of economic resources, different information sources on the routes, the availability of transportation, the use (or not) of a people smuggler and the available information on the different unpatrolled border crossings. While each route has its specific obstacles, all of them can be considered extremely dangerous. In 2020 in Mexico, the main crimes against migrants included robbery, kidnappings, trafficking and extortion.<sup>1</sup>

This snapshot aims to describe the different migration routes taken by people from the North of Central America on their journeys to the United States and Mexico, the protection risks they face on the way and how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected these routes.

## Key Messages

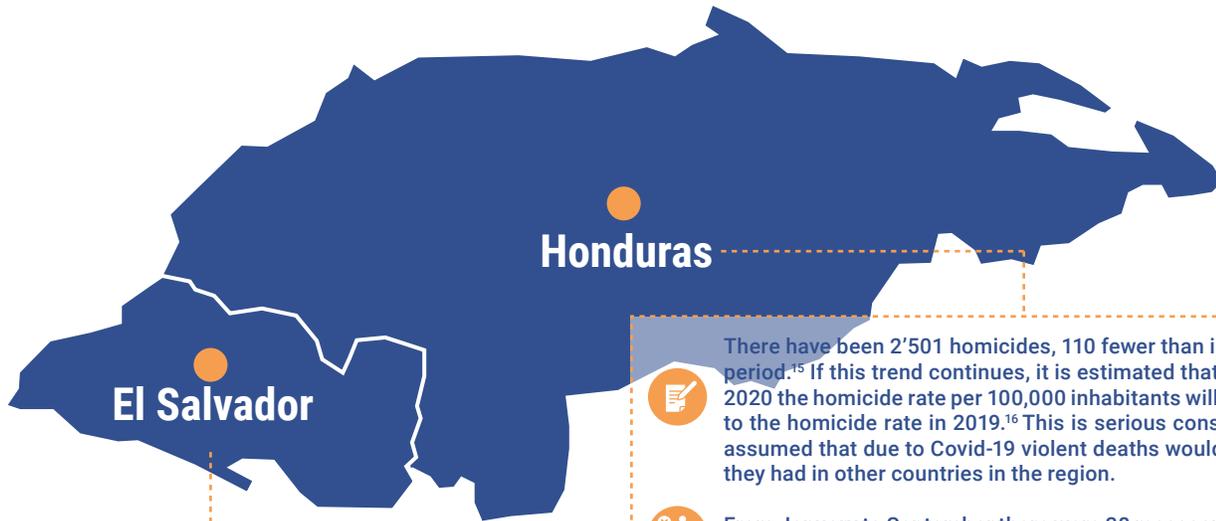
- 1** Available economic resources, information sources and means of transportation are some of the primary factors behind the selection of different migration routes by people leaving the North of Central America.
- 2** Protection risks en route are related to the profiles and vulnerabilities of people on the move. Women experience greater levels of sexual violence, while men suffer more physical attacks and torture during their migration.
- 3** Girls and women experience gender-based violence before, during, and after their journeys, regardless of whether they choose to travel with others as a protection strategy.
- 4** The institutional mechanisms available providing assistance to migrants in transit are disconnected and insufficient. State responses must adapt to the rapid changes in the different migration routes.
- 5** The mobility restrictions and border closures imposed by national governments due to the Covid-19 pandemic increased and intensified the protection risks along the migration routes to Mexico and the United States.



This is the eleventh snapshot on the protection situation in the North of Central America and Mexico; an initiative of the REDLAC Regional Protection Group for the NCA, led by the Norwegian Refugee Council, and supported by UNHCR, AECID and ECHO. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with 20 humanitarian organisations and academic institutions working in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico, as well as monitoring of official statistics, press, and academic studies. The document includes inputs from various organisations in the Protection Group, but does not reflect messages approved by each organisation.

# A general update on the protection crisis

## Key data from January to September 2020



Between January and September, 829 homicides were recorded, a 56% decrease compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

The National Civil Police registered 686 complaints of extortion in the first seven months of 2020.<sup>3</sup>

The Salvadoran Women for Peace Organisation registered 65 femicides from January to August.<sup>4</sup>

On July 28, a historic ruling was issued with the first conviction in the country for the murder of a transgender person. Three police officers were sentenced to 20 years in prison for the murder of Camila Díaz Córdova. According to Human Rights Watch, the decision was *"crucial for the protection of the rights of Salvadoran transgender people"*.<sup>5</sup>

El Faro newspaper has revealed that the Bukele government had negotiated a reduction in homicides and support for the government campaign for the 2021 legislative elections with the leaders of the MS-13 gang, in return for better conditions for prisoners.<sup>6</sup>

Cindy Erazo, accused of aggravated homicide six years ago for giving birth to a stillborn baby after suffering an obstetric emergency, was released on parole in September. There are 18 women in prison in El Salvador due to one of the strictest anti-abortion laws in the world.<sup>7</sup>

8'478 people were deported to El Salvador from the United States and Mexico between January and September, a 71% decrease compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>8</sup>

There have been 2'501 homicides, 110 fewer than in the previous period.<sup>15</sup> If this trend continues, it is estimated that by December 2020 the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants will be 44, similar to the homicide rate in 2019.<sup>16</sup> This is serious considering it was assumed that due to Covid-19 violent deaths would decrease, as they had in other countries in the region.

From January to September there were 38 massacres with a total of 132 victims.<sup>17</sup>

According to the Fourth Citizen Perception Survey on Insecurity and Victimization in Honduras, 90% of the population believe that their country is insecure and 55% say that their municipality can be considered dangerous.<sup>18</sup>

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a resolution of urgent measures ordering the State of Honduras to protect the Garifuna communities and to search for four Garifuna leaders who have been missing since the 18th of July after an apparent kidnapping.<sup>19</sup>

Between January and July, two LGBTQI human rights defenders and one environmental rights activist were murdered. The Center for Justice and International Law urged the government to implement measures to ensure effective compliance with human rights.<sup>20</sup>

Two journalists were killed in La Ceiba in July. According to the National Human Rights Commissioner, between 2001 and 2020 more than 80 journalists have been killed. 97% of these cases have gone unpunished.<sup>21</sup>

Eight environmental defenders in Colón were arrested for opposing a mining concession because of the pollution it causes in several tributaries, including the Guapinol River. Family members and civil society organisations have held demonstrations in front of the Supreme Court of Justice to protest this preventive detention measure.<sup>22</sup>

From January to September 2020, 31'185 people were deported to Honduras from the United States and Mexico, a decrease of 66% compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>23</sup>

# A general update on the protection crisis

## Key data from January to September 2020



### The caravans of October 2020

A group of approximately 4'000 people left San Pedro Sula for Guatemala on September 30th with the goal of migrating to the United States. According to the Guatemalan Migration Institute, more than 3'700 people from the caravan were returned back to Honduras. Those remaining traveled in groups of 10 to 15 people and headed to the northern department of Petén.<sup>24</sup> The caravan consisted of 65% men, 25% women and 10% children, and included approximately 40 unaccompanied minors.<sup>25</sup>

Under the pretext that people crossing the Honduran border were obliged to present negative Covid-19 tests, the Guatemalan authorities detained and returned thousands of people who crossed the border irregularly. Organisations reported that those travelling in the caravan lacked information on the route as well as personal protective equipment to prevent contracting Covid-19. In response, UNHCR distributed hygiene kits for vulnerable profiles and coordinated, together with WorldVision and the Honduran Red Cross, the delivery of 4'500 hygiene kits to reception points. The Norwegian Refugee Council supported the migrant shelters in Entre Ríos and Esquipulas in Guatemala, and in Ocotepeque, with the distribution of hygiene kits and biosafety equipment).<sup>26</sup>



1'889 cases of homicide were reported between January and September, 31% less than the same period last year.<sup>37</sup>



49 girls and 152 boys died violently between January and May.<sup>38</sup>



112 Isabel-Claudina alerts for missing women had been activated by the end of September, 67 fewer than the same period last year.<sup>39</sup>



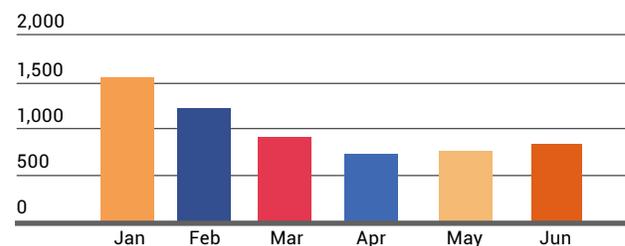
885 reports of domestic violence were reported between January and September, 25% more than the same period last year.<sup>40</sup>



A transgender Salvadoran woman seeking asylum was murdered in her home in Guatemala.<sup>41</sup> She had fled El Salvador because of gender-based violence and persecution from gang members. The President of COMCAVIS-Trans called on governments in the region to "seek mechanisms to protect LGBTI people, especially transgender people".<sup>42</sup>

### Reports of extortions - January to June 2020

Source: Infosegura<sup>43</sup>



In August, 60 families (more than 330 people) were extrajudicially evicted in Alta Verapaz, Urban Dos community, due to a land conflict. Armed persons forced them out of their homes, which were then burned.<sup>44</sup>



33'314 Guatemalans were deported from January to September, 50% from Mexico and 50% from the United States. 4'053 people were deported in September 2020, 36% more than the previous month. The number of deportations has increased since June 2020.<sup>45</sup>

# A general update on the protection crisis

## Key data from January to September 2020



33'007 homicides and femicides were registered from January to September. 704 were femicides.<sup>50</sup>



As of August, approximately 15'093 people remain on metering lists (waiting lists to apply for asylum in the US) at eleven points along the U.S.-Mexico border. The waiting time is between 5 and 11 months.<sup>51</sup>



From January to August 2020, 247 deaths and disappearances were recorded along migration routes, of which 70% were in the south of the United States and 29% in northern Mexico.<sup>52</sup>



119'257 Mexican nationals were deported from the U.S. between January and August.<sup>53</sup>

Applicants for Refugee Status in Mexico by Nationality January-September, 2020 <sup>54</sup>		Variation from the same period in 2019
Honduras	9'296	-69%
El Salvador	2'612	-71%
Guatemala	2'052	-46%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13'960</b>	<b>-68%</b>

Apprehensions at the US/Mexico border (fiscal year until August 2020) <sup>55</sup>				
Nationality	Unaccompanied minors	Travelling with families	Single adults	Total
El Salvador	1'964	4'038	8'272	<b>14'274</b>
Guatemala	7'540	10'392	23'392	<b>41'324</b>
Honduras	3'857	9'946	21'435	<b>35'238</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>13'361</b>	<b>24'376</b>	<b>53'099</b>	<b>90'836</b>

## Changes in migration policies

2020

According to data from IOM's Survey on the Impact of Covid-19 on Migrants, the pandemic reduced migration from Mexico and Central America to the United States by 60%.<sup>56</sup>

