



FOOD SECURITY AND EMIGRATION

Why people flee and the impact on family members left behind in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras



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Foreword

Migration, food security, violence and climate variability have been studied increasingly in recent years, both in Latin America and beyond, in an effort to better understand what drives people to leave their homes and countries. Yet often these issues have been examined separately rather than together.

Migration from Central America to North America is not a new phenomenon, nor is it one that is likely to end soon. The number of irregular migrants apprehended at the United States of America border with Mexico increased fivefold from 2010 to 2015. The numbers of unaccompanied children picked up arriving from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras surged between 2015 and 2016. This flow of people coincided with a period of heightened food insecurity in the Dry Corridor that traverses these three countries, known for its prolonged dry spells and droughts.

It is in this context that the World Food Programme (WFP), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have come together to strengthen the evidence base around these key issues to help inform policies and programmes in Latin America. This study highlights the link between food insecurity and migration, and describes the main push-factors that trigger the decision to leave one's homeland, such as poverty, violence and climate variability.

Building on *Hunger Without Borders*, an exploratory study conducted in 2015 by WFP, IOM, OAS and the London School of Economics, this report provides greater analysis of the dynamics of emigration and its links to food insecurity, along with important insight into why people flee and into the impact of emigration on the family who remain at their places of origin. The findings reveal some important misperceptions about the role of remittances and bring to light the precarious situation of people remaining at home without sufficient access to food.

We hope that this study will be a useful tool to strengthen the design of programmes and policies targeting the most vulnerable population segments and catalyse discussions among governments, development partners and civil society, all committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and, in particular, reaching Zero Hunger. It is also our hope that this study highlights the importance of long-term investments to enhance the food security and nutrition of people in the Dry Corridor of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, as this may reduce their propensity to emigrate.

WFP presents this report recognizing that without the support of the IADB, IFAD, OAS and IOM, as well as the governments of the three countries, the study could not have taken place.



Miguel Barreto

Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean
United Nations World Food Programme

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The research took place in the Dry Corridor of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The authors would like to recognize the invaluable collaboration of over 700 women and men from the communities visited across the region, the local and municipal authorities, as well as volunteers that facilitated the meetings.

Regis Chapman coordinated the work, while Byron Ponce-Segura managed the design, desktop and field operations. Both officials are based at the WFP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean.

There is a large list of outstanding collaborators to this study: WFP Country Directors: Nils Grede in El Salvador, Pasqualina Di Sirio in Honduras and Mario Touchette in Guatemala, as well as their teams; Marcelo Pisani IOM Regional Director for Central America, North America and the Caribbean and the IOM country teams; the Central America, Mexico, Panama and Dominican Republic Country Department at the IDB, where statistical and econometric analysis were conducted using government and WFP databases.

Various consultants and WFP staff supported the fieldwork. Danilo Palma Ramos supported the design of the methodology and led the field coordination in all three countries. The field team in El Salvador was composed of Olga Lucía Rodríguez (team leader) and Nidia María Umaña as well as WFP staff Vittorina Sola and María Cristina Gálvez. In Honduras, the team leader was Mercedes Elena Flores, who was supported by Ana Ruth Reyes, from (IOM), as well as Harieth Marizol Nuñez, Rosa Mercedes Escolán and Mario Guillermo Suazo. Guatemala's team was led by Arandi Melgar Castro, with support from Luis Guillermo Guerra Bone, Verónica Tobar Rodríguez and Nidia A. Ramírez Campos.

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Executive summary

Building on the results and recommendations of the exploratory study on the links between Migration and Food Security ("Hunger without Borders", 2015), WFP and its partners decided to further study linkages between food insecurity and migration, relying on qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Emigration (or out-migration) trends in Central America are conditioned by political and socio-economic conditions in the region and increase in response to civil strife and poverty. This study collected and analysed data on food security and environmental and climatic factors as potential triggers for out-migration. The geographical focus of the study was El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, particularly the most vulnerable part of these countries known as the Dry Corridor.

The propensity to migrate from food insecure regions of Central America is higher among the younger and more vulnerable people.

While migration from Mexico to the United States of America (USA) diminished in recent years, the flow of emigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras has increased substantially since 2010. While the proportion of women and young people among the emigrants from the Dry Corridor increased in the past two years, the majority of people leaving their country are men.

According to the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the number of "illegal aliens" as defined by the CBP, who were "apprehended" or detained in the Southwest border region of the USA, increased from around 50,000 during the fiscal year (FY) 2010 to more than 250,000 in FY 2014. Although the number of apprehended declined in FY 2015 to 218,810 people, in FY 2016, this number increased to 408,870. Although more apprehensions do not necessarily imply greater migrant flows, apprehensions are often considered as a proxy indicator of the total number of persons who attempt to cross the border irregularly during a certain period.

The almost 50 percent increase from FY 2015 to FY 2016 in the number of unaccompanied children (persons 16 years old or under) apprehended by USA border authorities is of great concern.

Emigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras returned by the Mexican authorities to their respective countries of origin were primarily men (79 percent); 050 percent of them were working in the agricultural sector before migrating. Emigrants reported the lack of employment or economic hardship (65 percent), followed by low income and poor working conditions (19 percent) and violence and insecurity (9 percent) as the main reasons for migrating. Family reunification was only indicated as a reason in one percent of the responses, according to official reports.

The Dry Corridor is generally characterized by high unemployment, limited and seasonal labour demands and low and irregularly paid wages.

More than half of the households interviewed reported spending more than two thirds of their income on food, which reflects a high level of economic vulnerability to food insecurity. Recent years have seen household food production further reduced due to poor rainfall and droughts linked to the El Niño phenomenon. Outside the Dry Corridor, employment opportunities in coffee production have also been reduced due to the coffee rust crisis. **Adverse climatic conditions in the Dry Corridor affect food security** by curbing agricultural productivity in commercial and subsistence farming as well as agricultural work opportunities. **The El Niño drought conditions that started in 2014 caused a significant increase in irregular migration to the USA.**

For this study, three national teams visited key districts, previously identified by key informants as having significant emigration to the USA. In addition, secondary data analysis was conducted using information provided by Mexican and USA migration authorities.

This information was complemented with key informant interviews, separate focus group discussions with men and women and a household food security survey. The survey targeted families where members had left the country since the last El Niño episode (2014-2016).

A qualitative study was conducted in 22 communities of the Dry Corridor in the three countries. Fifty-four key informants were interviewed, while some 660 community members participated in 44 focus group discussions (one for men and women in each location). Participants in the focus group discussions estimated that around 35 percent of emigrants from El Salvador, 25 percent from Guatemala and 9 percent from Honduras travelled with a valid visa but then stayed in the USA beyond the validity of their visas. Those who travel with valid visas usually have the necessary financial and social capital to facilitate their journey. However, migrants who travel without valid visas often use a migrant smuggler, pay high costs and acquire debt, often using their assets (such as a house and/or land) as collateral.

Thus, emigration negatively impacts family members left behind, who have to assume the debts incurred. Debts levels increase in cases of unsuccessful emigration. **Successful migrants provide vital support to the family who is left behind by regularly sending remittances.**

In the cases of successful emigration, 78 percent of households in the home country receive monthly "remittances", of which 42 percent indicate that remittances are their only source of income. More than half of the funds are used to buy food, followed by agricultural investments (buying land and animals) and investments in small businesses. Remittances are also spent on education and healthcare. Improved family well-being, especially enhanced diets, are some of the main impacts of remittances on households in the home country.

When those families do not receive remittances or other assistance, their economic situation progressively worsens. This may also result in changes in the division of labour in the family. Those household shifts may result in household members assuming different roles with related negative consequences. For example, women often have to undertake the agricultural activities of departed men on top of their traditional domestic responsibilities. Overall, emigration reduces the available work force and if not offset by remittances, typically results in increased food insecurity and deepening of poverty.

