



Understanding the adverse drivers and implications of migration from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras

A comprehensive analysis building on the report on “Complex motivations and costs of Central American migration”



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UNDERSTANDING THE ADVERSE DRIVERS AND IMPLICATIONS OF MIGRATION FROM EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA AND HONDURAS

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“Complex Motivations and Costs of Central American Migration”



FOREWORD

Large-scale migration outflows from the subregion of Northern Central America – encompassing El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – mainly toward Northern America is not a new phenomenon, nor is it one that is likely to end soon. The number of migrants from the subregion increased by nearly 600,000 in just five years, from 3.4 million in 2015 to approximately four million in 2020. Large movements of migrants traveling individually and in groups have increased in number and frequency since 2018 and have often included high proportions of family units, women and unaccompanied and separated children, many in situations of vulnerability. After a lull in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, a total of 781,763 encounters of migrants from the subregion were recorded on the south-west United States border in 2021 – the highest numbers ever recorded. These outflows have occurred in parallel with a multiplicity of ongoing socioeconomic, political and environmental crises in the three countries.

In recent years, migration dynamics in the subregion have increasingly been studied alongside food security, violence, climate variability, disasters and other thematic areas to better understand the factors that drive people to leave their homes. However, these issues are often examined separately rather than together. It is in this context that the World Food Programme (WFP), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have come together to conduct a study which strengthens the evidence base on the nexus of factors influencing migration from the subregion.

Building on “Complex Costs and Motivations of Central American Migration”, a policy brief released in 2021 by WFP, MPI and MIT, this study provides comprehensive information on the multisectoral needs of households in all three countries, on the profile of households with recent international migrants and on the profile of individual migrants themselves, including their reported livelihoods and sociodemographic profile, migration trajectories, motivations, costs and other dynamics. Additionally, the study sheds light on the potential relationship between certain living conditions in the subregion and recent international migration as well as migration intentions. The findings reveal that thousands of households continue to struggle to meet their most basic needs, often resorting to negative coping strategies in order to do so. The findings also reveal the dire economic motivations that influenced recent migrants’ decisions to leave the subregion, as well as some of the vulnerabilities they faced on their journeys. Finally, the study reveals how migration has served as a key adaptation strategy for families across the subregion, often forming the foundation of households’ ability to survive, thanks to the opportunities found in destination countries and the power of economic remittances sent to families and communities back home.

The objective of this report is to support regional and national response plans in Northern Central America and enhance the ability of governments in the region, United Nations agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, donors, development partners, civil society and additional stakeholders to understand current migration trends, as well as the complex nexus of factors influencing migration. Advancements in collecting up-to-date, accurate, accessible and granular data on these areas are fundamental in order to respond to and reduce the adverse drivers which fuel migration out of necessity, enabling actors to design evidence-based policies and interventions which guarantee that migration takes place in a safe, orderly and regular manner.

WFP and IOM extend immense gratitude for the support offered by IADB, PROGRESAN-SICA, Oxfam, Action against Hunger and WeWorld-GVC, as well as the governments of the three countries. We also thank the thousands of families who told us their stories, without whom the study could not have taken place.



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In addition, the Regional Migration Data Unit (RMDU) in IOM's Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean conducted in-depth data analysis and interpretation of the findings. The report was drafted by members of the RMDU, in no particular order - Dilana López, Mark McCarthy, Eugenia Loría and Raúl Soto.

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This publication serves as an in-depth research report as a follow-on to the initial policy brief on a survey elaborated by WFP, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) and the Civic Data Design Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), [Charting a New Regional Course of Action: The Complex Motivations and Costs of Central American Migration](#), published in November 2021.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES, MAPS AND TABLES.....	VII
ACRONYMS.....	XI
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	9
1.1 Context.....	9
1.2 Study setting and purpose	10
1.3 Past publications.....	12
1.4 Structure of the report.....	12
2. METHODOLOGY	14
2.1 Rationale	14
2.2 Analytical framework.....	15
2.3 General and specific objectives.....	16
2.4 Household survey methodology.....	16
2.5 Data collection tools and design, validation process and unit of analysis	18
2.6 Enumerator training.....	18
2.7 Data cleaning and processing.....	18
2.8 Data analysis.....	18
2.9 Limitations.....	19
3. LITERATURE REVIEW	20
3.1 Overview of migration and displacement within and from Northern Central America.....	20
3.2 Main factors influencing migration from the subregion.....	29
3.3 The impacts of migration in Northern Central America.....	38
4. MULTISECTORAL INDICATOR-LEVEL FINDINGS – ALL HOUSEHOLDS.....	41
4.1 Overview – multisectoral indicators	41
4.2 Demographic profile.....	41
4.3 Challenges, priority concerns and community perceptions.....	43
4.4 Household expenditures.....	48
4.5 Livelihoods	49
4.6 Food security	52
4.7 Household coping mechanisms	56
4.8 Health	58
4.9 Protection	58
4.10 Education.....	59
4.11 Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).....	60
4.12 Shelter.....	61
4.13 Social assistance.....	61
5. RECENT MIGRATION – HOUSEHOLD AND INDIVIDUAL PROFILES	63
5.1 Overview – recent international migration.....	63
5.2 Profile of international migrants.....	64
5.3 Remittances.....	74
5.4 Internal and cross-border circular mobility	78

6. MIGRATION INTENTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS	82
6.1 Overview – intentions to migrate	82
6.2 Desires, plans and preparations to migrate internationally	82
6.3 Desires, plans and preparations to migrate internally.....	87
6.4 The desire to remain	91
6.5 Perceptions of migration.....	91
7. EXPLORING VARIATION IN MULTISECTORAL HOUSEHOLD INDICATORS BASED ON HOUSEHOLD MIGRATION PROFILE	94
7.1 Overview	94
7.2 Results – testing relationships between the household recent migration profile and multisectoral household indicators.....	95
7.3 Limitations of the analysis	100
8. CONCLUSION	102
9. REFERENCES	103

LIST OF FIGURES, MAPS AND TABLES

- Figure 1.** The drivers of migration
- Figure 2.** Stock of international migrants originating from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, 1990–2020
- Figure 3.** Migrant returns registered in Northern Central America, 2016–2020 (thousands)
- Figure 4.** Apprehensions of migrants from Northern Central America, south-west United States border, fiscal years 2015–2020, 2021 (October—August)
- Figure 5.** Percentage (%) of the total population estimated to be living in poverty (less than USD 5.50 per day, 2011 PPP) in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, 2010—2019
- Figure 6.** Rainfall patterns for full seasons with standardized anomalies
- Figure 7.** Households with severe consumption-based coping strategies, pre- and mid-COVID-19
- Figure 8.** Households reporting changes in income due to COVID-19
- Figure 9.** Remittances received (absolute USD) (above) and as a percentage (%) of GDP (below), Northern Central American countries, 2015–2020
- Figure 10.** Percentage (%) of households reporting selected concerns as their number one (#1) priority concern at the time of data collection by country
- Figure 11.** Percentage (%) of households reporting selected concerns as their number two (#2) priority concern at the time of data collection by country
- Figure 12.** Percentage (%) of households reporting selected concerns as their number three (#3) priority concern at the time of data collection by country
- Figure 13.** Percentage (%) of households reporting that they were satisfied with their current area of residence at the time of data collection by country
- Figure 14.** Percentage (%) of households reporting that they perceived that the economic conditions in their area of residence were getting better or worse at the time of data collection by country and overall
- Figure 15.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether they perceived that their living standards were getting worse or getting better at the time of data collection by country and overall
- Figure 16.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether or not they could live comfortably on levels of household income at the time of data collection
- Figure 17.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether or not they could live comfortably on levels of household income at the time of data collection by country
- Figure 18.** Distribution of mean monthly household expenditures by different categories in USD (top) and percentage (%) (bottom)
- Figure 19.** Percentage (%) of the surveyed population reported to have worked to earn an income in the 30 days prior to data collection by various age groups, sex and overall
- Figure 20.** Of all individuals ages 15 and older in the surveyed population, percentage (%) by employment status at the time of data collection
- Figure 21.** Top six main sources of household income by country and overall
- Figure 22.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether household income had increased, decreased, remained the same or was lost completely due to COVID-19
- Figure 23.** Food security classification
- Figure 24.** Percentage (%) of surveyed households by food security classification

- Figure 25.** Percentage (%) of households reporting coping mechanisms employed in the seven days prior to data collection due to a lack of money to buy food (top six)
- Figure 26.** Percentage (%) of households reporting the proportion of their entire monthly household expenditure that was spent on food alone
- Figure 27.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether income levels were enough to buy food in the 30 days prior to data collection
- Figure 28.** Top 14 livelihood coping strategies adopted by households in the 30 days prior to data collection due to insufficient income by type of strategy
- Figure 29.** Percentage (%) of households reporting coping mechanisms employed in the 30 days prior to data collection due to lack of income by recent household migration profile
- Figure 30.** Percentage (%) of respondents reporting the main natural hazards experienced in the three years prior to data collection by country of origin and overall
- Figure 31.** Top three main sources of drinking water accessed by households by country and overall
- Figure 32.** Percentage (%) of households reporting that they received support from the government in the six months prior to data collection by country
- Figure 33.** Population pyramid of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection
- Figure 34.** Top eight motivations reported for why household members were perceived to have migrated internationally in the five years prior to data collection by sex of migrant and overall
- Figure 35.** Top eight motivations reported for why household members were perceived to have migrated in the five years prior to data collection by country of origin of migrant
- Figure 36.** Of all individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection, the percentage (%) by who each migrant travelled with on their journey
- Figure 37.** Of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection, percentage (%) reporting the use of the services of a smuggler by country of origin, sex and overall
- Figure 38.** Of household members reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection, percentage (%) by sources of finance accessed to cover migration costs by country of origin and overall
- Figure 39.** Of recent migrants who were reported to have returned to their households by the time of data collection, percentage (%) by reason for return
- Figure 40.** Percentage (%) of assessed households reporting that they received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection, by country and by whether or not the household reported at least one member who had recently migrated internationally
- Figure 41.** The average amount received (in USD) per remittance transfer (top) and per month (bottom) by country of origin, among remittance-receiving households that disclosed this information
- Figure 42.** Households reporting how remittances received in the 12 months prior to data collection were spent, by percentage (%) of how remittances were spent on each expense category
- Figure 43.** Top eight motivations reported for why household members were perceived to have engaged in internal mobility to another area within their own country in the five years prior to data collection
- Figure 44.** Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate permanently to another country by country of origin

- Figure 45.** Of respondents reporting the desire to move permanently to another country at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main motivations for wanting to do so (by country of origin and overall)
- Figure 46.** Of respondents reporting the desire to move permanently to another country at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main motivations for wanting to do so by sex
- Figure 47.** Of respondents reporting that they did not have plans to migrate abroad in the 12 months following data collection despite expressing the desire to migrate abroad at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main reasons why (by country and overall)
- Figure 48.** Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate internally to another department in their country, by country of residence and overall
- Figure 49.** Of respondents reporting the desire to migrate internally to another department in their country of origin, percentage (%) by main motivations for wanting to do so by country and overall
- Figure 50.** Of respondents reporting that they did not have plans to migrate internally in the 12 months following data collection despite expressing the desire to do so at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main reasons why (by country and overall)
- Figure 51.** Of respondents reporting the desire to remain, percentage (%) by main reasons for wanting to do so by country and overall
- Figure 52.** Percentage (%) of respondents reporting their opinion regarding the consequences that migration abroad would bring to families in the assessed zones in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
- Figure 53.** Percentage (%) of respondents reporting their opinion regarding the positive consequences that migration abroad would bring to families by sex
- Figure 54.** Percentage (%) of respondents reporting their opinion regarding the negative consequences that migration abroad would bring to their families by country
- Figure 55.** Percentage (%) of households that reported receiving remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection by household recent migration profile
- Figure 56.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether income was sufficient to buy food in the 30 days prior to data collection by household recent migration profile
- Figure 57.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether income was sufficient to buy non-food essential items (such as transport, housing, utilities or hygiene items) in the 30 days prior to data collection by household recent migration profile
- Figure 58.** Percentage (%) of households reporting that they had outstanding debts to pay off at the time of data collection by household recent migration profile
- Figure 59.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether they were satisfied with their standard of living at the time of data collection by household recent migration profile
- Figure 60.** Percentage (%) of households reporting whether or not they could live comfortably on levels of household income at the time of data collection by household recent migration profile
- Figure 61.** Percentage (%) of households reporting that at least one member lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic by household recent migration profile
- Map 1.** Departments where data collection took place by country
- Map 2.** Percentage (%) of households reporting at least one member who had engaged in internal mobility to another area within their own country in the five years prior to data collection by department

- Table 1.** Department selection criteria
- Table 2.** Selected demographics of respondents in the household survey in numbers (left) and in per cent (right)
- Table 3.** Overview of the total population living in Northern Central American countries over time, 1960–2020 (millions), total (left) and by percentage (%) change between decades (right)
- Table 4.** Migrants from Northern Central America residing in the United States by period of arrival in per cent (%)
- Table 5.** Educational attainment (population 25 years and over) of migrants from Northern Central America versus foreign-born (total) versus native-born in the United States in per cent (%)
- Table 6.** Employment by broad occupational category, population 16 years and above, migrants from Northern Central America versus foreign-born (total) versus native-born in the United States in per cent (%)
- Table 7.** Number of asylum seekers and refugees under UNHCR's mandate from Northern Central American countries, 2020
- Table 8.** Demographic indicators in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
- Table 9.** Employment indicators in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras
- Table 10.** Gross National Income and Gini index in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, 2020
- Table 11.** Estimates of the number of undernourished people in regions of Latin America and the Caribbean (millions)
- Table 12.** Profile of surveyed respondents and households
- Table 13.** Demographic profile of recent migrants identified within surveyed households
- Table 14.** Estimated mean and median household expenditure by country and overall in USD
- Table 15.** Percentage (%) of assessed households by calculated Food Consumption Score, by category, country and overall
- Table 16.** Total calculated monthly expenditure per capita, total monthly expenditure and total per capita expenditure on food by country and overall
- Table 17.** Percentage (%) of households reporting at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection by country of origin and overall
- Table 18.** Intended country of destination of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection
- Table 19.** Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate permanently to another country by sex, age group and recent household migration profile
- Table 20.** Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate internally to another department in their country by sex, age group and recent household internal mobility profile
- Table 21.** Multisectoral household-level indicators and association with the household recent migration profile

ACRONYMS

ACS	American Community Survey
BCR	Banco Central de Reserva
CA	Canasta Ampliada
CARI	The Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security
CATI	Computer-assisted telephone interviewing
CBA	Canasta Básica Alimentaria
CEPREDENAC	Centro de Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central
CBP	United States Customs and Border Protection
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CLR	Coffee leaf rust
CIPPDV	Commission for the Protection of Populations Displaced by Violence
CMNUCC	Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas Sobre Cambio Climático
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DAP	Data analysis plan
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DIGESTYC	Dirección General de Estadística y Censos
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EFSA	Emergency Food Security Assessment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FEWSNET	The Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GCM	Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
GCWE	Global Communities Women Empowered
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMDAC	Global Migration Data Analysis Centre
GNI	Gross National Income
COLEF	Colegio de la Frontera Norte
GRID	Global Report on Internal Displacement
GTQ	Guatemalan quetzal
HDI	Human Development Index
HH	Household
HNL	Honduran lempira
IADB	The Inter-American Development Bank
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IFAD	The International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INFORM	Index For Risk Management
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estadística
INM	Instituto Nacional de Migración
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

JRC	Joint Research Centre
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LPR	Lawful permanent residents
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
MPI	The Migration Policy Institute
MPP	Migrant Protection Protocols
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders
NCA	Northern Central America
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NTMI	Northern Triangle Migration Information Management Initiative
OIC	Organización Internacional del Café
PAIM SICA	Plan for the Comprehensive Attention to Migration
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PROGRESAN-SICA	Information Systems Programme for Resilience in Food and Nutrition Security at the Central American Integration System
RAM	Research Assessment and Monitoring Unit, WFP
rCSI	Reduced Coping Strategies Index
RMDU	Regional Migration Data Unit, IOM
SAN	Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional
SCGG	Secretaría de Coordinación General de Gobierno
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SESAN	Secretaría de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional, Guatemala
SGBV	Sexual- and Gender-Based Violence
SICA	Central American Integration System
STSS	Secretaría de Trabajo y Seguridad Social
SVC	Salvadoran colón
TPS	Temporary Protected Status
TVRH	Visitor Card for Humanitarian Reasons (in Spanish, Tarjetas de Visitante por Razones Humanitarias)
UASC	Unaccompanied and separated children
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNECE	UN Economic Commission for Europe
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPM	Migration Policy Unit Mexico
US	United States
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
USD	United States dollar
UTSAN	Unidad Técnica de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional, Honduras
WACDEP	Water, Climate and Development Programme
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WB	The World Bank

WHO
WFP
WOLA

The World Health Organization
The World Food Programme
Washington Office in Latin America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A. OVERVIEW

WFP and IOM collaborated on a study to enhance the understanding of migration profiles and adverse drivers of migration in NCA, which consists of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. This publication serves as an in-depth research report as a follow-on to the initial policy brief on a survey elaborated by WFP, the MPI and the Civic Data Design Lab at the MIT, [Charting a New Regional Course of Action: The Complex Motivations and Costs of Central American Migration](#), published in November 2021.

This research follows previous studies coordinated by both United Nations Agencies in the region and globally. It is aligned with the first objective of the GCM, which calls for the collection and use of accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies. Furthermore, the research is aligned with the first priority of IOM's Regional Strategy for the region of Central America, North America and the Caribbean, which aims to address the adverse drivers of migration, as well as WFP's Strategic Plan (2017–2021), which aligns WFP's programmes and activities with the SDGs to end hunger and contribute to revitalized global partnerships. The main component of this study consists of a multisectoral household survey with a focus on recent migrant outflows and respondent migration intentions conducted in four departments of each country in March and April of 2021.



B. CONTEXT: MIGRATION FROM THE THREE COUNTRIES OF NORTHERN CENTRAL AMERICA

The countries in NCA have experienced sustained outflows of migrants in recent decades. The United States has by far been the main country of destination of migrants from the three countries during the last 30 years. While the three countries experienced moderate economic growth in the same period, this growth has not been inclusive or led to a significant improvement in living conditions, with a persistent lack of economic opportunities and decent work, low and/or stagnant wages, food insecurity, poverty and inequality, high levels of informality, weak institutions and other adverse economic drivers. All three countries have per capita incomes 15 to 30 times less than the United States. These contextual factors, along with the impact of natural hazards (both rapid- and slow-onset), violence at the community, familial and individual levels, as well as family reunification and pull factors in key destination countries continue to play a role in the decision to migrate.

Access to regular pathways to migrate to the United States and other key destination countries are limited for many migrants from NCA. Those who manage to migrate through regular channels do so primarily through temporary worker programmes or family reunification channels. Many migrants who cannot avail of these mechanisms are instead left to journey thousands of kilometres by land from their origin in Central America through Mexico in search for a better life abroad. Land journeys are expensive, dangerous and usually rely on networks of local intermediaries, or smugglers, which are sometimes linked to other forms of organized (including violent) crime. Dangers for migrants include a wide array of protection concerns including violence, human trafficking and various health and safety risks. Tragically, many migrants never reach their destination, and there are many deaths and disappearances on these routes. Since 2014 and through October 2021, a total of 1,350 migrant deaths and disappearances were recorded by IOM's Missing Migrants Project in Central America, as well as 2,703 migrant deaths and disappearances in North America (mainly, near the United States–Mexico border).



C. SURVEY METHODOLOGY: QUESTIONNAIRE AND SAMPLING DESIGN

The questionnaire asked households to provide multisectoral information on living conditions at the time of data collection while also asking respondents to report on their intentions, plans and preparations to migrate in the future. The sample includes households with recent migration outflows (having at least one family member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection) and households without recent migration. For households with recent migration, information was collected on the characteristics of each individual who migrated in the specified period.

The survey assessed 4,998 total respondents, one per household sampled. Respondents answered questions about themselves, the household as a whole and members of their household. Enumerators collected data in face-to-face questionnaires between 20 April and 15 May 2021. The sample design had two analytical strata, consisting of households with recent migration outflows (at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection) and households without members who migrated in the same period. Households were selected in 12 departments, four per country. In each department, 25 communities were randomly selected using land scan data.

Survey results are indicative at the level of all four departments surveyed in each country and are not nationally representative. Differences reported between countries refer only to respondents located in these 12 administrative units assessed and are not generalizable or representative of departments or at the aggregate country level. Information on recent migrants themselves was collected by proxy from household respondents, which may affect the accuracy of survey results.



D. KEY FINDINGS

KEY FINDINGS: MULTISECTORAL PROFILE OF ALL SURVEYED HOUSEHOLDS

1. **Income and expenditures. A quarter of households reported that they were in a critical or difficult situation regarding levels of household income at the time of data collection. Approximately half of surveyed households were estimated to be living on less than USD 2 per capita, per day.**

- Just over half (52%) of all individuals ages 15 and older identified in the sample were reported to have worked to earn an income in the 30 days prior to data collection, with considerable variation by sex – 73 per cent for males compared to 29 per cent for females ages 15 and older.
- Twelve per cent (12%) of households reported that they were experiencing a “critical deficiency” of household income (that is, not being able to meet even the most basic needs), while 32 per cent reported that they were facing a “very difficult situation” in terms of levels of household income at the time of data collection. Around 48 per cent of households reported that they were “surviving” on current income, and just 16 per cent reported feeling that they could live comfortably with their levels of income at the time of data collection.

42%
of households reported
struggling or not
being able to meet
basic needs at current
income levels



- Median monthly expenditures were considerably low among the surveyed population in all three countries. Estimated median monthly per capita expenditures amounted to just USD 60, while median monthly household expenditures were estimated at USD 230. Median household expenditures were well below basic food baskets in both Guatemala and Honduras.

2. Food insecurity. It was calculated that approximately one in ten (9%) surveyed households were food insecure at the time of data collection.

- By country, the prevalence of food insecurity was 12 per cent among surveyed households in Guatemala, nine per cent in Honduras and five per cent in El Salvador.



- There were also signs of deficient quality in food consumption, with a notable lack in dietary diversity across many surveyed households.
- More than half of households (52%) reported buying cheap food or less preferred food as a coping strategy, followed by a reduction in meal proportions (32%) and borrowing food/purchasing food on credit (31%) in the 30 days prior to data collection.

3. COVID-19 pandemic. A large proportion of surveyed households (67%) reported that their household income decreased as a consequence of COVID-19.

- Approximately one-third (34%) of households reported that at least one household member had lost their employment or business during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the highest percentage seen among surveyed households in Guatemala (39%).
- Approximately one-third (32%) of all surveyed households reported perceiving that the living standards in their place of residence had worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Social assistance. During the pandemic, 48 per cent of the surveyed households reported having received some form of support from the government and/or other institutions.

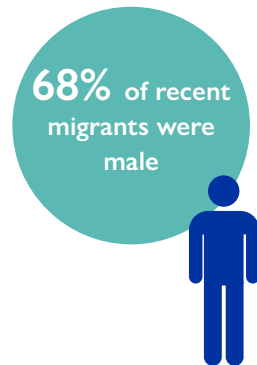
- In El Salvador, more than nine out of ten surveyed households (92.4%) reported having received support from a governmental programme in the six months prior to data collection. Of those surveyed households reporting that they had received governmental support in this period, 95 per cent reported that they had received in-kind food items.
- In Honduras, 16 per cent of surveyed households reported having received any support from a governmental programme in the six months prior to data collection, while in Guatemala 36 per cent of surveyed households reported having received support from the government in this period, mainly in the form of cash assistance.

KEY FINDINGS: RECENT OUTFLOWS OF MIGRANTS^A**1. Emigration. Results from the study show significant levels of recent migrant outflows from the subregion.**

- Nearly a quarter (24%) of surveyed households reported at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection, ranging from 22–23 per cent in El Salvador and Guatemala to 27 per cent of surveyed households in Honduras.

2. Profile of migrant outflows. Most recent migrant outflows identified within surveyed households were composed of young males of working age, with more feminized migration from Honduras.

- Seven in ten (68%) of the 1,200 individuals reported to have migrated from surveyed households in the five years prior to data collection were men, the vast majority between the ages of 18 and 41. Female migrants constituted just 32 per cent of recent migrants identified in the sample.
- Female migrants accounted for 21 per cent of recent migrants identified in surveyed households in Guatemala, 33 per cent in El Salvador and 38 per cent in Honduras.

**3. Adverse drivers. Most recent migrants left in search of better employment, wages and job opportunities abroad and to cover food and other essential needs. Low proportions of recent migrants were reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate due to violence/insecurity or natural hazards.**

- Three quarters (76%) of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection were reported to have done so to search for a better job, salary or working conditions, 14 per cent to cover food and 22 per cent other essential needs. Two in five (38%) were reported to have migrated due to unemployment in their countries of origin.
- Violence/insecurity was reported as motivation for only seven per cent (7%) of recent migrants identified in the sample, while natural hazards were only cited as a motivation for three per cent (3%).
- Motivations for migration did not differ significantly between recent female and male migrants.

4. Widespread migrant smuggling. Many recent migrants completed their journeys alone. Others went with friends and family. Over half of recent migrants reported using the services of smuggler(s).

- Nearly three in five (58%) recent migrants were reported to have completed their migration journeys without friends and family, while approximately two in five were reported to have migrated with family members and friends. Female migrants were more likely to have migrated

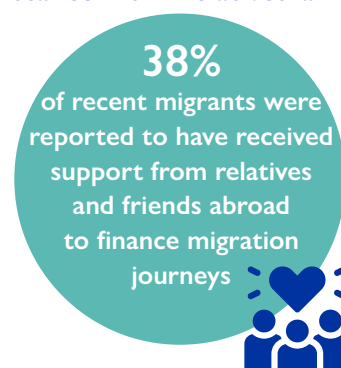
^A Information in this subsection on individual migrants was collected by proxy from household respondents. For the most part, individual migrants were not interviewed directly, unless they happened to return to their communities of origin by the time of data collection and responded to the survey on behalf of their household. Household respondents were asked to report on the characteristics of each individual who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection.

with friends and family when compared with male migrants.

- Fifty-five per cent (55%) of recent migrants were reported to have used the services of smugglers during their migration journeys. This was lower in Honduras (28%) compared to El Salvador (63%) and Guatemala (79%).

5. High migration costs. Recent migrants incurred significant costs in order to finance their migration journeys. Many financed their journeys through assistance from relatives and friends abroad or by taking on new debts.

- Of those recent migrants for whom respondents reported migration costs, the average quantity spent was approximately USD 5,000, between transportation, subsistence (such as food and water and other non-food items) as well as payment of intermediaries/smugglers.
- To finance their journeys, 38 per cent of recent migrants identified in the sample were reported to have received support from relatives and friends abroad, while 22 per cent were reported to have financed their journeys through loans and 18 per cent from savings.



6. Significant return migration. Substantial proportions of individuals who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior had already returned to their household by the time of data collection.

- One in three (33.3%) recent migrants were reported to have returned to their households by the time of data collection. The majority of those who returned (64%) were reported to have been returned involuntarily to their countries of origin.

7. The power of remittances. Remittances were found to form the foundation of many recipient households' ability to afford daily necessities.

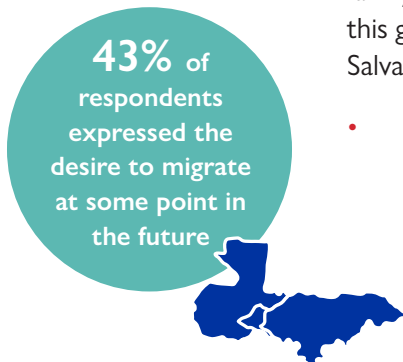
- Twenty-nine per cent (29%) of all assessed households reported having received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection – ranging from 22 per cent of assessed households in Guatemala, 29 per cent in Honduras and 36 per cent in El Salvador.
- Households with recent migrants reported having monthly expenses of USD 50 more than households without recent migrants, possibly due to remittances received in recent years.
- The vast majority of households that reported receiving remittances reported spending money received on meeting basic needs such as food, health care and housing-related costs. Sixty-four per cent (64%) of all remittances received were spent on food alone.

8. Migrant deaths and disappearances. The survey captured dynamics on the tragic loss of life during migration journeys. There were cases in which respondents reported that an individual who attempted to migrate from their household in the five years prior to data collection had lost their lives during their migration journey or whose whereabouts were unknown, highlighting the grave risks that migrants undergo each day embarking on migration routes through the region.

KEY FINDINGS: MIGRATION DESIRES, PLANS AND PREPARATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION

1. Migration desires, plans and preparations. Significant proportions of respondents – 43 per cent, or over two in five – reported that they would like to move permanently to another country if they had the opportunity to do so at any point in the future. However, very small proportions of respondents – six per cent in total – reported that they were actually planning on migrating in the 12 months following data collection. Even fewer respondents – just three per cent in total – reported having already engaged in specific preparations to migrate at the time of data collection (such as taking on a loan, saving money or organizing transport).

- Of those respondents reporting the desire to migrate at any point (across all three countries), approximately 80 per cent reported searching for a better job, salary or working conditions abroad as one of their main motivations for wishing to migrate.
- Of those respondents who were not planning to move to another country in the next 12 months (corresponding to 1,812), 59 per cent expressed the lack of resources to pay for the trip as the main reason preventing them from migrating.
- Of the 2,486 respondents (49.7%) who expressed the desire to remain in their communities of origin (that is, who did not report the desire to migrate permanently to another country or internally at any point in the future), the main reason reported for wanting to stay was to avoid family separation – this was reported by 66 per cent of respondents in this group in Guatemala, 71 per cent in Honduras and 59 per cent in El Salvador.
- Of respondents in El Salvador expressing the desire to remain in their communities of origin, over half (55%) reported a sense of rootedness in their country and community as a reason for intending to remain.



2. Perceptions of migration: migration is viewed ambivalently among survey respondents, who perceived the process to bring both positive and negative impacts to themselves, their families and their communities.

- Forty-six per cent (46%) of respondents reported perceiving that migrating internationally brings both positive and negative consequences to their families
- Among the positive perceptions of migration, respondents in all three countries mentioned improvements in levels of household income and family living conditions.
- Regarding the main negative consequences reported by respondents, among the three countries and for both men and women, family separation was the most frequently reported negative impact of migration (cited by 73% of respondents in total).

KEY FINDINGS: COMPARING SELECTED HOUSEHOLD AND INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS WITH OUTCOMES ON KEY INDICATORS

3. Adverse migration drivers. Economic variables such as employment, savings and income presented statistical associations with recent migration.

- The main identified drivers that had a measured and tested relationship with recent household migration profiles were income and economic-related factors. The following economic, livelihood, monetary and financial variables showed a statistical association with recent migration: jobs or businesses lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic, being dissatisfied with standards of living, lack of savings in the household, current debt or credit in the household, insufficient income for non-food items, insufficient income to buy food and whether households received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection.
- Other variables which were found to be associated with recent migration were: households headed by a single female, households affected by the coffee rust disease^b, the lack of electricity in the household, as well as household roofing materials (often used as a proxy to understand broader living conditions).
- The following variables showed no association with recent migration: whether households were in rural versus urban areas, as well being satisfied with current living conditions.
- Exposure to natural hazards was not determined to have a significant association with recent migration, except for households exposed to the coffee rust disease. On the other hand, exposure to natural hazards was determined to have a statistically significant relationship with whether respondents expressed the desire to migrate permanently to another country at some point in the future, specifically the exposure to hurricanes and tropical storms or the exposure to floods during the three years prior to data collection. This could become a trigger for migration if exposure in the future is more frequent and severe.



CONCLUSIONS: ADDRESS THE ADVERSE SOCIOECONOMIC DRIVERS OF MIGRATION AND CREATE REGULAR PATHWAYS.

Findings on the nexus of factors influencing migration from NCA would suggest an urgent need for comprehensive policy responses oriented toward addressing the adverse socioeconomic drivers of migration. While investments in economic development, building food security and poverty alleviation measures are meant for the long term, it would be also important to create additional and more inclusive regular pathways of migration, such as circular labour mobility, in the short- and medium-term.

^b Coffee Leaf Rust (CLR) is one of the main limiting factors of Arabica coffee production worldwide. The causal agent *Hemileia vastatrix* (fungus) produces large orange spores' masses on the lower leaf surface, leading to premature leaf fall (Talhinhas et al., 2017).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT

Migration in Northern Central America (NCA), comprised of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, has long been a feature of the subregion. Before the 1970s, individuals from the three countries mainly moved within the subregion or to other countries in Central America and Mexico. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, conflict occurring mainly in Guatemala and El Salvador began to change the face of human mobility, with larger and more diverse flows of individuals migrating out of the region.

Precarious and highly volatile living conditions in all three countries since the 1990s have led to even larger-scale and sustained outflows of migrants during the last three decades. Since 1990, the number of Guatemalans living outside their country of origin increased from just under 350,000 to nearly 1.4 million as of 2020, while the number of Salvadoran migrants increased from 1.24 million to 1.6 million and the number of Honduran migrants increased from 156,000 to 985,000 in the same thirty-year timeframe (UNDESA, 2020). The lion's share of outmigration from the subregion occurs northward toward the United States, the destination of 3.41 million, or 86 per cent of the total 3.95 million migrants from NCA in the world as of 2020 (ibid.).

In addition to strong pull factors such as family reunification, the desire to earn and send money home in the form of remittances, educational opportunities and the strength and attractiveness of labour markets in the United States and other key destination countries, the outflows of migrants are also heavily influenced by a number of long-term and emerging drivers, or push factors, in NCA countries of origin. One of the main drivers includes a consistent lack of economic opportunities and decent work, non-inclusive economic growth, low and/or stagnant wages, poverty and inequality, weak institutions and corruption. All three countries are some of the poorest in the entire Western Hemisphere – in 2020, the GDP per capita in Guatemala was USD 4,603, USD 3,799 in El Salvador and just USD 2,406 in Honduras (the GDP per capita in the United States, by comparison, was USD 63,544 in 2020) (World Bank, 2020). On average, 77 per cent of workers in the subregion are engaged in informal employment (Runde and Schneider, 2019). Labour markets in all three countries are heavily segmented by sex with far smaller proportions of women participating in wage employment (ECLAC, 2018).

Violence and threats of violence also play a role, often occurring in multiple and intersecting forms such as generalized community-level violence, gang and drug violence, and intrafamilial as well as SGBV, which in many instances may disproportionately affect certain sociodemographic groups such as women, minors and minority groups, including LGBT individuals (ECLAC, 2018; IOM and WFP, 2015, 2017; MSF, 2017 and Cheatham and Roy, 2021). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2020, there were around 515,000 refugees and asylum seekers globally originating from NCA countries (UNHCR, 2020). In addition, the IDMC recorded a total of 1.63 million internal displacements caused by violence in NCA countries in the four-year period between 2015 and 2019 (IDMC, 2020a).