In the United States, fast-track deportations of migrants and asylum seekers continue through the application of Title 42 (a code referring to public health), meaning that health law takes precedence over immigration law, and violating the right to seek international protection.<sup>57</sup>

Following an order from a judge in Mexico, the Commissioner of the National Migration Institute must guarantee and observe compliance with measures to preserve the lives and health of migrants and asylum seekers in migrant detention centres in the country.<sup>58</sup>

Also in Mexico, during the restructuring of the aforementioned National Migration Institute, 1'040 officials were found to have participated in corruption, and resigned from their posts or were the subject of legal action from the Controller's Office.<sup>59</sup>

In the United States, presidential candidate Joe Biden proposed a possible immigration reform that would end the separation of families, stop the current government's deportation policies, end prolonged detention, restore the DACA program and rescind travel bans.<sup>60</sup>

A court ruling issued by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the decision of the Trump Administration to end the TPS programme. This could mean the deportation of approximately 300'000 Salvadorans, 5'000 Nicaraguans, 1'000 Sudanese and 58'000 Haitians covered by this protection.<sup>61</sup>

## Covid-19 in the North of Central America

El Salvador

- According to data from the Government of El Salvador, as of the 5th of October, 14% of the total number of confirmed cases remained active, the infection rate was at 438 cases per 100,000 inhabitants and the mortality rate was at 3%. 35 people were in Quarantine Centres.<sup>9</sup> On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August there was a gradual reopening of the country with the reactivation of certain economic activities.<sup>10</sup>
- Health centers and hospitals suspended outpatient consultations, leaving chronically ill patients and people without access to family planning services, prenatal and postnatal consultations and mental health support, further highlighting the lack of access to public health services.<sup>11</sup>
- Between April and June 2020, 114 pregnancies of girls aged between 10 and 14 years old have been registered, and 2'746 pregnancies in adolescents aged between 15 and 19 years old, according to data from health centers across the country. These figures represent an 79% increase of pregnancies of girls aged 10 to 14 years old, and an increase of 72% among adolescents aged 15 to 19 compared before lockdown. This increase could be related to the rise in reports of sexual abuse and sexual violence in homes that have been reported since the closure of the schools and lockdown measures due to the pandemic.<sup>12</sup>
- The critical situation for transgender women in El Salvador has been exacerbated by the pandemic. The organization COMCAVIS-Trans has reported that none of the 138 trans people and activists it works with have received the \$300 subsidy offered by the government to people who have become unemployed during the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>
- The Ombudsman's Office has received continuous complaints from communities regarding the irregular supply of water to homes during the pandemic. This situation directly affects their right to health.<sup>14</sup>

## Covid-19 in the North of Central America

### Honduras

- According to data from the Health Surveillance Unit and the Ministry of Health from the 13th of October, 59% of the total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases remain active, with a 3% mortality rate.<sup>27</sup>
- The Secretary of Security and the National Police announced the extension of the lockdown until Sunday, October 18.<sup>28</sup> Citizens could procure supplies between 6:00 am and 8:00 pm and mobility was regulated based on the last digit of people's identity cards.<sup>29</sup>
- As of September the percentage of patients with Covid-19 in hospitals was approximately 44% and the rate of positive PCR tests in recent months was higher than 40%.<sup>30</sup>
- More than 17'500 cases of dengue were reported from January to September.<sup>31</sup>
- As of the 12th of September, more than 442 demonstrations had been reported in 73 municipalities of the country, 34% of which were about the lack of food. Workers in the transport sector held several protests demanding that the government lift lockdown restrictions on the sector, as only half of all vehicles are operating.<sup>32</sup>
- According to the "Gladys Lanza" Tribune of Women Against Femicides, in the twenty-three weeks of lockdown, 138 femicides and more than 76'520 calls were registered with complaints of domestic violence, an average of 274 calls per day.<sup>33</sup>
- More than 40% of nationally registered physicians have been infected and 30 have died from the pandemic according to the Honduran College of Physicians.<sup>34</sup>
- The National Commissioner for Human Rights has registered 1'198 complaints related to the measures taken by the government as part of the Covid-19 response. Of these complaints, 57% were against national government agencies; 9% against the National Police and 4% against prison authorities.<sup>35</sup>
- According to a study by the Asociación por una Sociedad Más Justa, approximately 1.1 million children in the Department of Francisco Morazán were not attending school during the pandemic.<sup>36</sup>

### Guatemala

- From March to September, 81'909 people were infected with Covid-19. The cumulative infection rate is 486 cases per 100'000 inhabitants and the mortality rate is 17 per 100 cases. Since July 27 mobility restrictions have been managed by a system of alerts in each municipality, limiting activities based on the number of active cases in the local area.<sup>46</sup>
- There has been an increase in school dropouts due to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, the cost of keeping children in the educational system, the lack of internet access in rural areas and the fact that many children have to support their parents with generating household income. On the other hand, families live in fear of catching the virus as they report that schools are not able to maintain minimum safety standards such as access to clean water.<sup>47</sup> Of the 95'588 children at the pre-primary level who studied in the private education sector, 40% have stopped studying because their parents cannot continue to pay the monthly fees.<sup>48</sup>
- The Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance reported 19'945 cumulative cases of acute malnutrition in August, 77% more than at the same time the previous year.<sup>49</sup>

## Before starting the journey

People from the North of Central America take the migration route north for a different reasons and factors, ranging from economic migration to being forced to flee, and these reasons are often multiple and combined.

Although it is difficult to identify exact data on the motivations of the different profiles of people who take the route, surveys of people in transit or in destination countries can provide an approximation of the variety of causes behind the migratory flows in this region.

### Reasons for leaving the North of Central America according to data from REDODEM, January-December, 2019<sup>62</sup>

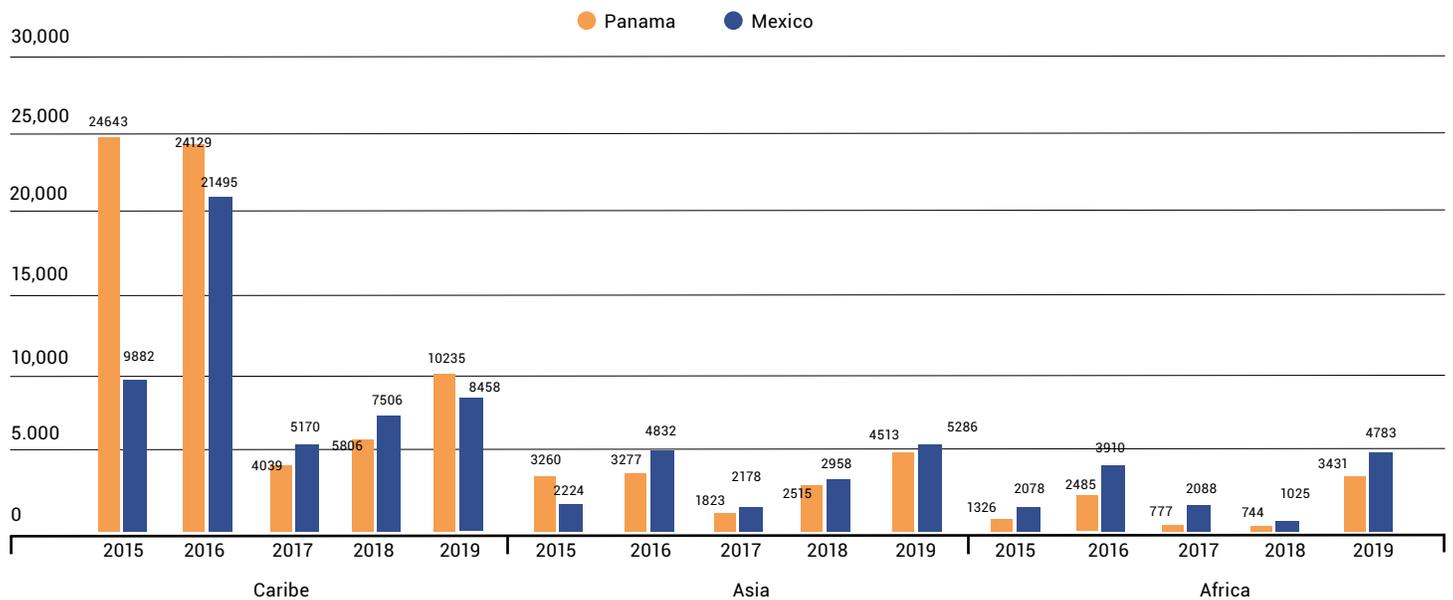
 <p><b>Environmental</b> Environmental reasons, including natural hazards (droughts, frosts, floods etc.)</p>	El Salvador	2	Total <b>41</b>
	Guatemala	7	
	Honduras	32	
 <p><b>Violence</b> Victims of intimidation/threats, extortion, persecution, recruitment/forced labor, mobility restrictions, physical violence, witnessing a homicide, domestic violence, sexual assault, occupation/robbery, kidnapping, gender discrimination and violence from extractive industries.<sup>63</sup></p>	El Salvador	804	Total <b>4,344</b>
	Guatemala	336	
	Honduras	3,240	
 <p><b>Economic</b> Unemployment, low-paying employment, search for better job opportunities, debt, lack of resources, inability to access microcredit.</p>	El Salvador	859	Total <b>14'192</b>
	Guatemala	1'303	
	Honduras	12'030	
 <p><b>Personal</b> Family reunification and search for missing relatives.</p>	El Salvador	73	Total <b>678</b>
	Guatemala	109	
	Honduras	496	
 <p><b>Sociocultural</b> Desire to live in another country, to access education or health care.</p>	El Salvador	21	Total <b>339</b>
	Guatemala	41	
	Honduras	277	
			<b>19'594</b>

It should be noted that the number of refugees and asylum seekers from the North of Central America has increased during the past five years. It is estimated that there are around 470'000 refugees and asylum seekers from the North of Central America in the world, of which 97,000 are in Mexico.<sup>64</sup>

## Other migrants on the migration route

Due to its geographical position, each year, thousands of people from other regions cross Central America in order to reach the United States, Mexico and Canada. Since 2015, there has been an increase in the numbers of migrants from Cuba, Haiti and various countries in Africa.<sup>65</sup>

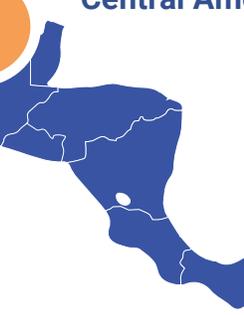
**Number of irregular migrants identified by authorities in Panama and Mexico, 2015 - 2019**



**A study on extra-regional migration in South America and Mesoamerica conducted by IOM in 2019 identified that:<sup>66</sup>**

- 85% of the extra-regional migrants are between the ages of 18 and 35.
- 71% are men and 29% women.
- 22% of women and 9% of men travelled with children under 18.
- Migrants regularly enter the American continent through Ecuador, Brazil and Chile and transit through Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico.
- The trip from Colombia to Mexico takes approximately seven to ten weeks.