There is clearly a link between food insecurity and emigration from the three countries.

Poverty and unemployment are the general causes

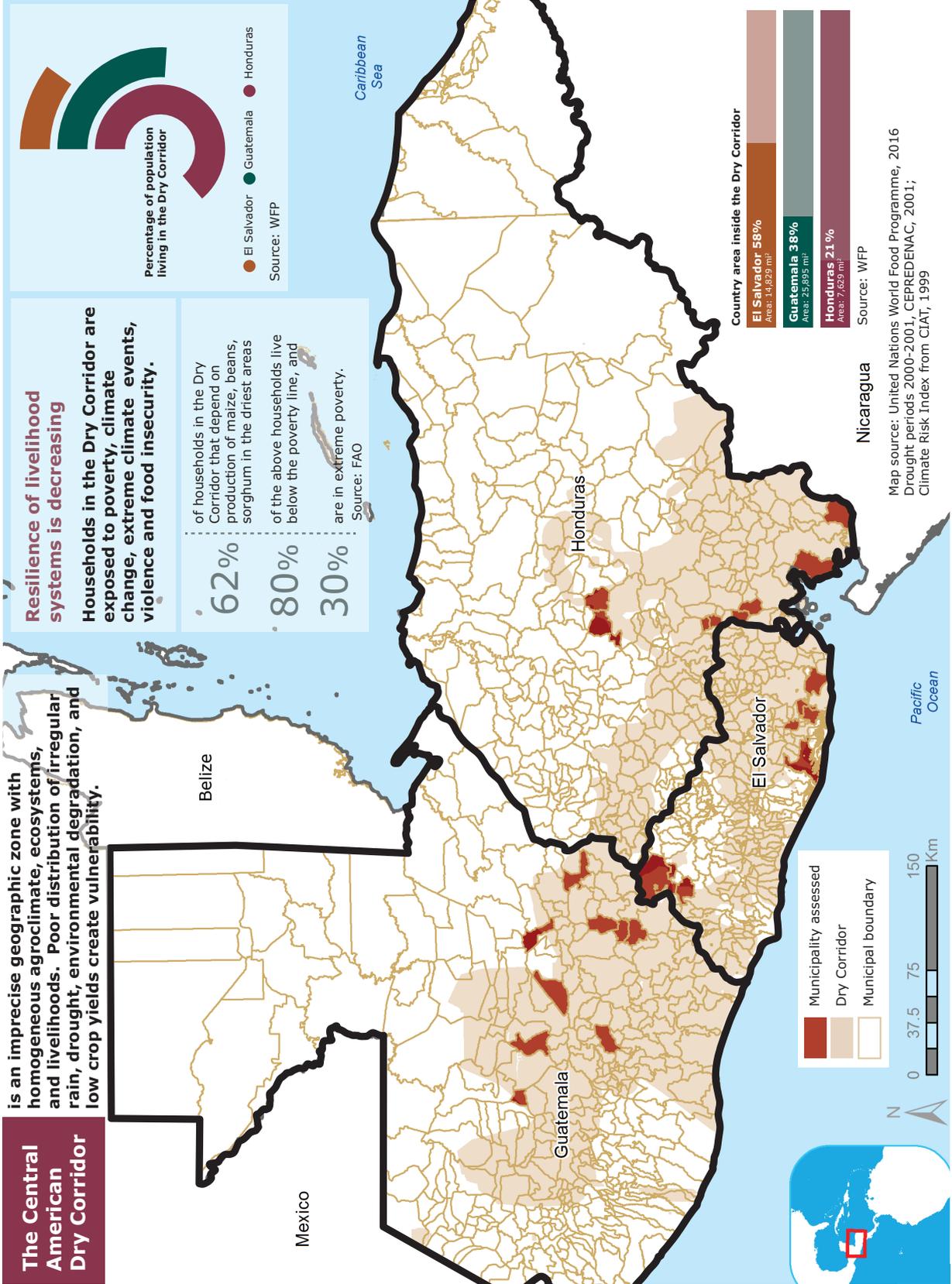
of emigration, followed by reduced agricultural productivity, adverse climatic events such as droughts, pests that result in crop losses and the widespread occurrence of violence. The high rates of food insecurity found in the households that participated in this study demonstrate the linkages between emigration and food insecurity. **Nearly half (47 percent) of the families interviewed during this study were food insecure** (38 percent were moderately food insecure and 9 percent were severely food insecure). **These levels of food insecurity have not been previously seen in the region**, including in the results of various assessments over the past three years that focused on drought and the effects of El Niño in the Dry Corridor.

The findings revealed that nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of households are already applying emergency coping strategies: such as selling land. Again, this is well above what is normally seen in the region in times of shock. What increases concerns is that none of the households had the capacity to apply less extreme "stress coping" strategies, as they had already depleted such options. This reflects a concerning **cumulative effect over time on food insecurity**, as well as the very limited resilience such households have to protect themselves against shocks and their effects.

While only 19 percent of interviewed households had unacceptably low food consumption levels, the lack of dietary diversity is of major concern, even among those households with adequate total consumption levels. This finding is not new for the Dry Corridor, but it raises concerns about overall dietary quality and its impacts on health and nutrition. Guatemala, in particular, has levels of food consumption that point to a major problem, with 42 percent of interviewed households having poor or borderline food consumption levels.

Violence also plays an important role in serving as a reason for migration in El Salvador, where it was reported as a sensitive trigger, while in Guatemala and Honduras it was found to be less important.

The information collected through this study allows for the development of several policy and programmatic recommendations aiming at mitigating the impact of the variables acting as emigration push-factors, with a focus on food insecurity.



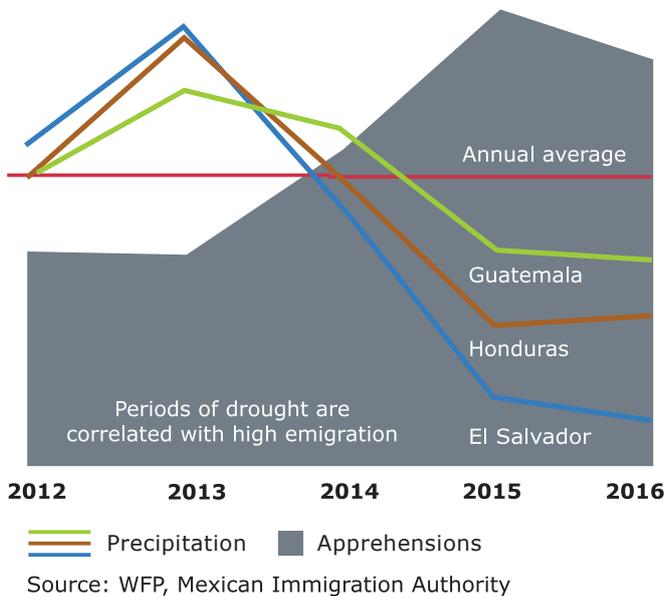
Focus and Objectives of the Study

The focus of this study has been on “out-migration” (emigration) across state borders in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and its impacts on food and nutritional security.