Rapid-onset disasters and slow-onset climate and environmental processes both currently – and in the past – have also stemmed further migration and displacement within and out of the subregion. In 2020, the total number of new internal displacements due to hazards in the subregion were 17,000 in El Salvador (IDMC, 2020b), 339,000 in Guatemala (IDMC, 2020c) and 937,000 in Honduras (IDMC, 2020d). Specifically, Hurricanes Eta and Iota decimated the subregion, affecting a total of four million people in Honduras and 2.4 million people in Guatemala (IOM, 2020). Many individuals were also displaced in El Salvador (ibid.). Since 2014, extreme prolonged droughts and heavy rains associated with the El Niño (southern oscillation) phenomenon have decimated maize and bean crops in the Dry Corridor of Central America (spanning NCA and Nicaragua, primarily) (Baez, 2017).

These environmental processes, combined with other drivers mentioned above, have directly impacted the food security situation in all three countries and have left millions of people vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition (ibid.). Food insecurity, in turn, generates possible knock-on effects upon migration (WFP and IOM, 2017).

Migration can be an important strategy used by households to cope with income uncertainties and food insecurity risks and contribute to the resilience and development of communities (IOM and WFP, 2020). For example, poor rural households may send one or more family members into cities or abroad to work in sectors other than agriculture in order to reduce their risk of hunger and extreme poverty and to cope with possible adverse shocks (Christian Aid and InspirAction, 2019). Generally, households that receive remittances tend to have better food security outcomes than those without this income source (Mora-Rivera and van Gameren, 2021).

While migration can bring many potential benefits to NCA countries of origin, transit countries and countries of destination, it becomes more challenging to harness these positive benefits when the process does not take place in a safe, regular, orderly and humane manner. With a general absence of regular pathways, migrants from NCA are often left with no other choice than to depart through irregular channels. Apprehensions of nationals of NCA countries recorded at the south-west United States border have consistently exceeded those of Mexican nationals since 2016 (Bialik, 2019). In fact, two-thirds of the 507,402 apprehensions of UASC recorded at the south-west United States border between 2008 and 2020 originated from NCA countries (US CBP, 2021a). Over 260,000 apprehensions of NCA nationals were registered at the south-west United States border in the fiscal year 2018, while 620,000 were recorded in the fiscal year 2019 (ibid.) (notably, not all migrants who are apprehended are irregular migrants, as many may have claims to asylum or other legal forms of entry into the United States).

Many of those apprehended in recent years have arrived in large groups travelling on foot through NCA and Mexico toward the United States, a form of transportation commonly referred to as “migrant caravans”. These large population movements not only consist of a high number of individual adult migrants but also family units and UASC.

The outbreak of the global pandemic caused by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in early 2020 has had strong impacts on the health and socioeconomic conditions in NCA countries and across the Americas, while also contributing to a notable decrease in mobility in the region and the imposition of numerous border and travel restrictions by countries in order to contain the spread of the virus (IOM, 2021b). Apprehensions of nationals from NCA recorded at the south-west United States border in the fiscal year 2020 decreased by 83 per cent compared with the fiscal year 2019, to just 106,762 (ibid.). However, 2021 demonstrated a strong reversal of this trend, with the number of apprehensions at the south-west United States border reaching levels not seen for at least two decades (Pew Research Center, 2021). Among these apprehensions was a significant number of UASC from NCA, reaching 102,284 between January and August 2021 (ibid.).

Migrant returns also appeared to be affected – at least temporarily – at the onset of the pandemic. After increasing steadily year on year from 2017 to 2020, the number of returns registered in NCA countries declined by 64 per cent from 251,778 in 2019 to just 89,907 in 2020 (IOM, n.d.a). However, the number of returns also appeared to pick up slightly in 2021, with 70,074 returns registered in all three NCA countries between January and August 2021, an increase of 7.2 per cent compared with the same period of 2020 (ibid.). Often returning to difficult reception conditions in NCA, without durable solutions and effective return and reintegration services, those returned may be motivated to leave again in the future.

1.2 STUDY SETTING AND PURPOSE

As the subregion is witnessing a new mass outflow of individuals migrating northward in 2021 and 2022 and given that durable solutions to precarious economic, political, environmental, social, security and COVID-19/health situations appear unlikely at least in the near term, there is a fundamental need for up-to-date information and data on the multisectoral needs and vulnerabilities of households in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Understanding these needs and vulnerabilities may then shed light on the persistent and emerging nexus of factors that are stemming continued migrant outflows from the subregion, often of individuals in adverse and highly vulnerable situations.

To respond to these information gaps, the RAM Unit in the WFP’s Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean in Panama City, Panama conducted a multisectoral household assessment with a thematic focus on migration in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras in March–April 2021. Initial findings of this

assessment are compiled in a joint analysis conducted by WFP, The MPI and the Civic Data Design Lab of the IT): [The Complex Motivations and Costs of Central American Migration | World Food Programme \(wfp.org\)](#), which was finalized in November 2021.

Recognizing that the data collected bore a wealth of information that had not been completely explored, WFP and the RMDU in the IOM's Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean in San José, Costa Rica, joined forces to conduct an in-depth complementary analysis. This exercise was a follow-up on a number of past studies conducted jointly by WFP and IOM in the subregion (see section 3.3).

In addition to providing comprehensive information on total multisectoral needs of all surveyed households, the assessment was implemented in order to support subregional and national response plans in NCA and enhance the ability of governments in the subregion, UN agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, donors, development partners, civil society and additional stakeholders to understand current migration trends, as well as the complex nexus of factors influencing migration from NCA.

Advancements in collecting up-to-date, accurate, accessible and granular data on these areas are fundamental in order to respond to and reduce the adverse drivers which fuel migration out of necessity, enabling actors to design evidence-based policies and interventions which guarantee that migration takes place in a safe, orderly and regular manner. These realities have been recognized and outlined in numerous international frameworks, including:

- The [SDGs](#), in particular:
 - Target 10.7 – “Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”.
 - Target 17.18 – “... Increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status...”.
- The [GCM](#), in particular:
 - Objective 1 – Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies.
 - Objective 3 – Provide accurate and timely information at all stages of migration.
 - Objective 17 – Eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration.

The GCM also underscores the importance of addressing the adverse drivers of forced migration (Objective 2) to make migration a choice rather than an obligation and calls for the establishment of safe pathways of migration for persons affected by disasters, environmental degradation and climate change (Objective 5).¹

At the regional level, the Propuesta Política de Migración Regional Integral (Comprehensive Regional Migration Policy Proposal) adopted in 2018 by the Member States of the SICA (Central American Integration System),² ensures that intraregional migration flows are governed by the principles of human rights and security. SICA is now working on a new PAIM SICA.

The information collected in this survey is also expected to inform and align with IOM and WFP's own interventions in the subregion. The first strategic priority of the [IOM Regional Strategy for Central America, North America and the Caribbean for the period 2020–2024](#) is to address the adverse drivers of migration, while the second priority focuses on facilitating safe, regular and orderly forms of migration. The fourth action point under the third pillar on governance specifically calls for the “enhance[ment of] the capacity of governments to collect, analyse and use migration and internal displacement data for

¹ The strand of work under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement devoted to human mobility – including, in particular, the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Task Force on Displacement – includes similar recommendations to “averting, minimizing and addressing displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change” (UNFCCC, 2018: 2). The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) remains the key reference in terms of efforts to address disaster displacement.

² Born from the Organization of Central American States in 1951 and created by the Tegucigalpa Protocol of 1991, SICA is the main entity pursuing regional integration in Central America. Eight Member States are included in SICA: Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

evidence-based policymaking” while the fifth action point aims to “strengthen national, provincial and local governments’ ability to develop and implement well-managed migration policies” (IOM, 2020).

The WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021) focuses on ending hunger and contributing to revitalized global partnerships to implement the SDGs. It provides a conceptual framework for a new planning and operational structure that will enhance WFP’s contribution to the countries’ efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Responding to emergencies and saving lives and livelihoods through direct assistance, or by strengthening country capacities will remain a major part of WFP’s operations and is crucial in supporting countries’ efforts to achieve the SDGs. WFP’s dual mandate allows it to use a development lens in its humanitarian responses and to align early recovery and development interventions accordingly. As a result of this dual mandate, WFP’s experience in both humanitarian and development contexts has allowed it to establish unique strengths and capacities for building resilience for food security and nutrition, including for contexts of protracted crises. WFP is committed to support countries by reaching people in need first and ensuring that no one is left behind. Recognizing that all 17 SDGs are interconnected, WFP prioritizes SDG 2 on achieving zero hunger and SDG 17 on partnering to support the implementation of the SDGs.

1.3 PAST PUBLICATIONS

The current assessment is a follow-up on three past studies conducted jointly by WFP and IOM, which have focused on shedding light on the linkages between migration, food insecurity and other factors influencing human mobility in NCA, and is a complement to the aforementioned WFP–MIT–MPI report published in November 2021:

- [Hunger without Borders: The hidden links between food insecurity, violence and migration in the Northern Triangle of Central America – An exploratory study](#) in 2015, which considered the potential linkages between migration, food insecurity and violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The report found that there was indeed a relationship between migration, food and nutrition, security and violence.
- [Food Security and Emigration: Why people flee and the impact on family members left behind in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras](#) in 2017, highlighted the linkages between food insecurity and migration and described the main push factors that trigger peoples’ decision to leave their countries of origin, such as poverty, violence and climate variability. The study focused on outmigration from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, showing that migration is one of the coping strategies used to confront crises. Findings revealed that family reunification, the desire to look for better opportunities abroad and the desire to improve socioeconomic status were significant factors in the decision to migrate.
- [At the root of exodus: Food security, conflict and international migration](#) in 2017, further explored how food insecurity – especially when combined with conflict – can be a powerful driver for people to move.
- [The Complex Motivations and Costs of Central American Migration](#) in 2021, compiled the main findings of the data collected in April 2021 and is also complemented by a website: [Charting A New Regional Course of Action \(mit.edu\)](#).

Additionally, in November 2020, IOM and WFP published a joint study on the [Implications of COVID-19 for Hunger, Migration and Displacement](#) at the global level, which looks at the impact of the pandemic on the nexus between hunger, conflict and human mobility.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report begins with an in-depth discussion of the methodologies employed in order to implement the survey in chapter two, including coordination structures, the research design process, sampling strategy and household selection, the data cleaning and analysis process, as well as challenges and limitations. Chapter three of this report presents a documentary analysis summarizing key migration trends in the subregion in recent years as well as a review of key existing literature looking at the drivers of NCA

migration. Chapter four then delves into the total multisectoral household-level findings for all 4,998 surveyed households across the three countries.

Chapter five of this report then presents key information on the migration profile of the 1,200 households in which at least one individual was reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection, presenting individual-level information (collected by proxy from household respondents) on 1,634 individual migrants identified to have migrated from these 1,200 households. Chapter six presents key indicator-level findings based on reported migration desires, plans and preparations for the 4,998 respondents who participated in the survey.

Finally, chapter seven of this report will present key findings related to bivariate statistical analyses conducted based on the two analytical axes of focus in this report, looking at relationships (or lack thereof) between variation in outcomes in key multisectoral household-level indicators (ranging anywhere from protection to food security and livelihoods) and household recent migration profiles – that is, whether households reported at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection. Chapter 10 presents the key conclusions of the study.

Note: It is important to specify that while dynamics of internal and cross-border mobility were covered in parts of the survey and are mentioned when relevant (particularly in chapter five and in the context of intentions to migrate internally, outlined in chapter six), this report focuses on the dynamics of international migration.

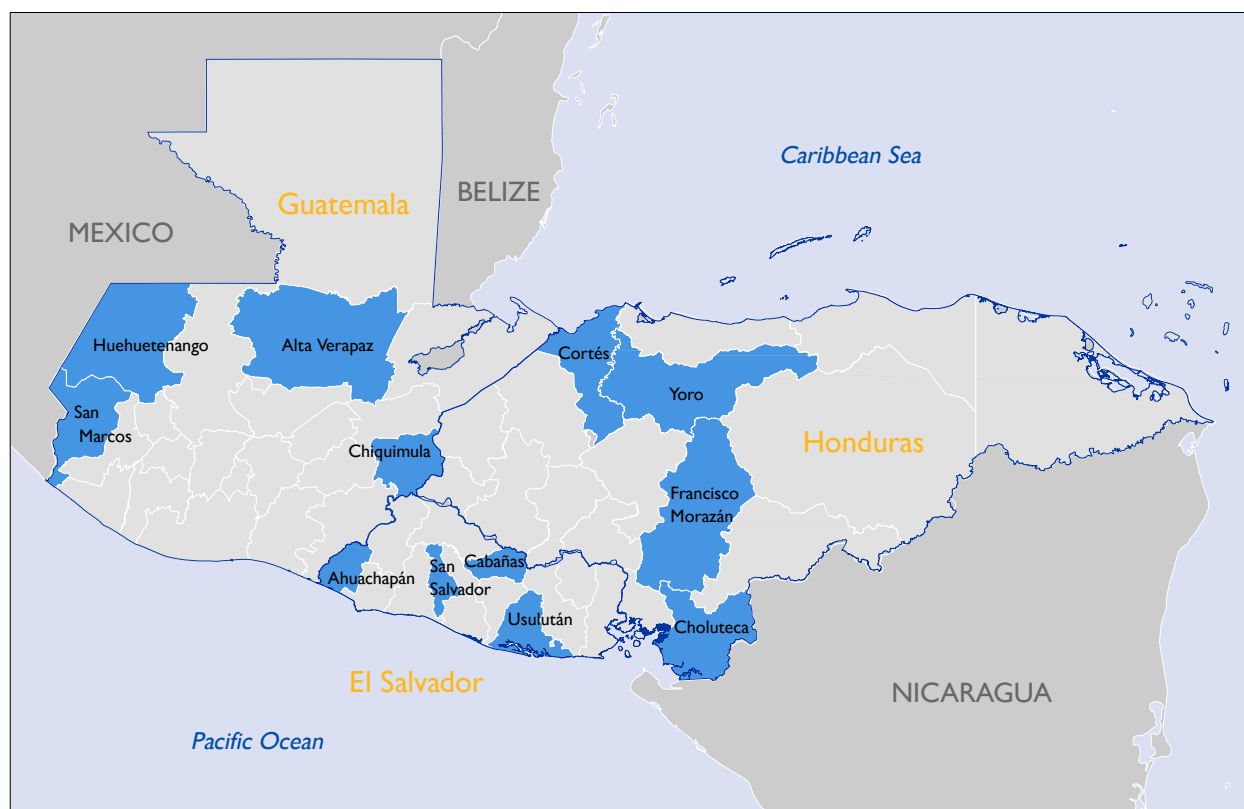
While findings are often reported by country of origin, it is important to iterate that the survey was only conducted in the four departments with the highest incidence of migration and/or food insecurity in each country due to time and resource limitations (chapter two will specifically outline the rationale behind the selection of departments in each country). As such, differences between countries refer only to respondents located in these 12 administrative units assessed and are not generalizable or representative of departments or at the aggregate country level.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines the methodological approach undertaken in order to conduct the present study, as well as the analytical framework utilized in order to inform the total survey design and guide the analysis and interpretation of findings.

Complemented by a thorough review of secondary data, this study relies primarily on household survey data collected by the WFP and international and civil society partners. Between April and May 2021, the research team conducted interviews with nearly 5,000 households in 300 communities across the following 12 departments: Ahuachapán, Cabañas, San Salvador and Usulután in El Salvador; Alta Verapaz, Huehuetenango, San Marcos and Chiquimula in Guatemala and Choluteca, Cortés, Francisco Morazán and Yoro in Honduras (Map 1).

Map 1. Departments where data collection took place by country



Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM or WFP.

2.1 RATIONALE

The survey provides specific indicator-level information on all households, on the profile of households with recent international migrants and on the profile of individual migrants themselves, including their reported livelihoods and sociodemographic profile, migration trajectories, motivations, costs and other dynamics. Additionally, the survey sheds light on the potential relationship between certain living conditions in NCA countries of origin and recent international migration (since 2016) as well as migration intentions, by way of correlational analysis.

The study sample is indicative of households at the department level. The departments included in the survey were selected both based on the reported number of migrants returning to each department (as a proxy for emigration rates) as well as food insecurity levels, in order to capture households from diverse socioeconomic settings (Table 1).

Table 1. Department selection criteria

Country	Department	Selection criteria	
		Acute food insecurity	Migrant return rate
El Salvador	Ahuachapán	Crisis	Average
	Cabañas	Stressed	High
	San Salvador	Stressed	Low
	Usulután	Stressed	High
Guatemala	Alta Verapaz	Crisis	Low
	Chiquimula	Crisis	Average
	Huehuetenango	Crisis	High
	San Marcos	Stressed	High
Honduras	Choluteca	Crisis	Low
	Cortes	Crisis	Average
	Francisco Morazán	Crisis	Low
	Yoro	Crisis	High

Source: IPC, *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification*; El Salvador (Nov. 2020 to Feb. 2021); Guatemala (Nov. 2020 to March 2021) and Honduras (December 2020 to March 2021);³ Information Management Unit, Return rate 2020.⁴

2.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical model used for this study is based on the “migration as adaptation” framework to understand individual or household decisions to migrate and provide a grounding base to understand how different factors interlink and influence the decision of whether a person or family will migrate internationally, internally or remain in their community of origin.

As described in the model below (Figure 1), people migrate for complex reasons: to improve incomes, for family reunification, to escape violence or persecution and to mitigate their risks from rapid-onset disasters or slow-onset climate and environmental processes. Although many people migrate due to economic factors, political instability and social pressures can also drive people to leave. Food insecurity, especially when combined with violence and the impact of climatic shocks, can be a powerful driver for people to move. The decision to migrate is also determined by personal and household characteristics and other intervening obstacles and facilitators such as legal frameworks, the cost of moving and family and social networks, among other factors.

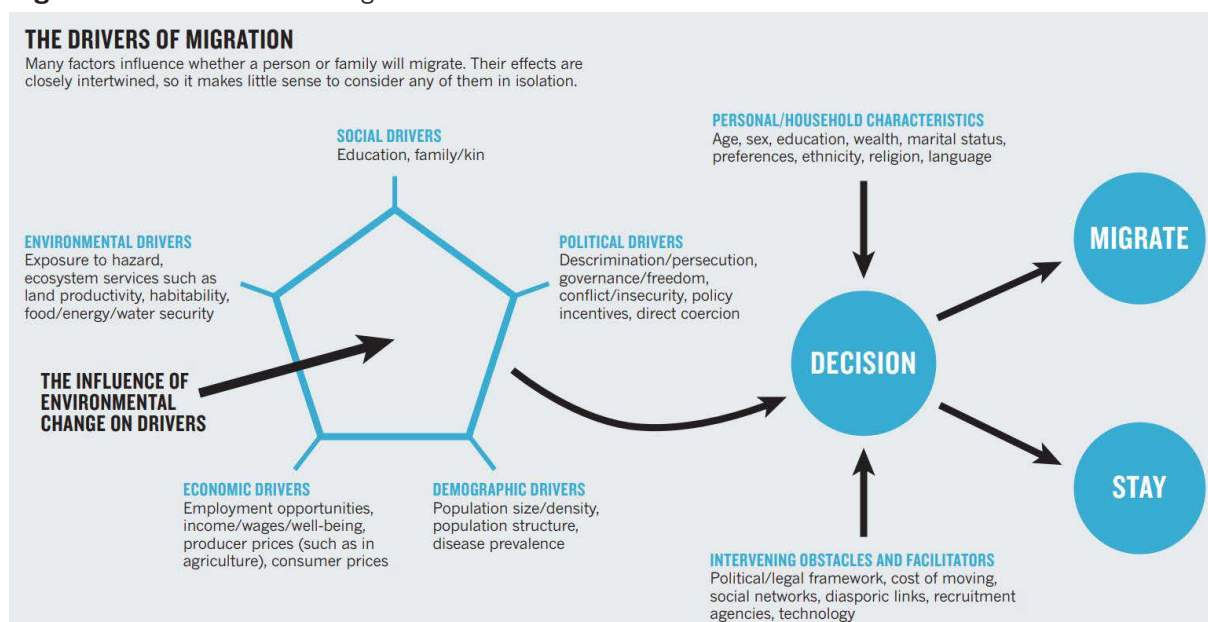
It is relevant to highlight that migration can be an effective way to allow people to diversify income sources and cope with income uncertainties and food insecurity. Concurrently, migration can contribute to the resilience and development of communities, for example, by way of the money and goods that are sent back to countries of origin by nationals living abroad (known as remittances).

In order to build the resilience of communities and maximize migration's contribution to development in countries of origin, transit and destination, it is fundamental to better understand the drivers and motivations behind why people decide to migrate, both to mitigate the adverse drivers of migration and to ensure that the process takes place in a safe, regular, humane and voluntary manner.

³ IPC classifies areas with acute food insecurity into five phases: minimal; stressed; crisis; emergency and famine.

⁴ Return rate scale: low (0–0.4 per cent); average (0.5 per cent) and high (0.6–0.1 per cent).

Figure 1. The drivers of migration



Source: Black, R., Bennett, S., Thomas, S. and Beddington, J. (2011). *Climate change Migration as adaptation*. Nature 478 (7370), pp. 447–449.

Note: The above graphic was prepared by Black et. al. (2011).

2.3 GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

WFP and IOM planned this study with an overall objective to support subregional and national response plans in NCA and enhance the ability of governments in the subregion, UN agencies, other intergovernmental organizations, donors, development partners, civil society and additional stakeholders to understand current migration trends, as well as the complex nexus of factors influencing migration from NCA.

Based on the above, the report explores two analytical axes:

- (1) **Recent migration:** Comparing outcomes for households reporting at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection versus those without any members who migrated or attempted to migrate in this time period.
- (2) **Migration intentions:** Comparing the profiles of individual respondents that reported desires, intentions and/or plans to migrate at the time of data collection versus those reporting that they would like to remain in their communities of origin.

2.4 HOUSEHOLD SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Designed by WFP according to Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis guidelines,⁵ the face-to-face household survey asked respondents in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras about their living conditions, intentions to migrate and the sociodemographic characteristics of household members who had migrated recently, among other related questions. The survey was administered in person by trained enumerators between 20 April and 15 May 2021. A total of 4,998 households were assessed (see Table 2 for sample distribution and selected demographics).

The survey is based on a two-step stratified cluster sampling design with two analytical strata: households that reported having at least one household member who had migrated during the five years prior to data collection and households reporting having no members who migrated during the same period. From design to execution, the sample aimed to assess as robust of a cross section of the target population as possible (incorporating departments with low and high migrant return rates, high levels of food insecurity

⁵ WFP, “Comprehensive Food Security & Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) Guidelines – First Edition, 2009,” updated 30 January 2009.

and a mix between both rural and urban areas). WFP calculated a required sample size minimum of 1,500 households among the four assessed departments in each country. The main parameter used to calculate the sample size was the percentage of people directly receiving remittances in the country, as a proxy for migration. The proportion of people directly receiving remittances was derived from national migration and remittances surveys conducted in the three countries between 2016 and 2018. Based on these surveys, a total of 17 per cent of all households were estimated to receive remittances in El Salvador (Encuesta Nacional de Migración y Remesas – El Salvador, 2017), nine per cent in Guatemala (Encuesta Estudio de Remesas Guatemala, 2016), and 17 per cent in Honduras (BID: Población receptora de remesas en Honduras, 2016).

Following review and validation by IOM, WFP administered the survey instrument in 12 departments – four in each of the three Central American countries, adapting to mobility and health restrictions resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Findings are indicative at the departmental level for the selected departments, which also constitute the areas with some of the highest levels of emigration in each country. Municipal-level figures for returnees were provided by IOM.

In each department, 25 communities were randomly selected using land scan data. Once in the communities, enumerators were trained to randomly select households using a systematic approach based on a randomly selected number. Enumerators conducted at least 15 interviews per site and visited a total of 100 communities in each country.

Table 2. Selected demographics of respondents in the household survey in numbers (left) and in per cent (right)

	Sample count	Total
Total number of individuals interviewed	4 998	100
Age group		
18–34	1 612	32
35–44	1 028	21
45+	2 358	47
Sex		
Female	3 675	74
Country of origin and department		
El Salvador	1 703	34
Ahuachapán	526	11
Cabañas	313	6
San Salvador	353	7
Usulután	511	10
Guatemala	1 730	35
Alta Verapaz	405	8
Chiquimula	392	8
Huehuetenango	437	9
San Marcos	496	10
Honduras	1 565	31
Choluteca	386	8
Cortés	408	8
Francisco Morazán	385	8
Yoro	386	8

^a One respondent preferred not to specify their sex, meaning the remaining 1,322 respondents (26% of the sample) were male.

2.5 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND DESIGN, VALIDATION PROCESS AND UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The data collection tool was designed by WFP and IOM, following the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and EFSA guidelines,⁶ as well as a migration module proposed and modified by IOM based on the local context.

The tool was reviewed thoroughly by IOM and WFP teams. Prior to data collection, the tool was shared for comments, inputs and final validation with national government partners and NGO partners in all three countries, as well as SICA (at the regional level) and food security counterparts such as the SESAN in Guatemala and the UTSAN in Honduras.

The main unit of analysis for this survey was the household. The definition for “household” used in the present assessment was individuals living together who shared expenses on food and other basic necessities. Surveys were conducted with adult respondents (18 years and over) in each household. Free and informed consent was obtained from each respondent prior to commencing the survey. Referral mechanisms were established in each of the three countries in order to respond to any protection risk disclosures that may have arisen during data collection. The tool was piloted prior to commencing data collection.

2.6 ENUMERATOR TRAINING

Enumerators were hired and trained by WFP together with various local partners in each of the three countries. In Guatemala, data were collected by staff from Oxfam, GCWE, and a private company. In Honduras, WFP worked with enumerators provided by members of the food security cluster, while in El Salvador, enumerators participating in data collection were the ones generally hired by WFP for post-distribution monitoring exercises. Training of enumerators took place in April 2021. Training sessions were conducted by WFP and supervision was ensured by WFP and national government partners, including SESAN, UTSAN and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador.

2.7 DATA CLEANING AND PROCESSING

Data were collected using the KoBo application, with a select few designated WFP personnel given access to raw data. Data were checked daily for inconsistencies based on standard operating procedures, including checking for inconsistencies and cleaning values, identification and correction of outliers, as well as the removal and/or replacement of incomplete or inaccurate records. All changes to the data set were documented in a cleaning log.

2.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using the SPSS software, both for the generation of simple indicator-level output tables as well as statistical analysis. Data analysis was realized according to a comprehensive data analysis plan that was reviewed by WFP and IOM before implementation. The main descriptive/indicator-level findings are presented in chapters four, five and six.

Chapter seven presents the findings based on statistical relationship testing to determine whether there may be a relationship between variation in outcomes on key multisectoral individual and household indicators and whether or not: (1) households had at least one recent migrant, or (2) respondents reported the desire to migrate permanently to another country.

The correlational analysis was performed based on chi-square tests for independence. While chi-square tests are useful in determining whether two categorical variables are related or not, relationships do not necessarily imply that one variable has a causal effect on the other, nor does the analysis determine the

⁶ WFP, “Comprehensive Food Security & Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) Guidelines – First Edition, 2009,” updated 30 January 2009.

direction of the relationship. As such, the analysis is exploratory in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of potential variations in outcomes among the surveyed population based on recent migration profile but should be complemented by additional research and analysis in the future and triangulated with other sources of information.

2.9 LIMITATIONS

Due to resource limitations and COVID-19 health and mobility restrictions, it was not possible to conduct a nationally representative survey. As previously discussed, the geographical coverage of the study was limited to four departments in all three countries and was based on predetermined criteria as well as extensive discussions with government and humanitarian partners in each country. WFP included households from both rural and the urban areas and selected departments with some of the highest levels of emigration, to enable a robust survey of the migration situation in all three countries.

In addition, information collected on individual migrants was collected by proxy from household respondents and not necessarily from migrants themselves, unless the recent migrant happened to return to their communities of origin by the time of data collection and responded to the survey on behalf of their household. Findings on individual migrants' characteristics, experiences and costs thus capture household members' perceptions and memory of events, which may affect the accuracy of the results. However, this is a common limitation in studying populations in transit and can still provide significant insights into migration dynamics in the subregion.

It is worth specifying that the vast majority of respondents were non-migrant, female household members. This may have an impact on the results for certain indicators, including perceptions of living conditions, migration intentions, livelihoods, consumption patterns and more. Finally, it is worth specifying that, with limited exceptions, the current study does not capture information on or provide insights to dynamics of internal migration in the three countries.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT WITHIN AND FROM NORTHERN CENTRAL AMERICA

This section is a brief (non-exhaustive) summary of data and trends both past and present of migration and displacement internally and internationally within and from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, highlighting total populations, recent flows, migration pathways, dynamics of displacement and the demographic and socioeconomic profile of migrants, as well as recent developments during the COVID-19 pandemic, among other topics.

3.1.1 Historical background – international migration

Prior to the 1970s, migration from NCA countries was predominantly intraregional – including, for example, long-standing daily and seasonal cross-border labour migration of Guatemalans in southern Mexico (which continues to this day), as well as Salvadoran labour migration to Honduras and Panama from (approximately) the 1930s to the 1960s (Menjívar and Cervantes, 2018; Castillo and Toussaint, 2015; Jonas, 2013).

The first large outflow of migrants from NCA countries began in Guatemala and El Salvador in the 1970s, sparked by conflict in both countries. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the civil war in El Salvador pushed millions of Salvadorans to flee to other countries not only in Central America but also Mexico, the United States, Canada and farther afield (Menjívar and Cervantes, 2018; Pederzini et al., 2015). Similarly, outmigration from Guatemala accelerated in the late 1970s as swaths of predominantly indigenous Mayan populations fled persecution, violence and civil war, with many seeking protection in Mexico and to a lesser degree the United States (Jonas, 2013; Pederzini et al., 2015). These dynamics continued in both countries in the 1980s, further exacerbated by the economic fallout of the “Lost Decade” for Latin America, which led to a debt crisis, stagnation, high inflation and a deterioration of social conditions in all three NCA countries (International Monetary Fund, 2000). On the other hand, outmigration from Honduras (which was not facing a civil war) was relatively low in the 1970s and 1980s (Pederzini et al., 2015; Reichman, 2013). In fact, Honduras received many Salvadorans and (to a lesser extent) Guatemalan migrants and refugees in this period (Pederzini et al., 2015).

The profile of emigration from NCA began to shift in the 1990s as peace accords were signed in both Guatemala and El Salvador. A notable degree of return migration occurred in the early nineties; however, these dynamics would not remain durable. In addition to the fallout of protracted conflicts, which left highly unstable and fractured states, the entire subregion struggled to recover from the economic turmoil of the 1980s (Reichman, 2013; Menjívar and Cervantes, 2018; Jonas, 2013). Even as all three countries began implementing broad neoliberal economic reforms and structural adjustment policies and continued to develop export-oriented industries in the 1990s (achieving moderate growth), none of the three achieved meaningful stability or suitable improvements in living conditions. This is in part due to significant cuts in social spending, which exacerbated inequality and class divisions and tended to neglect the needs of the rural poor – many of whom were continually being pushed off their land by large agricultural producers (Pederzini et al., 2015; Reichman, 2013; Menjívar and Cervantes, 2018; Jonas, 2013; Congressional Research Service, 2021).

From the mid-1990s onward, migrants from all three NCA countries were leaving in large numbers, the vast majority to the United States, in search of better economic and living conditions. Mixed migration flows from the subregion throughout the 2000s have been influenced not only by economic conditions but also other factors, including environmental hazards and disasters such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which led to mass displacement and stemmed further outmigration for years, as well as growing insecurity and violence in all three countries (discussed in greater detail in further subsections), which has generated

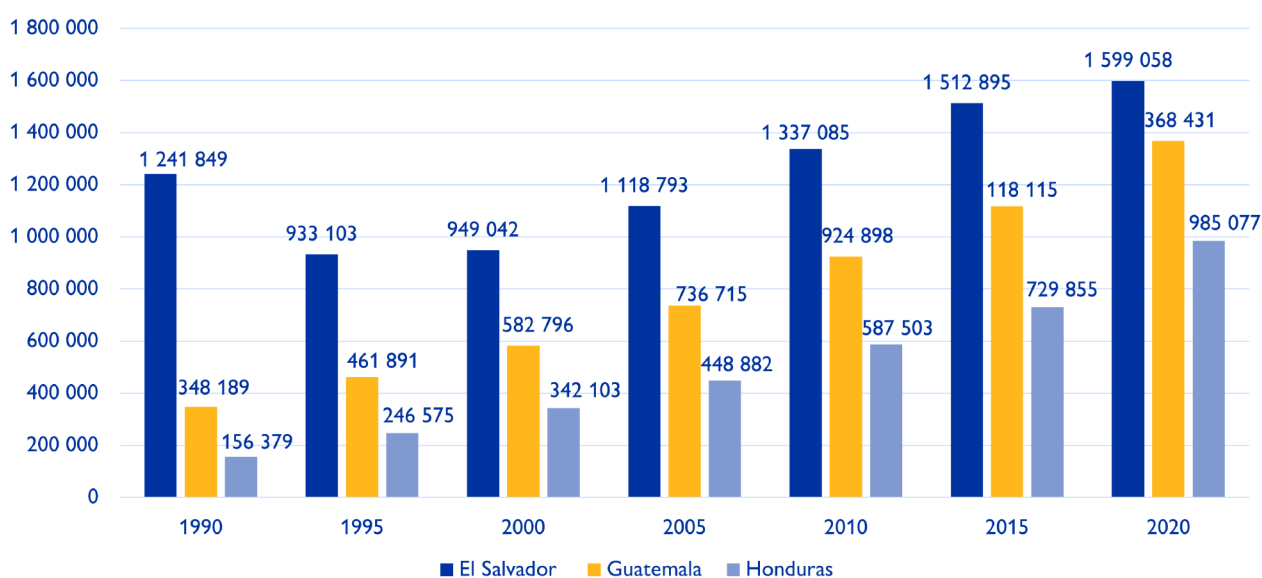
further departures of vulnerable individuals from the subregion, often in need of international protection (Pederzini et al., 2015; Reichman, 2013; Menjívar and Cervantes, 2018; Jonas, 2013). As further sections will discuss, drought and other slow-onset climate and environmental processes have also influenced migration out of the subregion in recent years.