## Migration routes used by extra-regional migrants through the Americas:

<p><b>1</b> South America</p> 	<p><b>Risks</b></p> <p>Language barriers (these are present throughout the region, and can cause barriers to accessing services).</p> <p>Receiving incorrect information about migration processes and routes.</p>	<p><b>Borders</b></p> <p>The main points of entry to the continent are Brazil and Ecuador.</p> <p>Haitians regularly reside for some time in Chile and Brazil before changing their country of destination.</p>
<p><b>2</b> Central America</p> 	<p><b>Risks</b></p> <p>Due to the geographic and climatic conditions in the territory, as well as the presence of organised criminal networks, the Darien Gap is considered the most dangerous point of the trip.</p>	<p><b>Borders</b></p> <p>The border between Costa Rica and Panama usually hosts large numbers of migrants waiting for transit permits.</p>
<p><b>3</b> Mexico</p> 	<p><b>Risks</b></p> <p>Safety risks on the Tapachula-Tijuana route.</p> <p>Difficulties with obtaining temporary work.</p> <p>Lack of information about the specific situations and needs of the Asian migrant population.</p>	<p><b>Borders</b></p> <p>The Tapachula area on the southern border is a saturation point for migrants at border stations while they wait for a transit permit or seek shelter. In the main cities on the northern border with the USA, such as Tijuana and Matamoros, the outcome of the refugee determination process usually takes several months.</p>

Source: Extra-regional Migration in South America and Mesoamerica: Profiles, experiences and needs, International Organization for Migration, 2019

Due to the socio-political crisis that began in Nicaragua in 2018, more than 100'000 people have been forced to flee the country and approximately 77'000 people have requested asylum in Costa Rica.

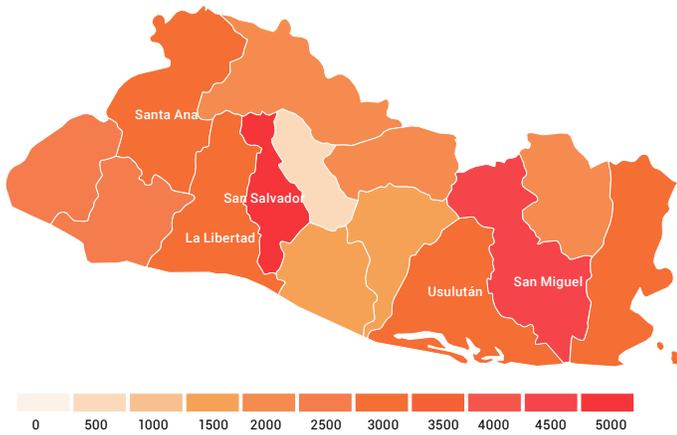
However, Nicaraguans have also fled to other countries.<sup>67</sup> Mexico received 4'054 requests for asylum from Nicaraguans between 2018 and September 2020.<sup>68</sup>

# Main departure points of the migration routes in the North of Central America

A comprehensive understanding of the migration routes should start with data showing the main departments and municipalities in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador from which people migrate to the United States and Mexico. However, there is no accurate information available indicating the places of origin of displaced persons and migrants. Nevertheless, information on the communities that deported persons return to provide a proxy of the main regions that people leave from, even though they do not constitute an exact indicator (especially because many deported people do not return to their places of origin due to the fear of persecution or of being victims of violence).

## El Salvador

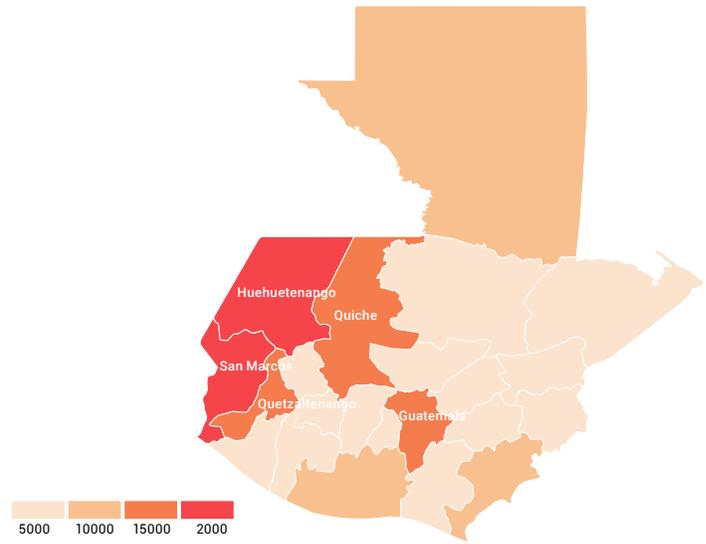
Data from 2019 shows that in El Salvador, the departments of San Salvador, San Miguel and Usulután received the highest number of deported people. Furthermore, San Salvador and San Miguel are the departments with the highest levels of violence; last year they registered 26% of all homicides committed across the country.<sup>69</sup>



Source: IOM Northern Triangle Human Mobility Information Management Initiative (NTMI). Number of migrants returned to El Salvador by department of destination in 2019.

## Guatemala

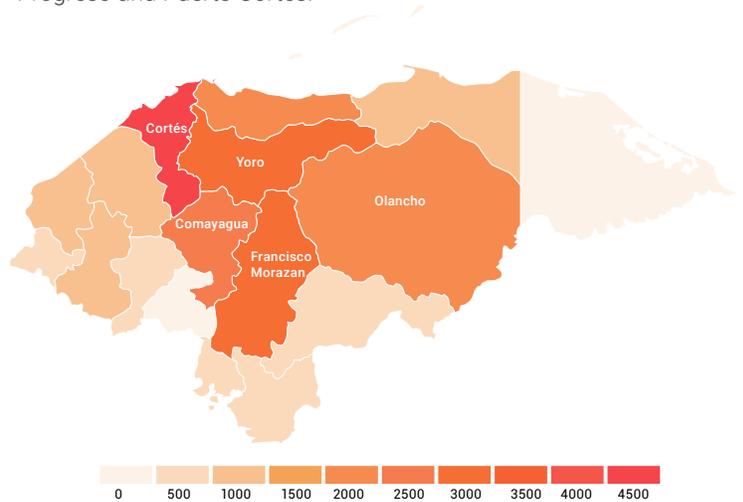
In Guatemala in 2019, the departments of Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Quiché and Quetzaltenango had the highest number of deported people.<sup>70</sup> The homicide rates are higher in the departments in the southeast, centre and north of the country, and as such do not overlap with the departments with high levels of arriving deportees.<sup>71</sup> However an analysis at the municipal level shows an overlap of high numbers of deported people returning and high levels of insecurity; just 19 municipalities in the country receive 20% of deported people and 39% of homicides.<sup>72</sup>



Source: IOM Northern Triangle Human Mobility Information Management Initiative (NTMI). Number of migrants returned to Guatemala by department of destination in 2019.

## Honduras

Finally, in Honduras in 2019, the departments of Cortés, Francisco Morazán and Yoro were the main territories that received the highest numbers of deported Hondurans. At the same time, 36% of the country's murders were concentrated in five municipalities in these three departments: Distrito Central, San Pedro Sula, Choloma, El Progreso and Puerto Cortés.<sup>73</sup>



Source: IOM Northern Triangle Human Mobility Information Management Initiative (NTMI). Number of migrants returned to Honduras by department of destination in 2019.

As such, although violence is not the only cause of displacement and migration from the North of Central America, a correlation can be observed between the places of origin of deported people and the regions affected by generalised violence.

## How do people start their journeys?

### Preparation:

When violence is the main cause of displacement, people are usually forced to flee immediately, without having the time to prepare for the trip.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, economic migration in border areas has become part of the culture of this region, and has become a standard practice for young people of a certain age to cross borders in order to seek work opportunities and send remittances to their families.<sup>75</sup> The decision to migrate is seen as a survival option in response to the lack of opportunities.<sup>76</sup> Preparation for the trip includes finding a way to finance the expenses involved. Some migrants obtain loans in order to hire "coyotes" (people smugglers) or to make the trip on their own.<sup>77</sup>

### Information:

In both cases, information on the routes and how to start the journey from the North of Central America to the United States or Mexico is obtained by word of mouth. Another source of information are the coyotes themselves, who are recognised as a reliable source of information at the community level, despite the fact that when people hire them they run the risk of falling into trafficking networks and not being registered by government and non-government organisations that can provide protection. For the mass displacements known as "caravans" that emerged in 2018, information on departure dates and routes is shared through social networks.<sup>78</sup>

### Knowledge of risks:

Young women and adolescents often prepare themselves emotionally and physically to face the risks involved in irregular migration. According to a study by the Central American Women's Fund, six out of every ten women migrants are victims of violence during their journey to the United States. However, due to misinformation about their rights, several young people and adolescents believe that they cannot request protection or support because they are travelling irregularly.<sup>79</sup>

*"Before leaving, many migrant women inject themselves with a long-lasting contraceptive to try to avoid unwanted pregnancies from rape. They assume that they will be sexually abused in transit."*

Central American Women's Fund, Marked by Migration

### Human traffickers:

In the North of Central America, it is a common practice for many migrants and displaced persons to hire coyotes to reach the United States. The Colegio de la Frontera Norte's 2019 Migration Survey of Mexico's Southern Border states that Guatemalans hire the services of a coyote more than other nationalities.<sup>80</sup> In 2019, 64% of people surveyed used coyotes to reach the United States, figures that have remained constant since 2015.<sup>81</sup> According to a study by the Rafael Landívar University "there has been an increase in the number of coyotes who have links with transnational networks across Guatemala and Mexico. There is also a high degree of professionalism in the coyotes, who rapidly incorporate U.S. legislative changes into their strategies and anticipate the reactions of U.S. immigration agents".<sup>82</sup> Salvadorans are the next largest group to use coyotes. In 2019, 59% of those surveyed said they used coyotes to make the trip, a figure that has also remained constant. 18% of Hondurans interviewed used coyotes in 2019, which demonstrates a notable decrease since 2017 when 65% used coyotes, while 56% used them in 2016. This trend can be explained by an increasing lack of economic resources available to pay a coyote and the use of caravans (mass displacements) as an alternative transit strategy to hiring coyotes.<sup>83</sup>

### New human mobility dynamics caused by Covid-19

Despite the closure of national borders in the North of Central America and Mexico, **people have continued to migrate**. According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency, at the beginning of the pandemic there was a 60% reduction in apprehensions on the southern border of the United States. Since then the numbers have increased. 16'962 people were detained in April 2020, 23'143 in May and 32'512 in June.<sup>84</sup> As part of survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration on the effects of Covid-19 on migrants, it was stated that "84% of people who thought about migrating in the last 12 months will resume their trip when mobility restrictions have been normalized. This seems to indicate that the pandemic has only postponed people's plans to migrate".<sup>85</sup>