The three main study objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the push-factors for out-migration from communities in the Dry Corridor of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and determine the extent to which food insecurity constitutes one of these motivating factors;

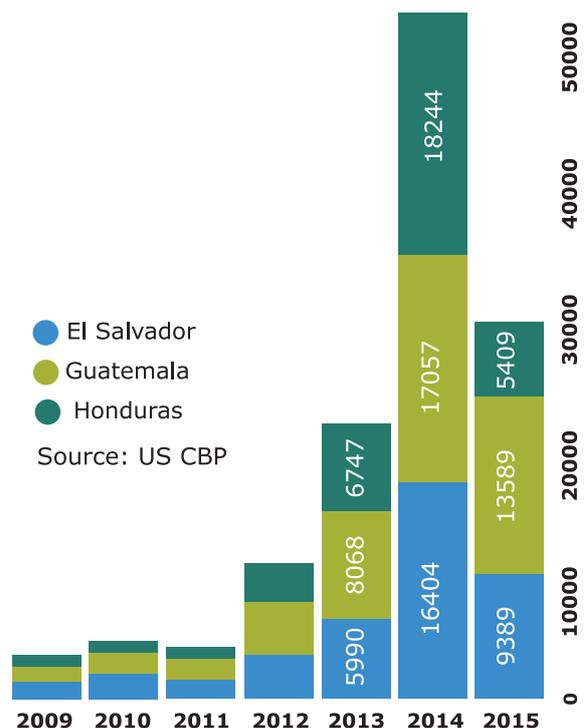
APPREHENSIONS BY MEXICAN AUTHORITIES AND HISTORIC PRECIPITATION DEFICIT



“The United States is the primary destination for emigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras”.

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN ENCOUNTERED BY USA AUTHORITIES

- Approximately 79% of migrants are men, most are 20-29 years old
- Approximately 21% of migrants are women
- Half of deportees worked in agriculture before migrating
- One third of returned migrants have up to six years of formal education



EMIF-SUR, 2015

2. To understand how migration affects those left behind, namely regarding the households' and the communities' food and nutritional security.

3. To review the potential effects of violence both on food insecurity and out-migration and provide some recommendations on protection elements.

The study explores the relationships between migration and food security, as well as some manifestations of violence and its potential effects on emigration and food insecurity. Other elements, such as climate change, natural disasters and poverty, are considered but without the detail given to the first two variables.

Methodology in Graphics

Country	SV	GT	HN	
				Secondary data review: +90 documents
	18	22	14	54 key informants
	16	16	12	660 people in 44 focus groups
	42	40	41	123 household surveys

Migration: Status, trends, shocks and push factors

The percentage of the total population of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras living abroad, as per a 2013 report from the Migration Policy Institute, was 18, 8 and 12 respectively. Up to 80 percent of them reportedly live in the USA.

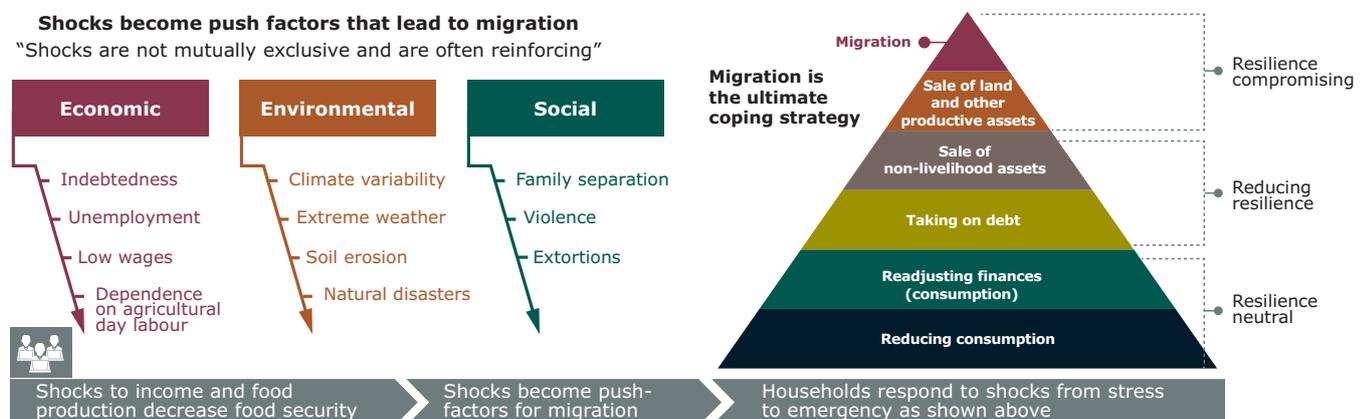
Recent years have witnessed an increase in the number of emigrants from the countries of the study to the USA and the sharp increase in the numbers of accompanied and unaccompanied children is particularly striking.

Emigration peaks, as captured by statistics, are conditioned by natural disasters, climatic shocks and socio-economic conditions affecting the studied countries. This study found a correlation between the number of foreigners presented to Mexican immigration authorities and the effects of El Niño on agriculture.

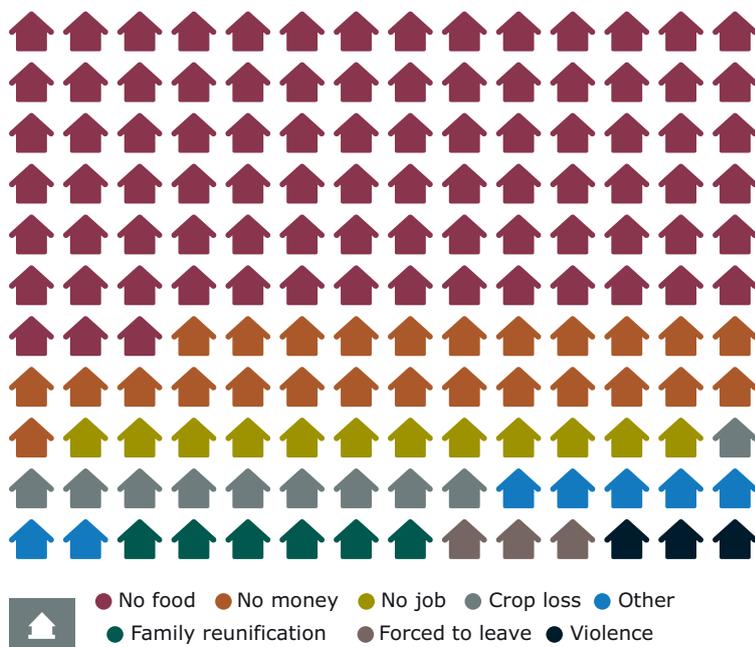
Increasingly more women tend to migrate as a proportion of all migrants: around 15 percent of returned migrants in 2009 were women compared to 21 percent in 2015 (EMIF-SUR, 2015).

Returned migrants increasingly come from rural areas, 31 percent in 2009 and 52 percent in 2014. This is consistent with the finding that an increasing number of migrants returned by Mexico previously worked in the agricultural sector: 41 percent in 2009 and 53 percent in 2015. On the other hand, returned migrants who previously worked in the construction sector decreased from 25 to 15 percent in the same years.

Studies by IFAD and the Washington based Inter-American Dialogue found that in Guatemala, food insecurity is linked to drought. However, it was noted that natural disasters do not determine migration in the short-term but are factors that contribute to more long-term and gradual migration patterns.



REASONS FOR EMIGRATION IN SURVEYED COMMUNITIES



Unemployment in the Dry Corridor according to key informants

- El Salvador 52%
- Guatemala 54%
- Honduras 68%

People’s voices in the Dry Corridor: Shocks and Push Factors

It is already recognized that environmental, economic and social shocks are triggers of emigration.

Extensive consultations in the Dry Corridor of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras help to reveal what the official figures often fail to capture. WFP conducted ten household Emergency Food Security Assessments (EFSA) due to El Niño between 2014 and 2016. For the surveyed emergency-affected population, considering the six main reasons to emigrate, the highest percentage say “no food” is the most important reason, other reasons are shown in the illustration.