Large-scale migration from NCA was and continues to be facilitated by the growth in transnational (or diaspora) communities, particularly in the United States. Many migrants and refugees who arrived during the conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s have served as a powerful foundation for families and friends in NCA countries who arrived in the 1990s onward, either through direct channels of migration through family reunification (given that many became naturalized citizens) or simply as sources of information, knowledge and resources for non-migrants back home (Congressional Research Service, 2021). These dynamics continue to this day.

3.1.2 International migrants

As per UNDESA estimates, after decreasing between 1990 and 1995 (driven by return migration to El Salvador), the total population of international migrants from NCA countries increased by 140 per cent between 1995 and 2020, from 1.64 million to 3.95 million (UNDESA, 2020). In the thirty-year period between 1990 and 2020, the migrant population originating from Guatemala increased nearly fourfold, by 293 per cent, while the population of migrants from Honduras increased more than sixfold, by 530 per cent (ibid.). The stock of migrants from El Salvador increased nearly twofold between 1995 and 2020, by 71 per cent (ibid.). As of 2020, 10 per cent of Hondurans and eight per cent of Guatemalans lived outside of their country of origin, while the highest levels of emigration (as a proportion of the total population) were registered in El Salvador at 25 per cent (own calculations, based on UNDESA, 2019; UNDESA, 2020).

Figure 2. Stock of international migrants originating from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, 1990–2020



Source: UNDESA, 2020.

There is near parity in the number of male and female migrants originating from NCA countries. In 2020, 48 per cent of migrants from the subregion were male and 52 per cent were female (UNDESA, 2020). This distribution has remained roughly the same since 1990 (when 49 per cent were male and 51 per cent were female) (ibid.). However, there is notable variation between countries. While migrants from El Salvador and Guatemala are almost equally distributed by sex, a notably larger proportion of migrants from Honduras were female (59%) than male (41%) in 2020 (ibid.).

The United States serves as the main country of destination for the majority of migrants from NCA – 78 per cent (773,045) of Honduran migrants, 88 per cent (1,410,659) of Salvadoran migrants and 90 per cent (1,226,849) of Guatemalan migrants lived in the United States as of 2020 (ibid.). Other notable countries

of destination outside of the Central American region include Mexico (for all migrants from NCA), Spain (for Hondurans and to a lesser degree Guatemalans) and Canada (for Salvadorans and Guatemalans), while main intraregional corridors in Central America include Salvadoran migrants in Guatemala and Costa Rica, Guatemalans in Belize and Honduran migrants in Nicaragua and El Salvador (*ibid.*).

As the number of people leaving the subregion continues to grow, all three countries have maintained significant population growth, which has remained relatively high over the past 60 years, albeit slowing in El Salvador in particular since 2000 (see Table 3).

Table 3. Overview of the total population living in Northern Central American countries over time, 1960–2020 (millions), total (left) and by percentage (%) change between decades (right)

Country	1960	%	1970	%	1980	%	1990	%	2000	%	2010	%	2020
El Salvador	2.76	+32	3.67	+20	4.59	+15	5.27	+12	5.89	+5	6.18	+5	6.48
Guatemala	4.21	+34	5.62	+23	7.28	+27	9.26	+26	11.65	+26	14.63	+22	17.92
Honduras	2.04	+33	2.72	+26	3.68	+35	4.96	+33	6.58	+27	8.32	+19	9.90

Source: UNDESA, *World Population Prospects*, 2019.

3.1.3 Migration journeys

Each year, thousands of migrants from NCA countries leave the subregion, the vast majority to the United States. Travel northward occurs under a variety of modalities, both regular and irregular, temporary and permanent, first time and repeat. Those leaving range anywhere from temporary workers to entire family units, adult migrants travelling alone, students, asylum seekers and unaccompanied and separated children.

Estimates from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) show that 34 per cent of Salvadoran migrants in that year were naturalized United States citizens, compared with 28 per cent of Guatemalan migrants and 23 per cent of Honduran migrants (US Census Bureau, 2020). The vast majority – three in every four – of Central Americans who became lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in the United States in the fiscal year 2019 did so through family reunification channels, followed by those obtaining LPR status by way of their status as a refugee or asylee. There were limited numbers of employment-based LPRs issued to nationals of the three countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). Many migrants are also recruited through temporary labour migration channels in the United States and although Mexican migrants predominate, migrants from all three NCA countries are eligible to be recruited through H-2A (temporary agricultural workers) and H-2B (temporary non-agricultural workers) programmes in the United States (USCIS, n.d.a; USCIS, n.d.b).

However, vast proportions of migrants are not able to avail themselves of these limited regular pathways (among other barriers). Consequently, a large proportion of migrants are left with no other option but to journey thousands of kilometres by land out of NCA and through Mexico, crossing multiple borders, extremely difficult terrains and hostile environments, most with the intention of arriving (and crossing) the south-west United States border (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and IOM, 2018).

In order to reach their final destination, many migrants from NCA rely on a network of predominantly local, community-based smugglers and smuggling groups, often termed ‘coyotes’ or ‘polleros’ who, among other services, organize transport and logistics, help avoid detection by authorities and provide up-to-date information on routes (UNODC, 2018). The UNODC notes that the reliance on smugglers in the region has only increased in recent years as the increase of security and border enforcement operations has made transiting without the assistance of an intermediary exceedingly difficult (*ibid.*).⁷ Based on an analysis of numerous data sources in the region, UNODC estimates that the land route from Central America through Mexico to the United States border costs migrants anywhere from USD 4,000 to as much as USD 15,000 (*ibid.*). In order to finance these journeys, many have to take out exorbitant loans from lenders in their countries of origin, sell or mortgage their properties and assets or borrow money from family members (IOM, 2021).

⁷ One exception, however, is the recent proliferation of migrant caravans, which have allowed individuals to travel in large groups and thus reduced the need to rely on smugglers (Araya, 2019).

During their journeys, many migrants are vulnerable to human trafficking, kidnapping, torture and other forms of violence, either at the hand of their smugglers, other migrants or perpetuated by other criminal groups and state and non-state actors, with women and children being especially vulnerable (Médecins Sans Frontières, n.d.; Save the Children, n.d.; UNODC, 2018; Canales and Rojas, 2018; ECLAC and IOM, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has not diminished the need for the use of smuggling services in the region, and as mobility in the region rebounded in 2021 (discussed further in subsection 3.1.9), the continuation of heightened border restrictions, the prolonged socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic in origin countries, the interruption of visa processing and immigration procedures and continued immigration and border enforcement procedures (now with expedited measures) means that many migrants have and will continue to rely on the services of smugglers (UNODC, 2021; IOM 2021).

At the same time, greater restrictions and increased patrols may push some migrants and their smugglers to take even more dangerous and more circuitous routes, increasing their exposure to various risks (UNODC, 2020). During the pandemic, migrants in transit may risk running out of money, being stranded in transit locations, confronting racist and xenophobic incidents, and, among other concerns, contracting COVID-19 and falling ill, with no guarantee of access to critical health services (IOM, 2020; Guadagno, 2020; Mixed Migration Centre, 2020). Migrants who are increasingly destitute and have no other alternatives in light of the pandemic may be more susceptible to human trafficking both in transit and once in destination countries (UNODC, 2021).

Tragically, many migrants who set out on their journeys never make it to their destinations. From 2014 to October 2021, a total of 1,350 migrant deaths and disappearances were recorded by IOM's Missing Migrants Project in Central America, as well as 2,703 migrant deaths and disappearances in North America (IOM, n.d.b). Of these, 2,699 (two thirds) were registered at the United States–Mexico border (ibid.). In both regions, significant numbers of deaths and disappearances have been recorded in pandemic years, including 534 in 2020 and 386 between January and October of 2021 (ibid.).

3.1.4 Profile of migrants from Northern Central America in the United States

As the main destination country of migrants from NCA, analysing nationally representative data on all migrants from NCA living in the United States provides significant insights into their overall demographic and socioeconomic profile. Many of the indicators presented below – in particular, markedly lower levels of educational obtainment, lower incomes and higher poverty rates (among other dynamics) compared with the total migrant population as well as the non-migrant population in the United States – are not just reflective of destination-side factors (for example, related to integration) but are rather a continuation of conditions in NCA countries of origin that drove many to emigrate in the first place.

Nationally representative data from the ACS in 2019 confirm that Salvadoran migration in the United States has longer-established roots, with half of all migrants from El Salvador living in the United States for more than 20 years (US Census Bureau, 2020). While migration from Guatemala lies somewhere in the middle, data reflect that a significant share of migration from Honduras has occurred within the last 10 to 11 years (US Census Bureau, 2020).

Table 4. Migrants from Northern Central American residing in the United States by period of arrival in per cent (%)

Period of arrival	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Entered 2010 or later	24	32	40
Entered 2000 to 2009	27	32	30
Entered before 2000	49	37	31

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey – “Selected Population Profile in the United States–2019”, Table ID S0201, 2020 [accessed 3 October 2021].

Educational obtainment is low among migrants from NCA in the United States – among the population age 25 and above, half of all Salvadoran migrants, nearly half of Honduran migrants and nearly three in

every five Guatemalan migrants in the United States do not have a high school diploma, approximately double the rate of the foreign-born population in total and between six and seven times greater than the native-born United States population (ibid.).

Table 5. Educational attainment (population 25 years and over) of migrants from North Central America versus foreign-born (total) versus native-born in the United States in per cent (%)

Level of education achieved	Native-born	Foreign-born	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Less than high school diploma	8	26	50	56	46
High school graduate	28	22	27	22	28
Some college or Associate's degree	31	19	15	14	16
Bachelor's degree	21	19	6	6	7
Graduate or professional degree	13	14	2	2	2
n (size of subset)	185 344 676	39 553 892	1 200 045	866 413	659 795

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey – “Selected Population Profile in the United States – 2019”, Table ID S0201, 2020 [accessed 3 October 2021].

Approximately three in four (72–75%) Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans from age 16 years and above living in the United States are in the civilian labour force (ibid.). This is compared to 67 per cent of the total foreign-born population age 16 and above and just 62 per cent of the native-born population age 16 and above (ibid.). An analysis of broad occupational categories for the population 16 years of age and above shows that migrants from NCA are far more concentrated in service, construction and maintenance occupations when compared with the total foreign-born population and the native-born population, and less concentrated in sales and office occupations as well as management, business, science and arts occupations (ibid.).

Table 6. Employment by broad occupational category, population 16 years and above, migrants from North Central America versus foreign-born (total) versus native-born in the United States, per cent (%)

Occupational category	Native-born	Foreign-born	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Management, business, science and arts occupations	41	35	12	11	11
Service occupations	17	23	34	32	30
Sales and office occupations	22	15	11	9	10
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	8	13	22	29	33
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	13	16	21	19	15
n (size of subset)	131 204 304	27 554 490	955 595	724 067	450 249

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey – “Selected Population Profile in the United States – 2019”, Table ID S0201, 2020 [accessed 3 October 2021].

In the United States, the median annual household income in 2019 was USD 56,375 for Salvadoran migrant households, USD 47,148 for Guatemalan migrant households and USD 45,785 for Honduran migrant households, compared with USD 63,550 for foreign-born households overall and USD 66,040 for native-born households (ibid.). The poverty rate for Salvadoran migrant families in the United States was 15 per cent in 2019, compared with 23 per cent for Guatemalan migrant families and 26 per cent for Honduran migrant families, versus 12 per cent for foreign-born families in total and eight per cent for native-born families (ibid.). Data also reflect that health insurance coverage for migrants from NCA

is significantly less than the overall foreign-born population and the native-born population and that the majority of migrants from all three countries report speaking English “less than very well” (ibid.).

3.1.5 Refugees and asylum seekers from Northern Central American countries

Data from the UNHCR show that the number of refugees and asylum seekers from NCA countries has skyrocketed in recent years, driven by continued violence and crime, inequalities and weak institutions (UNHCR, n.d.a). Fleeing gang violence, forced recruitment into criminal activities, extortion, threats as well as SGBV, among other intersecting direct and structural forms of violence, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers from these three countries has increased from 109,766 in 2015 to 549,251 by the end of 2020 – an increase of 400 per cent (UNHCR, n.d.b).

Table 7. Number of asylum seekers and refugees under UNHCR’s mandate from Northern Central American countries, 2020

Country	Refugees	Asylum seekers	Total
El Salvador	45 640	149 537	195 177
Guatemala	24 559	146 108	170 667
Honduras	34 473	148 934	183 407

Source: UNHCR, [Refugee Data Finder](#), n.d. [01 October 2021].

The United States is by far the main destination country of asylum seekers and refugees originating from each of the three NCA countries, hosting 65,325 refugees (62% of the global total) and 444,579 asylum seekers (94% of the global total) from the subregion at the end of 2020 (ibid.). Mexico features as the second most prominent destination country for refugees and asylum seekers from all three countries, with 26,840 refugees (26%) and 51,782 asylum seekers (12%) from NCA in 2020, followed by Spain, the destination of 1,749 refugees (2%) and 13,675 asylum seekers (3%) from NCA in the same year (ibid.).

Aside from traditional asylum systems, many migrants from NCA avail of other forms of complementary protection in countries of destination. As of March 2021, an estimated 198,420 Salvadorans and 60,350 Hondurans held Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States (Congressional Resource Service, 2021). The TPS is a blanket form of humanitarian relief available to designated foreign nationals in the United States “who may not qualify for asylum but are nonetheless fleeing – or reluctant to return to – potentially dangerous situations” (ibid.).

Mexico also offers a form of complementary protection known as the Visitor Card for Humanitarian Reasons (in Spanish, *Tarjetas de Visitante por Razones Humanitarias*), or TVRH, which has been issued to numerous NCA nationals in recent years. Between 2018 and 2020, a total of 50,210 TVRHs were issued to NCA nationals in Mexico, 23 per cent to Salvadorans, 11 per cent to Guatemalans and 67 per cent to Hondurans (Mexican Migration Policy Unit (UPM), 2018, UPM 2019, UPM 2020).

3.1.6 Internal migration and displacement

Although not an area of focus in the present study, it is important to acknowledge the importance of internal migration and displacement dynamics in the subregion. In 2020, as per estimates from the IDMC, there were a total of 1.41 million new internal displacements registered in NCA, the majority of which (1.29 million, or 92%) were due to disasters (IDMC, 2020). Honduras was the hardest hit in absolute terms, experiencing close to one million new disaster-related displacements, while Guatemala experienced 339,000 (ibid.). In both countries, Hurricanes Eta and Iota were the main events behind these significant levels of displacement (ibid.). A total of 17,000 disaster-related displacements were recorded in El Salvador in 2020, the majority of which resulted from Tropical Storm Amanda in March (ibid.). From 2008 (when IDMC first began publishing data) until 2020, the entire subregion has experienced 1.89 million new disaster-related displacements (ibid.).

Internal displacement in NCA also occurs in the context of violence. In 2020, El Salvador was the only country where new displacements due to violence were registered, reaching 114,000 (IDMC, 2020). While no new internal displacements due to violence were registered in Guatemala and Honduras in 2020, there were notable numbers of people estimated to be living in violence-related internal displacement situations, estimated at 242,000 in Guatemala⁸ and 247,000 in Honduras (ibid.).⁹

In broader terms of internal migration, it is worth highlighting that Central America is the second fastest urbanizing region in the world, after sub-Saharan Africa (Maria et al., 2017). Aside from population growth, much of the region's rapid urbanization in recent decades can be attributed to internal migration (ibid.). It is expected that, within the next generation, seven in every 10 people in Central America will be living in cities (ibid.). Apart from traditional mechanisms influencing internal migration – such as marriage, family reunification, searching for employment, or education – other factors, including climate change, are projected to have an increasing impact on internal mobility (World Bank, 2018). In Central America, long-term climate change is having a significant impact on maize and bean production (particularly in Honduras and El Salvador), generating significant economic losses (ibid.). Studies have already shown that climate variability generates fluctuations in migration, and as rural and agricultural-dependent populations face economic vulnerability due to droughts and other events, many households will continue to turn to cities to seek alternative livelihoods (ibid.).

The share of the NCA population living in urban areas has increased steadily since 1960 (World Bank, n.d.a). El Salvador appears as the most urbanized country of the three, with the share of the population living in urban areas increasing from 38 per cent to 73 per cent between 1960 to 2020, followed by Honduras, where the share increased from 23 per cent to 58 per cent in the same period, and then Guatemala, which remains the least urbanized of the three, albeit still witnessing significant growth between 31 per cent in 1960 to 52 per cent in 2020 (World Bank, n.d.b).¹⁰ Despite rapid urbanization, it is worth noting that the growth rate, while positive, has declined slightly year on year since 2008 in El Salvador, 2000 in Guatemala and 2002 in Honduras (ibid.).

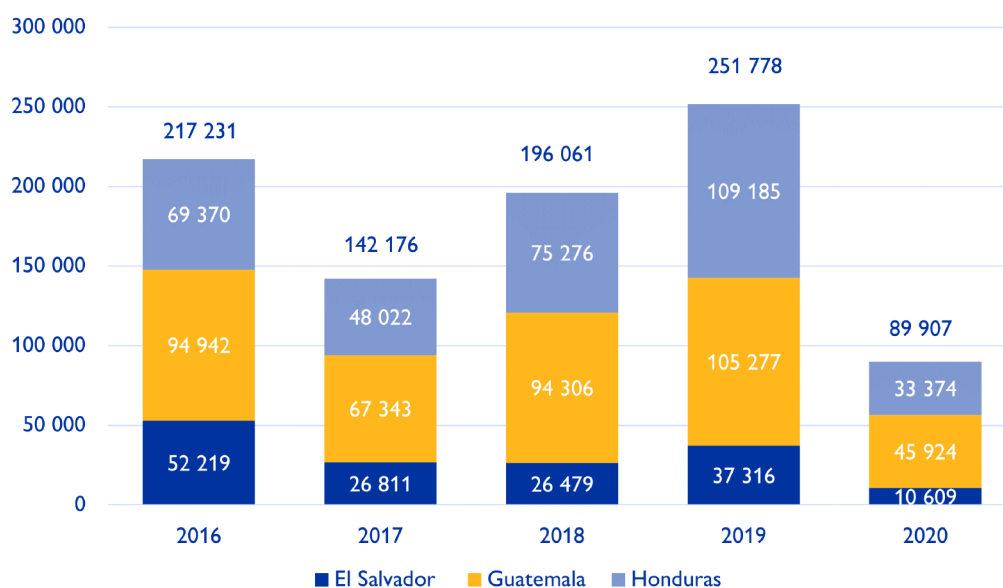
3.1.8 Return migration

Return migration – both voluntary and forced – is an important feature of migration trends in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. According to data from the IOM NTMI, a total of 897,153 migrant returns were registered in NCA countries between 2016 and 2020 (IOM, n.d.a). Of these, 52 per cent (407,792) were registered in Guatemala, 37 per cent (335,227) in Honduras and 17 per cent (154,134) in El Salvador (ibid.). Among these returns were 683,583 adult males (70%), 128,562 adult females (14%), 86,129 boys (10%) and 51,599 girls (6%) (ibid.). The majority of migrant returns in recent years have been from Mexico and in slightly smaller proportions from the United States, with very few registered from other countries (ibid.).

⁸ This figure is likely an underestimate and is based on outdated data from 1997 of individuals internally displaced during Guatemala's 36-year-long civil war. For more information on caveats and limitations of this data source, see the methodological note [here](#).

⁹ Estimates for Honduras on internally displaced people due to violence are based on cumulative figures between 2004 and 2018, obtained from Honduras' inter-institutional CIPPDV and its partners. For more information on caveats and limitations of this data source, see the methodological document [here](#).

¹⁰ These World Bank estimates differ slightly from national instruments, such as the Guatemalan census, which estimated the share of urban population at 53.85 per cent (National Statistics Institute Guatemala, 2019).

Figure 3. Migrant returns registered in Northern Central America, 2016–2020 (thousands)

Year	From the US (%)	From Mexico (%)	From other countries (%)
2016	36	64	0.1
2017	49	52	0.2
2018	50	50	0.1
2019	46	53	2.0
2020	47	53	0.7

Source: IOM NTMI, *Returns – Northern Triangle*, n.d. [04 October 2021].

Return migration can pose significant benefits for countries of origin as migrants may bring new skills and assets (financial or otherwise) acquired abroad that can benefit local economies and development, provided that sustainable return, reception and reintegration services and infrastructure are in place nationally and in local communities (Bojorgquez, 2015; Ruiz et al., 2019). Services can range anywhere from immediate transportation, food and medical and psychosocial support to medium- and longer-term interventions, which seek to reintegrate returnees into health and social assistance systems, provide documentation, educational opportunities or livelihoods initiatives, such as vocational training courses or job placement programmes (ibid.).

Initiatives to support return migrants must also take into account the length of time migrants were abroad, gender (particularly girls and women), age (focusing on youth and older adults), other characteristics (such as disability and criminal records) as well as – perhaps most importantly – whether return occurred voluntarily or involuntarily (particularly given that migrants returned involuntarily rarely have the chance to prepare adequately in advance) (Ruiz et al., 2019). More profoundly, in addition to comprehensive return and rehabilitation services, without long-term and durable solutions to complex situations and adverse drivers in NCA countries of origin, many migrants who return voluntarily or involuntarily may be driven to migrate again in the future (ibid.).

3.1.9 Recent trends in international migration flows from Northern Central America

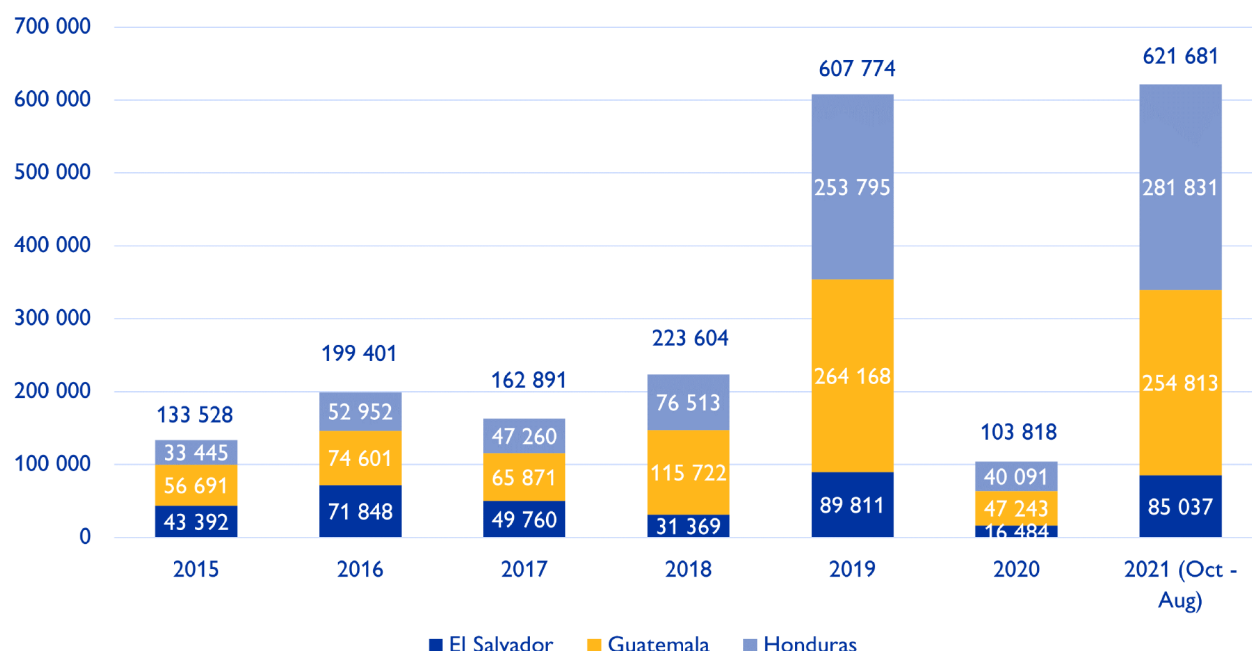
In recent years, and through 2021, migration from NCA has remained high on policy agendas for the United States and countries throughout the region. Beginning in 2016, the number of apprehensions of migrants from NCA countries surpassed those of migrants from Mexico at the south-west United States border for the first time (Bialik, 2019). This trend has remained constant through the fiscal year 2020 (Ibid.). Sustained policy and media attention are also attributed to a perceived increase in the size and frequency of migrants from NCA transiting northward in large groups over land, sometimes deemed

migrant caravans or “caravan migration”, from October 2018 onward (IOM, n.d.a; IOM n.d.b). These recent movements have taken place within a backdrop of continued levels of endemic violence, instability, corruption and widespread economic and food insecurity exacerbated by drought in the subregion, among other factors (Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), 2017). Also striking has been the high presence of families and child migrants, including UASC, in outflows from the subregion in recent years (ibid.).

Migration and mobility in Central and North America appear to have been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March 2020 onward (IOM, 2021a; IOM, 2021b). Particularly during the initial stages, numerous border closures, flight and transportation disruptions, travel and mobility restrictions, disruptions in immigration and visa processing procedures, and other health and sanitation requirements implemented by countries in the region to contain the spread of the virus appear to have drastically affected both mobility (measured, for example, by an overall decline in international arrivals registered in every country in the region) as well as migration (ibid.).

Between October 2014 (the beginning of the fiscal year 2015) and August 2021, United States CBP reported 4,165,512 apprehensions (not including inadmissibles identified by Offices of Field Operations) at the south-west United States border (US CBP, 2017;2021). Of these, 49 per cent (2,052,697) were migrants from NCA. Apprehensions of NCA migrants reached astronomical levels in the fiscal year 2019 (more than three times the number registered in 2018) before dropping off significantly in 2020, particularly during the initial five or six months of the pandemic (March–August) (US CBP, n.d.a) (see Figure 4). However, 2021 saw a strong reversal of this trend, with levels of apprehensions at the south-west United States border reaching levels not seen for at least two decades (Pew Research Center, 2021). Among these apprehensions was a significant number of UASC from NCA, reaching 102,284 between January and August 2021 (US CBP, n.d.b). This is compared with just 15,033 UASC from NCA apprehended in all of the fiscal year 2020, 62,748 in the fiscal year 2019 and 38,189 in the fiscal year 2018 (ibid.).

Figure 4. Apprehensions of migrants from Northern Central America, south-west United States border, fiscal years 2015–2020, 2021 (October–August)¹¹



Source: US CBP, “Southwest Land Border Encounters”, n.d. [accessed 07 October 2021]; “United States Border Patrol Nationwide Apprehensions by Citizenship and Sector FY2007 – FY2020”, 2021.

¹¹ Apprehensions data are not an accurate proxy to use in measuring or asserting changes in irregular migration flows to the United States over time or in any given year, given that many migrants may arrive in an irregular manner but are not apprehended and given that an increase or decrease in recorded apprehensions could be due to changes in surveillance or enforcement practices. Data may include the same individual who has attempted to enter the United States multiple times and has been apprehended on numerous occasions in the same year. Note: fiscal years in the United States encompass 1 October to 31 September.

Following similar trends, encounters of migrants from NCA recorded by Mexican immigrant authorities also decreased substantially in 2020, reaching just 75,399, compared with 152,138 in 2019 (UPM, 2020; 2019). The number of encounters of migrants from NCA in Mexico spiked again in 2021, reaching over 124,000 in the first eight months of the year (UPM, 2021).¹²

Migrant returns were also affected, at least during the initial stages of the pandemic. After increasing steadily year on year from 2017 to 2020, the number of returns registered in NCA countries declined by 64 per cent from 251,778 in 2019 to just 89,907 in 2020 (see Figure 3 in section 3.1.8). Numbers of returns picked up slightly in 2021, with 70,074 returns registered in all three NCA countries between January and August 2021, an increase of 7.2 per cent compared with the same period of 2020 (IOM, n.d.a).

Finally, the pandemic also appears to have affected regular migration and mobility channels. In the United States, the number of immigrant and non-immigrant visas issued decreased by 54 per cent from 9.2 million in the fiscal year 2019 to just 4.25 million in the fiscal year 2020 (US Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2021). Of these, the number of immigrant and non-immigrant visas issued to NCA nationals in the fiscal year 2020 reached just 75,783, a 47 per cent decrease compared with the fiscal year 2019 (when 143,269 were issued) (US Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2021; 2020, 2019). While there was a slight increase in 2021, numbers were far lower than pre-pandemic levels.

3.2 MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRATION FROM THE SUBREGION

3.2.1 Overview

Migration is a complex phenomenon that depends on the interaction of multiple and intersecting micro-, meso- and macrostructural factors influencing one's decision to migrate (IOM, 2020a). These factors are structural elements that have the potential to facilitate, enable, constrain and trigger migration processes (Czaika et al., 2020). In Central America, a confluence of economic, demographic, environmental, security and political factors have shaped migration flows both past and present. While poverty, insecurity and crime are some of the most recurrent push factors, there are also pull factors such as economic and work opportunities and family reunification that also influence mobility in and out of the region (MPI, 2016a). Demographic factors such as high population growth rates and significant youth populations of working age, particularly in Guatemala and Honduras, equally have an impact on migration trends (García et al., 2019).

As mentioned above, there are many factors that influence whether a person or a family will migrate. This section organizes the main factors following the framework of "[the drivers of migration](#)" (outlined in chapter two) that emphasizes the following as the main migration drivers: demographic, economic, social, political and environmental.

3.2.2 Sociodemographic drivers in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

Between 2000 and 2020, Guatemala's population increased by 5.3 million people, while the Honduran population increased by about 3.3 million (World Bank, 2021). The average annual population growth rate from 2015 to 2020 in these two countries exceeded 1.6 per cent, well above that for the entire LAC region (1.07%) and the world (1.11%) (World Bank, 2021c). These indicators are particularly important with respect to migration, given that youth unemployment is already a significant concern and major driver of migration in NCA (Huang and Graham, 2019). As more young people enter labour markets where opportunities for decent work and wages are scarce, pressures to migrate may increase further, exacerbated by limited opportunities for training and educational development as well (UN, 2017; Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021).

¹² Similar to apprehensions data in the United States, data on encounters in Mexico are not an accurate proxy to use in measuring or asserting changes in irregular migration flows to Mexico. Figures do not reflect numbers of individual migrants but rather encounter/apprehension events, with the possibility of migrants being counted multiple times.

Table 8. Demographic indicators in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras

Country/region	Total population and percentage (%) increase between 2000 and 2020		Urban population (2020) (thousands) (left) and percentage of total population (%)
	2000	2020	
El Salvador	5 887 930	6 486 201 (9.2)	4 763 (73)
Guatemala	11 589 761	16 858 333 (31.3)	8 738 (52)
Honduras	6 574 510	9 904 608 (33.6)	5 780 (58)
Latin America (excluding high income countries)	471 805 920	595 242 966 (20.7)	479 256 (81)

Source: World Bank, *Population, total, urban population, urban population (% of total population)* 2020. [19 January 2022].

3.2.3 Economic growth and employment

The NCA subregion experienced nearly three decades of economic growth from 1991 to 2017 (World Bank, 2021e). Before COVID-19, the subregion grew at an average rate of more than 4.5 per cent per year for nearly three decades (*ibid.*). Sustained growth has led to some social progress and reduction of poverty; however, meaningful improvements in living conditions have been hindered by persistent inequality and income disparity (discussed in further subsections), lack of access to finance and credit (both locally and internationally), significant barriers to entrepreneurship and starting businesses, criminal activity and the risk of extortion and other factors (Walker and Vazquez, 2021). These shortcomings have become key forces for migration. It is also worth noting that economic growth will not necessarily stem migration, as increased access to resources can also make migration more accessible.

The UNDP HDI provides an insight into socioeconomic conditions by measuring variables such as perceptions of well-being, gross national income per capita and environmental and socioeconomic sustainability. In 2020, out of 189 ranked countries, El Salvador's HDI ranked 124, Guatemala's 127 and Honduras at 132, with all three countries falling under the classification of "medium human development" (UNDP, 2020).¹³

The main economic activities in NCA are agriculture, trade and services; in Guatemala (33%) and Honduras (29.5%) agriculture remains the main economic activity (ILO, 2017). Moreover, since the vast majority of persons in these countries are employed in the informal sector, unemployment rates are relatively low in all three countries. Nevertheless, the high prevalence of informality – estimated at 77 per cent on average for the subregion – in workforces often means that access to decent work and wages is more limited, alongside a greater likelihood of hazardous working conditions and limited access to social protections, key labour rights and resources for workers and their families (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021). These factors would expose that it is not necessarily a lack of access to jobs but rather (aside from non-economic drivers) the lack of decent work (that is, "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity" as defined by the International Labour Organization, or ILO) that are driving people away from their homes in NCA in search of employment and income opportunities (European Commission, n.d.). As people leave in search of better opportunities, this loss of human capital in NCA countries of origin, in turn, can limit further economic growth (Martinez, 2019).

¹³ The HDI rate in 2019 for the NCA: El Salvador: 0.673; Guatemala: 0.663 and Honduras: 0.634.

Table 9. Employment indicators in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras

Country	Top three economic sectors, by % of population employed in each sector of economic activity (2019)	Proportion (%) of the population working in informal employment (2019 or most recent year)	Unemployment rate (%) (2020)
El Salvador	1. Trade (30.6) 2. Other services (19.6) 3. Agriculture (16.4)	69	5
Guatemala	1. Agriculture (33.0) 2. Trade (27.5) 3. Other services (15.3)	79	9
Honduras	1. Agriculture (29.5) 2. Trade (23.7) 3. Other services (19.3)	83	7

Source: ILO, *Statistics on the informal economy*, 2021. [07 October 2021]. a Recent year, 2017. Unemployment, total (% of total labour force) (modelled ILO estimate), 2021. [07 October 2021].

Labour market segmentation is also a significant gap in NCA. In Central America, women still face considerable barriers to entering formal labour markets (World Bank, 2021). Guatemala, which has the lowest unemployment rate in NCA, has the widest gap in labour market participation by sex, with the employment rate for men double the rate for women – 83.6 per cent for men and 41.4 per cent for women, a difference of 42.2 percentage points (ECLAC, 2018). This trend is reflected, less remarkably, in the other NCA countries such as El Salvador and Honduras, where the difference between men and women is 33.5 and 31 percentage points, respectively (*ibid.*).¹⁴ Additionally, in Central America, informal employment rates for women were estimated at 61.8 per cent compared to 55.6 per cent for men as of 2017 (ILO, 2018).

Due to low average educational attainment in all three countries, most of these workers are lower-skilled. In each of the three countries, only about a quarter of the potential labour force has completed upper secondary school and only about one in ten has completed any type of tertiary education (World Bank, 2018). In this context of weak labour demand, a largely lower-skilled workforce and high informality, labour force participation is low, especially for women and young people. Young people in NCA are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and economic inactivity. Approximately 28 per cent of young people between 15 and 24 in the three countries are neither studying nor working (referred to in the region as “ninis”) exceeding the LAC average of 21 per cent in 2017 (IADB, 2017).