In Guatemala, **people with protection needs** face difficulties entering the country, and the delays have increased for the processing of asylum requests.<sup>86</sup> This is leading people to opt for more dangerous routes with limited government presence, to avoid being detected. In addition, discrimination and extended waiting periods have increased in border areas.<sup>87</sup> The mobility restrictions that prevent the circulation of public transport make it difficult for migrants to move and to meet their basic needs and rights.<sup>88</sup>

There have been two **mass displacements** to the United States during the pandemic. The first occurred on June 30, 2020 with a caravan from Honduras that was stopped before it left the country, demonstrating a trend of preventing migration through repressive strategies in countries of origin.<sup>89</sup> The second caravan was reported on September 30 when a group of approximately 3'500 to 4'000 Hondurans entered Guatemala irregularly, attempting to cross to Mexico and the United States. This caravan was organised through social networks. On October 1 the caravan arrived at the El Florido border crossing between Guatemala and Honduras. Guatemalan immigration authorities requested identification documents from adults, passports for minors, and negative PCR tests for Covid-19. Also on October 1st, the President of Guatemala decreed a state of prevention in the departments where the caravan was going to pass through.<sup>90</sup> More than 3'700 people were returned to Honduras by Guatemalan authorities and approximately 1'000 people received humanitarian assistance in the Omoa reception centers. The remaining members of the caravan who were not returned to Honduras divided into small groups of approximately 10 to 15 people to continue on with their journey. According to monitoring by OHCHR in Honduras, there are ongoing calls to form new caravans, possibly this year and in 2021.<sup>91</sup>

The number of **returned migrants** has increased. For many people, the lack of work caused by the pandemic, as well as lack of resources and savings, have forced them to return to their places of origin<sup>92</sup> and some have chosen to hire coyotes for this journey, especially as mobility restrictions have further complicated the normal migration routes.<sup>93</sup> In Guatemala, people have entered the country irregularly by avoiding health checkpoints<sup>94</sup> and in other cases they have been stranded in border areas.<sup>95</sup> In El Salvador there has been a lack of clear guidelines around the PCR tests from migrants returning to their communities of origin. For example, negative Covid-19 tests are required at the Las Chinamas border if a person wishes to enter the country, but not in El Amatillo.<sup>96</sup>

In Mexico, 3'563 people were released from immigration detention centres due to Covid-19<sup>97</sup> and were transported to the southern border.<sup>98</sup> According to data from the Mexican Ministry of Health issued on October 11, from a population of 1'911 migrants in detention, 28% (541 cases) tested positive for Covid-19, of which 11% were from Honduras, 8% from El Salvador, and 4% from Guatemala.<sup>99</sup> From March to September 2020, 39'157 people were **deported** to the North of Central America, 49% less than the same period of the previous year.<sup>100</sup> However, whenever the Asylum Cooperation Agreements (ACAs) are reactivated, the numbers of people in need of international protection are predicted to rise.<sup>101</sup>

# Migration routes in the region



Routes in Guatemala	
<span style="color: green;">●</span>	Corito to La Técnica, El Ceibo and El Naranjo
<span style="color: red;">●</span>	Agua Caliente, Las Chinamas to La Mesilla and Gracias a Dios
<span style="color: blue;">●</span>	Agua Caliente, Las Chinamas and La Hachadura to Tecún Umán

Route	México
<span style="color: blue;">●</span> South-eastern route	From Tenosique to Tierra Blanca
<span style="color: yellow;">●</span> South-western route	From Tapachula to Medias Aguas
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Central route	From Medias Aguas to Querétaro
<span style="color: lightblue;">●</span> North-eastern route	From Querétaro to Ciudad Acuña
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Northern route	From Querétaro to Ciudad Juárez
<span style="color: darkblue;">●</span> North-eastern route	From Querétaro to Tijuana

The migration routes shown are based on patterns identified by the humanitarian organisations that provide assistance to migrants in the country and were interviewed for this snapshot. It is important to note that the migration routes are not static and can change.

# Migration routes through El Salvador

## Departure from El Salvador

Widespread violence is one of the main factors triggering both the internal and cross-border displacement of Salvadorans. Evidence of this trend is that the zones where deported persons return to generally coincide with the areas that have the highest levels of insecurity: 21 municipalities in El Salvador that receive 39% of deportees, are also home to 25% of the country's homicides.<sup>102</sup>

In 2019, 71'500 internally displaced persons were registered in El Salvador.<sup>103</sup> It should be noted people internally displaced as a result of generalised violence are often forced to become displaced again due to not finding a durable solution, and as such internal displacement is often a prelude to cross-border migration as people seek refuge in safer countries.<sup>104</sup>

According to information from humanitarian organisations, it is estimated that in 2019 an average of 300 Salvadorans left the country every day for the United States.<sup>105</sup> The migration route crosses the eastern border, with people usually travelling by bus to Guatemala. According to one humanitarian organisation, people usually choose one of two border crossings: La Hachadura and Las Chinamas. The migration route to Guatemala through the La Hachadura border crossing is less frequented and has less traffic.<sup>106</sup> According to government data, there are 142 irregular border crossings between El Salvador and Guatemala. It is estimated that most of the irregular entries and exits occur near the Las Chinamas border and around Las Pilas, Los Encuentros and San Matías.<sup>107</sup> According to humanitarian organisations, the number of these irregular border crossings may have doubled recently, as a result of the implementation of the Territorial Control Plan and the pandemic mobility restrictions. In March 2020, in order to prevent irregular border crossings, to contain the spread of Covid-19, the national government deployed 2'000 soldiers to guard the border.

Humanitarian organisations indicate that travelling with caravans to undertake the migration route can be seen as both a protection decision (a self-defense mechanism against possible risks) as well as financial decision (for those who are unable to pay for coyotes). In 2018, a caravan began its journey on October the 31st from the Plaza al Divino Salvador del Mundo, in San Salvador. More than 1'300 Salvadorans congregated at this point, and then divided into three groups, leaving at five, eight and nine in the morning. The migration route began in the Alameda Manuel Enrique Araujo neighborhood and continued towards Santa Tecla. During the journey from Lourdes, Colón and Sonsonate, the Caravan divided into two groups: the larger group went to the San Cristóbal border crossing and the other group walked to the La Hachadura border.<sup>108</sup> According to official figures from the Directorate of Immigration and Foreigners, 1'351 Salvadorans entered Guatemala as part of this second migrant caravan: 630 through the La Hachadura border and 721 through the San Cristóbal border. Salvadorans who did not travel with official documentation were separated from the group and returned to San Salvador. After passing the final checkpoint on the Salvadoran side of the border, some people crossed the Río Paz, the natural border between El Salvador and Guatemala. This journey is longer than the route taken by Salvadoran migrants who travelled with official documentation as it was estimated that two hours are required to cross the river. Finally, the remaining members of the caravan crossed the Pedro Alvarado Border, the last step before entering Guatemalan territory.<sup>109</sup>

## Protection risks

Salvadoran migrants heading to the United States and Mexico are at particular risk of human trafficking.<sup>110</sup> According to the Trafficking in Persons Report 2020, published by the U.S. Department of State, in El Salvador traffickers exploit women, men, children, unaccompanied minors, teenage girls and LGBTQI persons, especially transgender people. Other exploitative practices employed by gangs are related to forced marriage.<sup>111</sup> The exploitation of Salvadorans is evident in sectors such as agriculture, domestic services and the textile industry. However, the risk of exploitation is present along the migration route, as well as upon arrival in host countries where they are obliged to participate in forced or poorly paid labor, forced criminal activities and sexual trafficking.

*"It was quick, it took us less than five minutes. We were then driven part of the way in a car and the rest on the back of a motorcycle to the border with El Salvador, but when we got there the police caught us. We had to bribe them. They asked us for \$400 each, but we could only give them \$100 each, which they reluctantly accepted. But they threatened to arrest us."*

Testimony of Salvadoran migrants as told to VICE media

### Land borders in El Salvador



Extra-regional migrants, specifically Nicaraguan and Honduran persons in transit through El Salvador, do not escape sexual and labor trafficking either. Last year the authorities prosecuted nine individuals (eight for sex trafficking and one for forced labor) and convicted 12 people (three for sex trafficking and nine for forced marriage).<sup>112</sup>

### Salvadorans on the migration route

Salvadorans experience a number of protection risks during their transit through Mexico. They represent the fourth highest nationality of people returned to Mexico under the MPP programme, with a total of 7'597 people returned between January and December 2019. In addition, 69'418 unaccompanied minors from El Salvador were detained by the U.S. border patrol between 2014 and 2019, while 121'802 people travelling with families were apprehended between 2016 and 2019.<sup>113</sup> More than 11% of the people registered by REDODEM last year who reported being the victims of aggressions, violations and barriers in accessing their human rights were Salvadoran nationals.<sup>114</sup> In addition, 287 Salvadorans reported that they had suffered attacks and/or probable violations of their human rights during their migration in the period from April to December 2019.<sup>115</sup>

## Government responses

It is important to note that the immigration policies of the United States and Mexico **criminalise migrants and displaced persons** through the use of detention and deportation without due process. There has been an increase in the militarisation of the borders in the countries of the North of Central America as part of the implementation of safe third country agreements, and other militarisation and externalisation policies, some of which have been justified as being necessary public health measures during the pandemic.

In August 2019, the Government of El Salvador announced the deployment of 800 border police agents, along with the Directorate of Migration, in the international airport and along the borders, to guard the 154 irregular border crossings across 200 kilometers of borders between El Salvador and Guatemala. These agents were intended to **prevent the irregular migration of Salvadorans** heading to the United States, by, in part, detaining people trying to leave the country. The government states that their mission will be to combat the criminal groups and gangs as the main triggers of forced migration. However, this new measure restricts the movements of irregular Salvadoran migrants, as well as of internally displaced persons and asylum seekers, who may have also reported suffering persecution from state security agents.<sup>116</sup> It is important to remember that El Salvador has the sixth highest number in the world of nationals seeking asylum, with 136'292 asylum applicants registered in 2019.<sup>117</sup>

There are no government responses in place to protect Salvadorans with an irregular migration status in transit to the United States and Mexico. However, there are several **government centres that provide assistance to other categories of migrants**. The Directorate for Comprehensive Assistance to Migrants provides immediate assistance to returned/deported migrants from Mexico and the United States.<sup>118</sup> This support is delivered through the Centre for Comprehensive Assistance to Migrants, which provides the following services:<sup>119</sup>

- Comprehensive assistance to foreigners with an irregular migration status, facilitating their administrative processes.
- Facilitating access to consular assistance for foreigners, providing them with identification through a provisional document and coordinating support from their respective embassies and consulates
- Providing temporary housing to Salvadoran deportees with high levels of vulnerability and who for different reasons cannot return to their place of residence.