The focus group discussions of this study identified violence (El Salvador), poverty (Guatemala) and

unemployment (Honduras) as the main reasons for emigration, followed, in the same country order, by poverty and unemployment; unemployment and crop losses; and poverty and search for better opportunities. In general, “drought and its consequences” was identified as the main problem for the studied period of time. Key informants also identified family reunification as a pull factor of emigration.

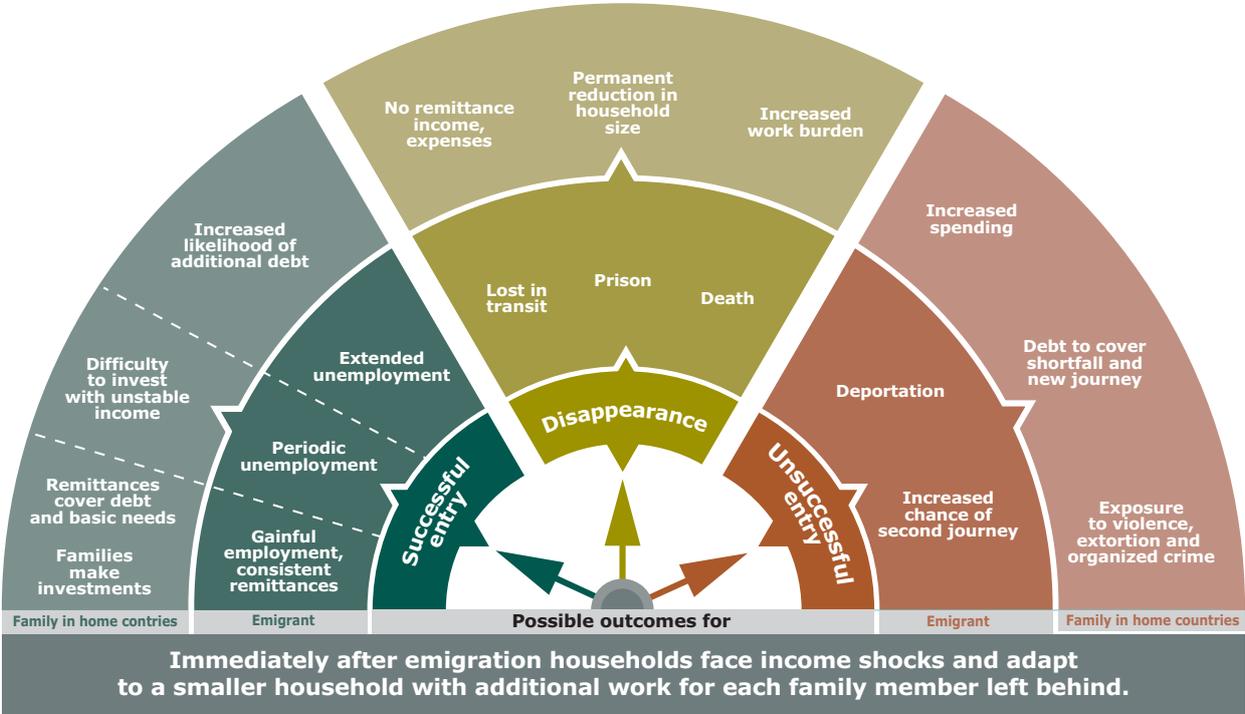
Poverty is playing a critical role in emigration. The poorest cannot afford to pay migrant smuggler fees, making the trip more risky. If this option is chosen, they use their houses and small land plots as collateral. If deported in the attempt to reach the USA, they end up losing their livelihood assets and end up in a worse situation, including exacerbated food insecurity.

The full page illustration on page 12 visualizes all factors related to migration from the surveyed areas, the methods employed, the possible outcomes, the effect of remittances and the impacts of emigration on the households.

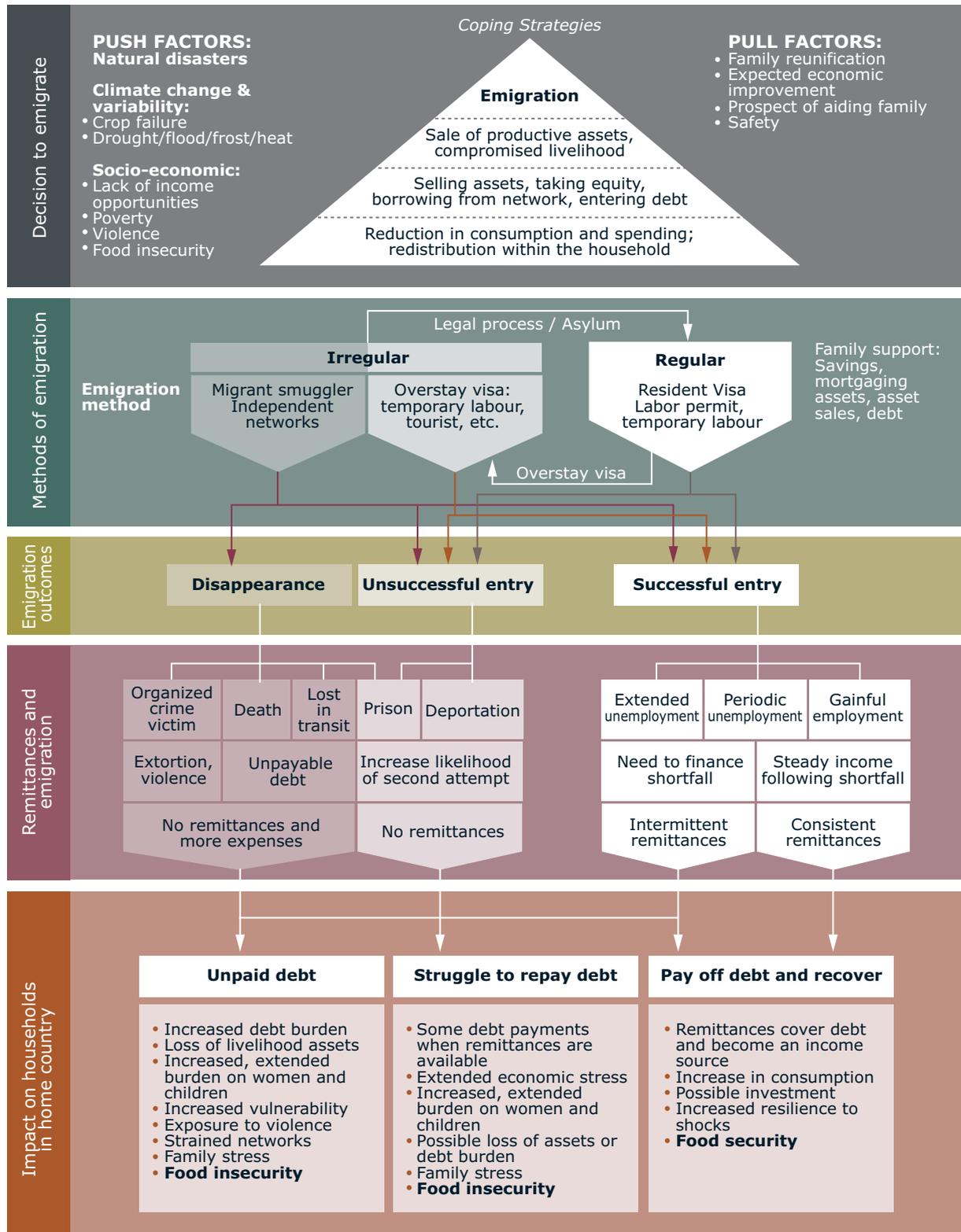
Households first try to cope with shocks using temporary measures which primarily affect their level of expenditure and food consumption

patterns; however, as the situation deteriorates, they move to livelihood-affecting strategies which reduce their resilience to future shocks. They stated that emigrating is a last resort. This decision brings with it not only the hardship of the journey for the individual but a series of effects both for the emigrant and the family left behind. This is captured in the infographic below.