The lack of job opportunities, wage differentials and aspirations propel young people away from home in search of employment and income opportunities. Many of these young people are attracted to the United States labour market due to the economic opportunities which are readily accessible and where there is high demand for large numbers of lower-skilled workers.

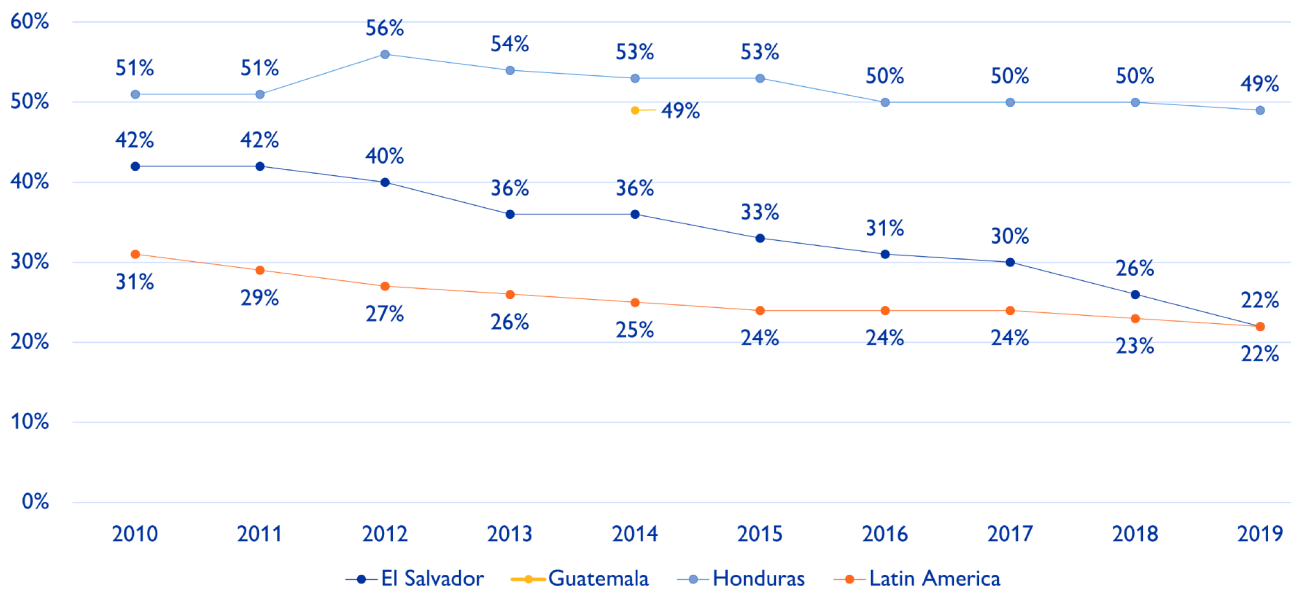
3.2.4 Poverty and inequalities

All three countries have some of the highest poverty rates in the LAC region¹⁵ (World Bank, 2021f). As of 2019, 49 per cent of Hondurans and 22.3 per cent of the Salvadorans were living on less than USD 5.50 a day (PPP, 2011) (*ibid.*). These levels of poverty have prompted further emigration (IADB, 2019).

¹⁴ The employment rate by sex in 2016 for El Salvador was 80.2 per cent for men and 46.7 per cent for women and Honduras was 74.0 per cent for men and 43.0 per cent for women (ECLAC, 2018).

¹⁵ The comparison between countries in the region is possible only in 2014 due to the availability of comparable data. The poverty rates in 2014 are as follows in the selected countries and by region: Honduras, 52.5 per cent; Guatemala, 49.1 per cent; El Salvador, 35.5 per cent; Central America, 36.8 per cent and Latin American and the Caribbean, 25.4 per cent.

Figure 5. Percentage (%) of the total population estimated to be living in poverty (less than USD 5.50 per day, 2011 PPP) in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, 2010-2019



Source: World Bank, [Poverty rate](#), 2021. [07 October 2021].

Note: The poverty rate for Guatemala is only available from 2014.

Table 10. Gross National Income and Gini index in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, 2020¹⁶

Country	Gross national income (GNI) per capita (PPP USD) (2020)	Gini index (2020)
El Salvador	8 050	38.38
Guatemala	8 690	46.47
Honduras	5 050	47.61

Source: World Bank, [GNI per capita, PPP \(Current International USD\)](#), 2020; Statista [Gini index by country](#), 2020. [07 October 2021].

The reversal in poverty reduction exacerbated by the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic builds on what was already characterized as a “lost decade” of very low growth and social stagnation in the region (ECLAC, 2021). The poor remain predominantly rural, young and undereducated while a large portion of the rural population is composed of families who depend on small-scale and rain-fed subsistence agriculture and are often unable to meet their basic needs (FAO, 2012).

In the NCA countries, most of the population living in poverty lives in rural areas – reaching 70.9 per cent in Honduras, 65.8 per cent in Guatemala and 42.8 per cent in El Salvador (ECLAC, 2021). People living in rural areas are more sensitive to economic, political and climatological crises owing to the vulnerability of areas devoted to agriculture (ECLAC, 2018).

While sustained poverty makes it difficult for individuals and families to imagine a better future in their home countries, slight income growth has made it possible for more families to migrate and cover the costs associated with migration – which could include, for example, paying for transportation costs, accommodation in transit or upon arrival to destination countries, paying for documentation or in certain cases, the hiring of smugglers to facilitate transit (MPI, 2020).

Additionally, large inequalities in the distribution of income, assets and resources undermine food access, particularly for the poor and vulnerable. Central America is characterized by one of the highest levels of inequality in the LAC region, with Honduras ranking second only after Brazil in terms of inequality measured

¹⁶ According to the World Bank, the [Gini index estimate](#) is defined as: “the extent to which the distribution of income (or, in some cases, consumption expenditure) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality.” (World Bank, 2021).

by the Gini index (El Salvador appears, however, to have a relatively low inequality rate based on available data) (World Bank, 2021).

Particularly striking is the extent of gender inequality in the subregion – only 15 per cent of women farmers in the Dry Corridor own land while 44 per cent of women depend upon income from others for their own subsistence (WFP, 2019). There is a rich body of evidence and literature that demonstrates how women have played a critical role in poverty reduction and economic growth in the subregion. One World Bank study estimated that the extreme poverty rate in Central America would have been 30 per cent higher in 2010 if female labour income had remained the same from 2000 to 2010 (World Bank, 2012). Despite the commitment made towards eliminating gender inequality, such as the Montevideo Strategy for implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the sustainable development framework by 2030, structural barriers to women’s rights and autonomy continue to exist which in turn are a detriment to poverty reduction and fighting hunger.

3.2.5 Social drivers: Family reunification and diasporas

The existence of family ties and networks in destination countries is another driver that facilitates migration by providing information and hands-on support and assistance (IOM, 2021). Transnational migrant communities can provide a degree of relief from the physical and economic insecurities that the migration process can generate (Pew Research Center, 2017). Moreover, family reunification alleviates the psychological, social and economic burdens of migrants’ assimilation and adjustment, and can provide a boost to relatives already living in the country of destination (MPI, 2021).

The United States is the main country of destination for the NCA. After three decades of migration from the NCA, about one in five Salvadorans and one in 15 Guatemalans and Hondurans already live in the United States, making the United States the desired destination for most children and families leaving the subregion (MPI, 2016b).

Regarding diasporas, in 2019, the Central American diaspora is comprised of approximately seven million United States residents who were either born in Central America or reported Central American ancestry or origin (IOM, 2021). Individuals with Salvadoran ancestry or origin made up 2.8 million individuals in this group, followed by two million with Guatemalan ancestry or origin and 1.3 million people with Honduran ancestry or origin (ibid.).

3.2.6 Political drivers: Policies, conflict and insecurity

3.2.6.1 Policies

Government policy choices in both origin and destination countries are influential in driving migration as they shape the individual perceptions of and actual costs, benefits and risks of migration (UN, 2017).

Regarding the large-scale migration from Central America, mostly to the United States, there are important factors at the policy level to consider. On one hand, the governments in the NCA countries have struggled to address the socioeconomic difficulties, security conditions and respond to natural hazards due to weak institutions and systemic corruption (Congressional Research Service, 2021). On the other hand, changes in policies in the United States may also influence migration.

Nowadays, Central American migration flows are more likely to include UASC and families with children partially due to the attempted policy shifts in United States border security and immigration in recent years. Experts highlight that while border enforcement strategies have substantially deterred the migration of undocumented adult migrants, they may have provided incentives for children and families to migrate in the absence of effective policy strategies that successfully manage the dual demands of border control and humanitarian protection of vulnerable migrants (MPI, 2019).

MPPs – also known as “Remain in Mexico” – and TPS are key policy initiatives that influence migration to the United States. Under MPP, individuals were given notices to appear in immigration court and were then returned to Mexico to await immigration proceedings (DHS, 2021). As discussed in section 3.1, TPS grants work authorization and protection from deportation to certain nationals of designated

countries where return is not deemed safe, either due to ongoing armed conflict, a natural disaster or other extraordinary circumstances (USCIS, 2021). Taking into consideration the violence in NCA and the impact of disasters such as Hurricanes Eta and Iota, the government and some advocacy groups are pressuring for Guatemala to be designated for TPS, like that of El Salvador and Honduras, which are currently part of the list of designated countries (MPI, 2016).

In addition to the United States policies and programmes, there are also policies in other countries of destination and transit. For example, many migrants from the subregion access Humanitarian Status Visitor Cards (TVRH) in Mexico, initially mentioned in section 3.1. These humanitarian visas provide freedom of movement and employment opportunities across Mexico for a period of one year to holders. Humanitarian status visitor cards also have a Unique Population Registry Code, which grants access to employment, healthcare and other essential government services.

The TVRH card has been an important legal document for caravan members from NCA. In 2019, the National Institute of Migration in Mexico granted temporary humanitarian status cards to individuals travelling in migrant caravans at the southern border and at various points around the country (INM, 2018). This initiative aimed to prevent migrants from being vulnerable to the various risks involved in travelling through Mexico without legal registration and was aligned to promote a regular, orderly and safe migration, with strict adherence to the protection and respect of the human rights of migrants (INM, 2019).

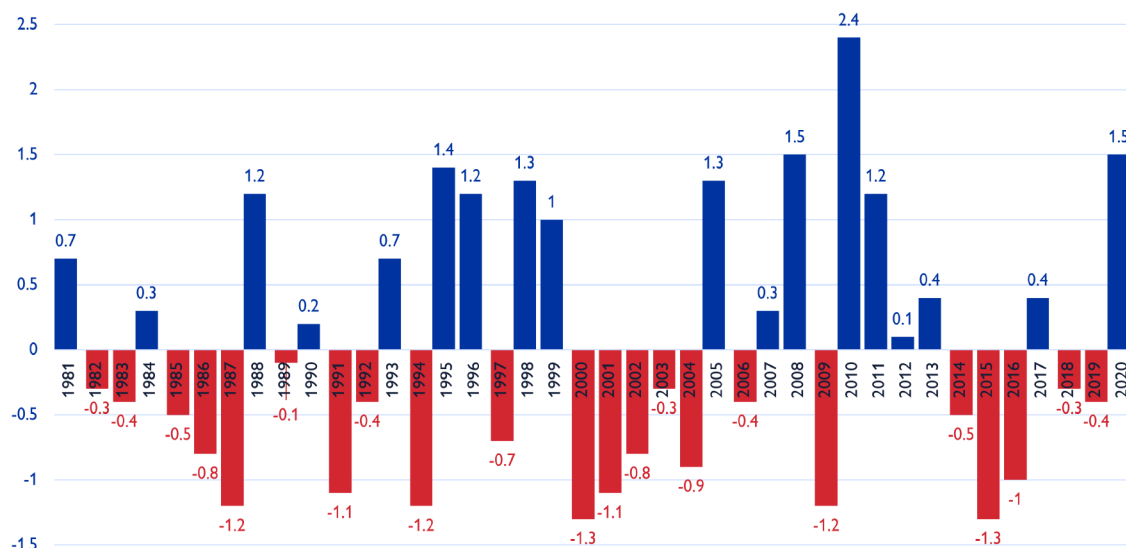
3.2.6.2 *Crime and violence*

Crime and violence are identified as other reasons for migration. Central America is one of the most violent regions in the world according to the global ranking of countries based on their rates of violent death, with Honduras in second place behind Syria, El Salvador in sixth and Guatemala eleventh. (IDMC, 2015). The nature of violence varies from country to country but includes violence driven by international organized crime tied to drug trafficking, as in the case mostly in Honduras and parts of Guatemala; the consolidation of powerful gangs, especially in El Salvador and Honduras and political conflict, especially in Honduras and parts of Guatemala (MPI, 2020). All three countries possess some of the highest homicide rates in the world, including 61.80 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in El Salvador, 41.70 per 100,000 in Honduras and 26.10 per 100,000 in Guatemala as of 2017 (UNODC, 2019). Notwithstanding the high homicide rates in the three countries, victimization goes beyond the exposure to homicide and varies from extortion and robbery to gang violence and drug trafficking (IADB, 2019). Additionally, violence appears to be shifting towards more extractive and predatory activities at the local level with a less obtrusive and more fragmented presence of major transnational criminal organizations (IDMC, 2015).

3.2.7 **Environmental drivers: Disasters, environmental degradation and climate change in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras**

In recent years, climate extremes have been identified as important forces driving migration. Historical data suggest that periods of drought are correlated with high emigration and that migration in the region fluctuates in response to climate variability (World Bank, 2018b).

A review of the available evidence points to significant exposure within NCA countries to a wide range of environmental hazards. Reduced rainfall and droughts are a critical shared concern in the three countries. The Central American Dry Corridor, which includes areas in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (along with other countries) has particularly suffered from drought, rainfall variability and water scarcity in recent years. Drought periods in Central America, characterized by prevalent dry conditions, lasting high heat conditions and delayed rains, have caused a major impact on food security (Pons, 2021). Persistent droughts have provoked disastrous losses in agricultural production and the declaration of states of emergency in Honduras in 2018 and 2019 (Presidency of Honduras, 2019).

Figure 6. Rainfall patterns for full seasons with standardized anomalies

Source: Rainfall data WFP-VAM, CHIRPS/UCSM, 2021.

Even under an optimistic scenario of a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures, it is expected that the number of hydrometeorological events impacting Central America will increase drastically (De Coninck et al., 2018). The intensity of the events is also projected to increase, with great influence on weather patterns, agriculture, ecosystems, public health and economies, and with devastating consequences on the most vulnerable populations.

As an example, the El Niño phenomenon which started as early as January 2019 came on the heels of nearly six consecutive dry years since 2014, seriously impacting rural communities due to the damaged agriculture. Suppressed rains resulted in poor vegetation conditions and directly impacted the planting and cropping seasons. This led to localized production shortfalls of main crops, particularly in northern Guatemala where farmers reported losses of maize and bean crops due to the prolonged dry spells (FAO, 2019).

Central America is considered a “multi-hazard prone area, highly exposed and characterized by factors such as its geographic location, prolonged cyclonic seasonality from the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, geomorphology of the territory and confluence of active tectonic plates, which maintain the region with a high level of seismicity” (UNDRR and CEPREDENAC, 2014, page 2). The latest report of the IPCC points to projections of increased temperatures and expansions of agricultural and ecological drought in NCA in the coming decades (IPCC, 2021).

Volcanic activity also has a history of affecting the subregion, including the 2018 deadly eruption of Volcán de Fuego in Guatemala and the subsequent evacuation of thousands of people. The settlement of communities on higher slopes of the volcano has increased their potential exposure to volcanic activity (Romano, 2019). The earthquakes recorded in Guatemala in 2021 or El Salvador in 2001 also show the vulnerability of the subregion to seismic activity: the earthquakes provoked hundreds of fatalities by triggering landslides in areas of settlement expansion, compounded by deforestation and unplanned building (Bommer et al., 2002).

The **INFORM risk tool**, led by the Joint Research Centre of European Commission, helps in identifying risk scenarios of humanitarian crises and disasters in each country. Guatemala and Honduras appear under the “high risk” category and a stable progression over the last three years (with a stable level of recorded risk), while El Salvador remains in the “medium scenario” rank but has witnessed an increase in its risk pattern. Drivers of risk in all three countries appear relatively similar, with strong exposure to various hazards and limited coping capacities (IASC and European Commission, 2020).

Drivers of disaster risk include processes of unplanned rapid urbanization, which entail the growth of settlements in risk-prone areas. The concentration of population and productive activities in high-risk areas remains a challenge (World Bank, 2019). Inequalities and the prevalence of large shares of the population of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras living in poverty and with limited access to resources increase

disaster risk. Of specific concern are categories such as women, children and indigenous populations, who have specific vulnerabilities to the impacts of disasters and climate change. Women for instance have generally more limited access than men to land ownership, resources and information, putting them in more vulnerable positions to climate impacts. Poverty among indigenous groups is higher than the national averages and reliance on natural resources also makes them exposed to climate variability (Christian Aid and InspirAction, 2019).

The reliance of NCA countries on subsistence agriculture and limited water management options also enhances the subregion’s vulnerability. The topography of the subregion makes irrigation challenging and only limited to areas already dominated by extensive landowners (Warner et al., 2009). While innovation and adaptation are scarcer in areas under subsistence agriculture, “a decrease in suitability and yield is expected in Mexico and Central America for beans, coffee, maize, plantain and rice” (Mbow et al., 2019). The livelihoods of small farmers dependent on maize and beans are heavily affected by climate variability (WFP, 2017). Basic grains are critical to the agricultural sector of Central America, and “are the foundation of the diet of a significant part of the population, in addition to being one of the main sources of income and employment” (Global Water Partnership, 2016, p. 14).

3.2.8 Food insecurity trends, its root causes and drivers in Central America

The decades-long decline in hunger in the world, as measured by the proportion of the population that is undernourished, has since been reversed beginning in 2014 (FAO et al., 2020). Central America is one of the regions where instances of hunger have worsened in recent years. As the below chart demonstrates, the proportion and the absolute number of people affected by hunger in Central America is on the rise, with approximately 4.2 million more undernourished people in 2019 than in 2010, when the estimated number of undernourished was 12.4 million.

Table 11. Estimates of the number of undernourished people in regions of Latin America and the Caribbean (millions)

Region	Number of undernourished (millions)							
	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 ^a	2030 ^b
World	825.6	668.2	653.3	657.6	653.2	678.1	687.8	851.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	48.6	39.6	38.8	42.4	43.5	46.6	47.7	66.9
Caribbean	8.4	7.2	7.4	7.3	7.1	7.3	7.2	6.6
Latin America	40.1	32.4	31.4	35.1	36.3	39.3	40.5	60.3
Central America	11.8	12.4	13.4	14.7	14.4	14.7	16.6	24.5
South America	28.4	20.0	18.0	20.4	21.9	24.6	24.0	35.7

Source: FAO, 2020. *State of Food Security and nutrition in the World 2020*.

^a Projected values.

^b The projections up to 2030 do not reflect the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By March 2021, about 7.8 million people in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador were estimated to be facing high acute food insecurity (IPC4 Phase 3 and above) including almost 1.2 million facing an emergency (IPC Phase 4) (IPC, 2020a, 2020b, 2021). The economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the double impact of Hurricanes Eta and Iota have, as a consequence, entailed the rise of the number of people in need in the subregion who have been unable to adequately meet their basic food requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the lean season,¹⁷ which is normally from April to July. The economic fallout triggered by the pandemic crisis resulted in the rapid decline of food access due to one or a combination of the following factors: loss of income and employment, particularly in the informal sector, as well as high food prices.

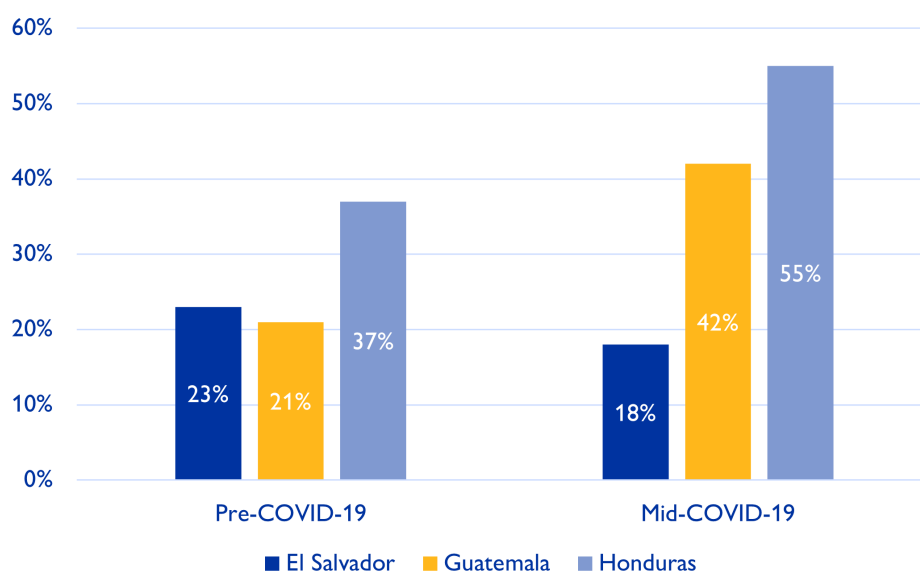
¹⁷ Lean season: the period before harvest (normally the hungry season for the poor and vulnerable); <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6183898/#CIT0012>.

Additionally, the hurricanes in 2020, one category-four hurricane (Eta) and one category-five hurricane (Iota) made landfall in Central America within two weeks or one another in November 2020, leaving extensive damage to crops and farmland, livestock and fishing assets and critical infrastructure. According to available estimates, over 200,000 hectares of staple food and cash crops were damaged in the region (FEWSNET, 2020). The hurricanes hit the region during the peak of the agricultural labour season and during the Postrera harvest,¹⁸ which normally starts in November, at a time of the year when poor and very poor households typically earn most of their annual income. It was another hard blow to vulnerable communities already facing economic hardships due to the pandemic, while hundreds and thousands of people were driven to temporary shelters with limited access to health care facilities, further stoking fears of localized outbreaks of COVID-19.

Reduced household food access exacerbated pre-existing drivers of food insecurity such as climate shock (namely, drought and tropical storms), not only impacting smallholder farmers who have been the primary focus of livelihood assistance in the Dry Corridor but also vulnerable households whose income mostly relies on informal wage labour such as in coffee farms, the tourism sector and service economy.

WFP's remote monitoring results in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador revealed that the proportion of households employing severe consumption-based coping strategies (such as reducing the portion of meals or number of meals eaten by adults) during COVID-19 nearly doubled in Guatemala, while in Honduras it increased to more than half of households compared to the pre-COVID-19 period (WFP, 2020). At the same time, an overwhelming majority of households in all three countries reported income losses or unemployment during COVID-19.

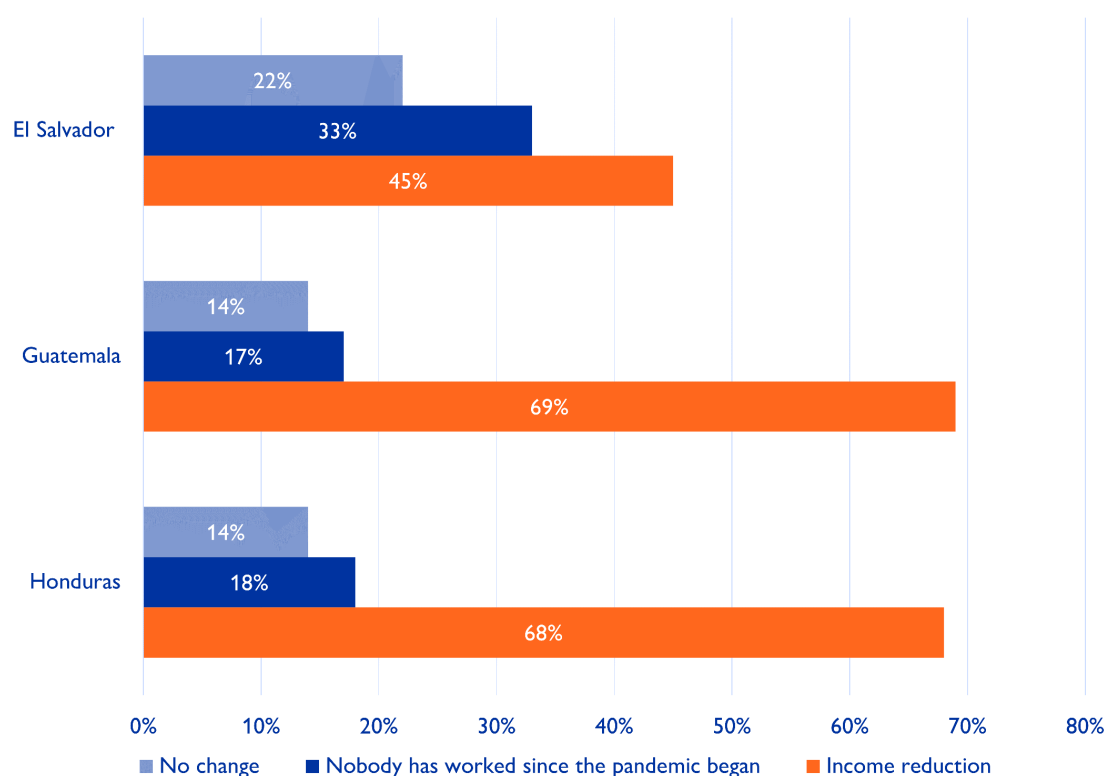
Figure 7: Households with severe consumption-based coping strategies, pre- and mid-COVID-19



Source: WFP CATI surveys, pre-COVID-19 (December 2019/February 2020) and Mid-COVID-19 (May/August 2020).

¹⁸ Postrera is the second crop cycle generally between September and February; https://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/liaison_offices/wfp292705.pdf.

Figure 8: Households reporting changes in income due to COVID-19



Source: WFP CATI surveys, pre-COVID-19 (December 2019/February 2020) and Mid-COVID-19 (May/August 2020).

Despite the governments' relief measures to support the worst affected, the compound effect of the hurricanes on the longstanding vulnerabilities of the subregion in the midst of an ongoing pandemic crisis is further driving more people into poverty and hunger in the subregion.

3.3 THE IMPACTS OF MIGRATION IN NORTHERN CENTRAL AMERICA

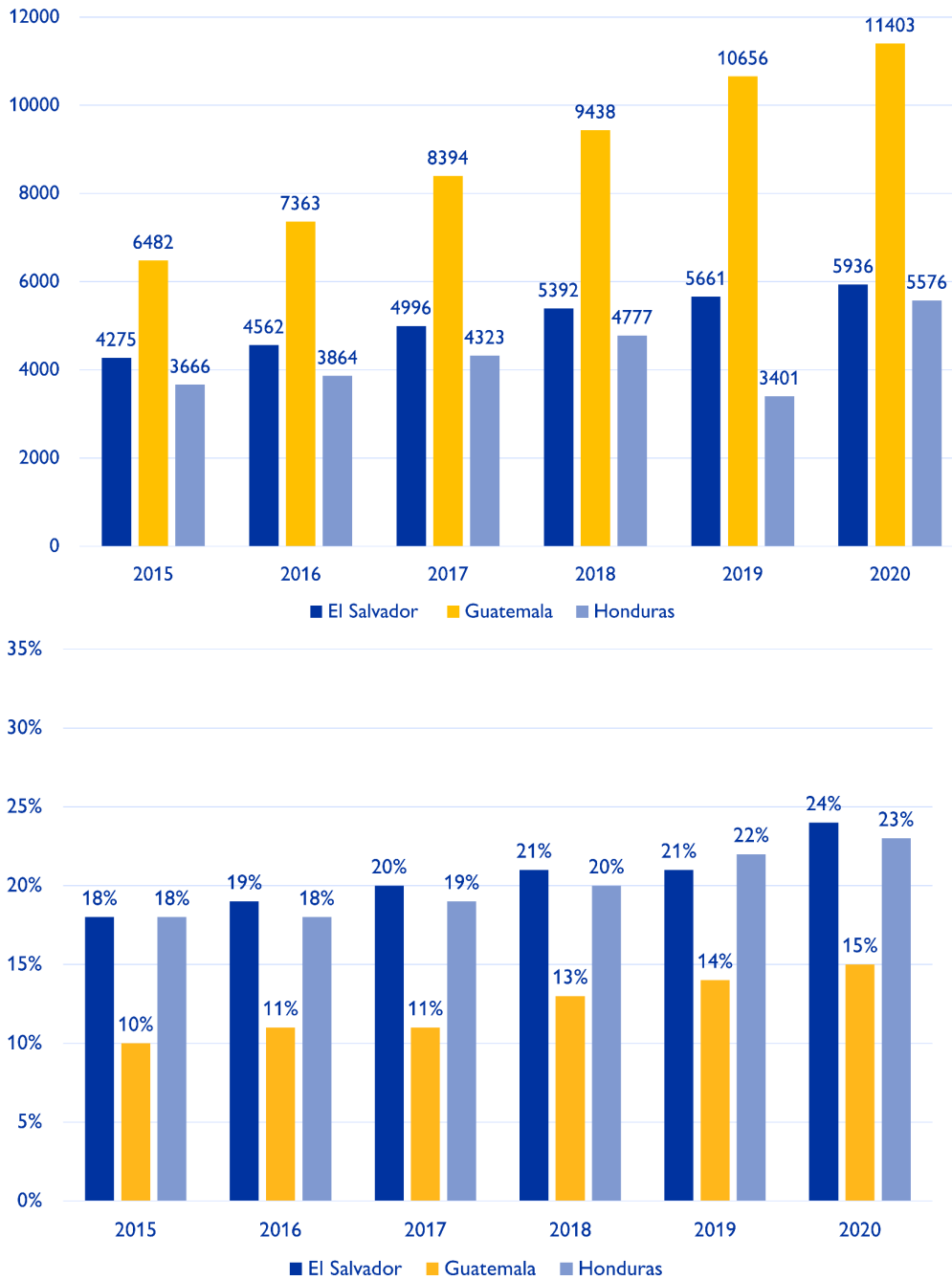
One of the most frequently cited and recognized benefits of migration is seen in the earnings sent home by migrants in the form of cash or goods, known as remittances. An overview of available evidence in NCA points to two important findings: (1) Remittances are important contributors to both national income (as a proportion of GDP) and household income in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, and are often essential in covering recipients' daily living needs and (2) they have been remarkably resilient in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Remittances in El Salvador increased by 4.9 per cent in 2020 versus 2019, by 7.0 per cent in Guatemala in 2020 versus 2019 and by 3.2 per cent in Honduras (World Bank, 2017). Before 2020, remittances had been increasing steadily year on year in all three countries. For example, remittances constituted just 0.3 per cent of GDP in Guatemala, 0.04 per cent in Honduras and 1.4 per cent in El Salvador in the year 1980 (ibid.). By 1990 this had increased only slightly (1–2 percentage points) in Guatemala and Honduras but had already reached 7.6 per cent in El Salvador, while by 2010 remittances already constituted more than 10 per cent of GDP in all three countries (ibid.). As of 2020, remittances constituted nearly a quarter of GDP in Honduras and El Salvador and nearly 15 per cent in Guatemala (see Figure 9 below).

In 2020, the World Bank noted a significant drop in remittances to the region beginning in quarter two, particularly in April and May (World Bank, 2021). However, in subsequent quarters flows to all three countries increased drastically, a product of remitters sending home larger portions of money in times of the COVID-19 crisis (with Hurricanes Eta and Iota also having an effect), a result of economic stimulus in the United States and also a factor of more remitters sending money through formal versus informal channels (ibid.). Partly due to the increase in remittances and due to economic slowdowns in other sectors in countries of origin, remittances contributed an even stronger proportion to the total GDP of all three countries in 2020 than levels ever seen before (ibid.). Remittances are vital to propping up NCA economies and constitute the largest source of external financing in all three countries, far outnumbering

money received in the form of Foreign Direct Investments and Official Development Assistance (Central American Bank for Economic Integration, 2021).

Figure 9. Remittances received (absolute USD) (above) and as a percentage (%) of GDP (below), Northern Central American countries, 2015–2020



Source: World Bank, “Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)”, n.d. [accessed 08 October 2021]; “Annual Remittances Data (updated as of May 2021)”, 2021.

National-level surveys shed light on the use of remittances in all three countries. The National Survey on Migration and Remittances (in Spanish, Encuesta Nacional de Migración y Remesas) in El Salvador found that one in five households reported receiving remittances, amounting to an annual average of USD 3,010 (Ministry of Foreign Relations, General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses, IOM, 2017). Recipient households reported using remittances mainly to meet daily essential needs, including food and clothing (95%), utilities and services such as water, internet and electricity (48%), medical expenses (28%) and medicine (22%) (ibid.). More than one in five households receiving remittances reported using money to buy their homes (ibid.).

In 2016, IOM led a similar survey in Guatemala with 3,224 households. The population benefitting from remittances in 2016 was estimated at over 6.2 million individuals, roughly half in urban areas and roughly

half in rural areas (IOM, 2016). Of these, 1.67 million reported directly receiving remittances (ibid.). Receiving households reported using remittances for a variety of diverse reasons, including an average of 35 per cent on paying for daily basic needs such as clothing, transport and food but also significant proportions invested in house construction, furniture, repairs and more (ibid.). An average of seven per cent was reportedly spent on productive goods, while eight per cent was spent on social investments (for example, health and education) (ibid.).

Finally, in 2016, the IADB studied the socioeconomic characteristics of remittance-receiving populations in Honduras. This study found that one in five Hondurans benefitted from remittances and that women represented 68 per cent of this group (IADB, 2016). Approximately 80 per cent of remittance-receiving households reported using the funds for daily consumption goods (ibid.). Notably, 83 per cent of households receiving remittances were determined to be living in poverty or to be at risk of poverty (ibid.).¹⁹

Literature on the impact of remittances shows that the effects are generally positive. Figueroa's (2016) analysis of outmigration from Central America and Mexico from 1990 to 2020 found that the departure of migrants did not generate statistically significant shocks on home countries, whereas the effects on origin economies were positive (and statistically significant) in large part due to the remittances sent.

Aside from financial assistance, migration can also lead to benefits through the exchange of knowledge, ideas, learning, skills, behaviours, cultural practices, ideas and more flowing bidirectionally between countries of origin and destination, particularly by way of returning migrants and transnational communities. This phenomenon is often known as "social remittances". On the other hand, despite the many benefits of migration from the subregion, negative knock-on effects include loss of valuable human capital from countries of origin, as well as family separation and loss of productive members of society to care for dependent members, including the very young and the elderly (WFP, 2021).