There are some efforts to promote **informed migration and local opportunities at home**. IOM, in partnership with the General Agency for Migration and Foreigners and more than 25 local partners, implements a communications campaign called "Connect with your future". This campaign is aimed at providing reliable information on regular migration paths, as well as local development opportunities for young people in the municipality of Ahuachapán.<sup>120</sup>

In response to human trafficking, in two of the most affected areas (the municipalities of San Miguel and Ahuachapán) the Attorney General's Office has hired eleven new prosecutors to **fight human trafficking**. Although this initiative stands as an important step forward, there are still aspects that need to be improved to strengthen its effectiveness, such as by: increasing in the number of staff who conduct investigations, increasing the budget, providing the offices with technological equipment and developing a modernised case management system to collect, share and analyze the information that is available to enforce the law.<sup>121</sup> Another noteworthy action is the implementation of the Special Law against Trafficking of Persons of 2014 and the Special Law on Migration and Foreigners, which grant residence to victims of human trafficking through different entry and exit permits for a period of two years, which can then be extended.<sup>122</sup> However, it is also important to highlight the need for resources to ensure the implementation of these laws, especially in relation to humanitarian assistance, temporary accommodation, emotional support and monitoring of cases.<sup>123</sup>

In terms of the international commitments undertaken by El Salvador, within the framework of the **Brazil Plan of Action**, training was provided to 70 public officials (National Civil Police, General Directorate of Migration and Foreigners and Customs) in border areas on the international protection of refugees, with support from UNHCR. This work intends to improve the identification of persons in need of international protection and to link them to the national asylum system, in order to guarantee them access to the territory and improve the process of granting refugee status for persons in

need of international protection. In addition, in July 2019, El Salvador became a signatory of the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS). This involved a commitment to begin collecting data on the following areas by 2020: the number of people identified, assisted and referred in border/transit areas; the percentage of individual cases or family units at risk or who have been displaced in municipalities prioritised for interventions; cases at risk of being displaced and people who have been displaced and have had their rights violated.<sup>124</sup>

## Migration routes in Honduras

### Main Routes

In Honduras, two migration routes converge: the route taken by Hondurans and the route taken by extra-regional migrants in transit.

As in El Salvador, internal displacement due to widespread violence contributes to cross-border displacement. According to a study that characterised internal displacement based on the type of violence that caused it, between 2004 and 2018, an estimated 247'090 people were internally displaced by violence.<sup>125</sup> According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras and the National Migration Institute, an average of 400 people crossed into Guatemala each day with the intention of reaching the United States during 2019.<sup>126</sup>

Hondurans tend to leave through the western part of the country, specifically at the Agua Caliente (Ocotepeque) border crossing where there is a high level of crime due to the presence of organised criminal groups. However, in the last year it was identified that many people prefer to reach Guatemala through Cortés on the northern border and then crossing Corinto, which is a less dangerous route, but takes longer.<sup>127</sup>

Honduras is also a transit country for extra-regional migrants. According to the National Migration Institute, 26'239 irregular migrants entered Honduran territory in 2016, compared to 4'332 in 2017, and 2'277 between January and the end of July in 2018. In the first semester of 2019, 19'277 in transit were identified, reflecting an increase of 651%.<sup>128</sup> Most of the extra-regional migrants are Cuban and Haitian, but there are also Syrians, Afghans, Nigerians and Congolese (among other nationalities). They generally enter the country from Nicaragua through the Guasaule and the Las Manos border crossings, both of which are located in southern Honduras. They stop in the departments of Choluteca and El Valle before starting their journey across Honduran territory. Most migrants enter and leave the territory irregularly, normally transferring from one bus to another as they head towards the border crossing at Ocotepeque to enter Guatemala, following the Pan-American Highway until they reach Tapachula. This is a

complex and dangerous route in which a high number of deaths and accidents are reported.<sup>129</sup>

Although in 2006 Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador signed the Central America-4 Free Mobility Agreement (CA-4) that ensures free mobility for citizens of the four signatory countries for a period of 90 days, without restrictions other than the requirement to present their identity documents, due to the current context and the situation of the pandemic, the borders have been closed.<sup>130</sup> Individuals wishing to regularly enter Honduras must present a negative PCR test for COVID-19 or their entry is not authorized.

There are several centres that provide assistance for extra-regional migrants and Hondurans in transit:

- The Centre for Assistance to Irregular Migrants (CAMI) is located in Choluteca on the southern border of the country.
- Located on the border with Corinto (Honduras - Guatemala) in the north of the country, is the Izabal Apostolic Vicariate Migrant Shelter, part of the Nuestra Señora de Fátima en Guatemala Parish in Izabal.
- In the west of the country located on the border with Aguas Caliente (Honduras - Guatemala) is the San José Ocotepeque Migrant Shelter.<sup>131</sup>

## Protection risks

Protection risks vary depending on the migration route taken and the socio-economic profile of migrants. According to the Trafficking in Persons Report 2020, migrants and internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Migrants in transit from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, the Middle East and South America are vulnerable to being trafficked. Traffickers also exploit children, men and women through forcing them to engage in domestic service, drug trafficking and selling in the street in both Honduras and in other countries, especially in Guatemala, Mexico and the United States. Criminal organisations and gangs coerce and threaten young men and women to transport drugs, charge extortion and commit violent acts. While this phenomenon occurs primarily in urban areas, some NGOs have observed an increase in these activities in rural areas.<sup>132</sup>

### Hondurans on the migratory route

According to data from REDODEM, in 2019 there were 19'056 Honduran nationals registered as transiting through Mexico, with 16'296 men, 2'732 women and 28 people identified as non-binary.<sup>133</sup> From this group, 62% cited economic factors as the main reason for leaving the country; 33% did not specify a reason, while 4% referred to violence. The majority of Honduran migrants in transit through Mexico are **18 and 25 years of age**. The two most prominent age groups in 2018 and the first half of 2019 were people aged between 18 and 29 years of age (59%) and those between 30 and 44 years of age (38%). It is important to note that in the first half of 2019 the percentage of **migrant women** who were returned from Mexico increased compared to 2018 from 26% to 34%.<sup>134</sup>

People from Honduras may be **more vulnerable to the risks involved in transiting through Mexico** compared to Salvadoran migrants as they are more likely to use transportation that can be classified as dangerous, such as trains, they take longer to make the journey, they experience more risks and hire fewer coyotes. In the first half of 2019, 62% of Hondurans used a bus or van and 26% walked and swam during their migration route. Finally, 20% of Hondurans surveyed reported that they were insulted, yelled at, physically assaulted and robbed. The most frequent **length of stay** among Hondurans returned from Mexico included 58% who stayed between a week and a month in the country, 24% who stayed between a day and a week, and 15% who stayed between a month and a year. 94% of the returned Hondurans were **detained on the street or on the road**; 95% of these detentions were made by the Mexican National Migration Institute.<sup>135</sup> According to a humanitarian

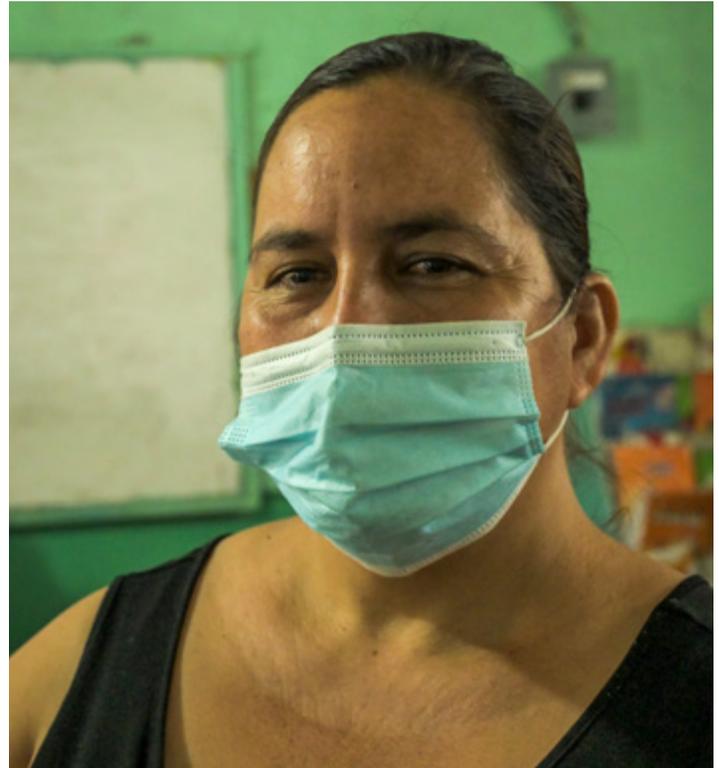


Photo: NRC/Christian Jepsen, 2020.

organisation based in Honduras, the biggest trend in crimes reported by Honduran migrants in transit in Mexico has been the fragmentation and division of families, as well as kidnappings, especially of women. The kidnappers release the men and continue to hold the women against their will in order to solicit ransom payments after migrants cross the border into the United States.<sup>136</sup>

Hondurans travelling to the United States represent the main nationality of **people returned to Mexico under the MPP programme**, with a total of 21'166 persons returned in 2019. 73'216 unaccompanied Honduran children were detained by the U.S. Border Patrol from 2014 to 2019, while 270'477 Honduran family members were apprehended by the same patrol between 2016 and 2019.<sup>137</sup> This population experiences a series of human rights violations, as well as the difficulties and losses associated with their deportation process and return to Mexico. 54% of people registered by REDODEM last year who reported having experienced aggressions, violations and barriers to accessing their human rights were Hondurans.<sup>138</sup>

## Government responses

Despite the fact that Honduras has a normative human rights framework, it only applies to migrants residing in the country and not to those in transit.<sup>139</sup>

Similar to the situation in El Salvador, trafficking is one of the main protection risks for both irregular Honduran migrants and extra-regional migrants crossing the country. The Honduran government has improved its diagnostic and investigative capacity outside of the country in terms of the trafficking of migrant and returned/deported minors, achieving the repatriation of 27 Honduran minors through its diplomatic missions. In 2019, the government identified 75 victims of trafficking in its national territory, 66 of whom were victims of sexual exploitation and 9 were victims of labor exploitation. NGOs identified an additional 78 victims of trafficking last year. The Inter-Institutional Commission against Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons (CICESCT) coordinates actions with the National Migration Institute (INM) and the Centre for Assistance to Returned Migrants (CAMR) to evaluate cases of migrants who may have been victims of trafficking. The Ministry of Education has developed a handbook for teachers to support the reintegration of children who are returned/deported migrants, victims of trafficking or internally displaced persons. The national government has implemented awareness campaigns with a special emphasis on migration routes through Guatemala and Mexico, human trafficking and its impact on society. CICESCT has provided training to police, judges, lawyers, immigration officials, municipal authorities, psychologists, social workers, tourism professionals, students, and representatives of non-governmental organizations throughout Honduras.<sup>140</sup> However, despite the fact that the regulatory framework provides for the possibility of granting foreign victims of trafficking temporary protection status, permanent residence permits, or work permits, the government did not provide any restitution to victims in 2019. An independent assessment of trafficking in Honduras found that most victims did not file complaints due to their lack of confidence in the system, fear of reprisals and a lack of awareness about their access to justice.<sup>141</sup>

As a member of the Regional Integral Framework for Protection and Durable Solutions (MIRPS), the Honduran Government has established that one of the needs and challenges faced by the country is to provide adequate assistance to the Honduran population abroad in terms of asylum processes, as well as to returned migrants in need of protection.<sup>142</sup>

However, the current circumstances caused by Covid-19 have aggravated the lack of protection for Hondurans in transit to the United States and Mexico. On March 15, the government declared a State of Emergency that resulted in the closure of government institutions, including the National Institute of Migration and the Centre for Assistance to Migrants, which in accordance with Ministerial Decree PCM 021-2020 suspended their services.<sup>143</sup> In



Photo: NRC/Christian Jepsen, 2020.