Possible emigration outcomes for both the migrating person and the family at point of origin.



EMIGRATION: THE CAUSAL MODEL



Food insecurity and migration: the connections

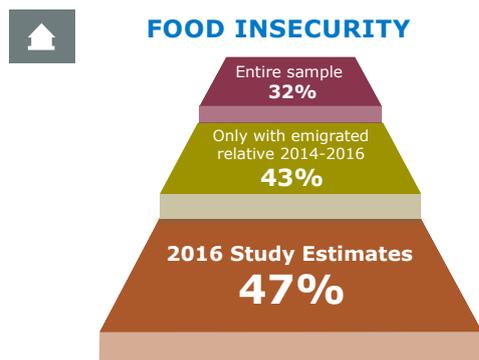
The incapacity to properly feed the family can become an emigration push factor. To validate the answers provided by the key informants and the focus group discussions, the ten Emergency Food Security Assessments (EFSA) conducted by WFP since the start of the El Niño crisis provided important evidence, which was complemented with the household food security assessment that was conducted as part of the study.

Combined into one dataset, the previous EFSA reported a significant rate of food insecurity: **32 percent**. This was enough to justify a WFP regional food assistance intervention. After extracting and reprocessing the data of households reporting a recently emigrated family member, the levels of food insecurity rose to **43 percent**. Then, after several consecutive failed crop seasons, “the survey of households with recently emigrated family members, which was conducted as part of this study, revealed a **47 percent** rate of food insecurity. This value is unprecedented in the region and is comparable with humanitarian crises in other parts of the world.

This is not a minor finding. It shows that food insecure families use emigration as the ultimate coping strategy, with very high risks in terms of personal security during the journey and for the capacity of relatives left behind to create resilience to shocks and be able to improve their livelihoods.

The indicator used by WFP to measure the severity of coping strategies and how they compromise livelihood systems shows that **72 percent** of interviewed households applied emergency type coping mechanisms.

On average, close to 20 percent of the families surveyed in 2016 had unacceptable food



consumption with a peak of 42 percent in Guatemala. Because a diet based on beans, maize and oils can be calculated as acceptable, those results do not represent good dietary diversity, which in general showed poor results. WFP measurements of food consumption place a high value on both proteins and fats, noting that a diet high in beans (proteins) and oils (fats) results in good food consumption, even if the diet is not diverse. However, like the overall levels of food security, these results are extremely high compared to previous assessments in the three countries.

It also supports the statement **that food insecurity causes emigration and emigration can cause [more] food insecurity**.

Impacts of emigration and links with debt and remittances

Emigration can have both positive and negative impacts. The positive side is mainly about remittances and the changes in the economic situation for the family that they can create, depending on the amounts received and the regularity of transfers.

The priority use of remittances is on food (this was unanimous among men and women, whether they were interviewed as key informants or part of a focus group). In Guatemala and Honduras, basic needs such as education and medicine rank second, while other investments rank third. The priority in El Salvador is the inverse of the above.

LOCAL SOCIOECONOMIC LEVEL OF EMIGRANTS' FAMILIES

Key respondent reporting of numbers of emigrants according to socio-economic levels

Country	Low socio-economic level	Middle socio-economic level	High socio-economic level	Total
Guatemala	8	14	0	22
Guatemala	5	9	1	15
Honduras	3	8	0	11
Total	16	31	1	48

Legend: Low socio-economic level (1 bill icon), Middle socio-economic level (2 bills icon), High socio-economic level (3 bills icon)

FOOD INSECURITY OF FAMILIES BEFORE AND AFTER EMIGRATION

Estimated percentage of families with migrant members who...			
Country			
	33%	27%	40%
	55%	35%	10%
	NK	NK	NK

-  Received food assistance before departure of family members
-  Received food assistance after the departure of family members
-  No food assistance neither before nor after departure of family members

NK Not Known

Note: The term "food assistance" can include distribution of food rations, as well as other food-related assistance such as vouchers for purchase of food in markets.

The testimonies of the contacted households in the Dry Corridor area of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras indicate that on average 61 percent of them receive remittances, although only 34 percent receive them monthly. The monthly

transfers can be as low as US\$50 and as high as US\$1,000. Higher amounts are received to pay the emigration debts. Migrant smuggler fees across the region range from US\$3,500 up to US\$15,000.

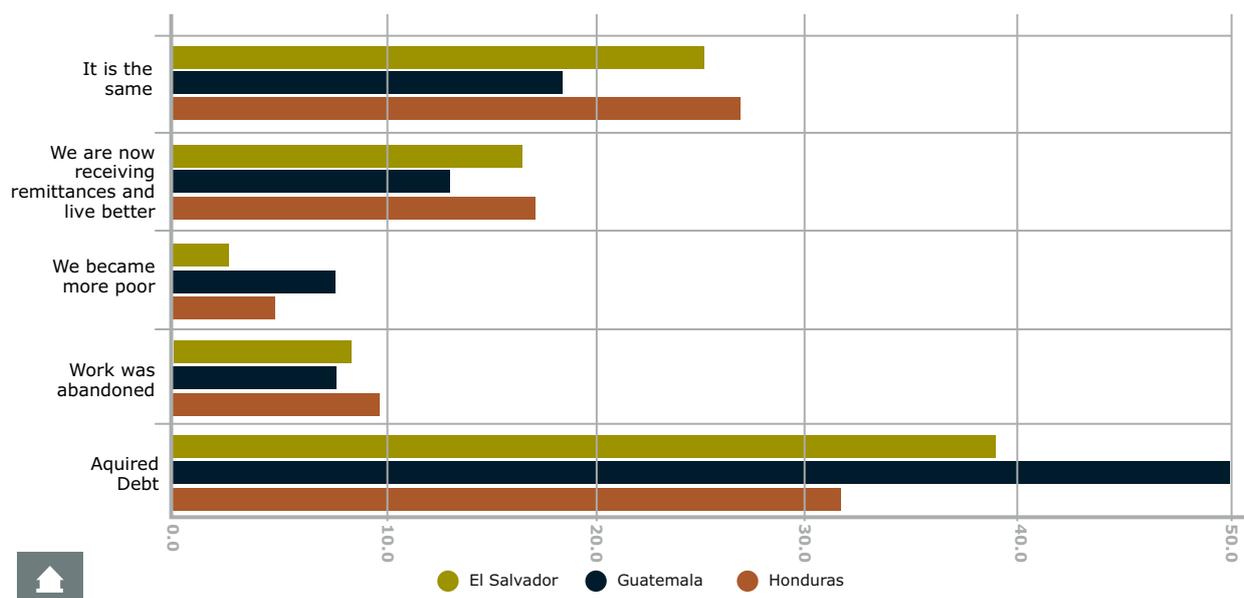
On the negative side, the poorer and more indebted the emigrant family is, the more severe are the negative impacts.

Women and children are affected. If the man emigrated, the women must add the responsibility for productive activities, including agriculture, to their workload. In some cases, children also have to contribute to the productive activities of the household, which is an example of the numerous protection issues that need to be considered linked to emigration.