¹⁹ The Central Bank of Honduras conducts biannual surveys on remittances with a more limited sampling approach, which provide complementary insights into remittances amounts and frequencies as well as the use of the funds. Findings from these surveys were consistent with those in the previously mentioned reports (IADB, 2016).

4. MULTISECTORAL INDICATOR-LEVEL FINDINGS – ALL HOUSEHOLDS

4.1 OVERVIEW – MULTISECTORAL INDICATORS

This section summarizes multisectoral findings for all surveyed households in the present study, regardless of recent migration profile or respondent migration intentions. The indicators presented include, among others, a general overview of the profile of respondents, household demographic profile, household perceptions, livelihoods, household expenditures, food consumption, health, education and coping mechanisms.

Table 12. Profile of surveyed respondents and households

Sex of respondents	
Male	26%
Female	74%
Location of surveyed households (urban or rural setting)	
Urban	32%
Rural	68%
Average age of surveyed respondents	
44 years	
Age distribution all individuals identified in surveyed households	
0–17 years (minors)	30%
18–34 years (young adults)	47%
35–59 years (adults)	21%
60+ years (elderly)	2%
Average household size	
4 members	
Percentage of households that were headed by a single female	
19%	

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The study interviewed 4,998 households across four departments in each of the three NCA countries, with surveys distributed approximately evenly (one-third) across each country. See Table 2 in chapter two (Methodology) for a breakdown of the number of households interviewed per department.

Out of all respondents (4,998, for each of the 4,998 households interviewed), three fourths were female while just one fourth were male. Most households were located in rural areas (see the table above).

In total, 24 per cent of households – corresponding to 1,200 households of the 4,998 households surveyed – reported that at least one household member migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection. Within these 1,200 households, a total of 1,634 recent migrants were identified. The largest proportions of households reporting that at least one member had migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection were found in the departments of Usulután in El Salvador (where 15% of households reported that at least one household member had migrated or attempted to migrate in this period), Huehuetenango in Guatemala (12% of households) and Yoro in Honduras (12%). Most recent migrants identified in the sample were men (representing 69% of the 1,634 recent migrants identified in the sample) between the ages of 18 and 34 (56%).

Moreover, in total, six per cent of households reported that two or more household members migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection. The largest proportions of households where two or more members were reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in this period were witnessed among surveyed households in Honduras (8%). Table 13 below shows the demographic profile of recent migrants, with information collected by proxy from respondents. See chapter five for in-depth information on recent migration profiles of surveyed households.

Table 13. Demographic profile of recent migrants identified within surveyed households

	Count	Percentage of all surveyed households
Total number of surveyed households	4 998	100
No. of households reporting recent migration	1 200	24
Number of recent migrants		
0	3 812	76
1	882	18
2	217	4
3+	87	2
	Count	Percentage of recent migrants identified
Total number of recent migrants	1 634	100
Age groups of recent migrants		
0–17	204	12
18–34	910	56
35–44	311	19
45+	209	13
Sex of recent migrants		
Female	506	31
Country and department of origin of recent migrants		
Guatemala	523	32
San Marcos	115	7
Huehuetenango	194	12
Alta Verapaz	106	6
Chiquimula	108	7
Honduras	589	3
Choluteca	99	6
Cortés	118	7
Francisco Morazán	173	11
Yoro	199	12
El Salvador	522	32
Ahuachapán	81	5
Cabañas	119	7
San Salvador	78	5
Usulután	244	15
Destination countries of recent migrants		
United States	1 464	90
Mexico	32	2
Spain	73	4
Other	65	4

^a Recent migration refers to households that reported that at least one member migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection.

^b Nine respondents, corresponding to one per cent, preferred not to specify the sex of the household member who had migrated, meaning the remaining 1,119 migrants or 68 per cent were reported to be men.

^c Other countries cited included Panama, Canada, Italy, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras, among others.

4.3 CHALLENGES, PRIORITY CONCERNS AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

4.3.1 Priority concerns

Households were asked to report their top three priority concerns at the time of data collection, ranking the three in order of importance. Figures 10 to 12 below show the distribution of households reporting various priority concerns as their number one, number two and number three ranked priority concerns at the time of data collection. The fear of contracting COVID-19 was the most frequently reported number one priority concern, whereas lack of work/unemployment featured most frequently among both the second-ranked and third-ranked priority concerns. Not having enough money to purchase food featured prominently among all three ranked priority concerns. Regardless of rank, fear of contracting COVID-19 as well as mobility restrictions due to COVID-19, lacking money to buy food as well as lack of work/unemployment were the most commonly reported concerns.

Figure 10. Percentage (%) of households reporting selected concerns as their number one (#1) priority concern at the time of data collection by country

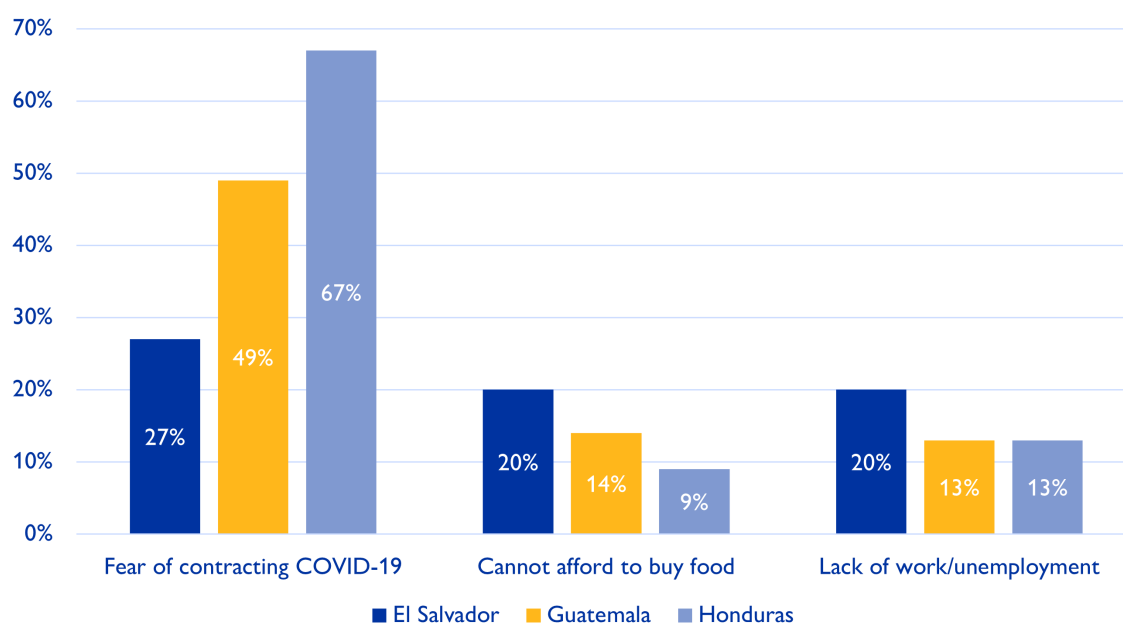


Figure 11. Percentage (%) of households reporting selected concerns as their number two (#2) priority concern at the time of data collection by country

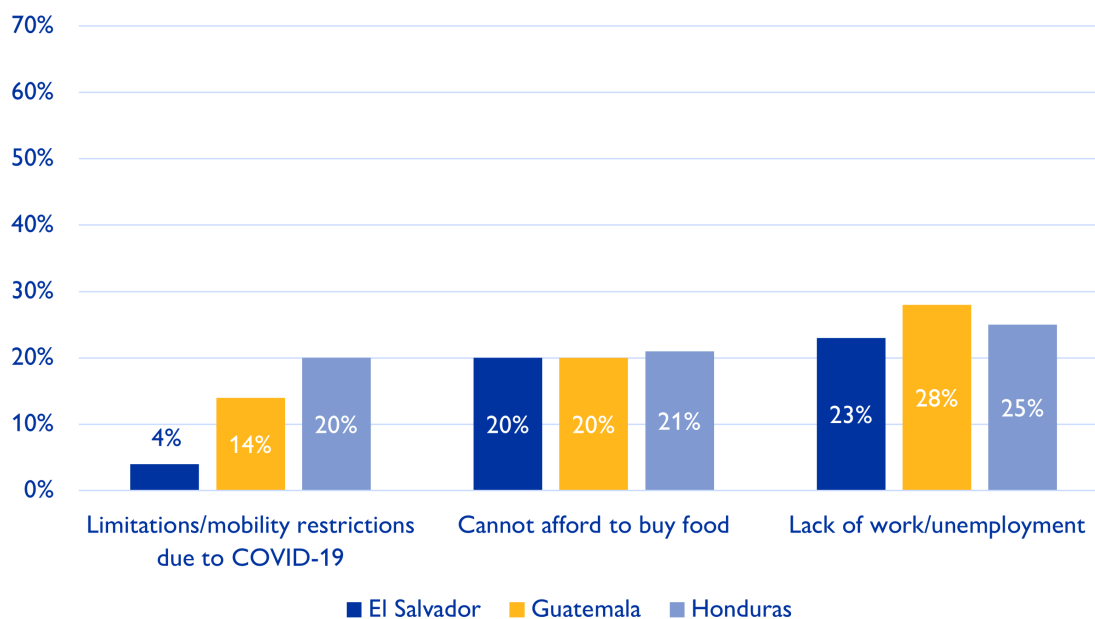
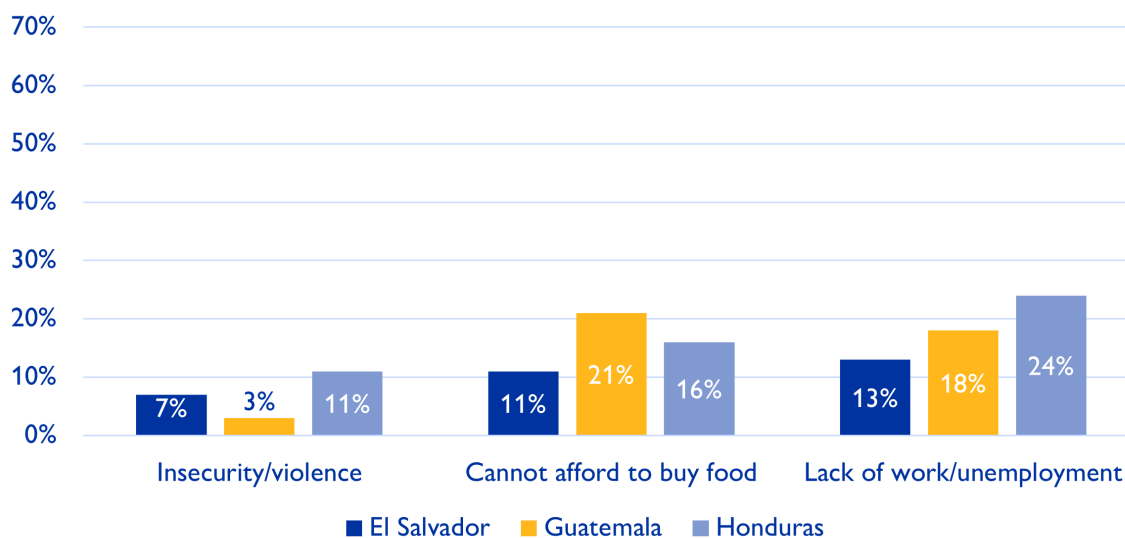


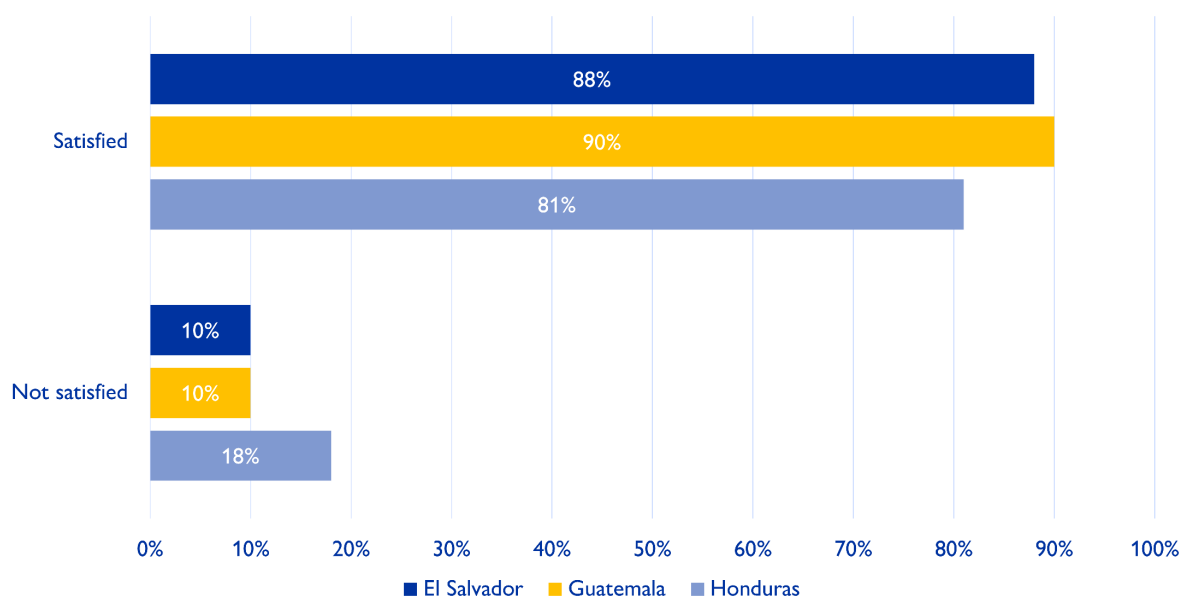
Figure 12. Percentage (%) of households reporting selected concerns as their number three (#3) priority concern at the time of data collection by country



4.3.2 Satisfaction with areas of residence

Households were also asked to report on their levels of satisfaction with their current area of residence at the time of data collection. Out of all households, 86 per cent reported being satisfied with their current area of residence (see Figure 13). The highest satisfaction rates among the surveyed population were measured in the departments of Cabañas in El Salvador (94%), San Marcos in Guatemala (94%) and Huehuetenango in Guatemala (93%). On the other hand, the highest proportions of households reporting that they were not satisfied with their current area of residence at the time of data collection were located in Honduras, reaching 18 per cent overall across the four surveyed departments.

Figure 13. Percentage (%) of households reporting that they were satisfied with their current area of residence at the time of data collection by country²⁰



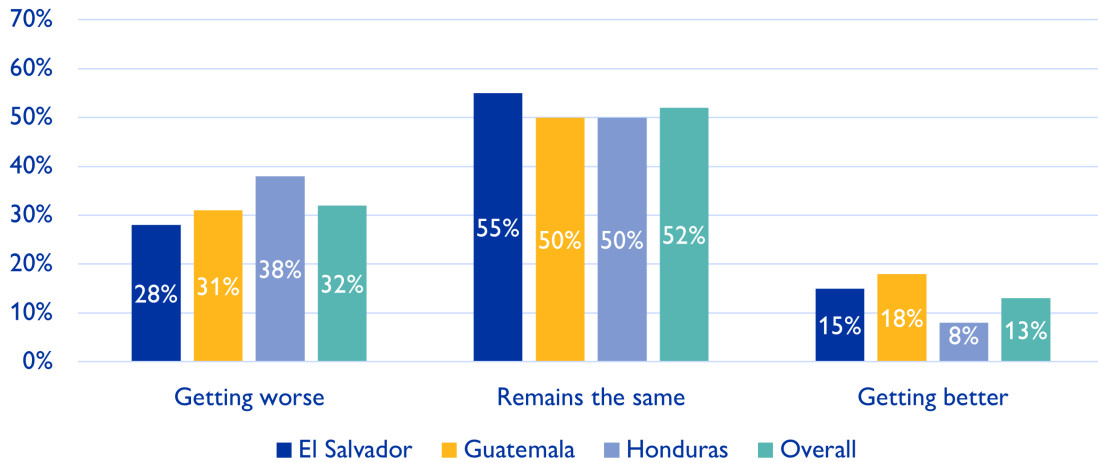
4.3.3 Perceptions of economic conditions

Households were asked to report on their perceptions of whether or not economic conditions in their area of residence were getting worse, remained the same or were getting better at the time of data collection. Overall, 32 per cent of households reported perceiving that economic conditions in their area of residence were getting worse. Slightly more than half (52%) of households reported perceiving that the economic conditions in their area of residence remained the same (Figure 14). The highest proportion of households that reported perceiving that economic conditions in their area of residence were getting worse were located in Honduras (37%), which also demonstrated the lowest proportions of households reporting that economic conditions appeared to be getting better in their area of residence (9%). Households interviewed in the Honduran department of Cortés reported the lowest levels of satisfaction among all surveyed departments, with over half (52%) reporting that they perceived economic conditions in their current area of residence to be getting worse at the time of data collection.

These perceptions may be explained in part by the fact that the department is home to the city of San Pedro Sula, the economic and agricultural hub of the country that suffered extensive damage to factories and farms from Hurricanes Eta and Iota in November 2020. At the time of data collection in the spring of 2021, these areas had not yet fully recovered from the disasters (Verza, 2021). In all surveyed locations, the COVID-19 pandemic was also expected to generate a significant impact on perceptions of and lived economic conditions at the time the survey was conducted.

²⁰ Figure 13 does not include the two per cent of respondents in El Salvador who did not know/preferred not to respond and one per cent in Honduras.

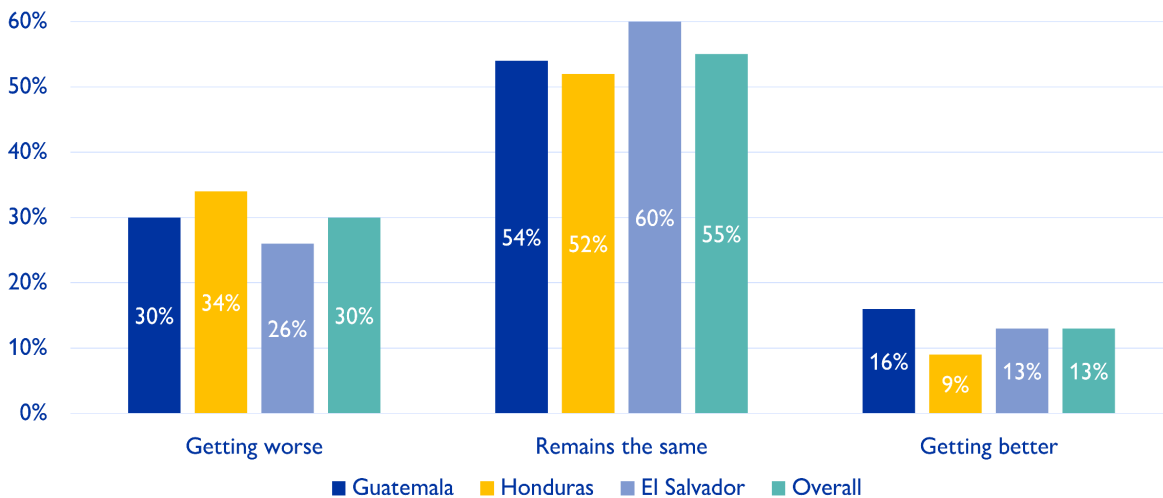
Figure 14. Percentage (%) of households reporting that they perceived that the economic conditions in their area of residence were getting better or worse at the time of data collection by country and overall²¹



4.3.4 Perceptions of living standards

Households were also asked to report their perceptions regarding changes in their overall living standards. Among all households, 55 per cent reported perceiving that their living standards remained the same while one third of households stated that their living standards were getting worse at the time of data collection. Households in Honduras were most likely to report perceiving that their living standards were getting worse (41%) and the least likely to report that their living standards were getting better at the time of data collection (7%) (Figure 15). As with economic conditions, over half of all households in Cortés, Honduras reported that their living standards were getting worse at the time of data collection. The highest proportions of households reporting that their living standards were getting better were in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, reaching approximately one in every three households surveyed in the department.

Figure 15. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether they perceived that their living standards were getting worse or getting better at the time of data collection by country and overall²²



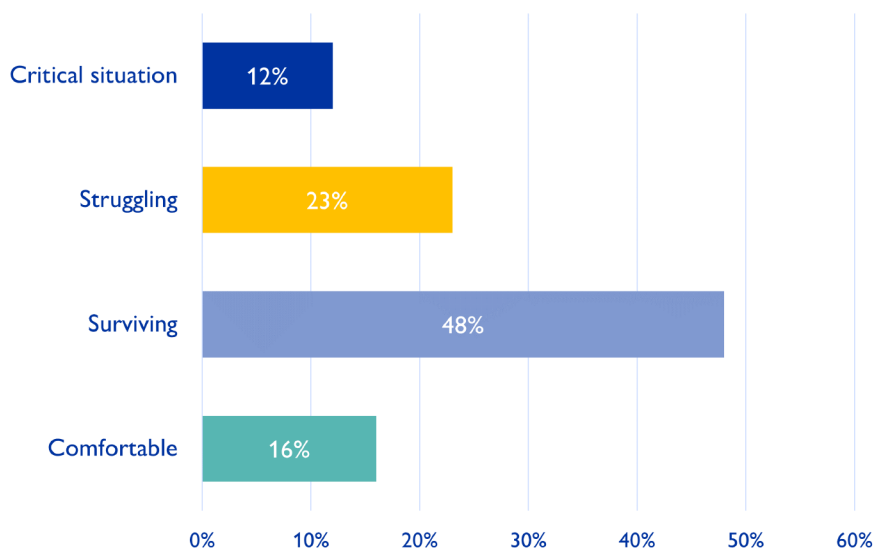
²¹ Figure 14 does not include the three per cent of households (overall) reporting “do not know/prefer not to answer”, including two per cent in El Salvador, four per cent in Honduras and one per cent in Guatemala.

²² Figure 15 does not include the five per cent of households in Honduras and one per cent in El Salvador who responded “do not know/prefer not to answer” (two per cent of all households overall).

4.3.5 Ability to live comfortably on current levels of income

Finally, households were also asked to report whether or not they could live comfortably on their levels of income at the time of data collection. Twelve per cent (12%) of all households surveyed reported that they were experiencing a “critical situation” with their household income (that is, not being able to meet even their most basic needs) at the time of data collection, while 32 per cent reported that they were “struggling” to meet basic needs on their current levels of income. Around 48 per cent of households reported that they were “surviving” on current income and just 16 per cent reported feeling that they were “comfortable” with their levels of income at the time of data collection (see Figure 16 below).

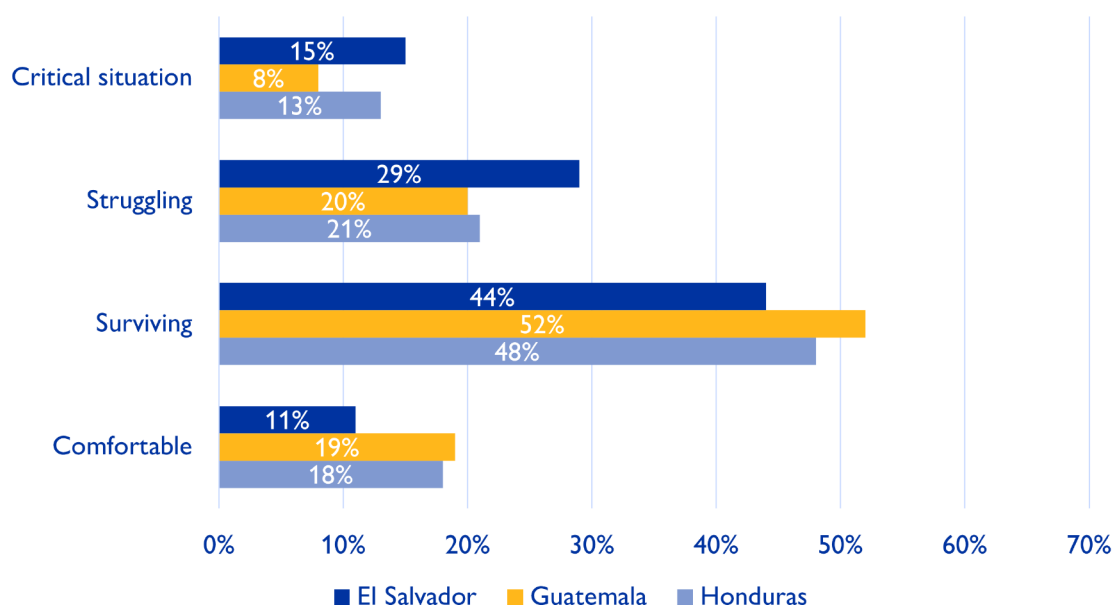
Figure 16. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether or not they could live comfortably on levels of household income at the time of data collection²³



Notably, while surveyed households in Honduras were more likely to report dissatisfaction with the overall economic situation in their areas of residence at the time of data collection, households surveyed in El Salvador showed the highest proportions reporting that they were in a critical situation or struggling on income levels at the time of data collection. Only 11 per cent of households surveyed in El Salvador reported that they were living comfortably on their income levels and 45 per cent reported that they were struggling or in a very critical situation at the time of data collection (see Figure 17 for breakdowns by country). Households in Guatemala, by contrast, reported the highest levels of satisfaction with their income levels at the time of data collection. One in four households from the Guatemalan departments of both Chiquimula and Huehuetenango reported living comfortably on their levels of income at the time of data collection.

²³ Response options were read and explained to the respondents aloud before answering the question. A total of 0.05 per cent (25 households) reported “do not know/prefer not to answer”.

Figure 17. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether or not they could live comfortably on levels of household income at the time of data collection by country



4.4 HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES

Estimated monthly household expenditures among surveyed households were considerably low during the present assessment. The mean estimated per capita monthly expenditures of the entire surveyed population was about USD 80, equivalent to about USD 300 per household per month. When considering median expenditure as a proxy for household income, the analysis indicated that half of all households were living on less than USD 60 per capita per month – or less than USD 2 per capita per day. Based on food expenditure questions, the per capita expenditure on food alone was also calculated (see the right-hand column in Table 14).

Table 14. Estimated mean and median household expenditure by country and overall, in USD

Country		Total estimated per capita monthly expenditure (USD)	Total estimated household monthly expenditure (USD)	Total estimated per capita food expenditure (USD)
El Salvador	Mean	92	330	30
	Median	70	260	30
Guatemala	Mean	70	270	30
	Median	50	200	20
Honduras	Mean	80	310	30
	Median	60	230	30
Overall	Mean	80	300	30
	Median	60	230	20

Note: Values were rounded to the nearest tenth.

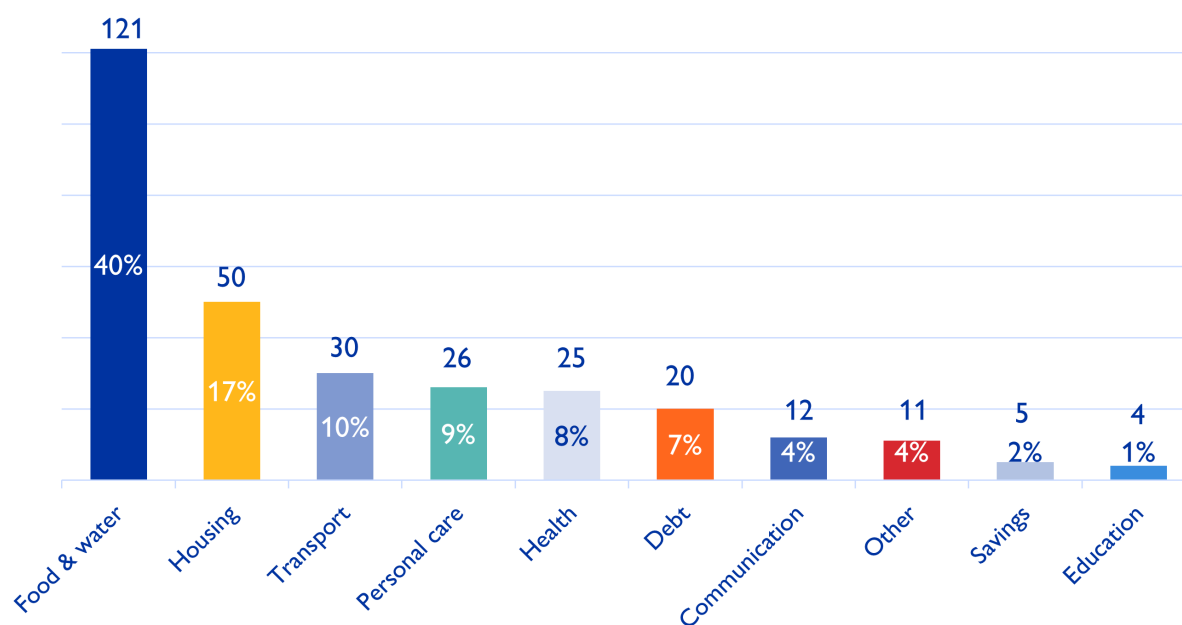
Based on the calculations in the above table, it is observed that mean monthly household expenditures in Guatemala (USD 270) were well below the country's basic food basket of USD 390 (INE, 2021)²⁴. In the case of El Salvador, calculated monthly household expenditures (at USD 330) exceeded the country's monthly basic food basket of USD 200 (DIGESTYC, 2021). Lastly, mean monthly household expenditures in Honduras – at USD 310 – were less than the country's monthly basic food basket set at USD 376 (Dirección General de Salarios de la Secretaría de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 2021). In each of the three

²⁴ The minimum basic food basket is understood as the minimum daily food to be consumed by households to meet nutrition requirements. The minimum cost incurred to meet minimum basic food baskets is different in each country.

countries, median calculated expenditures tended to fall considerably below the mean, underscoring significant variation in expenditure levels among surveyed households.

When looking at categories of expenses, households reported spending the majority of their money (40%) on food and water (see Figure 18).

Figure 18. Distribution of mean monthly household expenditures by different categories in USD (top) and percentage (%)



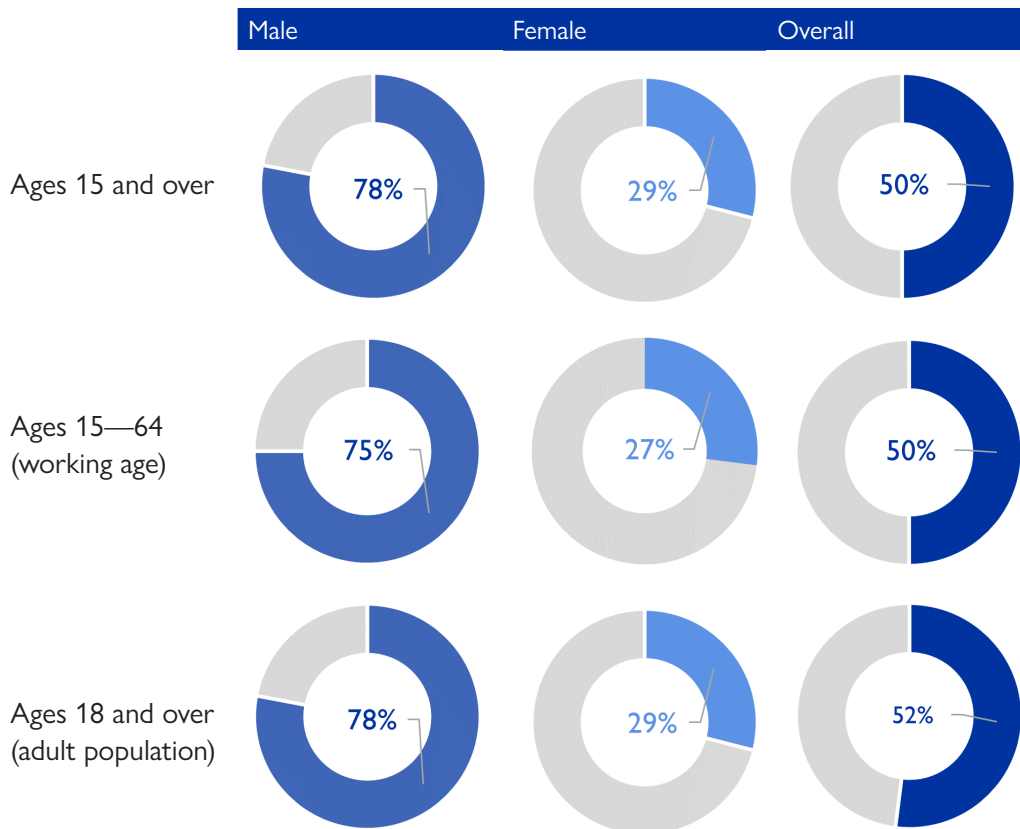
Further analysis revealed that households reporting at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection had higher median monthly expenditure (USD 357) compared to households with no recent migrants (USD 287). Regarding health-related expenses, on average from the total monthly expenses (USD 303.30), respondents reported that eight per cent was spent on medical expenditures (USD 24.98).

4.5 LIVELIHOODS

Respondents were asked questions about their sources of income, main occupations, as well as the effect of COVID-19 on their household income.

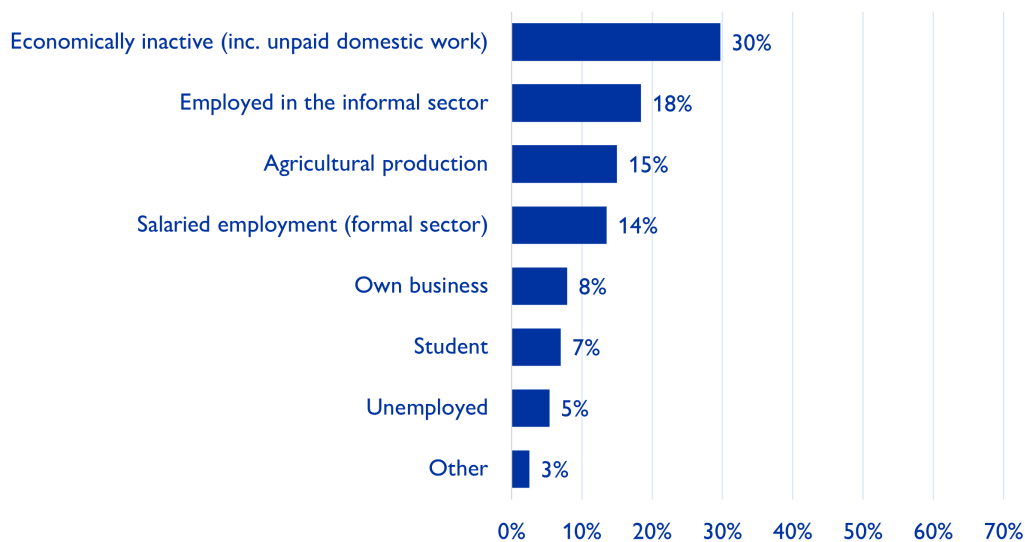
To measure employment, respondents were asked to report on whether each member of their household had worked to earn an income in the 30 days prior to data collection, whether through salaried employment, informal daily labour, own business or agricultural production. Overall, 52 per cent of individuals ages 15 and over were reported to have worked to earn an income in the 30 days prior to data collection, with significant variation by sex (Figure 19). As highlighted later in this section, COVID-19 had a significant impact on employment conditions in all three countries.