May, approximately 500 migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were identified in the country. Due to the closure of the Centre for Assistance to Migrants, they have been forced to remain in the city of Choluteca and to sleep on the streets. Other migrants slept in houses rented to them by community members, until they were removed by the police.<sup>144</sup> Their situation is complex, as in order to leave the country they need official permission to travel to the border and must pay a fine of USD 183. These migrants have not received responses from government institutions.<sup>145</sup> According to the "Situation of Migrants in Honduras" report prepared by the Choluteca Local Council, stranded foreign migrants have been left destitute and unprotected during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some migrants in transit in Honduras have been victims of abuses by members of the state security forces, as reflected in videos and photographs published in the media, social networks and reports made to human rights organisations.<sup>146</sup>

# Migration routes in Guatemala

## Main routes

Migrants that transit through Guatemala consist of Central American migrants and displaced persons, generally Hondurans and Salvadorans; regional migrants from Haiti, Cuba, Colombia, Mexico and Ecuador; and extra-regional migrants.

While some Central Americans are able to enter Guatemala regularly under the CA-4 Agreement, others choose to enter **through irregular border crossings**, as despite the agreements that ensure free mobility, many people lack the necessary identification documents or are unaware of the regular migration routes. It has also been identified that many people do not complete the official process of leaving the country and begin their journey through Mexico irregularly.<sup>147</sup> During 2018, Guatemala's immigration authorities reported that 9'628 people transited the country irregularly, 1'310 of whom were under 17 years old and 31% were women.<sup>148</sup>

The **points of entry** for migrants transiting through the country to the United States or Mexico are in the departments of Jutiapa, Chiquimula and Izabal, which border with El Salvador and Honduras, specifically through the border crossings at La Hachadura, Las Chinamas, San Cristóbal (El Salvador-Guatemala) and Agua Caliente and Corito (Honduras-Guatemala). **The exit points are through the departments that border Mexico**, specifically the Tecún Umán border crossing in San Marcos, the La Mesilla and Gracias a Dios border crossings in Huehuetenango and the La Técnica and El Ceibo border crossings in El Petén.<sup>149</sup>

In Guatemala, **four main migration routes** used by migrants in transit can be identified. Entry and exit to the country is either through established migrant checkpoints or irregular border crossings.

No	Entry Point	Transit	Exit Point	Description
1	Agua Caliente Chiquimula	Guatemala City	Tecún Umán – San Marcos	This historical route has been used by migrants from the North of Central America for more than 20 years. <sup>150</sup> It is currently the most difficult route to travel because it is the most visible route to authorities. It is a short distance to the border with Mexico and is more populated, but it is also safer because of the presence of government actors and humanitarian organisations. <sup>151</sup>
2	Corinto Izabal	Petén	Petén *El Ceibo *El Naranjo *La Técnica	Known as "the Honduran route" as people from this nationality generally use it. <sup>152</sup> They enter through the Corinto border crossing in Izabal, then arrive at the bus station in Santa Elena, Peten and leave through three exit points:  This is the border with an official border crossing between Guatemala and Mexico. This route is easily accessible because it has a paved road and is a populated area. In addition, government and humanitarian institutions such as the Migrant Shelter are present. This migration route is under increased surveillance by the National Civil Police.  This is the town where the El Ceibo border crossing is located and has hotels and banks. People can either exit via the El Ceibo border crossing or take a more dangerous route through irregular border crossings located in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve. Very few people use this route.  There is a small community of approximately 200 people living in the area. It is a lonely migration route with a few remote communities. Many migrants choose this route because there are less police and when they cross the river there is no migration checkpoint on the Mexican side. There is a Red Cross medical clinic in this community.

No	Entry Point	Transit	Exit Point	Description
3	El Salvador border	Guatemala City	Tecún Umán	This migration route is similar to the first one. Migrants often enter through the San Cristobal and Las Chinamas border crossings, while other migrants who enter the country through the La Hachadura border crossing can directly travel by public transport along the coast to Tecún Umán. <sup>153</sup>
4	El Salvador and Honduras borders	Guatemala City	Huehuetenango	It has been identified that this is the migration route that guides and/or coyotes use to transport migrants. In Huehuetenango there are two border crossings through which they exit the country, La Mesilla and Gracias a Dios. In addition, migrants can also cross the border at Ixcán Quiché through the Ingenieros border crossing. This route has a limited police presence. <sup>154</sup>

The migration routes described above are based on patterns identified by the humanitarian organisations that provide assistance to migrants in the country and were interviewed for this snapshot. It is important to note that the migration routes are not static and can change.



## Planned destinations of migrants

Migrants in transit through Guatemala usually have the United States as their main **destination country**. The Network for the Protection and Monitoring of Pastoral Care for People in a situation of Human Mobility from the Guatemalan Episcopal Conference attended to 11'924 migrants from January to October 2019, of which 68% stated that the United States was their destination country, 22% planned to reach Mexico, 6% wanted to return to their country of origin, 2% were heading to Guatemala, 1% wanted to go to Belize, 0.5% to Canada and 0.5% were undecided.<sup>155</sup>

The Characterization Survey of Migrants in Transit conducted by IOM in February 2020 in the country's border areas stated that: of the 245 people interviewed, 127 were travelling alone and 118 were travelling in groups (an average of 2.5 people per group and 21% of those interviewed were undocumented). 56% were Guatemalans, 26% Hondurans, 14% Salvadorans and 4% were from other countries. Four out of five migrants were men, of whom 54% were aged between 18 and 29. The average age of women travelling was 26. 46% of the population interviewed had migrated before and 20% of the people interviewed had been forced to change their residence in the five years before migrating because of violence or insecurity.<sup>156</sup>

## Protection risks on the migration routes through Guatemala

While travelling the migration routes through Guatemala, people are exposed to various protection risks, such as abuse by authorities, physical and sexual violence, robbery and theft, extortion, human trafficking, lack of access to basic services and humanitarian assistance, family separation as well as loss of contact with family in their place of origin and disappearances.<sup>157</sup>

*"Often when people arrive at the shelter, they don't have any money left, usually because the authorities have taken away the little money they had, due to them not having any official identification. They take 500 GTQ per adult and 700 GTQ per child".*

Migrant shelter

**Extortion** by the National Civil Police and migration authorities is a constant occurrence on migration routes in the country.<sup>158</sup> Public officials threaten to stop migrants and return them to the other side of the border, or prevent them from crossing without paying a bribe. This occurs primarily in the border areas and surrounding roads, violating their right to transit under the CA4 agreements. People are more exposed to this type of extortion when they do not have identification documents.<sup>159</sup> Migrants in transit are often forced to pay higher prices on public transport as bus drivers threaten to turn them in at police checkpoints.<sup>160</sup>

**Women fleeing with their children** and do not have a travel permit signed by the father, (who in some cases, may be their persecutor), or children and adolescents who do not have a passport (the only travel document accepted for children and adolescents according to the CA4 agreements), are not allowed to enter the migration checkpoints. This situation increases protection risks because they either return to their places of origin or use an irregular border crossing where they are exposed to networks of traffickers or criminals who steal their belongings, cell phones and money.<sup>161</sup>

**Sexual violence** is another constant occurrence on the migration route for women and people of the LGBTQI community, as they are forced to "exchange of their bodies for protection". Access to justice is limited in these cases because on many occasions the perpetrator is their guide or coyote and reporting a crime to the relevant authorities would require returning to their country of origin because of their irregular migratory status.<sup>162</sup>

## Most affected places

The first at-risk areas identified along the migratory route are the **border areas** where migrants enter and exit the country.<sup>163</sup> According to the 'Final Report on the North-South migration routes', *"upon entering Belize, Guatemala and Mexico, migrants in transit face a hostile situation of constant discrimination that includes extortion, physical and verbal aggression, threats and intimidation, harassment and violence perpetrated by members of municipal, state and federal authorities. The most frequent cases are associated with abuses by the National Police and immigration authorities; in addition to harassment by criminal gangs and drug cartels".*<sup>164</sup>

The second at-risk areas are **bus terminals**, such as the Santa Elena Petén terminal, Station 2-43 (also known as La Ruidosa) and the Puerto Barrios bus station in Izabal. These are places where many migrants arrive and where they are often misinformed or tricked. Taxis and buses offer to take people to their destinations with overpriced fares. Passengers can also be robbed. In this area there are also people who exchange foreign currency at a price well below the official rate. Local coyotes are also present and offer to take migrants to the border with Mexico for a certain amount of money. Trafficking networks identify their possible victims in these spaces.<sup>165</sup>

The third at-risk area are **roads**. The checkpoints operated by the National Civil Police along migration routes often represent a risk for irregular migrants as they are susceptible to being victims of extortion by authorities, or detained and returned to their countries of origin by migration authorities. On the road leading to La Mesilla in Huehuetenango from Guatemala City there are several checkpoints.<sup>166</sup> This situation also occurs on the Izabal - Petén route.<sup>167</sup> It is important to emphasize that the presence of government institutions on the migration route is extremely important for establishing protection mechanisms for migrants, and as such it is necessary to strengthen government agencies.