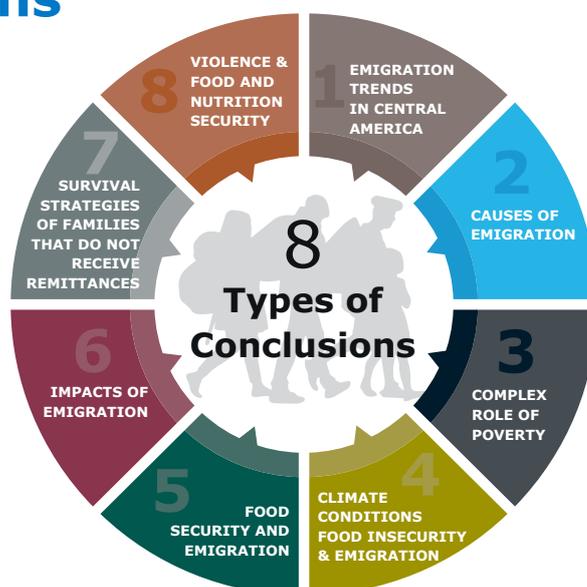
When the emigrant is deported or does not reach the destination for different reasons, the burden of the debt becomes unsustainable. People who offered their houses or their land as collateral for the trip debt can become destitute, as the research team confirmed.

Another negative outcome is that many families of unsuccessful emigrants become dependent on food assistance due to lack of support. In some places, relatives of emigrated people (successful or not) are subject to extortion based on the assumption that they are receiving remittances.

DIFFERENT IMPACTS OF EMIGRATION, BY COUNTRY



Conclusions



1. EMIGRATION TRENDS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

1.1. Adults still constitute the majority of emigrants from the Dry Corridor of the three Central American countries, but the proportion of **accompanied and unaccompanied children has increased in the last years**. It is expected that the results from this study will strengthen the ongoing efforts of governments and partners to address and reverse this trend.

1.2. Successful emigrants can become a source of support for family members who stay behind, once they establish themselves in the destination country, by sending back remittances. Those emigrants who are apprehended on route to their final destination and are deported back to their communities (about half of all emigrants), very often try again, as **reaching their destination is the only way to repay debts acquired to cover the emigration costs**. The economic situation of the family is likely to worsen with each new attempt, given the high emigration costs.

2. CAUSES OF EMIGRATION

2.1. Poverty and unemployment are the most common causes of emigration, followed by problems linked to agricultural losses and adverse climate events (drought, high temperatures and pests), as well as high levels of violence in some

countries. The population describes this in several ways, including the **“inability to put enough food on the table”**. Family reunification is an emerging motive for emigration, particularly for accompanied and unaccompanied children. The above motives are not mutually exclusive and people often emigrate for multiple reasons.

2.2. The high prevalence of food insecurity found among the families with members who have emigrated suggests that food insecurity may be both a cause and a consequence of emigration.

2.3. One of the main goals of emigration is generate income that can be sent back home as remittances, in order to repay debts, support families to meet current basic needs and to make investments for a better life. Violence and the need to escape from life threatening situations has also been mentioned as a motive for emigration, but mostly in El Salvador.

3. COMPLEX ROLE OF POVERTY

3.1. Legal travellers who become irregular emigrants (by overstaying their visa) usually belong to households at the relatively higher socio-economic level.

3.2. Some irregular emigrants belong to families at a middle socio-economic level. Their jobs (before departure) did not provide regular and comparatively good income and kept them in a

state of economic uncertainty and vulnerability. In turn, this economic insecurity can induce a level of food insecurity that starts as moderate and can become severe over time.

3.3. In addition to the economic problems they face and their inability to feed their families properly, emigrants from middle and low socio-economic strata have to acquire debts (with family assets as collateral) to pay for the emigration journey to the USA or elsewhere.

3.4. For the poorest strata of the population, using a migrant smuggler is not an affordable option - unless they have a relative who has previously emigrated and can cover the costs. Most emigrants in this category attempt to go on their own (without using a migrant smuggler) with increased risks of not reaching their intended destination. Their departure can translate into destitution for relatives who stay behind.

3.5. Poverty is also described by emigrants' families as a lack of capacity to adequately feed family members and pay for other basic needs.

3.6. There is often a perception that families with members who have successfully emigrated to the USA have adequate resources due to the remittances they receive. This does not account, however, for the costs of emigration and the impacts on the family members who stay behind. This study finds that those remittances do not always fully cover the total costs of emigration for family members, at least in the short to mid-term. The study found that 40 percent of households with emigrants have acquired debt and that remittances do not begin at the time of emigration. When remittances do begin to flow, most of the income goes towards debt repayment and consumption of basic foods. In the cases where emigrants stabilize and get gainful employment, more than half of the remittances are used to buy food in the three countries, followed by agricultural investments (buying land and animals and investments in small businesses) in El Salvador. The second destination in Guatemala and Honduras is education and healthcare. The study also found that in some cases, families who receive remittances are automatically excluded from social programmes, in certain cases with the approval of other community members.

3.7. There is a large difference between the minimum and maximum values of the remittances (US\$50 to US\$1,000/month) received by remaining family members. Without knowing how much each individual family receives, it is not possible to estimate which families continue to be food insecure despite the support from abroad and which families improve their financial situation.

3.8. If remittances can provide for improved food access, but do not sufficiently offset debts incurred to finance emigration costs, or offset labour force losses, the net result will be continued economic hardship. As a result, when remittances are not productively exploited, even families who regularly receive remittances appear to be stuck in a poverty trap and/or potential need to emigrate.

4. CLIMATE CONDITIONS, FOOD INSECURITY AND EMIGRATION

4.1. Adverse climate conditions in the Dry Corridor negatively affect food and nutritional security through declines in the local production of food, as well as a reduced availability of agricultural work opportunities. There appears to be a connection between the appearance of El Niño in 2014 and an increase in irregular emigration to the USA.

4.2. Members of families affected by the drought are 1.5 percent more likely to emigrate than similar households elsewhere. Although this is a low value, the significance lies in the fact that the correlation between drought occurrence and emigration is positive and the probability of emigrating is higher than that of families who are not from the Dry Corridor.

4.3. It clearly emerges from several studies that climate change and emigration are strongly linked. The present study did not have a focus on climate change. However, challenges stemming from climate variability, poor rainfall distribution and drought, were identified in this study as key push factors for temporary and/or permanent emigration, reflecting a response to environmental adversity. Smallholder farmers, poorer fisher folk and other IFAD target groups are among the ones who suffer the most from climate change. With the region expected to face multiple impacts of climate change in the years ahead, migration may increase its shift from affected rural areas to other

areas that experience lower environmental risks, including neighboring countries.

4.4. On the other hand, communities affected by drought conditions are also affected by unemployment, short duration of seasonal labour demand, as well as by low and irregularly paid wages. Emigration is a common coping mechanism in these communities.

4.5. It would be incorrect to conclude that in general, families are worse off when migrating. The positive impact of remittances can be observed sometimes by simple observation, but for the analysis of vulnerability and food insecurity, the attention of this study goes to those cases where the cycle of getting employment, sending remittances to pay debts and stabilizing remittances to normal and regular levels are not reached.

5. FOOD SECURITY AND EMIGRATION

5.1. **Food insecurity**, seen by the population as the **inability to bring food to the table**, can trigger the decision to emigrate. Moreover, the family members who stay behind can go through a period of aggravated problems to cover their food needs because they lost a food provider, they are indebted and, in the case of those who are deported or die during the journey, the crisis can extend and even lead to losing the family livelihood.

5.2. The proportion of food insecurity among families with a recently emigrated member is very high as per the WFP Food Security Index: 47% of households were found to be food insecure. This included 38% with moderate food insecurity and 9% with severe food insecurity. **These high levels of food insecurity have not been seen in the region before, including during the repeated food security emergency assessments conducted by WFP since El Niño emerged in 2014**, (please refer to figures 14, 15 and 16 in the main report using the link provided on the cover).