Figure 19. Percentage (%) of the surveyed population reported to have worked to earn an income in the 30 days prior to data collection by various age groups, sex and overall²⁵



Overall, 4.8 per cent of individuals ages 15 and older were reported to be unemployed at the time of data collection. Figure 20 below shows the reported employment status of all individuals age 15 and older.

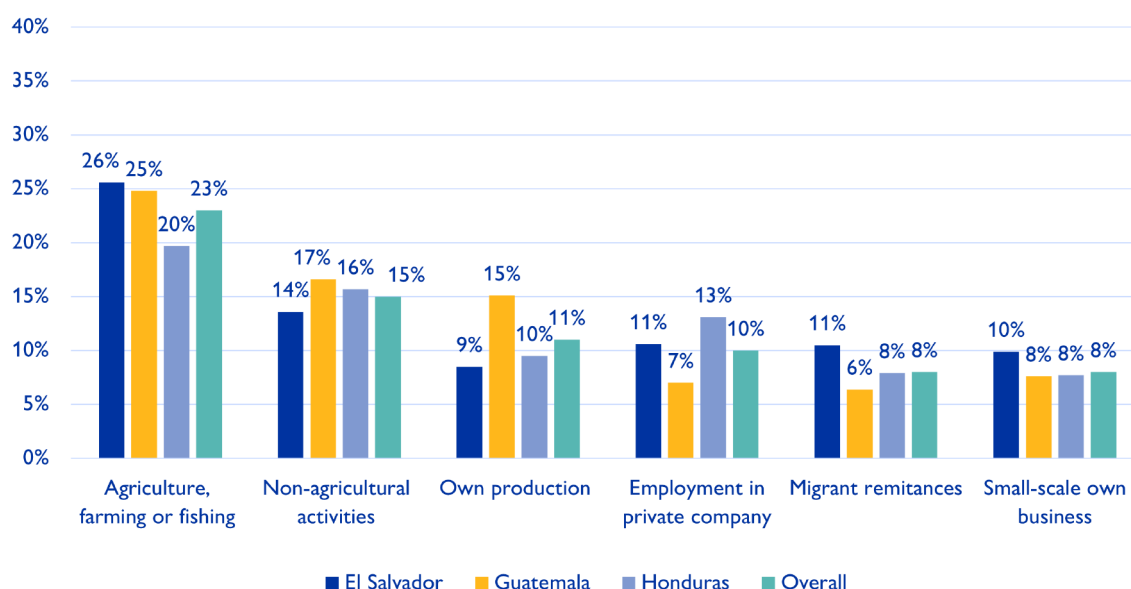
Figure 20. Of all individuals ages 15 and older in the surveyed population, percentage (%) by employment status at the time of data collection²⁶



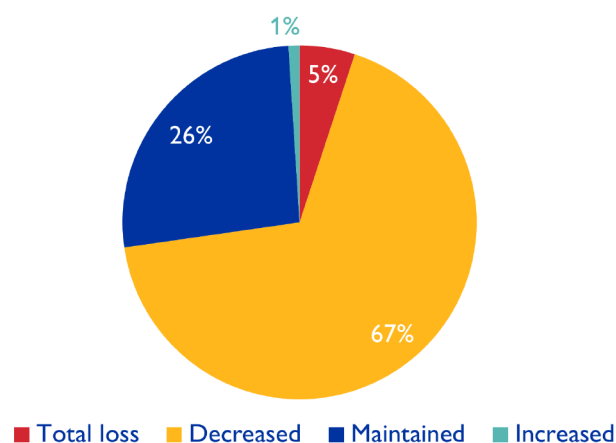
When households were asked to report their main sources of household income, one out of five reported agriculture/farming or fishing as their main income source, followed by non-agricultural activities such as hairdressing, carpentry, security, paid domestic work or bricklaying (Figure 21).

²⁵ Sex disaggregation does not include the five individuals for whom sex was reported as “other”. Proportions for ages 15 and over are out of: overall, n = 16,064; male, n = 7,512; female, n = 8,547. Proportions for ages 15—64 are out of: overall, n = 14,345; male, n = 6,688; female, n = 7,652; ages 18 and older are out of: overall, n = 14,770; male, n = 6,840; female, n = 7,925.

²⁶ Respondents could choose only one option.

Figure 21. Top six main sources of household income by country and overall²⁷

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 34 per cent of households reported that at least one household member lost their employment or business, with the highest percentage seen in Guatemala (39%). Furthermore, more than seven out of ten households reported experiencing a decrease or total loss of their source of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether household income had increased, decreased, remained the same or was lost completely due to COVID-19

The highest proportions of households reporting that they had experienced a decrease in their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were those whose main source of income was informal trading or street vending (88%), followed by households deriving their main source of income from own small-scale businesses (78%) and those whose main income source was daily work (also known as “jornaleros”²⁸) in agriculture, farming and fishing (77%). Over two fifths (42%) of households reported that their main source of income was derived from seasonal or temporary work, reaching 57 per cent of households in Honduras, followed by El Salvador (38%) and Guatemala (32%).

Furthermore, 14 per cent of households reported that migrant remittances were among their top two sources of income. The highest proportions were seen amongst surveyed households in El Salvador, reaching 17 per cent, followed by Honduras (14%) and Guatemala (11%). When asked about savings, more than four out of five households reported not having any savings at the time of data collection.

²⁷ Respondents could choose up to three main sources of household income and were asked to rank these in order based on proportional contribution. “Own production” are goods or services that are consumed by the same household that produces them.

²⁸ A *jornalero* is a person who works in exchange for a wage or pay per day of work, although extensively it applies to agricultural workers who do not own land.

For those reporting saving money in the six months prior to data collection, the average amount saved was USD 42.30 per month.

In terms of household debt, 29 per cent of households reported having debts at the time of data collection. Of households reporting having outstanding debts at the time of data collection, the main reasons reported for having taken on debts were to buy food, pay health expenses and investing in and/or setting up a new business. In Honduras, just over one third of all surveyed households reported having taken on debts to pay for food (34%). One fourth (25%) of all households surveyed in Guatemala reported paying for food as the reason for taking on debts while 20 per cent reported coverage of health expenses as a reason. In El Salvador, the primary reason reported by households for having taken on debts was to investment in or start a business, reaching 18 per cent of households. Purchasing food was the second reason (15%).

Across all countries, the three main sources of financing accessed by households were relatives, friends and banks. In the case of El Salvador, 46 per cent of households who reported having outstanding debts had obtained financing from a bank, while in Honduras that percentage was only 18 per cent. Of households in Guatemala who reported outstanding debts at the time of data collection, 43 per cent reported obtaining financing from relatives or friends.

4.6 FOOD SECURITY

4.6.1 Food consumption and dietary diversity

This subsection highlights key information on food consumption measured across all assessed households, including the prevalence of food insecurity, the food consumption score, as well as food-related coping strategies.

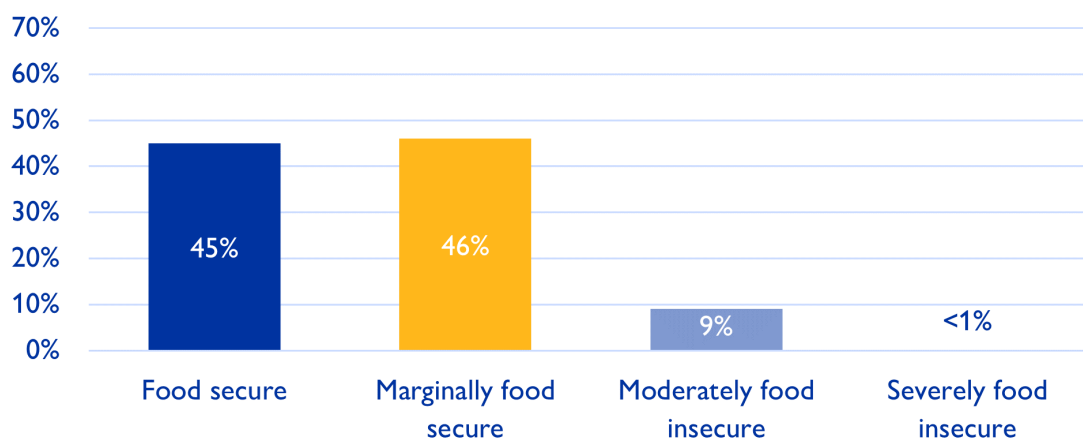
CARI is a WFP methodology used to analyse and report the level of food insecurity within a population. In order to account for the multidimensionality of the concept of food security, CARI classification not only considers the food consumption dimension but also looks at household coping capacity (using indicators measuring economic vulnerability and asset depletion), as well as the ability of households to meet essential needs. Following the CARI approach, households are classified into four food security categories, as described in Figure 23.

Figure 23. Food security classification

Food Security Classification	Description	Food Secure / Food Insecure
Food Secure	Able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical coping strategies	Food Secure
Marginally Food Secure	Has minimally adequate food consumption without engaging in irreversible coping strategies; unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures	
Moderately Food Insecure	Has significant food consumption gaps, or marginally able to meet minimum food needs only with irreversible coping strategies	Food Insecure
Severely Food Insecure	Has extreme food consumption gaps, or has extreme loss of livelihood assets that will lead to food consumption gaps, or worse	

Source: [The Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security \(CARI\)](#).

Overall, nine per cent of all surveyed households were estimated to be food insecure as of April–May 2021, as shown in Figure 24. In the specific case of Guatemala, the percentage of food insecure households reached 12 per cent, followed by Honduras (9%) and El Salvador (5%). There was no significant variation in levels of household food insecurity between households with or without recent migrants.

Figure 24. Percentage (%) of surveyed households by food security classification

The prevalence of food insecurity was obtained by analysing food consumption patterns, food and livelihood coping strategies and economic vulnerability. CARI combines several indicators to generate the total food security classification. The FCS and the food-related coping strategies indicate the status of the families interviewed: what they were eating, the variety of the food they were consuming and what behaviours they adopted when they were unable to meet their food needs. Moreover, CARI includes indicators that represent the economic status of the families, including behaviours/coping strategies that families adopted to overcome a lack of income to purchase food. The more serious these mechanisms are, the less capacity the family has to face a shock in the future (or to continue to face shocks). Economic vulnerability also looks at asset ownership.²⁹ The following paragraphs will examine the findings related to many of these aforementioned dynamics.

WFP developed the FCS as a standard proxy indicator for diet quality. The FCS is applicable to different contexts while guaranteeing reliable and comparable results. As a proxy indicator, the FCS represents the dietary diversity, energy and the macro- and micronutrient content of the food that people eat. The FCS is a composite score based on dietary diversity (the number of food groups consumed by a household in the seven days prior to data collection), food frequency (the number of days a particular food group is consumed) and the relative nutritional importance of different food groups. The FCS divides the population into three groups based on their consumption pattern: poor, borderline and acceptable food consumption.

Analysis of the FCS demonstrated that nearly 10 per cent of the assessed households across the three countries had a calculated FCS of inadequate (poor or borderline), while 90 per cent had an acceptable FCS³⁰ (Table 15). Notably, there was no notable variation in calculated FCS by whether or not households had at least one recent migrant.

²⁹ The standard CARI approach uses the food expenditure share as a proxy for economic vulnerability.

³⁰ The FCS is a WFP corporate indicator collected in all assessments and monitoring activities. The FCS is a composite score based on self-reported information on food groups consumed (from nine food groups in total) and food frequency (number of days food groups were consumed during the past seven days), weighted by the ascribed relative nutritional importance of different food groups. Based on standard thresholds, households are classified into one of three food consumption groups: poor, borderline, or acceptable, with scores of ≤ 21 , 28 and 35, respectively, except in situations of high oil and sugar consumption, for which the cut-offs used for the same groups are ≤ 28 , 35 and 42, respectively.

Table 15. Percentage (%) of assessed households by calculated Food Consumption Score, by category, country and overall

Country	Poor FCS	Borderline FCS	Acceptable FCS
Overall	3	7	91
El Salvador	3	3	95
Guatemala	4	13	84
Honduras	3	4	93

It is worth mentioning that large proportions of households reported engaging in coping mechanisms in the 30 days prior to data collection in order to maintain the acceptable food consumption levels reflected in the table above. These strategies (see next subsection) imply a reduction of both quality and quantity of food consumed as well as a lack of dietary diversity. Once families have exhausted coping strategies, food consumption levels can further deteriorate.

While 10 per cent of surveyed households had inadequate food consumption levels, the lack of dietary diversity is of major concern. The majority of households interviewed with acceptable food consumption levels consumed cereals, roots and tubers almost on a daily basis. Families complemented the daily intake of cereals with pulses (beans, lentils) six days a week on average and dairy products three days a week on average. Nonetheless, the total consumption of meat, fish, eggs, vegetables and fruits was below three or four times a week for each food group. This lack of dietary diversity indicates inadequate nutritional intake.³¹

Households with a calculated FCS of poor were more likely to base their diets only on cereals, fats and sugars. Meat, fish and eggs were consumed on average less than once a week by households in this group; fruits, vegetables and pulses were also only consumed once a week on average. Families with borderline food consumption were able to eat pulses twice a week on average and meat, eggs, fish and dairy products once a week on average.

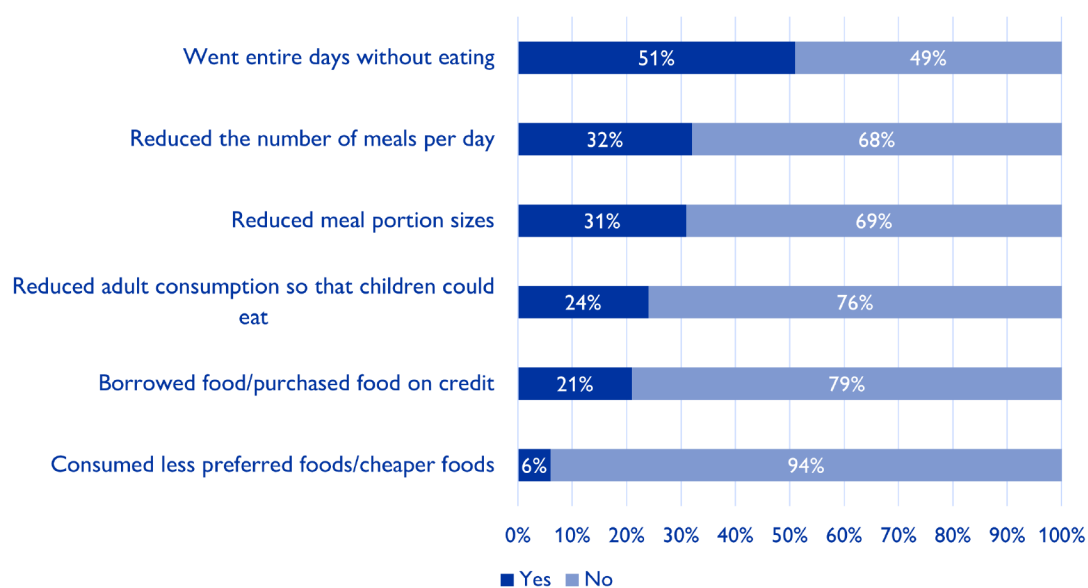
4.6.2 Food consumption coping mechanisms

Food-related coping strategies are behaviours applied by households to gain direct access to food or access to income to purchase food (WFP, 2015). Significant proportions of households interviewed in all three countries reported applying these types of strategies to meet their food needs.

Respondents reported having used one or more of the following food-related coping strategies during the seven days prior to data collection – more than half of respondents (51%) reported buying cheap or less preferred food (lower quality or not the preferred brand). The second most common strategy was the reduction of meal portion sizes, reported by 32 per cent of households. Nearly one third (31%) of the households reported borrowing food/purchasing food on credit in the seven days prior to data collection. Twenty-four per cent (24%) of households reported that adult household members had reduced their food consumption in the seven days prior to data collection so that children or other vulnerable family members could eat (Figure 25).

³¹ Household Food Security Profiles, WFP, April 2005; Microsoft Word – HHFSP Cover.doc (wfp.org).

Figure 25. Percentage (%) of households reporting coping mechanisms employed in the seven days prior to data collection due to a lack of money to buy food (top six)³²

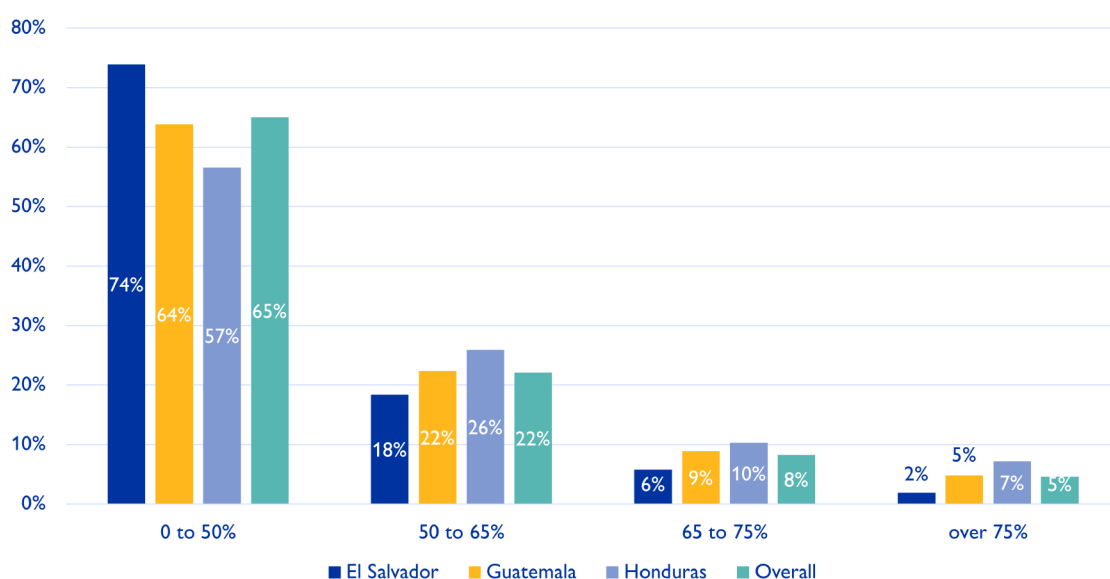


Food-related coping strategies are used to compute the rCSI. The rCSI compares the hardship faced by households by measuring the frequency and severity of the behaviours they engage in when faced with food shortages. When households occasionally reduce and/or restrict their food consumption during a week, they are classified as having a low coping level (0–4); when they engage in these strategies more than three times a week, they have a medium coping level (5–18) and families have a very high coping level (19 and above) if they adopt more than one strategy daily.

Among respondents, on average, the rCSI was seven, meaning households had a medium coping level. When we compared the rCSI between households with migrants and without migrants, the difference was just one point (six and seven respectively). Despite this difference of one point, both are classified as having a medium coping level.

The figure below shows the food expenditure share per country. Thirty-five per cent of respondents reported spending between 50 to 75 per cent of their entire monthly household expenditure on food alone, with Honduras being the country with the highest percentage of households spending between 50 to 75 per cent of their monthly household expenditure on food, at 43 per cent (Figure 26).

Figure 26. Percentage (%) of households reporting the proportion of their entire monthly household expenditure that was spent on food alone



³² Respondents could choose multiple options.

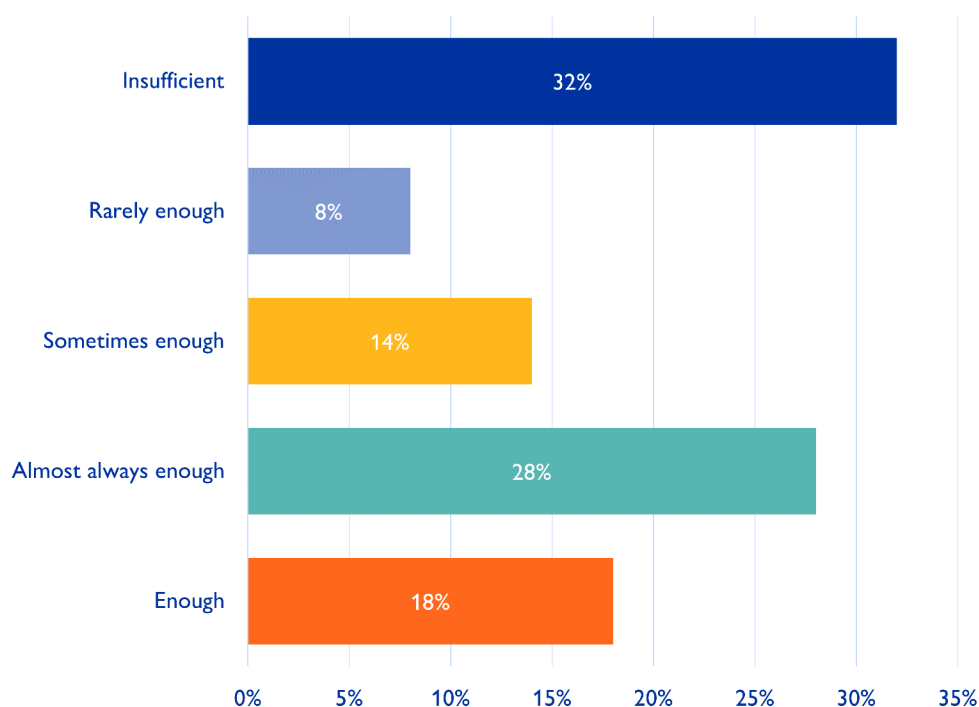
The table below shows the expenditure on food per country. Per capita food expenditure was similar in El Salvador and Honduras and slightly less in Guatemala (Table 16).

Table 16. Total calculated monthly expenditure per capita, total monthly expenditure and total per capita on food by country and overall

Country	Total per capita monthly expenditure (USD)	Total household monthly expenditure (USD)	Total food expenditure per capita (USD)
El Salvador	92	331	33
Guatemala	68	274	26
Honduras	82	306	33
Overall	81	303	30

Among the three countries, two out of five respondents claimed that income earned in the 30 days prior to data collection had been insufficient or rarely enough to purchase food (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether income levels were enough to buy food in the 30 days prior to data collection

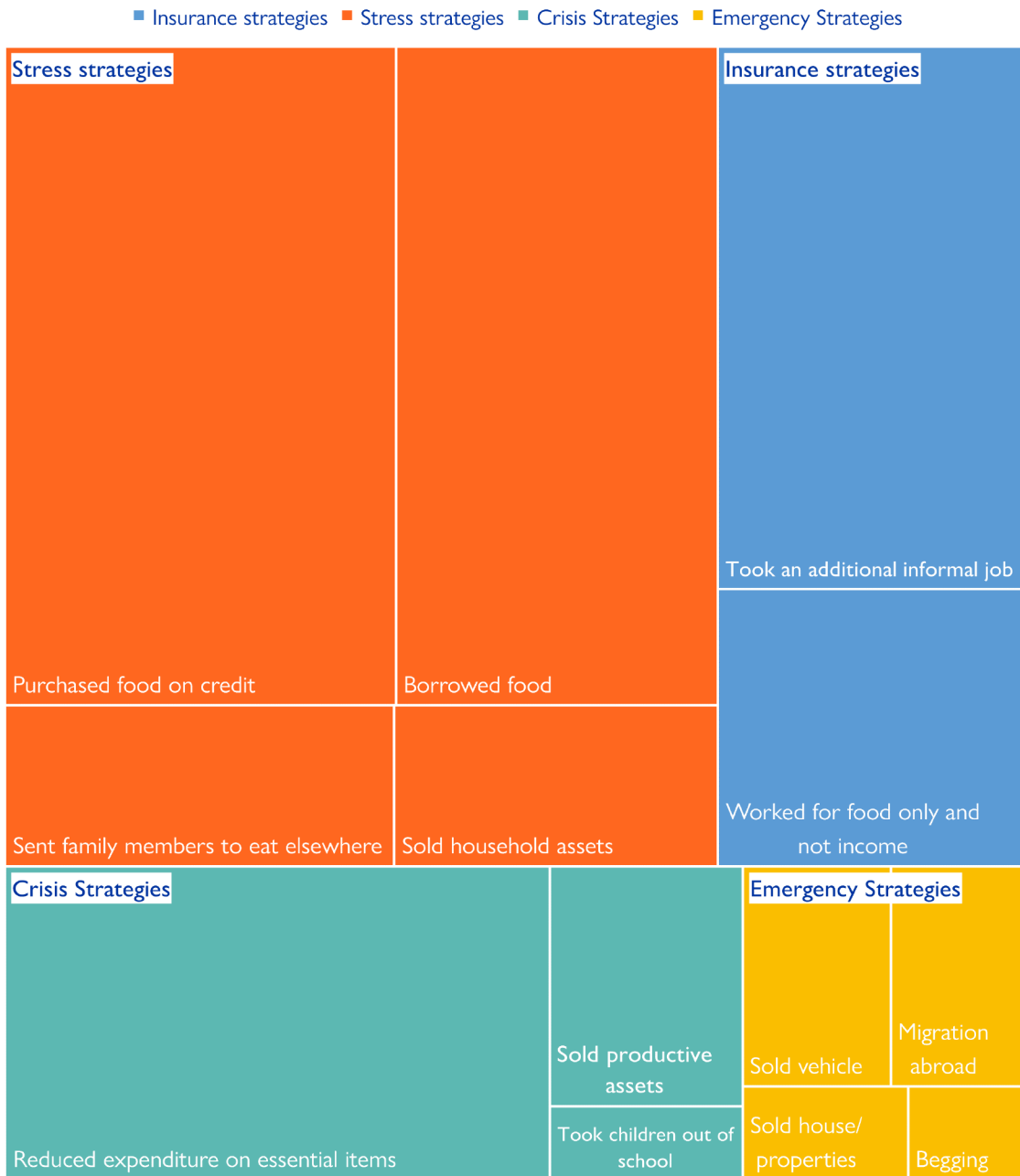


4.7 HOUSEHOLD COPING MECHANISMS

This subsection highlights key information on coping mechanisms employed by surveyed households in the 30 days prior to data collection due to a lack of sufficient income. Results indicate that the most popular coping mechanism was the purchase of food on credit, borrowing money to buy food, the acceptance of informal, risky, poorly paid or daily wage labour and working for food (and not for money).

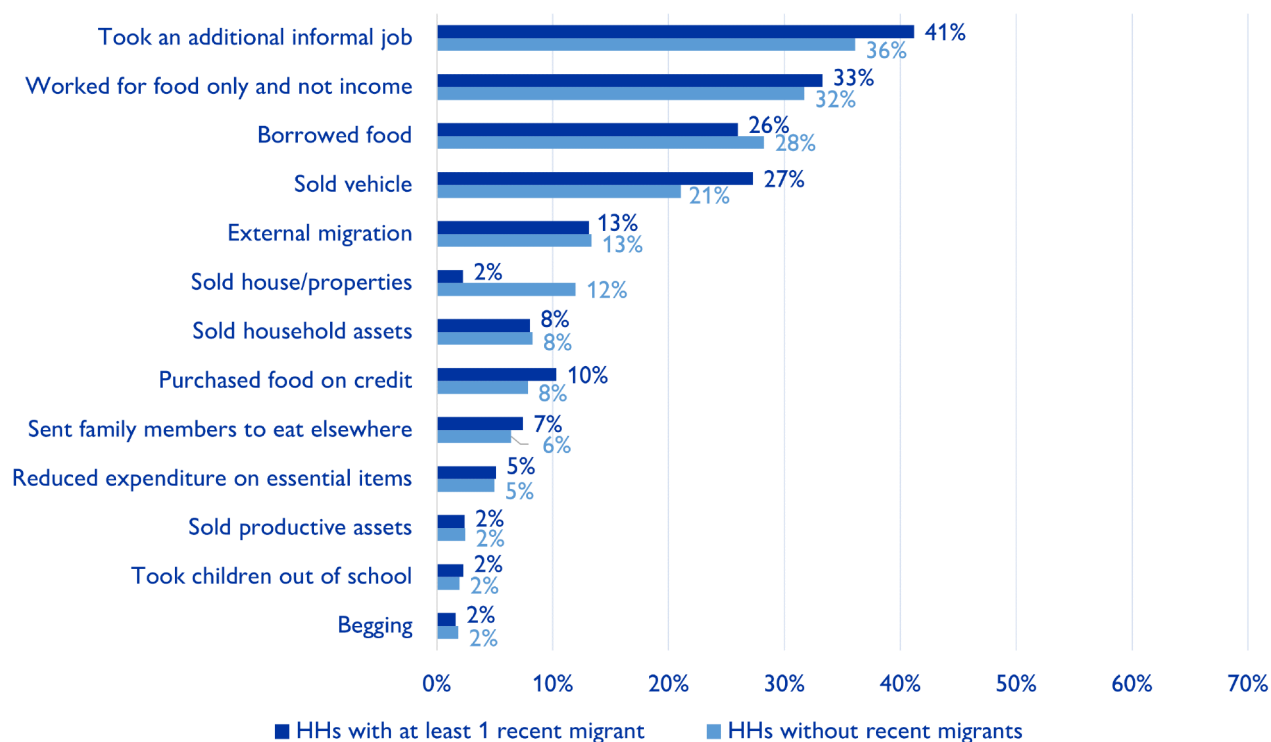
Almost two out of five households reported buying food on credit during the 30 days prior to data collection. One out of three households reported having borrowed money to satisfy their household food needs in the specified period (Figure 28). In the case of Honduras, 45 per cent of households reported that someone in the household had bought food on credit in the 30 days prior to data collection while this percentage was lower in the case of assessed households in El Salvador (30%).

Figure 28. Top 14 livelihood coping strategies adopted by households in the 30 days prior to data collection due to insufficient income by type of strategy



As Figure 29 shows, when household coping strategies were compared between households with recent migrants and households with no recent migrants, there were some observed variations, particularly on the proportion of households reporting that someone in the household took on an additional informal job, sold a vehicle or sold their house/properties.

Figure 29. Percentage (%) of households reporting coping mechanisms employed in the 30 days prior to data collection due to lack of income by household recent migration profile



4.8 HEALTH

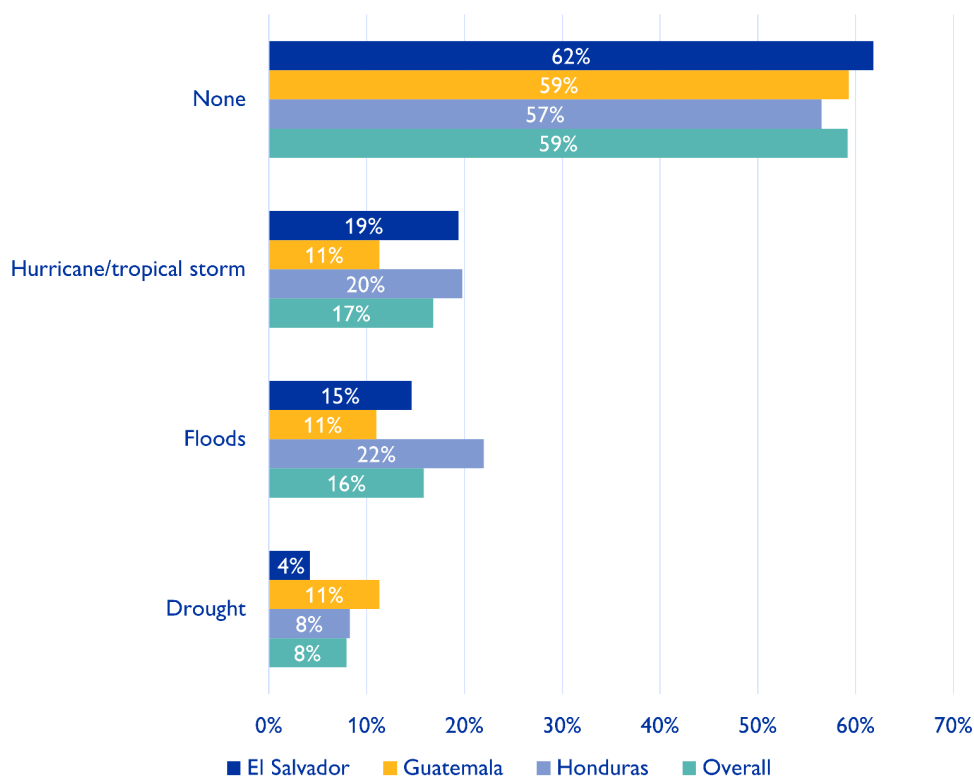
This subsection summarizes the key findings related to health including health status, expenditures on health and fear of contracting COVID-19. Only four per cent of the surveyed population were pregnant females and eight per cent were females who were breastfeeding at the time of data collection. Moreover, one out of ten households reported having at least one household member with a chronic illness such as diabetes, cancer, a cardiovascular condition or chronic respiratory problems.

Nearly one third of surveyed households (29%) reported having at least one individual who needed help completing daily activities such as communicating, walking or bathing. The majority of those individuals who were reported to require help completing daily activities were reported to need assistance due to visual and walking problems, and many of these individuals were elderly.

4.9 PROTECTION

This subsection highlights key results on different protection issues reported by households during the survey. Overall, thirty per cent of the households reported that they were impacted by one or more natural hazards in the three years prior to data collection. Of households reporting that they had been affected by a natural hazard, one in three claimed that floods produced by hurricanes and/or tropical storms were the main types of hazards, followed by droughts (8%) (Figure 30).

Figure 30. Percentage (%) of households reporting the main natural hazards experienced in three years prior to data collection by country of origin and overall



At the time of data collection, four per cent of the households reported insecurity and violence as their number one priority concern. Households surveyed in El Salvador showed the highest proportions (5%) and Guatemala the lowest (1%). In total, 18 per cent of households considered insecurity and violence as one of their top three priority concerns at the time of data collection, with proportions among households surveyed in Honduras and El Salvador being the highest (20% and 21% respectively).

The main situation of insecurity experienced by the households in their localities was robbery (23%). In the case of Honduras, this percentage was the highest among the three countries with 33 per cent, followed by drug sales (21%).

More than two out of five households reported that they considered violence to have increased or remained the same in their place of residence in the 12 months prior to data collection. However, in Honduras, one out of four households reported perceiving that violence had increased in their place of residence in this period.

4.10 EDUCATION

More than a year after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many children and young people in the subregion were out of school, often affected by the full or partial closure of their study centres and changes in the modality of education delivery from face-to-face classes to a virtual environment. This subsection examines the regular attendance and enrolment at school and tries to understand the modality of attendance and the impact of school closures on school feeding programmes.