## Protection risks specific to each migration route

*"Everywhere there are regrettable events. On all roads migrants encounter difficulties"*

### Migrant shelter

Each migration routes in Guatemala has specific protection risks related to situational and contextual aspects, the presence of criminal groups and the presence of institutional actors:

The **Agua Caliente - Tecún Umán route** is an historical migration route and therefore has a higher presence of humanitarian actors, and it passes through urban areas, making it a safer route for women and children to some extent.<sup>168</sup> However, because it is more visible and well known there are more immigration controls, such as those carried out by the Mexican National Guard, which controls the border zone and prevents the passage of irregular migrants, often through violent actions.<sup>169</sup> The militarisation of this area has changed migration dynamics and has forced people to take greater risks. For example, at the Suchiate River, some migrants choose to cross at night to remain undetected by authorities, putting them at risk of drowning or of becoming victims of criminal acts.<sup>170</sup>

The **Izabal-Petén route** has become popular during the last ten years<sup>171</sup> because of the lower amount of checks at border crossings allowing migrants to continue on their journeys.<sup>172</sup> This route has a lower presence of humanitarian and State actors. In one of the available detours for this route, in El Naranjo, people travel through the Mayan Biosphere Reserve to reach Mexico. By taking this detour migrants face the risk of suffering injuries or accidents and are not able to access medical services.<sup>173</sup> According to Reuters, for the past 12 years *"drug gangs that have been trafficking cocaine through the same jungle area for some time are now entering into the business of human trafficking. They charge fees for migrants to pass through the Reserve or kidnap migrants to extort money from their families"*.<sup>174</sup>

It has been identified that people who travel through **Huehuetenango** usually use guides or coyotes. People who travel with coyotes are told not to engage in conversation with anyone to avoid being discovered, and as such give limited answers when asked questions by staff from humanitarian organisations. This situation makes it difficult to gather information and identify their protection needs.<sup>175</sup> People are at risk of being abandoned by coyotes at the borders, and the government's institutional presence is limited in this region.<sup>176</sup>

## Migrant and displaced women in Guatemala

Women and girls report transit as the stage of migration when they suffer from the highest risk of violence and feel unprotected.<sup>177</sup> From 2014 to 2018, 31% of migrants in transit with an irregular migratory status who were referred to the Migration Office in the country were women (5'515). These figures have varied depending on the year, but the percentage of women has remained the same compared to men (following the creation of the new government agency, the Guatemalan Migration Institute, public institution are no longer publishing the percentages of female migrants).<sup>178</sup>

According to the study titled *Women and Migration: Experiences from Mesoamerica: "as border security measures tighten, violence against people, especially migrant women, has increased. Women have the least resources to undertake the migratory journey safely and generally depend on external resources, both at the start of their travel and during their journeys along the migration route"*.<sup>179</sup>

Physical and psychological violence against migrant and displaced women in transit regularly occurs. Women in an irregular situation can be victims of extortion by government agents. The lack of awareness and training for government officials in relation to cases of violence against women exposes them to greater risk, danger and re-victimisation. Travel costs for women are often double, due to illegal charges from transport services. Faced with the loss of economic resources for transiting through Guatemala, women are left without money to negotiate their safety for the rest of the journey. Sexual violence is used as the main tool of control over migrant and displaced women during the migration route. Coyotes can force women to exchange sex for "protection", so that they are not left abandoned during the journey or are handed over to other criminal organisations. During transit, women can be targeted by trafficking networks and become victims of sexual exploitation.<sup>180</sup>



Photo: NRC, 2020.

## Government responses

According to the Human Rights Ombudsman's 2019 Annual Circumstantial Report, during 2019 the Government of Guatemala adopted several **policies and measures to increase the safety of migrants and address crimes against migrants in transit. Examples given were that the U.S. government** sent agents from the Department of Homeland Security to Mexico's southern border to help the Guatemalan government stop the migratory exodus of Central Americans. Under the Governance Plan, the arbitrary detention and deportation of migrants was increased with the participation of the PNC, agents from the Ports, Airports and Border Crossing Division and the Special Division of Criminal Investigation, as well as accompaniment from migration authorities.<sup>181</sup>

In response to the protection needs of migrants in transit, the national government has implemented **actions in favor of unaccompanied or separated children and adolescents.** The Inspector General's Office undertakes an assessment of the best interest of the child and refers the case to a competent judge who decides on the necessary protection measures.<sup>182</sup> In addition, the Social Welfare Secretariat of the Presidential Office provides shelter to children in unaccompanied migration contexts.<sup>183</sup>

Humanitarian organisations have reported that the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office has implemented mobile units in several border areas to work on protection for migrants, including through the reception of complaints.<sup>184</sup>

## Humanitarian response

In general, it is humanitarian organisations that provide assistance to migrants in transit.<sup>185</sup> In 2016 the **Safe Spaces Network** was created with the objective of providing guidance and advice to people in need of international protection and to deportees.<sup>186</sup>

According to UNHCR: *"In Guatemala, the National Safe Spaces Network consists of seven partner organisations, nine shelters (including one for unaccompanied children and another for LGBTQI people) and 10 information and assistance spaces located in strategic areas. This Network provides vital humanitarian assistance and information on protection mechanisms for people in need of international protection. Monitoring of border crossings and face-to-face protection mechanisms have been strengthened in the departments of Petén and Izabal through joint missions by the Migration and Protection Working Group".*<sup>187</sup>

In recent years migrant shelters have been staffed by an increasing number of professionals who provide psychosocial assistance and legal guidance to migrants and people in need of international protection.<sup>188</sup>

# Migration routes through Mexico



Migrants from the North of Central America enter Mexico through three main migration corridors:

Route	Cities in Guatemala	Cities in Mexico
<b>Jungle</b>	El Ceibo, La Técnica and Bethel.	Tenosique and Palenque.
<b>Central</b>	La Mesilla and the Gracias a Dios Border.	Motuzintla, Frontera Comalapa and La Trinitaria.
<b>Pacific</b>	Tecún Umán and El Carmen.	Cacahoatán, Tapachula and Ciudad Hidalgo.

The crossing through the Central Corridor, which passes through Mexican towns such as Palenque and Frontera Comalapa in Chiapas, is usually more frequented by people who are being escorted by guides, polleros or coyotes, who are generally hired in the countries of origin. The other two corridors that pass through localities such as Tenosique, Tabasco and Tapachula, Chiapas tend to be used more by those travelling independently.

Due to the clandestine way in which migrants enter and travel through Mexico, it is difficult to know with certainty which migration corridor is the most used. However, according to data from the Colegio de la Frontera Norte's Migration Survey on Mexico's Southern Border, in 2018 between 40 and 67% of people surveyed from Guatemala used the Central Corridor to cross into Mexico, while between 13 and 51% of people from Honduras used the Jungle Corridor and approximately 62% of people from El Salvador used the Pacific Corridor.<sup>189</sup>

**These three corridors meet in Veracruz, from where people continue along three migration routes.** The first continues through Veracruz until it reaches Tamaulipas, a state that at its northern end has three border cities through which people seek to enter the United States (Matamoros, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo). The second migration route goes through central Mexico and crosses states including Puebla, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Mexico State, Queretaro and Guanajuato. In Guanajuato people must decide between three more options: 1) continue on the route that will take them to Saltillo, a city located in the east of Coahuila, from where they can travel to border cities such as Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa; 2) continue to Torreón, a city located in the west of Coahuila from where they can try to enter the United States through Ciudad Juárez; or 3) travel to the city of Guadalajara from where they can reach Mexicali or Tijuana, both border cities located in Baja California, or the city of Nogales in Sonora.

The Colegio de la Frontera Norte points out that the Pacific Route, which leads to border cities in Baja California and Sonora, is primarily frequented by Guatemalans (although in more recent years and with increasing frequency by Hondurans), while the Atlantic Route, which crosses Veracruz and Tamaulipas is used by migrants from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador because it is shorter. In this case cities such as Reynosa and Matamoros are usually the preferred sites for crossing the border.

Finally, it is important to mention two things. First, that **due to the implementation of the MPP Programme, a migration route has emerged, used by people who wish to apply for asylum in the United States, which runs parallel to Mexico's northern border.** Basically, those travelling this route try to find a border crossing that is receiving asylum requests and has the least amount of people on the waiting list. These migrants move between border cities such as Matamoros, Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña, Ciudad Juárez, Agua Prieta, Nogales, Mexicali and Tijuana.<sup>190</sup>

Secondly, these traditional migration routes emerged over the last decade of the 20th century and were intimately linked to the railroad routes that cross Mexico. However, **in recent years migration routes have multiplied due to the increasing restrictions and obstacles faced by people wishing to travel on the freight train (which means that people instead have to walk hundreds of kilometres during their journey), as well as the diversification of strategies used by guides and coyotes.** Currently the amount of migration routes are increasingly, using the vast network of Mexican roads and highways to reach destinations in Mexico and the United States. During 2019, the National Migration Institute detained migrants in 339 municipalities (equivalent to 14% of the country's municipalities) located in 30 of Mexico's 31 states.<sup>191</sup>

### Detentions of migrants in Mexican municipalities, as reported by the National Migration Institute, 2019

Based on INM data, 2019.<sup>92</sup>



## Protection risks

Particularly in southern Mexico, migrant women are at risk of of **human trafficking and sexual exploitation** by criminal groups operating in this region. In some cases, this occurs when women are promised that they will be able to obtain the necessary resources to pay for their migration,<sup>193</sup> however some women are often forced to stay in one place for long periods of time, or even indefinitely. Similar circumstances are faced by LGBTQI migrants, who also face a greater risk of suffering discrimination because of their sexual orientation in a country where macho behaviour is entrenched and accepted.

## Violations and crimes along the migration route

Although all migration routes involve multiple risks for the migrants that transit them, **attacks tend to be more frequent and considerable on the Atlantic Route** due to the iron grip that organised crime groups and drug cartels have on this migration route. This is because it is the shortest route, and as a result it is the most used by specific population groups such as women, LGBTQI people, girls and female adolescents, as well as elderly persons. The Pacific Route is the longest migration route and is the least dangerous. However, **in the northern region of the country the involvement of drug cartels along migration routes has become commonplace, as migrants represent a 7 billion dollar business each year.**<sup>194</sup>

Despite the fact that there are various risks for migrants in transit (such as **getting lost, the lack of food and water, extreme cold or heat, dizziness or fainting, physical accidents, the risk of drowning, attacks by animals, being abandoned by traffickers, guides and coyotes, as well as being victims of crimes such as assault, robbery, human trafficking, kidnapping, forced recruitment by criminal groups, extortion, sexual assault and abuse by authorities**)<sup>195</sup>, there are few government institutions and organisations (public or private, national or international) that record attacks and crimes committed against migrants and/or human rights violations.