5.3. The conclusions with respect to food access and according to a socio-economic classification of families provided by community members and key informants, are as follows:

- On average, a third of the families are considered as having sufficient access to food, be it through their own activities or with support from remittances.
- Another third of the families have some access to food but no long-term economic security. They consider emigration as an option. They tend to look for and take advantage of, local food assistance programmes.
- The third group, represented by 35%, 40% and 27% of the families in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, respectively, live in extreme poverty, have inadequate access to food and would emigrate if an opportunity presented itself.

5.4 When a desperate situation forces the poorest families to emigrate, they take the highest risks relative to dangers for survival and sustaining their livelihood. Community members and key informants consider food assistance as a mitigating factor to help solve some of their situation; they highly valued this assistance and related it to avoiding “forced” emigration.



- Enough food from remittances and other income
- Access to food in economic instability
- Live in extreme poverty

5.5. Some 70% of the families with recently migrated relatives in El Salvador and 58% in Guatemala, stated that they had not participated in food assistance programmes before or after the departure of their relatives. Receiving food assistance has been very important for families with recently emigrated relatives. Whilst having members of the family living abroad is not a

selection criterion for WFP food assistance programmes, (although it becomes important when communities make their recommendations on the families who are to receive assistance), **the high rates of food insecurity among these families suggest the conclusion that food insecurity is not only a cause for emigration. It is also an outcome which needs to be fully understood if appropriate actions are to be identified to mitigate the effects of emigration.**

5.6. Food assistance is considered very important particularly during the period when the emigrant settles down at his/her destination, finds a job, is able to send remittances and the family who stayed behind repays loans and other debts. Despite the importance of food assistance during this settling-in period, its role may be much more important before emigration takes place, to mitigate the push effect of food insecurity and avoid negative outcomes.

6. IMPACTS OF EMIGRATION

6.1. Positive impacts on family members at the place of origin:

6.1.1 In the case of emigrants who manage to reach the USA, an average of 78% of their families report receiving US\$50 to US\$1,000 a month by way of remittances. Those receiving higher amounts are likely to repay debts. The amount tends to decrease and stabilize after debts have been repaid. Once stabilized, more than half of the remittances are used to buy food; followed by agricultural investments (buying land, animals) and investments in small businesses. Left-over funds are allocated to education, medicine, utility bills, or buying home appliances. There is an undetermined period between when emigration takes place and the receipt of the first remittances to support family consumption. Economic stress is very high during this period. One of the main impacts of remittances is to improve the families' well-being, especially their food consumption.

6.1.2 There are positive and negative effects on women when men emigrate. Women take charge, managing the remittances and family resources. This is likely to have a positive effect on food consumption and on the wellbeing of the family as a whole, making women's empowerment an important area for action.

6.1.3 When emigration is motivated to escape threats of violence, successful emigrants may gain personal security at their destinations. However, they may have to endure violence during their migration journey.

6.1.4 If well managed, remittances enable children of recipient families to receive proper education and then become productively employed in a variety of activities.

6.2. Negative impacts for family members in the place or origin:

6.2.1 When funds to emigrate come from loans or sale of properties and assets, then debts, mortgages and economic scarcity lands on the relatives who stay behind. Their economic situation is negatively impacted and may become aggravated over time, when they receive little by way of remittances or any other assistance. Acquired emigration debts have to be repaid, independently of whether the emigrant successfully reached the intended destination and engaged in gainful activities or not. Indebted deportees many times cannot go back home because creditors will be asking for payment of the debt.

6.2.2 When women replace absent men in agricultural labour and production, an added burden is introduced for them, as this is usually added to their normal household and child-caring responsibilities. During the stressful period between the start of the emigration journey and receiving assistance, women have to take care of all family needs and may have to engage in extra economic activities to survive. The above can translate into further food insecurity.

6.2.3 Emigration reduces the labour force of the family, which may have a negative impact on agricultural production, livestock rearing and other economic activities and thus decrease family incomes.

6.2.4 Family disintegration, alteration of family structure and functions and increased perception of vulnerability and danger are socio-psychological impacts of emigration. The above increases the burden on family members who stay behind and can lead to exposure to new risks.

6.2.5 As reported by community members, there are cases where young family members who benefit from remittances end up abandoning school and jobs and may get involved in drug consumption or illegal and violent activities. This is clearly a protection issue of concern for humanitarian organizations and communities alike. The study did not include data to analyse the impact of remittances on education. But it may be assumed that the positive impact of remittances on supporting educational opportunities for young family members will outweigh any negative impacts.

support and may eventually also provide economic support.

7.4. WFP has been providing food assistance to vulnerable families in the Dry Corridor. They were targeted because of the drought and crop losses. It also became apparent that many of these families have recently migrated relatives and had not received any remittances. Food assistance is described by these families as life-saving. Food insecurity among families with emigrated members is high in the Central American Dry Corridor, as evidenced by the WFP food security emergency assessments in the three countries studied.

	Positive	Negative
When remittances cover debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families can cover basic needs • Invest in the household • Invest in education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One less family member • Increase work burden • Socio-psychological impacts • Reliance on networks and community
When remittances do not cover debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If emigrant is fleeing violence, they gain security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale of household assets • Additional burden on women's time

7. SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF FAMILIES THAT DO NOT RECEIVE REMITTANCES

7.1. Relatives who stay behind often have to assume the work (crops, domestic animals) previously undertaken by the emigrant(s) or take on wage labour jobs (*jornaleo*, domestic services) and this may be the case whether the family receives remittances or not.

7.2. Returnees may be able to repay emigration debts if they manage to earn and save money when abroad. To pay off debts they may sell properties and assets, obtain credits and loans, or ask for help from someone in the USA. There are reportedly many indebted returnees in the emigrants' communities who were caught and deported upon arrival, who may also face higher levels of indebtedness and possibly livelihood loss.

7.3. Emigrants' families and returnees (voluntary and deported) look for the support of organizations that are present in their communities. Some of them are international organizations, which provide institutional and legal support, as well as contacts with assistance programmes. Others are local entities, which provide legal and political

8. VIOLENCE, FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SECURITY

8.1. The term "violence" includes extortion, gangs, threats, assaults, robbery, domestic violence, as well as gender based violence and death sentences for youngsters who refuse to join or collabourate with gangs. There are differences between El Salvador and the other two countries in terms of the role that violence plays in emigration decisions and food and nutritional insecurity.

In El Salvador, violence was mentioned without restrictions (unlike Honduras) and came up as an important push-factor for emigration. The role of violence in Honduras is not clear due to the self-restriction by community members to discuss it openly. For Guatemala, the discussions were open and violence did not come up at the top of the triggering factors.

8.2. In the three countries, the families receiving remittances can be the subjects of threats and extortion. While in El Salvador violence was identified as a factor severely affecting normal economic activities, in Guatemala and Honduras this does not receive the same level of consideration, which does not mean that the problem is inexistent.

8.3. Only in El Salvador was it reported that voluntary and deported returnees engage in violent actions.

8.4. The interviewed citizens consider violence as a cause of both poverty and losing the capacity to properly feed their families. Violence represents restrictions to work and a constant loss of already restricted economic resources. Violence also create protection issues.

8.5. The journey's risks related to informal emigration are well known and documented.

The spike in recent emigration levels as well as increased numbers of unaccompanied children are a concern. Protection issues related to family members who stay behind also need to be addressed.

8.6. Protection needs to be mainstreamed into existing social assistance programmes in the Dry Corridor. Furthermore, governments and organizations with a protection mandate must consider how to better address these specific issues along the emigration chain, both for family members who stay behind and for the broader community in areas with high levels of emigration.

Recommendations



The findings of the study lead to certain reflexions regarding required policies and actions to deal with emigration from the Dry Corridor of the three countries. They lay the foundations for specific areas of actions to mitigate the emigration push-factors through actions like social safety nets, gender empowerment and protection measures. Research needs can also be identified to help shape prevention, mitigation and response measures to reduce the impacts of emigration on vulnerable populations.