During the current educational year, 92 per cent of children between the ages of 5–12 were reported to be enrolled in school or other formal educational opportunities. This percentage was the same when the data was disaggregated by boys and girls.

For those households with children enrolled in formal education during the current academic year, in Guatemala, 21 per cent of children were reported to not to be regularly attending classes, followed by households in Honduras (17%). In contrast, El Salvador had the lowest percentage: only three per cent of households with children enrolled in formal education during the current academic year reported that children were not regularly attending classes.

When respondents were asked about the modality through which their children had attended classes during the present academic year, percentages varied among the countries. For instance, in Guatemala, 43 per cent of households with children enrolled in formal education reported that children had been taking hybrid classes (distance education combined with face-to-face classes), followed by paper learning materials completed at home (25%) and online classes taught by the educational centre (21%). In the case of Honduras, more than half of households with children enrolled in formal education claimed that children had taken online classes (57%) and 23 per cent hybrid classes. In contrast, in El Salvador, households reported hybrid classes (38%) as the main form through which children received their education during the current academic year, followed by face-to-face classes (29%) and full in-person classes (28%).

Of those households with school-aged children who were reported not to be enrolled in formal education during the current academic year, the most frequently reported reason was that classes were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic: reaching 73 per cent of households in this group in Guatemala and 66 per cent of households in this group in Honduras. In the case of El Salvador, aside from school closures due to COVID-19, households also mentioned the lack of money to afford education or lack of desire on behalf of the student.

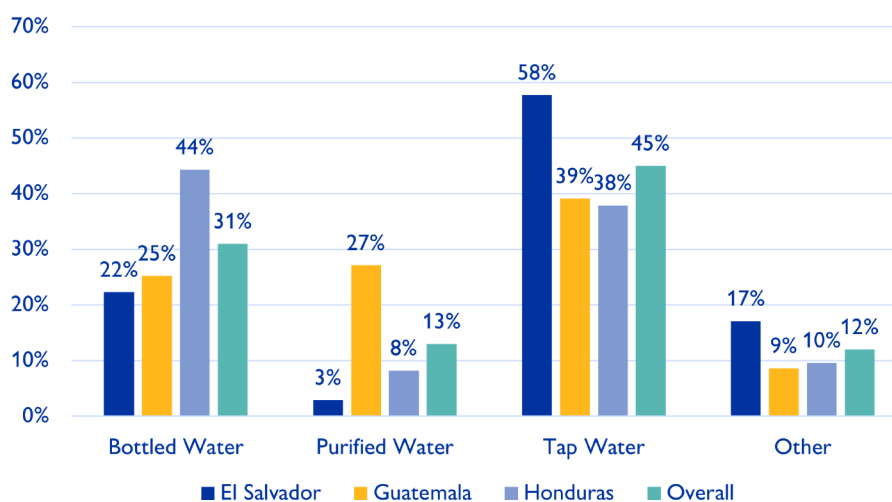
Out of households that reported having children enrolled in formal education during the current academic year in Guatemala and El Salvador, respondents claimed School Feeding Programmes had continued operating, since food was delivered and could be taken home (53% in Guatemala and 41% in El Salvador), while this proportion reached just three per cent in the case of Honduras. In Honduras, 44 per cent of households with children enrolled in formal education during the current academic year reported that the School Feeding Programmes had completely stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On average, from the total estimated household monthly expenditure across surveyed households in all three countries (USD 303.30), households reported spending just one per cent on average on education (USD 4.12).

4.11 WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

This subsection highlights key results on water and sanitation-related issues. Results from the study revealed that households in the three countries reported accessing different main sources of drinking water. For instance, in the case of El Salvador, a significant proportion of surveyed households reported drinking water directly from the tap (58%), while a plurality of surveyed households in Honduras reported primarily drinking bottled water³³ (44%), followed by tap water (38%). However, in the case of Guatemala, the sources of drinking water are equally split among bottled water, purified water (filtered, boiled or chemically treated) and tap water, with an average of 30 per cent for each type of source (Figure 31).

Figure 31. Top three main sources of drinking water accessed by households by country and overall³³



Note: Other sources of drinking water: groundwater (well), surface water (river, lake, pond, canal) and public water sources.

³³ Please note that bottled water is a non-sustainable water source, mainly because people need to pay for and rely on provisions and distribution.

When households were asked about waste management, more than half reported that they burn or bury their waste as their main form of waste disposal (60%), followed by the use of public home collection (29%).

In terms of the type of sanitary facility used, this was more varied among households. In the case of surveyed households in El Salvador and Honduras, the main type of sanitary facility used was a private toilet connected to a septic tank (29%), followed by a private toilet connected to a sewer (25%). Twenty-eight per cent (28%) of surveyed households in El Salvador also reported the use of private toilets (28%). Thirty per cent (30%) of households surveyed in Guatemala reported using a private toilet connected to a sewer (30%), followed by a private or common toilet connected to a septic tank (15%).

4.12 SHELTER

This subsection summarizes key aspects of shelter including the type of home that assessed households lived in, facilities available in the household as well as monthly living expenses. Seventy-seven per cent (77%) of households reported owning their current dwelling. However, in the case of El Salvador, this percentage was lower with just 65 per cent of households. However, households in El Salvador also demonstrated the highest proportions claiming free occupancy, at 20 per cent.

When households were asked about the type of home their household lived in, just three per cent reported to be residing in an improvised building, in contrast to the 87 per cent who reported residing in a private or independent house. Nine per cent of households reported not having electricity at home, while 16 per cent reported owning a computer and 20 per cent reported having residential internet.

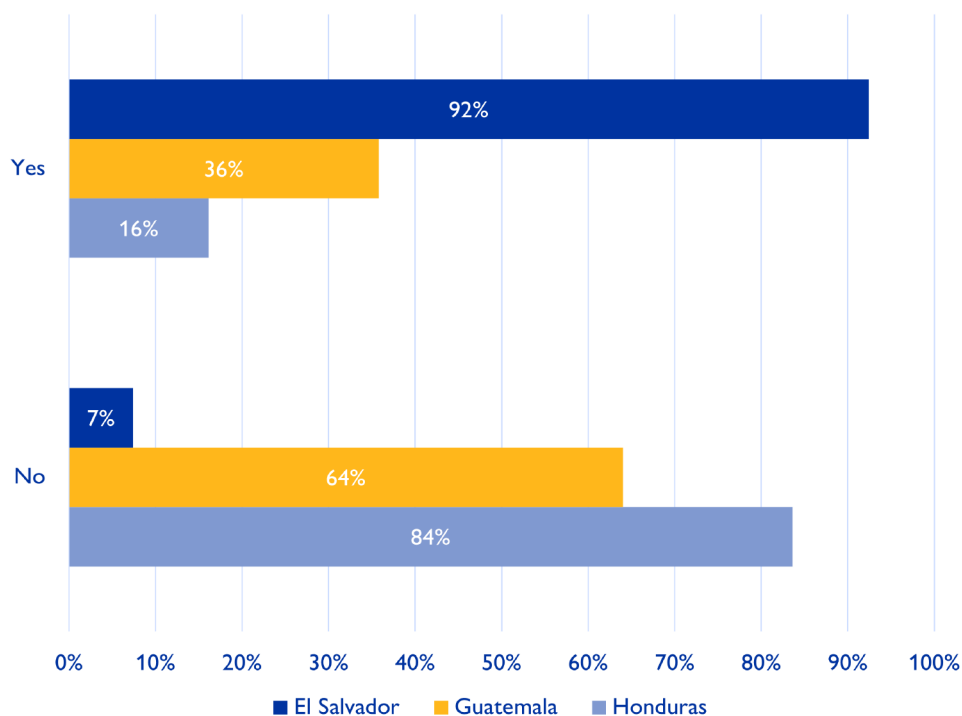
On average, from the total mean monthly household expenditure (USD 303.30), households reported that three per cent was spent on rent, on average (USD 7.56).

In terms of shelter type and materials used for their residences, 77 per cent of the households reported the predominant material for roofing were metal sheets (zinc). In the case of the walls, the materials used varied among countries. The main material used in El Salvador was concrete or mixed (71%), while in Guatemala, adobe, concrete and/or wood were the most common materials. In the case of Honduras, households reported the use of concrete (53%) and adobe (35%) as the main materials. The predominant material for flooring was cement across all three countries. Among the three countries, Guatemalan households (58%) were those most frequently using cement as flooring. In El Salvador, 30 per cent of households reported the use of cement bricks and 30 per cent reported the use of cement. In Guatemala, the preferred materials were cement (43%) and dirt (38%).

4.13 SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

This last subsection of the chapter highlights support from the government and other institutions reported by assessed households. During the six months prior to data collection, in El Salvador, nine out of ten households reported having received support from a governmental programme, mainly through the acquisition of in-kind food items (95%). On the contrary, in Honduras, only 16 per cent of households reported having received support from a governmental programme (also mainly in the form of in-kind food items). In the case of Guatemala, 36 per cent of households reported having received support from the government in the six months prior to data collection, mainly in the form of in-kind food items and cash assistance (Figure 32).

Figure 32. Percentage (%) of households reporting that they received support from the government in the six months prior to data collection by country³⁴



The proportion of households reporting that they had received assistance from a church, NGOs, private companies and/or the United Nations in the six months prior to data collection was relatively similar across the three countries, with 22 per cent of households reporting that they received support from any of these sources. In this case, once again, the largest type of support received was in the form of in-kind food across the three countries (84%).

³⁴ The figure does not include the one per cent of households in El Salvador that reported “do not know/prefer not to answer”.

5. RECENT MIGRATION – HOUSEHOLD AND INDIVIDUAL PROFILES

5.1 OVERVIEW – RECENT INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Unless otherwise stated, this section, as well as sections 5.2 and 5.3 that follow, summarize key findings related to recent international migrants identified among all surveyed households across the 12 assessed departments in the three countries. Recent international migrants are defined for the purposes of this study as any individual reported by the surveyed household member to have migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection. For a separate discussion on circular (or pendular) and internal mobility dynamics observed among the surveyed population, see section 5.4.

5.1.1 Household overview

Results from this study reflected significant levels of recent emigration. Nearly a quarter of surveyed households reported at least one individual who migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection (see Table 17).

Table 17. Percentage (%) of households reporting at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection by country of origin and overall

Country	Total no. of assessed households	No. of assessed households with at least one recent international migrant	Percentage of assessed households with at least one recent international migrant
Overall	4 998	1 200	24
El Salvador	1 703	374	22
Guatemala	1 730	402	23
Honduras	1 565	424	27

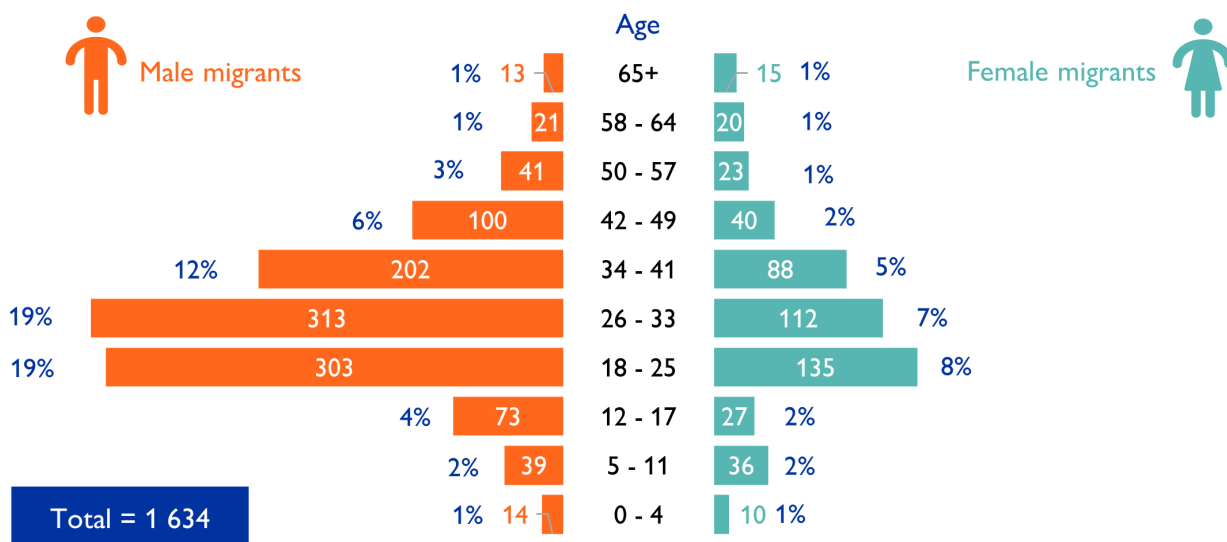
Of the households reporting at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection, the number of members reported to have migrated ranged anywhere from one to as many as seven per household.³⁵ Most households reported just one member who recently migrated, although over one in four households with recent migrants reported that two or more household members had departed. Of the households reporting at least one recent migrant, the median number of migrants was one, while the average was 1.36.

5.1.2 Individual overview

According to the survey results, recent migration from NCA is highly dominated by younger males of working age. Within the 1,200 assessed households reporting at least one individual who migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection, a total of 1,634 individual migrants were identified by proxy from respondents. Of these 1,634 recent migrants, 506 (or 31.0 per cent) were female and 1,119 (or 68.5 per cent) were male (there were nine individuals for whom sex was reported as other or was not disclosed). Figure 33 below shows the disaggregation of the identified population of recent migrants by reported sex and age.

³⁵ The definition for “household” used in the present assessment was individuals living together who share expenses on food and other basic necessities.

Figure 33. Population pyramid of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection



Note: Sex and age disaggregation does not include migrants for whom sex was reported other or was undisclosed (n = 9)

The mean age of all identified recent migrants was 30.1 years – 30.7 for females and 30.0 for males. Notably, the average age did not vary between the three countries. Overall:

- 12 per cent of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection were minors (below the age of 18);
- Nine in ten were of working age (ages 15–64);
- Just two per cent of recent migrants were elderly (defined as 65 years old and over).

Within the sample, there was notable variation in the sex of migrants across countries. The proportion of females among recent migrants in assessed households was:

- 21 per cent in Guatemala, 33 per cent in El Salvador and 38 per cent in Honduras.

Acknowledging the limitations in terms of representativity, this distribution seems to reflect broader dynamics in the subregion, given that the emigrant population from Honduras is by far the most feminized of the three countries (see chapter three for additional information) (UNDESA, 2020). The measurable share of minors on the move raises numerous protection concerns.

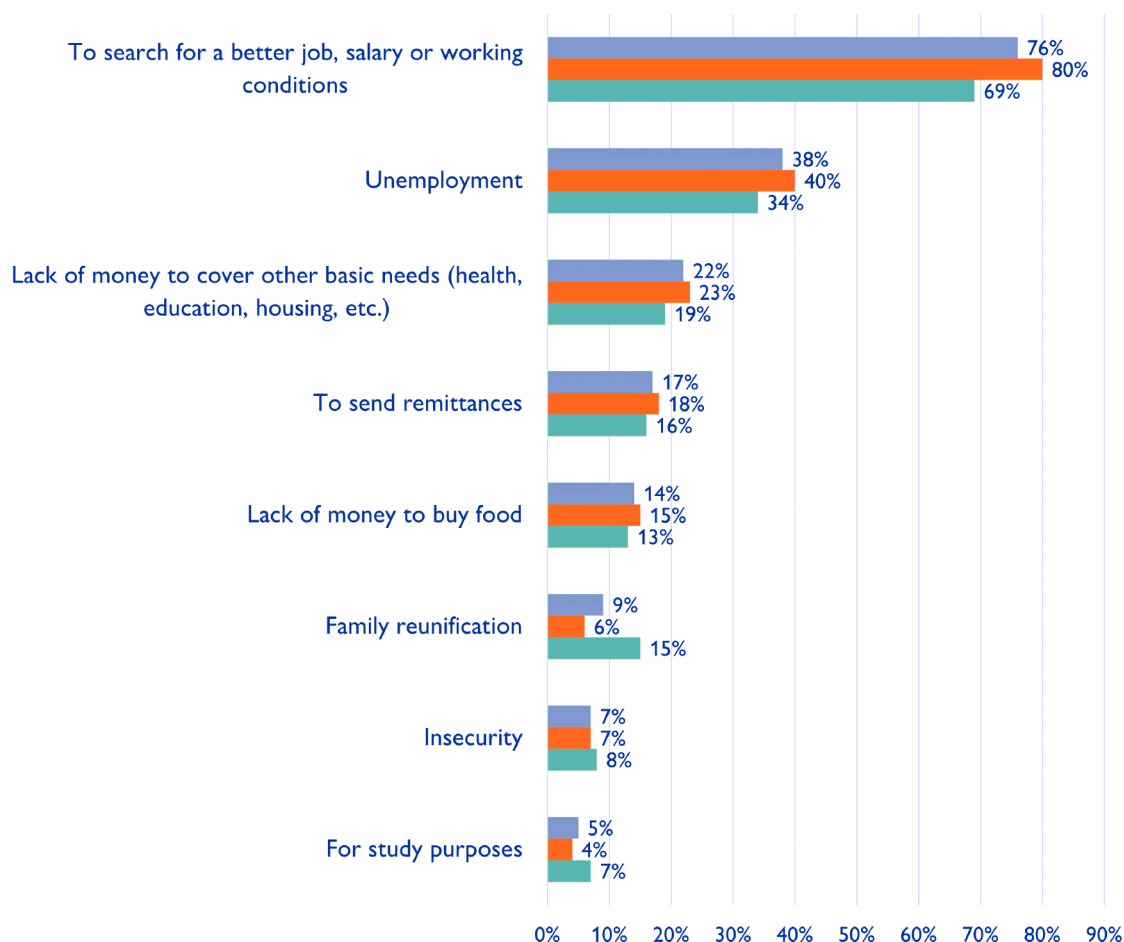
5.2 PROFILE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS

This subsection highlights key information on the profile of the 1,634 individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection, including their reported motivations, principal destinations, migration processes and more. Readers are informed that the following questions were asked for each individual migrant identified in each of the 1,200 households that reported at least one member who had migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection.

5.2.1 Motivations

Respondents were asked to report on why individuals in their households were perceived to have migrated. In general, economic hardships and an inability to afford basic living necessities featured among the top reasons cited for why individuals were perceived to have migrated, with slightly smaller proportions of females than males reported to have migrated in order to obtain a better job, salary or working conditions abroad and slightly smaller proportions of males than females reported to have migrated for family reunification purposes (see Figure 34).

Figure 34. Top eight motivations reported for why household members were perceived to have migrated internationally in the five years prior to data collection by sex of migrant and overall³⁶



Aside from the top eight reasons above, just three per cent of migrants were reported to have migrated due to natural hazards (such as floods, droughts, volcanic eruptions or hurricanes). This total includes those reported to have migrated due to the direct impacts of natural hazards as well as those reported to have migrated due to a deterioration of livelihoods caused by natural hazards. Given that Hurricanes Eta and Iota had greatly affected Honduras and Guatemala five or six months before the survey took place, this may reflect location issues (where the survey was not carried out in the departments most affected by the hurricanes) or time proximity (as preparing for international migration could take longer than the gap between the hurricanes and the survey). It could also potentially signify a smaller influence of environmental drivers on recent migration, the prevalence of economic drivers or confusion between the two (environmental factors affecting economic well-being), where economic drivers are easier to identify by respondents. Any of these hypotheses would need to be explored in follow-up research. Two per cent of migrants were reported to have migrated in order to experience new opportunities/adventures, while one per cent were reported to have migrated for health reasons and four per cent for “other” reasons.

Perhaps striking is the low prevalence of insecurity cited by respondents as a motivation for migration. This may be due to the specific departments where surveys were conducted in each country, or whether or not respondents were based in rural or urban areas. The low prevalence may also be due to the nature of the study – with information being collected by proxy from household respondents and not directly from migrants themselves – as well as the nature of the question – for example, the word “violence” was not specifically mentioned but rather insecurity, which may carry unclear connotations. Additionally, respondents may be reluctant to discuss dynamics of violence and insecurity, particularly with individuals that are unknown to them and particularly in difficult security environments.

³⁶ Total, n = 1,634; male migrants, n = 1,119; female migrants, n = 506. Respondents could choose multiple options. While reflected in the totals, the figure does not show disaggregated data for the nine individuals whose gender was reported as other or was not disclosed. This question was asked of each individual migrant in each household.

Results from other surveys, including those completed directly with migrants, appear to be mixed. For example, a 2017 survey conducted by the IADB of 1,859 migrants from NCA living in Los Angeles, New York and Washington D.C. who had arrived in the United States within the 10 years prior to data collection noted that 41 per cent of respondents cited violence and insecurity among the two main reasons for having decided to leave their country of origin (IADB, 2018). A more recent MMC 4Mi Snapshot Survey of 272 migrants in Mexico (71% of whom were from Honduras, 20% from El Salvador and 5% from Guatemala) conducted in June 2021 found that violence and insecurity was the main reason cited by individuals for having decided to leave their country of origin, reported by 81 per cent of respondents (MMC, 2021). One IOM DTM survey of members of a migrant caravan departing from San Salvador, El Salvador in October 2018 found that 46 per cent of respondents were migrating due to insecurity and violence (IOM, 2018), while another conducted in Tijuana, Mexico in December 2018 of nearly 400 (predominately Honduran) migrants who had arrived by caravan found that 47 per cent were migrating due to violence and insecurity (ibid.).³⁷

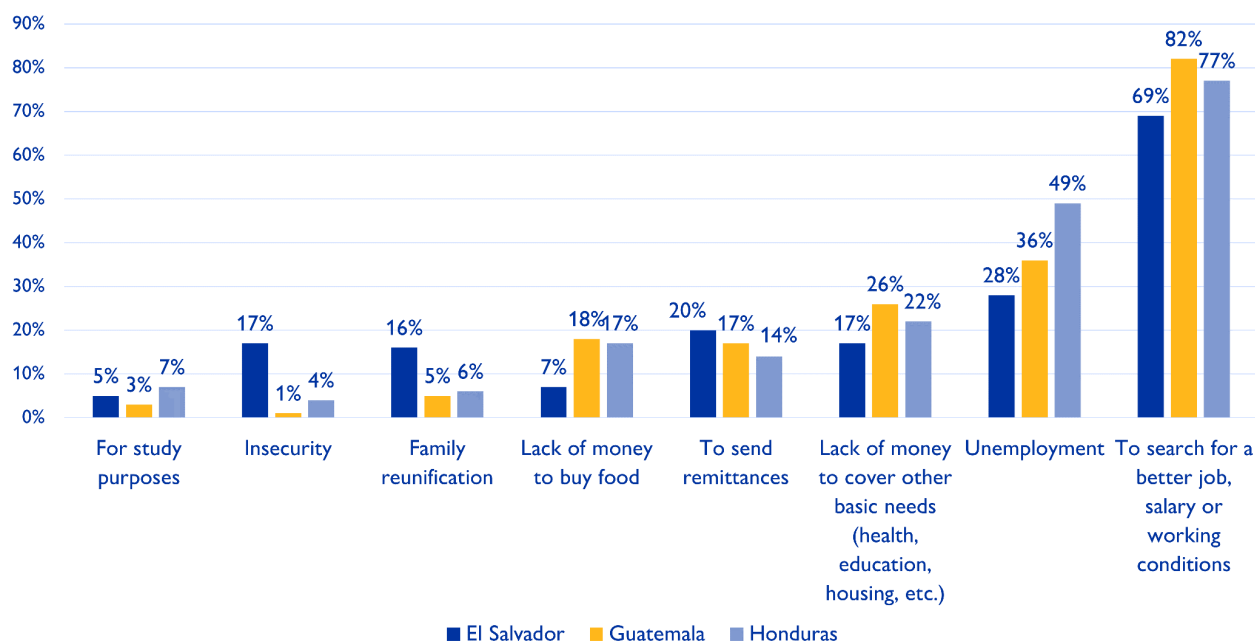
Reported motivations for having migrated differed slightly for recent child migrants (ages 0–17). Of the 204 recent child migrants identified among assessed households, the top four cited motivations were:

- 35 per cent – to search for a better job, salary or working conditions;
- 24 per cent – family reunification;
- 23 per cent – study purposes;
- 17 per cent – unemployment.

Keeping in mind the limitations for sample representativity, an analysis of responses by country of origin may provide indicative insights in variation across assessed departments. For example, unemployment was reported as a motivation for half of recent migrants in Honduras, whereas unemployment was cited as the main motivation for only a quarter of recent migrants identified in assessed households in El Salvador. On the other hand, family reunification and insecurity featured much more prominently among recent migrants in assessed households in El Salvador when compared with those in Guatemala or Honduras (see Figure 35).

³⁷ On the other hand, of the migrants from NCA returned by Mexican immigration authorities to countries of origin in 2019, surveyed as part of the annual Migration Survey on the Southern Mexican Border (also known as Emif Sur, per its acronym in Spanish), just 10.7 per cent of returning migrants from El Salvador, 7.5 per cent from Honduras and 0.1 per cent from Guatemala cited violence and insecurity as the main motive for having left their country of origin (COLEF, et al., 2020). The National Survey on Migration and Remittances in El Salvador conducted in 2017 found that 16 per cent of migrants were reported to have left due to insecurity, on par with the present survey (Ministry of Foreign Affairs El Salvador, General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses, IOM, 2017).

Figure 35. Top eight motivations reported for why household members were perceived to have migrated in the five years prior to data collection by country of origin of migrant³⁸



Further research may shed light on whether these variations in responses by country of origin are linked to broader national, subregional and regional trends. For example, far higher numbers of persons from El Salvador obtain LPR status³⁹ in the United States through family-sponsored preferences when compared with nationals of Guatemala and Honduras (US DHS Security, 2020). These dynamics appear to be a long-term trend and may be linked to the larger and longer-established populations of Salvadoran migrants living in the United States when compared with Guatemalans and Hondurans (MPI, 2021).

Additionally, while all three NCA countries have long faced similar issues related to crime, gang violence, high rates of homicides and femicides and more, El Salvador witnessed an acute increase in violence from 2015 onward after a truce between gangs and the government fell through in 2014 (Cheatham, 2021, Zaidi, 2019). From 2016 to 2018 (the most recent year for which standardized international data are available), El Salvador had the highest homicide rate in the world, surpassing Honduras and Guatemala (World Bank, n.d.). This trend remained constant at least through to the end of 2019, after which point a notable decrease was recorded in 2020 (Cheatham, 2021).

Finally, as highlighted in chapter three, Honduras has consistently registered higher unemployment rates than El Salvador and Guatemala for many years (World Bank, n.d.).

5.2.2 Main destination countries

Across all three origin countries, the United States was the main intended country of destination for the vast majority of individuals – 1,464 of 1,634, or nine in 10 – who were reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection. Just two per cent of migrants from the assessed households (n = 39) were reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate to another country in Central America, showing that **outflows are in large part extraregional**.

³⁸ El Salvador, n = 522; Guatemala, n = 523; Honduras, n = 589. Respondents could choose multiple options.

³⁹ Also known as “Green Card” holders, individuals who possess LPR are non-citizens who are lawfully authorized to live permanently in the United States (United States Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

Table 18. Intended country of destination of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection

Intended country of destination	%/n
United States	90 (n = 1 464)
Spain	4 (n = 73)
Mexico	2 (n = 32)
Other	4 (n = 65)

Most individuals who were reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate to Spain in the five years prior to data collection originated from Honduras. This may be indicative of larger overall trends given that the population of Honduran migrants in Spain is significantly larger than that of Salvadorans or Guatemalans. As of 2020, nearly 100,000 Honduran migrants were residing in Spain, an increase of 141 per cent compared with the approximately 41,000 that lived in the country as of 2015 (UNDESA, 2020). On the other hand, the number of Guatemalan and Salvadoran migrants reached just 10,000 and 12,000, respectively, as of 2020 (ibid.).

Finally, most of the individuals reported to have migrated to Mexico in the five years prior to data collection originated from Honduras and Guatemala, with virtually no migrants from assessed households in El Salvador reported to have left for Mexico as their final destination.

It is worth noting that not all migrants reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection were able to arrive at their destination on their first attempt:

- Some respondents noted that recent migrants had tried as many as two, three or even four times to reach their intended destination before they finally succeeded in doing so.

5.2.3 Migration process

To shed light on the migration process itself, the present survey asked respondents to report on: (1) who each individual household member had travelled with when migrating internationally in the five years prior to data collection and (2) whether or not each household member who migrated or attempted to migrate had done so with the assistance of a smuggler.

(3) Who did migrants travel with on their journey?

Most recent migrants were reported to have travelled alone (58%) from NCA while the rest travelled with at least one accompanying member (40%) (information was not disclosed for 2% of reported recent migrants).

In total:

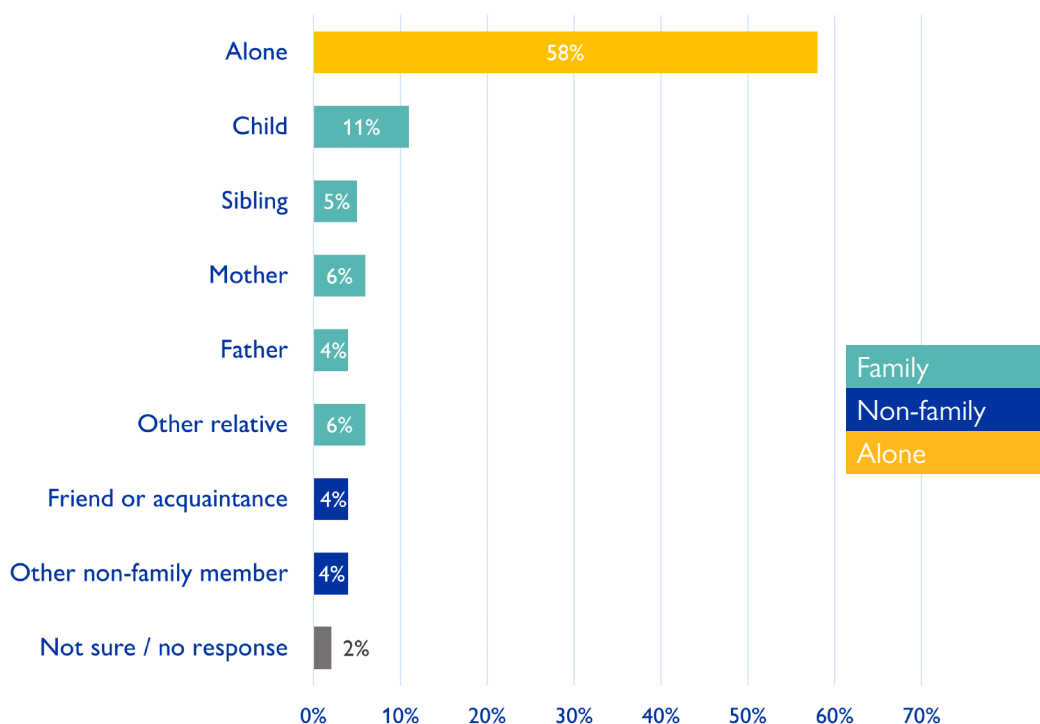
- 943 recent migrants (58%) were reported to have travelled alone (with or without the assistance of a smuggler);
- 658 (40%) were reported to have travelled with at least one person known to them;
- There were 33 migrants (2%) for whom this information was not disclosed.

Of the 1,634 recent migrants identified among assessed households:

- 572 (35%) were reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate with another family member. This includes parents, siblings or other relatives;
- There were 134 individuals (8%) who were reported to have migrated with other non-family members that were known to them, such as friends and acquaintances.

(Notably, migrants could have travelled with multiple family members, family members and non-family members, or exclusively with non-family members known to them. Many relatives/family members may not form part of the individual migrants' household).

Figure 36. Of all individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection, the percentage (%) by who each migrant travelled with on their journey⁴⁰



Understanding variation by sex carries important protection implications, given that women travelling solo are at heightened risk of facing violence, exploitation, abuse and other protection concerns during their migration journeys (UNHCR, 2015; MPI, 2018; Angulo-Pasel, 2018). Overall:

- 250 of 506 female migrants – 49 per cent – were reported to have migrated alone (that is, without the company of a family member, friend or another known individual);
- This rate was higher – reaching 61 per cent – for male migrants.

There were also notable variations between countries. Migrants from assessed households in Guatemala were far more likely to travel alone – reaching 69 per cent – when compared with migrants from assessed households in El Salvador (54%) and Honduras (51%). This may be linked to the larger total proportion of males among recent migrants identified in Guatemala or the tendency in El Salvador and Honduras of migrants to travel in caravans.

Child migrants – particularly those who travel unaccompanied – also face a broad range of vulnerabilities and human rights challenges, with an increased risk of confronting sexual, criminal or economic exploitation, including child trafficking (European Parliament, 2021). Of the 204 children (ages 0–17) reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection identified in assessed households:

- 51 or 25 per cent of identified child migrants were reported to have migrated alone.
- The median age of those reported to have migrated alone was 15.

Seventy-one per cent (71%) of the 204 recent child migrants identified in the sample were reported to have migrated with a family member. In most instances, among those who migrated with a family member, the majority (three in four) were accompanied by at least one parent. More children in the sample were reported to have migrated with their mothers than with their fathers or with both parents.

(4) Did migrants employ the use of smugglers?

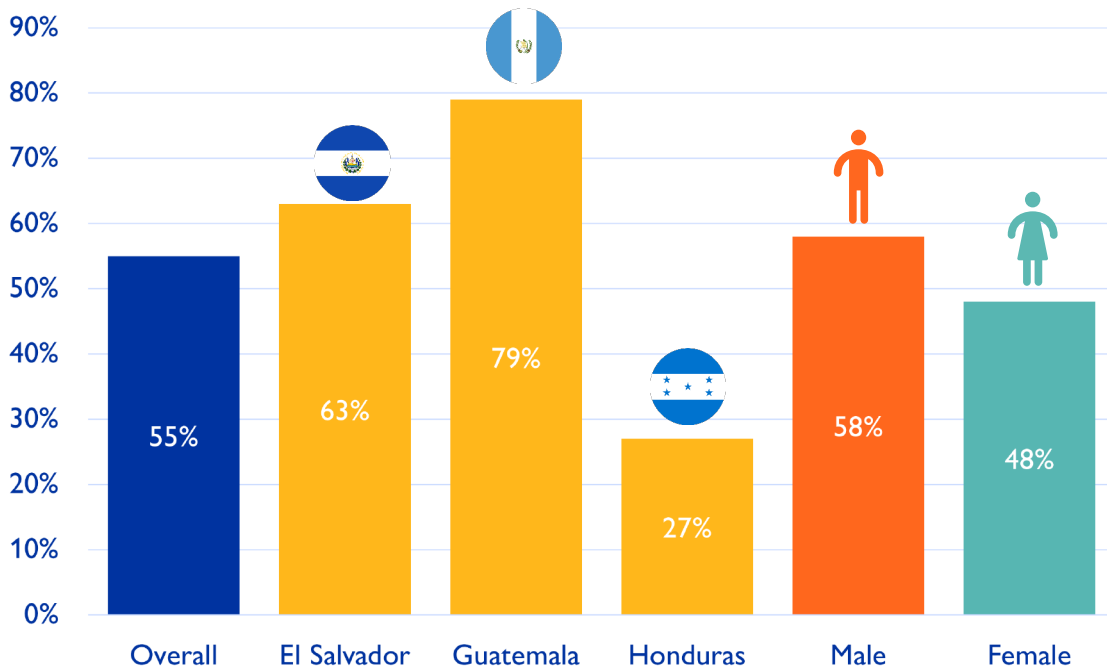
⁴⁰ n = 1,634. Respondents could choose multiple options. Totals will not add up to 1,634 (the population of identified recent migrants) given that some individuals may have migrated with multiple types of family members or with both family members and non-family members or only non-family members.