Doctors Without Borders documented that, during their time transiting Mexico, 39% of the people they treated had suffered a violent assault, 27% had been threatened or extorted, 6% had witnessed the death of a person (18% through homicide), 25% had been victims of physical violence, 44% had been kidnapped, 12% had suffered an attempted kidnapping and there was a 134% increase in cases of sexual violence in the first nine months of 2019.<sup>196</sup> The Migrant Defense Organisations Documentation Network (REDODEM) registered 8'161 aggressions, crimes and/or human rights violations committed against 3'703 migrants out of the 27'403 (representing 14% of the total) who accessed services provided by members of the network in 2019.<sup>197</sup> **Assaults and human rights violations suffered by migrants in transit include the following:**

### Assaults and human rights violations as reported by migrants (April-December 2019)

Assaults and/or probable human rights violations	Experienced	Witnessed	Both	Total
Theft	1'128	228	141	<b>1'497</b>
Extortion (in order to be able to continue their journey)	522	104	116	<b>742</b>
Verbal aggression	366	159	73	<b>598</b>
Physical aggression	242	235	51	<b>528</b>
Denial of access to public places	150	51	30	<b>231</b>
Detention without reason by non-immigration authorities	---	131	---	<b>131</b>
Homicide	---	89	---	<b>89</b>
Forced to have sex	19	38	2	<b>59</b>
Digital sexual assault or being forced to touch someone in a sexual manner	28	18	3	<b>49</b>
Forced to carry out an activity	16	5	7	<b>28</b>
Deprivation of liberty	88	64	13	<b>165</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2'559</b>	<b>1'122</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>4'117</b>

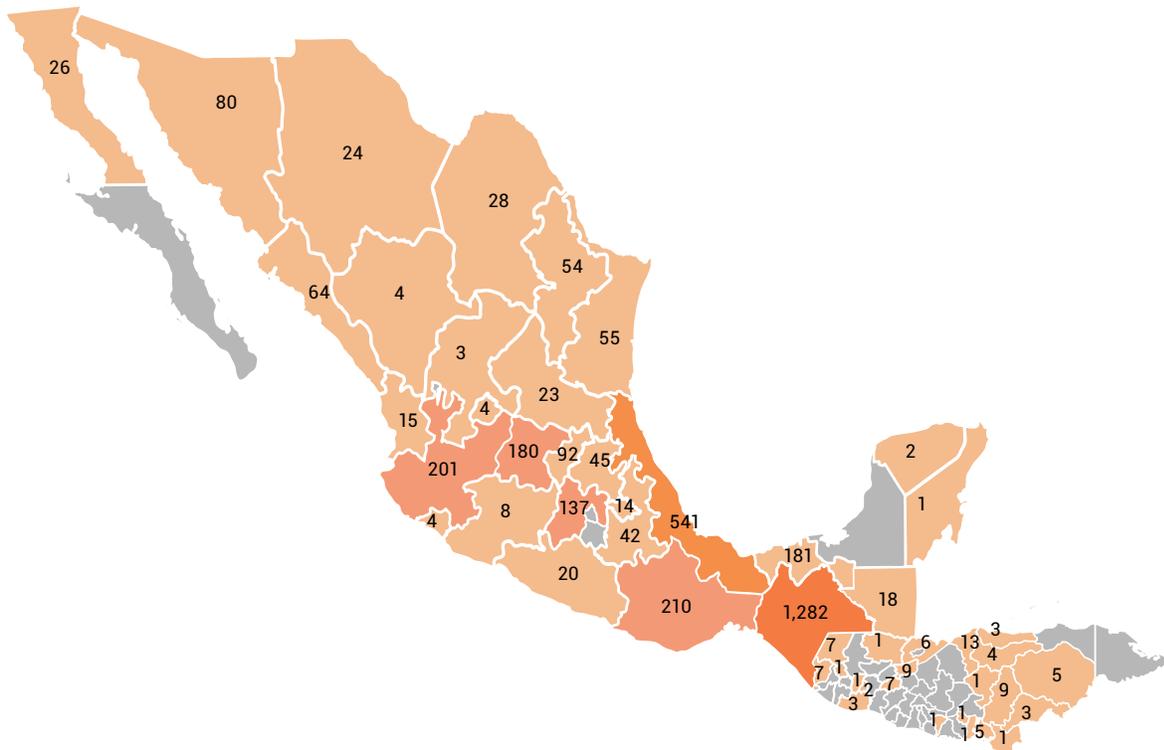
### Aggressors who committed assaults and/or human rights violations (April-December 2019)

Source: Migrant Defense Organizations Documentation Network, 2020.



### Assaults and human rights violations during migration, by State (April-December 2019)

Source: Migrant Defense Organisations Documentation Network, 2020.



According to data provided by the *Human Rights Survey of Migrants and Refugees in Tapachula*, Chiapas, carried out by the Fray Matias de Cordova Human Rights Center (CDHFMC) and El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (El Colef) during November and December 2018 and January 2019, **Central American migrant women were more likely to suffer attacks than men. Women are exposed to increased levels of vulnerability: gender-based violence doesn't just force them to flee their places of origin, but continues to happen in the transit countries and their destination.** Disaggregating the data by nationality, 24% of Salvadoran migrant women who were surveyed said they had suffered some form of aggression.<sup>198</sup>

**Transgender women experience specific protection risks** that are important to consider. It should be remembered that in El Salvador transgender women have a life expectancy that is 41 years less than the general population. The main threats they face in their country of origin (police violence, extortion and discrimination) can be exacerbated during transit and in their destination country.<sup>199</sup>

## Government response

Due to the multiple aggressions, crimes and/or human rights violations suffered by migrants, the Mexican government created the Migrant Crime Investigation Unit (UIDPM). The main objective of this government agency is to investigate federal crimes committed by and against migrants and people in need of international protection in vulnerable conditions, including forced disappearances.<sup>200</sup> The Unit prepared a Ministerial Action Protocol for the Investigation of Crimes with the objective of providing elements that facilitate the investigation and prosecution of crimes, as well as to guide actions that provide for the reparation of damages to victims so that they can achieve full access to justice.<sup>201</sup> As of 2019 this Unit had successfully prosecuted 3 of its 383 open cases (1%). Of the rest, 71 cases (less than 19%) did not proceed because they did not have the necessary evidence to continue with the investigation and 309 (81%) were pending.<sup>202</sup>

The National and State Commissions for Human Rights are entities that are responsible for guaranteeing full respect for the human rights of migrants. It is through these commissions that the Assistance to Migrants Programme was created, which aims to provide comprehensive assistance, ranging from prevention to the defense of the human rights of migrants.<sup>203</sup> One of the main limitations of these organisations is that they can only issue recommendations to authorities responsible for the violations, allowing these authorities to ignore these recommendations.

Finally, it is important to include the Beta Group for the Protection of Migrants in this list, which forms part of the National Migration Institute. The objective of the Beta Group is the protection and defense of the human rights of migrants, specifically through rescue operations, humanitarian assistance, legal advice and guidance on risks along migration routes.<sup>204</sup> It is necessary to mention that this group generates conflicting opinions among organisations and migrants themselves.<sup>205</sup> For example, in the north of the country, the Beta Group is usually seen in a positive light<sup>206</sup>, while in the south they are seen negatively because they participate in migration checkpoints and raids.<sup>207</sup>

## Humanitarian response

According to information from REDODEM, between April and December 2019, **51% of people who registered with the organisation stated that they had received some kind of support during their journey. Of these, 73% said they had received support from migrant shelters, while 17% said they had received support from people in the communities they had travelled through. Just 2% of migrants stated that they had received support from government authorities.** These percentages show that it is primarily organised and unorganised civil society that provides the assistance that migrants require, especially humanitarian assistance (82%).<sup>208</sup>

**Most organisations that support migrants are located in the southern states of Mexico**, primarily in Veracruz and Chiapas, and to a lesser extent in Tabasco and Oaxaca. Although organisations that support migrants exist in the central region of the country in states such as Puebla, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, México State, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato and Jalisco, there are less than in the south. In most of the country's northern region there are fewer organisations supporting migrants compared to the rest of the country, (however there are a significant number in the cities located near the border with the United States). Cities located on the Pacific Route in the states of Nayarit, Sinaloa and Sonora (particularly in the south), as well as others on the Central Route in the states of Durango, Zacatecas and Aguascalientes are almost entirely lacking in migrant support organisations. While these organisations exist in the states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas, **the large majority are located in border areas.**<sup>209</sup> **This leaves migrants exposed to various risks across huge areas of the country.**

In terms of the migration routes, the Atlantic route has the highest number of organisations, because it is the shortest and oldest. The Central and Pacific routes are longer and more recent, and still lack the necessary assistance and protection for migrants. In the north of Mexico there are areas that do not have migrant support organisations due to the strong presence and territorial control of organised criminal groups and drug cartels. However, despite the enormous deficiencies and limitations, organisations, especially those operated by religious groups, have provided humanitarian assistance to migrants to the best of their ability.

In general, **most organisations provide humanitarian assistance (food, clothing, shelter and hygiene), provide legal orientation and facilitate communication with family members.** However, there are gaps in some response sectors such as: mental and physical health care; access to livelihoods; and durable solutions. Only a few organisations (MSF, MdM and UNHCR) are able to provide these services in certain spots. It should also be noted that some organisations do not have sufficient capacity or training to provide more specialised support to victims of violence. Many organisations rely on volunteers or have a very small budget. In addition, the strong presence of criminal groups that control different areas of the country puts humanitarian and social service workers at high risk.

Although actions to facilitate access to justice and protection are not the responsibility of civil society organisations but those of the State, the documentation of attacks, crimes and/or human rights violations suffered by migrants during transit and upon arrival is a key activity of civil society organisations, and provides a valuable input to improve the services they provide. These organisations also accompany migrants as they report crimes on the migration routes and demand that the relevant authorities take action to address this issue.

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## Final considerations

- People from the North of Central America are displaced due to various overlapping triggers, such as violence, economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors.
- The main determinants behind the selection of which migration route to take from the North of Central America and Mexico are: available economic resources, information sources, means of transport and contacts. The flexibility that people have around these factors impacts their level of vulnerability to violence during the migration route.
- The main protection risks experienced by irregular migrants and extra-regional migrants whilst in transit to Mexico and the United States include robbery, human trafficking, smuggling, kidnapping and extortion. However, disaggregated data is required to capture human rights violations experienced by migrants, including information on their age, sex, nationality and chosen migration route.
- Migrant women travelling irregularly to Mexico and the United States suffer high levels of vulnerability along the migration route due to physical, psychological and sexual violence, from both government agents and people smugglers. The impact and duration of these violent acts are often long-term, even after women have abandoned or ended their migration route. The clandestine nature of these routes means that these crimes go unpunished.<sup>210</sup>
- State responses aimed at providing assistance and protection for irregular migrants in transit along the migration route are scarce, disconnected and use an administrative approach to manage migration flows. There is a need for institutions that provide services adapted to the porosity and constant changes in the migration routes, and to respond to the humanitarian needs of the people who travel them. Humanitarian organisations are the main actors providing assistance and protection to people from the North of Central America travelling to the United States and Mexico.
- Humanitarian organisations are the main actors providing legal assistance and psychosocial and health care to migrants, displaced people and those in need of protection along most of the migration routes. However, despite their efforts, their capacity is limited, especially in services such as mental and physical health care.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the tightening of legal and health requirements for entry into countries across the region. These restrictions generate a perverse cycle: irregular migrants seek new irregular border crossings to circumvent migration controls, exacerbating their exposure to the risks of suffering abuse and human rights violations along the migration route.

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