It is expected that the study findings provide valuable input for policy and programmatic decisions by the three Governments as well as WFP and its partners. The study also provides justification for actions and investments for a large number of institutions and stakeholders. This will necessarily require broadly based consultations among all actors: governments, international organizations, local authorities, civil society organizations and the communities where emigration originates. Some general recommendations to guide actions are identified below.

REDUCING VULNERABILITY TO PUSH-FACTORS

Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation Related

Climate surveillance initiatives and trend analyses of climatic variables affecting crop production, combined with soil use/productive capacity and natural disaster monitoring, should be strengthened with the aim to identify critical areas that will incorporate special preventative emigration measures (geographical targeting). The use of WFP's Integrated Context Analysis could be one tool to facilitate this analysis and should be promoted across the three countries as a starting point. This will bring together a wide range a partners, including national authorities and other development-oriented actors.

To enhance climate variability resilience, more comprehensive climate change adaptation efforts need to be pursued through a combination of both community-based and institutional-strengthening initiatives. In particular, integration with risk transfer schemes, such as weather-based parametric insurance for vulnerable farmers, might be a promising opportunity.

Financial mechanisms need to be created to ensure access to agricultural inputs for food production (cereals and pulses), as well as technical assistance and insurance schemes.

Recognizing the increasing frequency of water stress, dry spells and droughts in the Dry Corridor and using a resilience approach, it is important to create programmes to improve water management, such as small irrigation schemes, protection of water sources and agriculture diversification in areas identified as priority. These efforts, as well as community-based social safety nets aiming to increase food availability and access, need to be strengthened and integrated into community, district and departmental development plans.

There is a need to recognize the dynamics of the Dry Corridor, each of the three countries and the sub-region. In particular, while larger-scale investments in agricultural infrastructure would result in higher gains in production, the particular vulnerability of many households who benefit from agriculture in the area would not necessarily decrease. This is due to a combination of land tenure issues (not addressed in this study) and historical precedents in which such investments often result in advantageous purchases of improved lands from marginal households.

Promote risk reduction approaches to make communities less vulnerable to shocks. Strengthen informal and formal institutions at the local level with the aim to enhance the coping capacity of the communities and make them more resilient through measures designed to prevent, respond and recover from crisis situations.

Measures are needed to create local market opportunities for diversified food production by small-scale producers.

When food assistance is provided by WFP, or others, to mitigate push-factors for emigration or to respond to emergencies, the seasonality of food production and the length of the lean season should be considered to determine the duration of the assistance. This should be done instead of limiting assistance to a specific period independent of aggravating factors.

Responses to migration crises

For the studied countries, it is important to improve and systematize the way in which they respond to the assistance and protection needs of crisis-affected, vulnerable populations.

A useful tool for them to develop these kind of responses is the Migration Crisis Operational Framework (MCOF), which is an analytical and operational tool designed to enable countries to provide a holistic response to the complex nature of crisis-generated population flows. Therefore, it looks at all phases of a crisis (before, during, after) as a whole and considers the specific needs and vulnerabilities of crisis-affected migrants who fall outside of existing protection frameworks. Accordingly, the MCOF aims to identify and address institutional and operational gaps that exist in the current set-up of international responses to crises with a migration dimension. The Framework thus allows countries to respond to migration crises in a more coordinated, inter-connected way.

Social protection related

Considering the long chain of events that are required for remittances to turn a positive balance in the life of the most vulnerable, it is recommended that food security programmes and other social programmes should increasingly take into account the vulnerability level of families with recent emigrants. This should apply to public social protection programmes and to assistance provided by international and national organizations. The family composition should be considered, particularly the number of small children and elderly persons and whether the family is headed by a woman.

Develop crisis modifiers within social protection schemes to be alerted through surveillance of emigration push-factors at community and household levels. The aim is to prevent or offset in a timely manner the increasing pressure of these push-factors. This can also be informed by ongoing work by study partners, as well as by an ongoing WFP and Oxford Policy Management study on Shock Responsive Social Protection. The aim should be for social protection systems to increasingly emphasize the importance of adaptation and seasonal stresses while, also potentially serving as a tool to define unexpected needs following a shock.

Improve education coverage and training services to teach income-generation skills for children and youth, with incentives to stay in school. Support school meals transfers and connect school feeding programmes with local small-scale producers, thus creating new local markets for food production, while also working with those producers to improve product quality and supply consistency.

Introduce disaster risk reduction and food and nutritional security to agricultural development initiatives, directly engaging national authorities, local governments and communities, promoting partnerships among local actors and community empowerment.

Recognizing the high transfer costs of sending remittances back home, discuss with Remittance Service Providers (MTOs, FinTechs, mobile companies, MFIs, banks, postal operators and others) how to lower transfer costs, facilitate transfers into the most remote areas and link them to additional financial services in order to promote financial inclusion. The idea is to approach money transfer companies to suggest and support linkages with financial institutions so recipients can be linked with financial products through their remittances. In other words, promote the linkage of remittances and financial inclusion which, as has been demonstrated so far, notably by IFAD, to be one of the greatest development impacts that remittances can have at the family unit level. In terms of reducing the cost, the rationale is that greater competition – innovation in the market place coupled with an enabling environment (regulatory framework) – will expand the market by providing recipients with more options while reducing transaction costs.

Adequately Addressing Protection, Prevention and Adaptation Issues

Provide legal, social and psychological support for families with members who emigrated and who have compromised their livelihoods due to debts, mortgaged assets and loss of family labour. This must be a community-driven initiative to ensure proper targeting, making communities full partners and empowering them to make protection and prevention decisions that affect the community and the families with members who emigrated. It also involves the involvement of the beneficiaries in the participatory monitoring of activities and also of the implementers.

Support deported returnees with protection services, particularly when violence was the push-factor for emigration and create incentives to restore their livelihoods through the provision of a minimum set of resources.

Governments and the international community need to recognize that violence, particularly in El Salvador but possibly also in other Central American countries, is effectively a humanitarian emergency. Violence has significantly impeded development and while the levels of violence in the three countries of the study do not represent a traditional conflict but criminal acts, the impacts of violence are creating humanitarian needs.

There is a need to further ensure that gender needs are addressed, equal opportunities are created and assistance to the most vulnerable people prioritized with gender transformative approaches. As more men than women emigrate, the women who stay behind have to assume new responsibilities, including in agricultural production and in managing the family resources, in addition to their traditional tasks. Women's empowerment must prepare them to assume these new roles. This calls for targeted actions aimed at empowering women and to strengthen solidarity networks among women.

As it is foreseeable that climate change might continue during the near future, developing viable, specific solutions and policies (including National Adaptation Plans) to reduce forced movement is essential. Also important, such forced movements should be transformed into well-managed relocations within internal borders to help foster the resilience of individuals and communities, consequently creating diverse opportunities for livelihoods.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Preventing emigration caused by food insecurity should be strengthened in national initiatives linked to the SDGs and should be fully incorporated in relevant social protection, violence, as well as environmental management policy and action frameworks.

National Governments should take into consideration the identified effects of food insecurity on emigration to promote public policies and development plans focused on the vulnerabilities of the Dry Corridor of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

Promote regional alliances (UN and other international development agencies, donors and financial institutions, Civil Society), starting with the stakeholders of this study to support the government's public policies and action frameworks to reduce food and nutritional insecurity, violence and climatic events related to emigration.

All initiatives of the UN system addressing protection concerns should include a focus on food security and nutrition for an integrated approach.

Joint efforts to reduce migration and promote human development, such as the alliance for prosperity, should take into consideration long-term investment in food security and nutrition.

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