As discussed in chapter five, the use of smugglers – often termed coyotes, or polleros – to facilitate overland travel from and through Central America and Mexico toward the United States is a common phenomenon in the region.

- A total of 900, or 55 per cent of the 1,634 identified recent migrants were reported to have used the services of (a) smuggler/s during their migration journey.

This total includes both individuals travelling alone as well as individuals travelling with family members, friends, colleagues and other individuals known to them who were reported to have used the services of a smuggler. Interestingly, there was notable variation based on sex and country of origin (see Figure 37).

Figure 37. Of individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection, percentage (%) reporting the use of the services of a smuggler by country of origin, sex and overall⁴¹



It is difficult to determine the exact reasoning behind the variation in the reported use of smuggling services across countries. The low proportions in Honduras, for example, might be attributable to geographic factors, either due to dynamics of the department of origin or the point of contact between the migrant and their smuggler(s) – for example, if Honduran migrants did not make contact with smugglers until after their departure from the country, unbeknownst to the respondent.

However, perhaps more likely, the recent prominence of migrant caravans in the region – particularly from 2018 onward – may also play a role, given that significant numbers of women took part, including large numbers from Honduras (Araya, 2019). Caravans have been noted to alter the landscape of migration through the region as travel in large groups reduced the necessity to access the use of intermediaries, including smugglers (ibid.). Further targeted research may shed additional light on the validity of these hypotheses. Additionally, further research may shed light on whether migrant men are more likely to use the services of a smuggler than migrant women in the region, who, at least during the present study, were more likely to travel with another family member or individual known to them.

5.2.4 Migration costs and sources of finance

The migration process – whether undertaken through regular or irregular channels – can often entail significant costs for migrants and their families, ranging from paying for material goods necessary to complete trips, transportation services, administrative costs (such as for passports and other travel documents, or for visas), food and water during travel, accommodation and (in some cases) payment of significant fees

⁴¹ Total, n = 1,634; El Salvador, n = 522; Guatemala, n = 523; Honduras, n = 589; male, n = 1,119; female, n = 506. Sex disaggregation does not include migrants for whom gender was reported as other or was undisclosed (n = 9).

to intermediaries to facilitate travel. As mentioned in chapter three, individuals can often pay as high as USD 15,000 in order to migrate from Central America to the United States (UNODC, 2018). Migrants may also incur indirect costs associated with migration, including losing access to livelihoods while in transit.

To better understand the costs that recent migrants in NCA countries have incurred in order to migrate, respondents were asked to recall how much each individual member of their household who migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection had spent to cover their journey. Respondents reported knowing the cost spent on migration for a total of 819 from the total 1,634 individual recent migrants identified among assessed households.

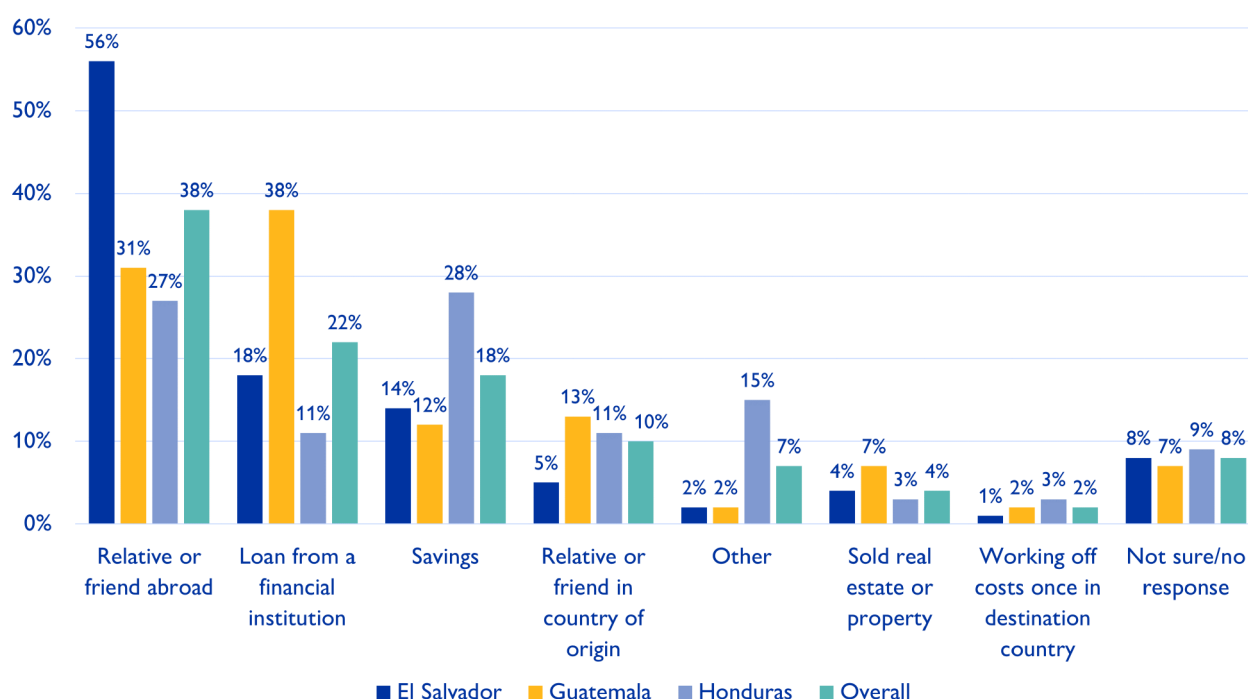
- Of the 819 individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection for whom respondents reported migration costs, the average quantity spent was about USD 5,000.

These findings are aligned with previous studies. For example, the 2017 survey on migration and remittances from El Salvador found that travelling with a coyote cost on average USD 6,384.

The above costs appear astronomical for a vast proportion of households in NCA, in light of the fact that roughly one third of respondents in the present study reported that household income was not sufficient enough to cover the purchase of food in the 30 days prior to data collection and given that more than a third of respondents reported that they were in a very critical situation or were struggling to live on their income levels at the time of data collection. In fact, the above migration costs represent as much as 17 times what assessed households would typically spend in an entire month (estimated at approximately USD 300) and are far higher than the estimated average monthly income levels reported among surveyed households (discussed in chapter four).

To understand how migrants paid for their journeys, respondents were asked to report on the sources of financing accessed for each individual who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection. The results are shown in Figure 38.

Figure 38. Of household members reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection, percentage (%) by sources of finance accessed to cover migration costs by country of origin and in total⁴²



⁴² Total, n = 1,634; El Salvador, n = 522; Guatemala, n = 523; Honduras, n = 589. Respondents could choose multiple options.

Results indicate that transnational/diaspora communities in other countries – in large part the United States – play a pivotal role in facilitating and even financing recent emigration among assessed households.

- Nearly two in every five recent migrants were reported to have received assistance – either in the form of a loan or donation – from a friend or relative abroad in order to finance their migration, reaching as high as nearly three in every five recent migrants from assessed households in El Salvador.
- Less than one in five recent migrants were reported to have relied on savings in order to finance their journeys, although migrants from assessed households in Honduras were far more likely to have been reported to have done so.

Another component that stands out is the significant levels of debt-financed migration reported among assessed households in all three countries.

- Over one in five migrants in the sample were reported to have financed their migration by taking on new debt, whether in the form of loans from a bank, from a money lender or from a cooperative or even a mortgage taken out on a house. This number reached as high as nearly two in five recent migrants identified in Guatemala.

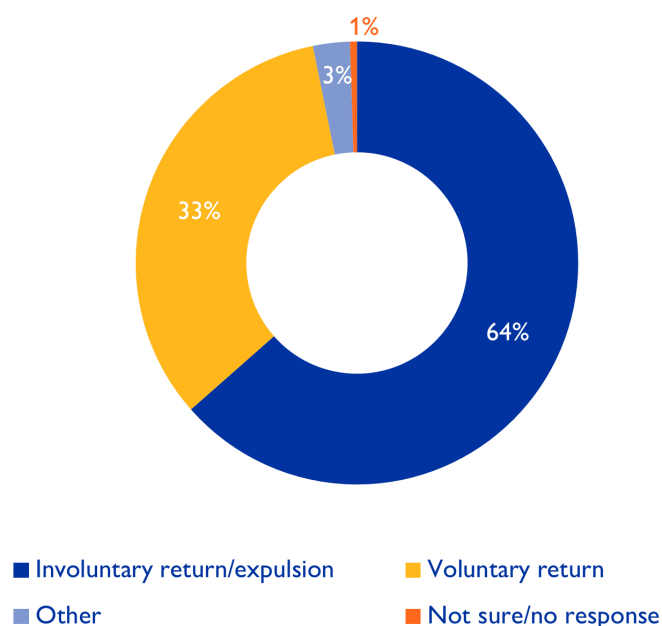
Debt-financed migration poses a number of potential risks for migrants and their families. While research on the topic is limited, some studies have noted that taking out loans to finance migration can increase the risk of exploitation, as it might pressure migrants into taking riskier decisions in transit and once abroad (IOM, 2019). Migrants may be less likely to leave exploitative situations (labour or otherwise) due to the need to repay loans, while many lack key financial literacy on how to manage debt repayments (ibid.). Given high rates of apprehensions and involuntary returns of migrants from NCA in Mexico and the United States, there is also a concrete risk that individuals financing their migration process with debts will not succeed in arriving at their intended destinations and will instead be returned to countries of origin where they have limited income sources available to repay their loans.

The high rates of debt-financed migration identified in this study highlight the need to ensure greater financial inclusion and access to sustainable credit in NCA countries. Training and information focused on building financial literacy among migrants who take out loans or are considering taking out loans would also be beneficial. These findings also reinforce the need to invest in and explore additional avenues for regular migration, including through circular labour mobility mechanisms, in order to reduce the pressures that individuals in NCA face to take on loans, reduce the possibility for exploitation and maximize the benefits of migration by ensuring that migrants' earnings can be spent productively both in countries of destination and in countries of origin, instead of on loan repayment.

5.2.5 Return migrants

Respondents were asked whether any individuals who migrated in the five years prior to data collection had returned to the household (voluntarily or involuntarily) at the time of data collection. Results show that substantial proportions of recent international migrants in the sample – 546, or one in three – had already returned to their households in countries of origin at the time of data collection (see Figure 39).

Figure 39. Of recent migrants who were reported to have returned to their households by the time of data collection, percentage (%) by reason for return⁴³



Of the 546 recent international migrants reported to have returned to households, over three in five were reported to have been returned involuntarily (for example, removed by authorities in countries of transit or destination).

This means that:

- 21 per cent or more than one in five of the 1,634 individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection identified in assessed households were involuntarily returned/removed from countries of transit or destination.

While these numbers may seem high, they appear to be largely on par with ongoing trends in the region whereby high volumes of migration have also been accompanied by high levels of returns/removals from both the United States and Mexico. Between fiscal years 2016–2019 (the most recent year for which data by country of nationality are available at the time of writing), a total of 354,036 NCA nationals were ‘removed’ by the United States (a removal is defined as a “compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal”) (US DHS, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019). This total includes 71,646 nationals from El Salvador that were removed in this four-year period, 169,118 nationals from Guatemala and 113,262 nationals from Honduras (ibid.). An additional 15,689 NCA nationals were ‘returned’ in this same period (returns are defined as a “confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien... not based on an order of removal”) (ibid.). Additionally, since the beginning of 2017 and until the end of June 2021, Mexican immigration authorities reported returning a total of 438,095 migrants from NCA to their countries of origin (UPM, Mexican Secretariat of the Interior, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021).

Of recent migrants reported to have returned voluntarily to their households at the time of data collection, the reasons reported for having returned voluntarily included family reunification, starting a business, due to having received compensation to return, illness or accident and insufficient financial resources, among other reasons.

High rates of return migration highlight the need for whole-of-migration response mechanisms in the region. While countries in NCA have built up systems to provide reception support in recent years (IOM, 2017; Ruiz et al., 2019), more resources are needed in order to ensure the sustainable return and reintegration in NCA, particularly in light of the ongoing socioeconomic and health challenges posed by COVID-19. It is encouraged that mechanisms take into account the specific needs of vulnerable groups,

⁴³ Out of all the individuals reported to have migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection who were reported to have returned to their household at the time of data collection, n = 546.

including women and children, migrants with disabilities, LGBT migrants and other vulnerable populations and that they are implemented within a framework which preserves migrants' rights and ensures their overall protection and well-being. Advancements in this area may also reduce the likelihood that returned migrants are driven to remigrate in the future (ibid.).

5.2.6 Missing and deceased migrants

- During the present study, some households reported that one or more household members had lost their lives after migrating or attempting to migrate at some moment in the past.
- Some households also reported household members who had migrated or attempted to migrate at some moment in the past and whose whereabouts were unknown at the time of data collection.

As discussed in chapter three, many migrants who embark on journeys through the regions of Central America and North America never reach their final destinations, with hundreds of migrant deaths and disappearances registered in both regions each year and likely many more unrecorded (IOM Missing Migrants Project, n.d.). On top of the tragic loss of life that can often result from migration journeys in the region and around the world, the loss of a loved one can also generate deep emotional and psychological impact and distress on relatives and friends back home, as well as economic hardships. For families and friends back home who are not aware of the whereabouts of their missing loved ones, the lack of information can prevent those affected from grieving and ultimately gaining closure (IOM Missing Migrants Project, 2021).

The identification of this tragic phenomenon during the present study highlights the immediate need for safe, humane and regular routes for migration in the Central America – Mexico – United States migration corridor in order to end migrant deaths and address the needs of families left behind.

5.3 REMITTANCES

This subsection highlights key information on the remittance profile of assessed households. Respondents were asked to answer a range of questions regarding any money or in-kind transfers that their households had received from abroad in the 12 months prior to data collection.

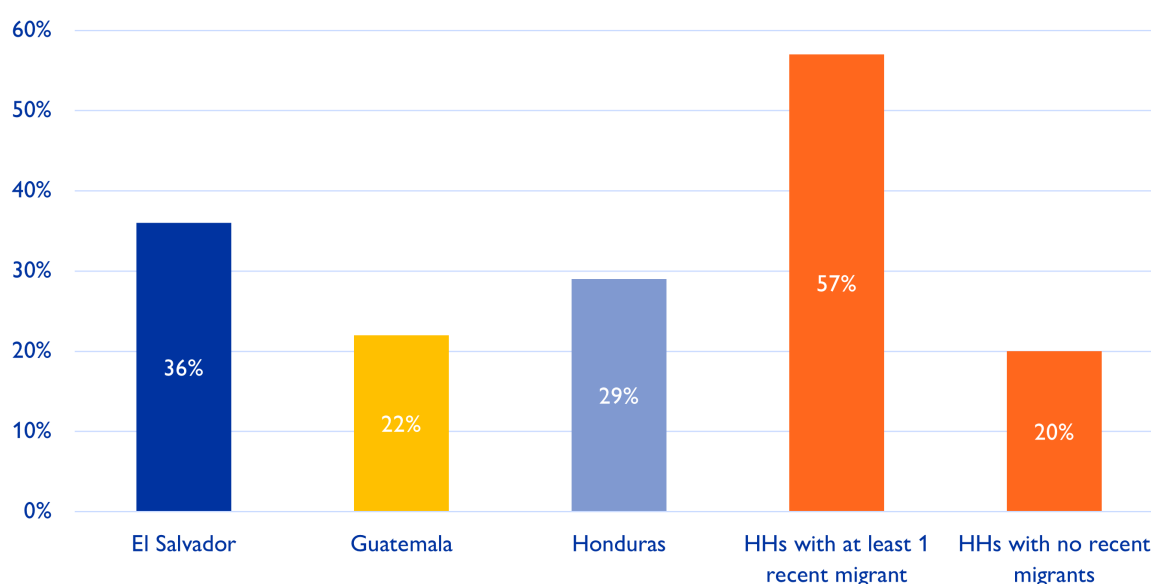
5.3.1 Households receiving remittances

- 1,447, or 29 per cent, of 4,998 assessed households reported having received remittances (either in the form of money or in-kind transfers) in the 12 months prior to data collection.
- Remittances sent to these households were estimated to directly benefit a total of over 5,150 individuals.⁴⁴

Figure 40 shows household proportions by country.

⁴⁴ Respondents were asked to report on how many individuals in their households directly benefitted from the remittances that they received.

Figure 40. Percentage (%) of assessed households reporting that they received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection, by country and by whether or not the household reported at least one member who had recently migrated internationally⁴⁵



- Households reporting that at least one individual had migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection were nearly three times more likely to report having received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection when compared with households with no recent migrants.

The proportions shown in Figure 40 appear even higher than what has been measured in previous surveys. In Honduras, for example, results from a household survey conducted by the IADB in 2014 and published in 2016 found that 17 per cent of households reported receiving remittances (IADB, 2016). In El Salvador, the National Migration and Remittances Survey (2017) found that 20 per cent of households reported receiving remittances (Ministry of Foreign Affairs El Salvador, General Directorate of Statistics and Censuses, IOM, 2017; DIGESTYC, 2021).

These high rates identified during the present survey may be because surveys were conducted in some of the highest migration districts in all three countries. COVID-19 and a bump in the influx of formal remittances received in the subregion in 2020 may also be a factor (World Bank, 2021). As discussed in chapter three, between 2019 and 2020 remittances received in Guatemala increased by seven per cent, by three per cent in Honduras and by five per cent in El Salvador, reaching record-setting levels in some months (ibid.).

5.3.2 Profile of remittance senders

Respondents were also asked to report on the principal remittance sender's relationship to household recipients. The most frequently reported answer was a child (39%), followed by a sibling (20%), a spouse/partner (10%), a parent (9%) and an uncle or aunt (6%). The predominance of children among the main remittance senders may be indicative of the fact that most recent international migrants identified in the sample were between the ages of 18 and 33. In contrast, most respondents who answered on behalf of recent migrants were over the age of 45. This would suggest that, at least in instances where the entire household has not emigrated, those individuals who do leave may be grown-up adult children, leaving older heads of households (parents) behind.

Among the 1,447 households reporting that they received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection, 883 – 61 per cent – reported that the principal remittance sender to their household was employed in the formal sector at the time of data collection. Of principal remittance senders employed in

⁴⁵ El Salvador, n = 1,703; Guatemala, n = 1,730; Honduras, n = 1,565. Households with recent migrants, n = 1,200; households without recent migrants, n = 3,798.

the formal sector, 52 per cent (463) were reported to be employed on a permanent basis while 48 per cent (420) were reported to be employed on a temporary or seasonal basis. An additional 271 principal remitters (19%) were reported to be employed in the informal sector at the time of data collection. Other principal remitters were reported to own their own business, while a few were noted to work in agricultural production.

5.3.3 Volume and characteristics of remittances

Of the 1,172 households reporting the length of time they had been receiving remittances, the average was just over six years. Sixty-four per cent (748) of these 1,172 households reported having received remittances for five years or less while 22 per cent (252) reported having received remittances for one year or less. On the other end of the spectrum, there were some households (74, or 6%) that reported having received remittances for 20 or more years.

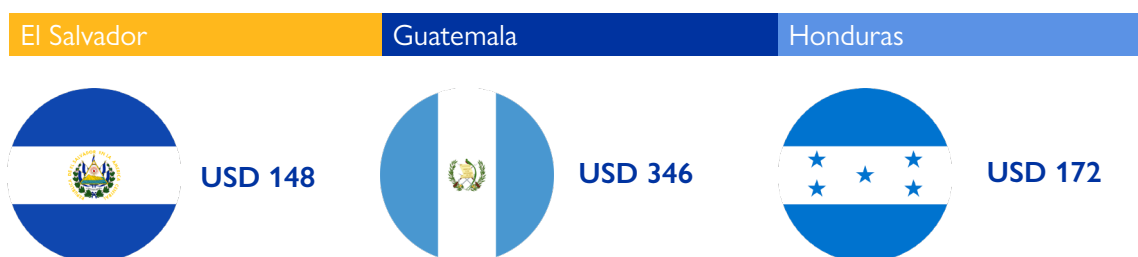
Households were asked to report on the frequency in which they received transfers. The largest proportion of households reported receiving transfers every month (2 in 5), although 12 per cent reported receiving remittances every two months, 10 per cent every three months and 10 per cent every six months. Just 15 per cent reported receiving transfers on a yearly basis (or longer).

Of the 1,447 households that reported receiving remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection, a total of 1,027 disclosed the typical amount received in every transfer.

- Of these 1,027 households, the average amount received per transfer was USD 210, while the average amount received per month was USD 242. This amount varied across the country of origin (see Figure 41).

Figure 41. The average amount received (in USD) per remittance transfer (top) and per month (bottom) by country of origin, among remittance-receiving households that disclosed this information⁴⁶

Per transfer:



Per month:



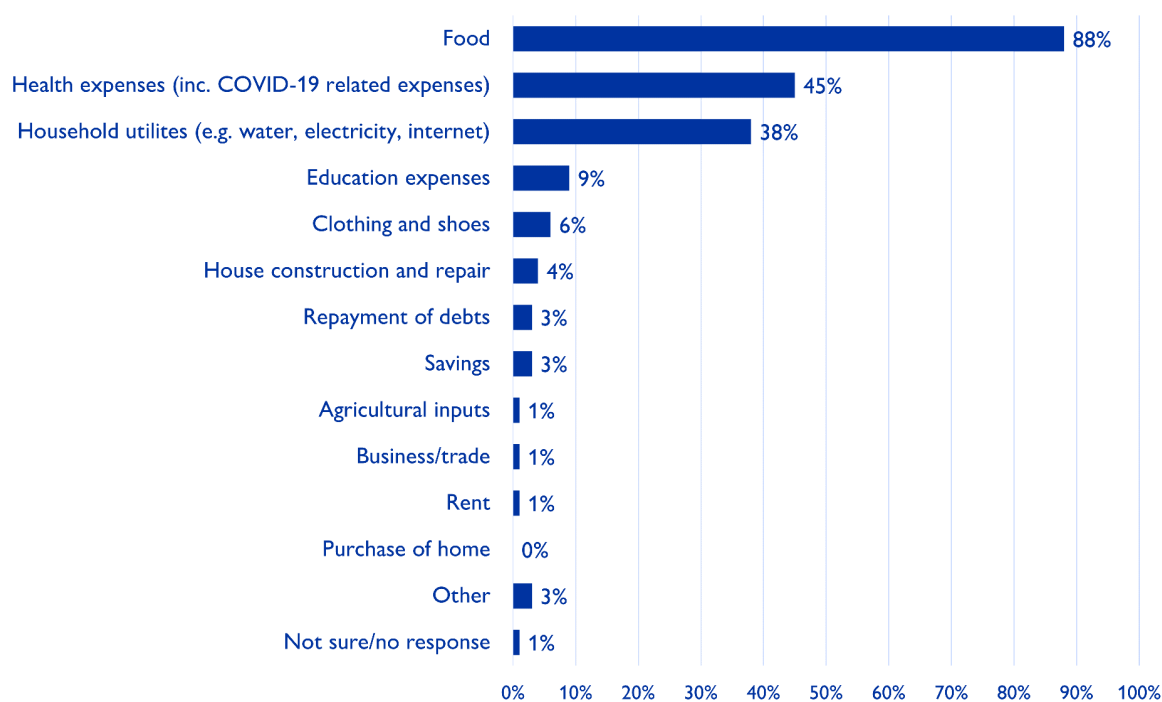
- The average reported amount received per remittance transfer is nearly half the estimated average monthly expenditure of assessed households in El Salvador (USD 331), 1.3 times greater than the estimated average monthly expenditure of assessed households in Guatemala (USD 274) and 56 per cent of the estimated average monthly expenditure of assessed households in Honduras (USD 306).

⁴⁶ Average transfer amounts are based on data reported by a total of n = 1,027 households that disclosed the typical amount of money received in each transfer. By country: El Salvador, n = 479; Guatemala, n = 289 and Honduras, n = 259. Respondents could report totals in different currencies. In virtually all occasions totals were reported either in USD or in the local currency of the household's country of origin (in Guatemala, the quetzal or GTQ, in Honduras, the lempira, or HNL, and in El Salvador, the colón or SVC).

5.3.4 Main uses of remittances

Finally, to assess how money received from abroad was spent in countries of origin, households that reported receiving remittances were given a list of different options ranging anywhere from food to rent or health costs and asked to report on whether they had used remittances received to pay for each type of expense. A total of 1,416 remittance-receiving households disclosed this information.

Figure 42. Households reporting how remittances received in the 12 months prior to data collection were spent, by percentage (%) of how remittances were spent on each expense category⁴⁷



- The vast majority of households reported spending remittances on meeting basic needs such as food, health care and housing-related costs, while far smaller proportions reported spending remittances on repaying debts, savings or purchase of properties, among other expense categories.
- Households reporting that they spent remittances on food reported spending an average of 64 per cent of all remittances received on this expense alone.

The above findings would suggest that, far from being a supplemental source of income for recipient households to spend on more long-term investments or savings, or on productive goods, remittances instead form the foundation of many recipient households' ability to afford daily necessities. This is particularly crucial to consider given the current COVID-19 operating context, which has seen notable increases in food insecurity, unemployment and poverty in the subregion, discussed both in this chapter as well as in chapters five and six. Increases in food security witnessed in the region in late 2020 and through to 2021 have also been attributed to the ongoing impacts of Hurricanes Eta and Iota which struck the region in November of 2020, together decimating hundreds of thousands of hectares of staple food and cash crops, destroying homes and farms and leading to decreased food stocks (WFP, 2021).

It is worth noting that the proportion of households reporting that their current incomes at the time of data collection were sufficient to pay for food differed significantly between households reporting having received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection versus those who did not report having received any remittances in this time period:

- Of the 1,447 assessed households reporting having received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection, 29 per cent reported that their income levels at the time of data collection were sufficient to afford food.

⁴⁷ n = 1,416.

- On the other hand, of the 3,532 households reporting not having received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection, just 14 per cent reported that their income levels at the time of data collection were sufficient to afford food.

The above contrast would perhaps suggest that for a certain number of assessed households, remittances could be making the difference between having enough money to pay for food and not having enough money to do so. This has been determined as statistically probable in chapter nine.

5.4 INTERNAL AND CROSS-BORDER CIRCULAR MOBILITY

This section briefly highlights key findings from the two modules on internal mobility and cross-border circular (or pendular) mobility included in the present survey.

5.4.1 Overview, methodologies and limitations of measuring internal and circular mobility

Internal migration – There is not a formally adopted legal or statistical international (UN) definition for internal migration. The IOM Glossary on Migration defines internal migration as “the movement of people within a State involving the establishment of a new temporary or permanent residence” (p. 108) (IOM, 2019). Typically, population and housing censuses are the most commonly used and referenced sources of data on internal migration. The phenomenon is usually measured by asking respondents to self-report their place of current residence at the time of data collection, which is then compared to their reported past residence, usually based on a minimum period (or minimum periods) of time (for example, 12 months, 5 years or based on place of birth) (Kirchberger, 2021) In general, the time periods involved differ across countries and even across surveys within countries (ibid.).

In the present study, respondents were not asked to report on previous and current places of residence and were not given a minimum threshold of time in order for household members to qualify under the internal mobility category. Rather, respondents were prompted to report on the number of individuals who currently or previously formed part of their household that had engaged in internal mobility to another area of their same country in the five years prior to data collection, either on a permanent or temporary basis. Respondents were also asked to report on the frequency in which household members engaged in this internal mobility (every week or less, every 15 days, every month, every two months, every three months, every six months, once per year or other). Respondents were asked to indicate which department they had gone to and also if they had engaged in internal mobility to a rural or urban area (for example, to specify whether the movement was between cities, municipalities or departments). Given that this question covered the broad dynamics of mobility related to work, study, commerce, health, tourism or otherwise, **it is not an accurate proxy to measure internal migration**. Readers are discouraged from making comparisons between the information presented in section 5.4 and the information on international migrants presented in sections 5.1-5.3.

The same can be said for temporary, recurrent movements of individuals across borders to other countries:

Circular (or pendular) migration – as with internal migration, there is not a formally adopted legal or statistical international (United Nations) definition for circular (or pendular) migration. IOM’s Glossary on Migration defines circular migration as “a form of migration in which people repeatedly move back and forth between two or more countries” (IOM, 2019). The phenomenon is often conceptualized differently by different actors, between those who include single back-and-forth movements with limited periods of stay in the country of destination (as per the definition employed in the European Union, for example) versus other actors who see circular migration as repeated movements, in order to differentiate from/or represent a specific type of temporary migration (UN Economic Commission for Europe, UNECE, 2016). Although beyond the scope of this report, various authors have proposed different methodologies and typologies to measure circular migration (see, for example, Agunias and Newland, 2007; Fargues, 2008; or Triandafyllidou, 2010) (ibid).

Due to the limitations in defining and measuring circular/pendular migration, the present study instead adopted a broader definition of the concept, focusing on measuring dynamics of recurrent cross-border movements of NCA nationals to other countries, whether for work, commerce, study, health, tourism or

otherwise, with respondents asked to report on the number of household members who had travelled back and forth repeatedly to another country in the five years prior to data collection.

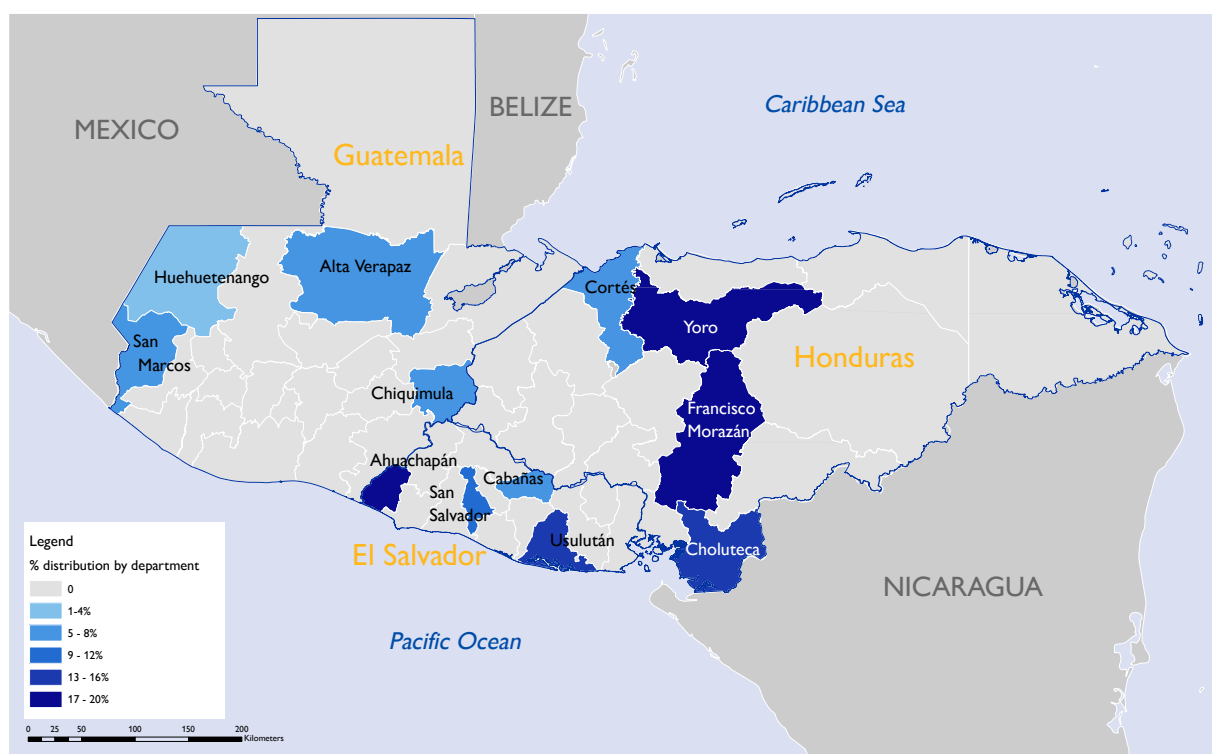
The subsequent subsections summarize the key findings of these two mobility dynamics.

5.4.2 Household and individual profile – internal mobility

Out of a total of 4,998 households,

- 471 – corresponding to nine per cent – reported that at least one member had engaged in internal mobility toward another area within their own country, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, in the five years prior to data collection.⁴⁸

Map 2. Percentage (%) of households reporting at least one member who had engaged in internal mobility to another area within their own country in the five years prior to data collection by department⁴⁹



Note: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM or WFP.

Dynamics of internal mobility are likely localized and unique to each assessed department. As such, observations by country are difficult, as lower or higher proportions could be a product of where surveys were realized (for example, departments located near the border with other countries, such as Huehuetenango and San Marcos in Guatemala might show lower levels of individuals reported to have participated in internal mobility and greater relative levels of circular/pendular mobility to and from Mexico, given its proximity). Other zones may demonstrate lower or higher proportions of internal mobility due to labour market, rural/urban, environmental or other dynamics. Map 2 above thus illustrates household proportions by assessed department. In El Salvador, four per cent of surveyed households in Cabañas, six per cent in San Salvador, nine per cent in Usulután and 13 per cent in Ahuachapán reported that

⁴⁸ Note: Respondents could report on whether the same individual had engaged both in internal mobility in the five years prior to data collection as well as if the same individual had migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection. As such, these phenomena were not exclusive and having migrated internationally would not have affected reported dynamics of internal mobility among the surveyed population.

⁴⁹ Proportions are from of all surveyed households in each of the assessed zones. El Salvador: Ahuachapán, n = 526; Cabañas, n = 313; San Salvador, n = 353; Usulután, n = 511. Guatemala: Alta Verapaz, n = 405; Chiquimula, n = 392; Huehuetenango, n = 437 and San Marcos, n = 496. Honduras: Choluteca, n = 386; Cortes, n = 408; Francisco Morazan, n = 385 and Yoro, n = 386.

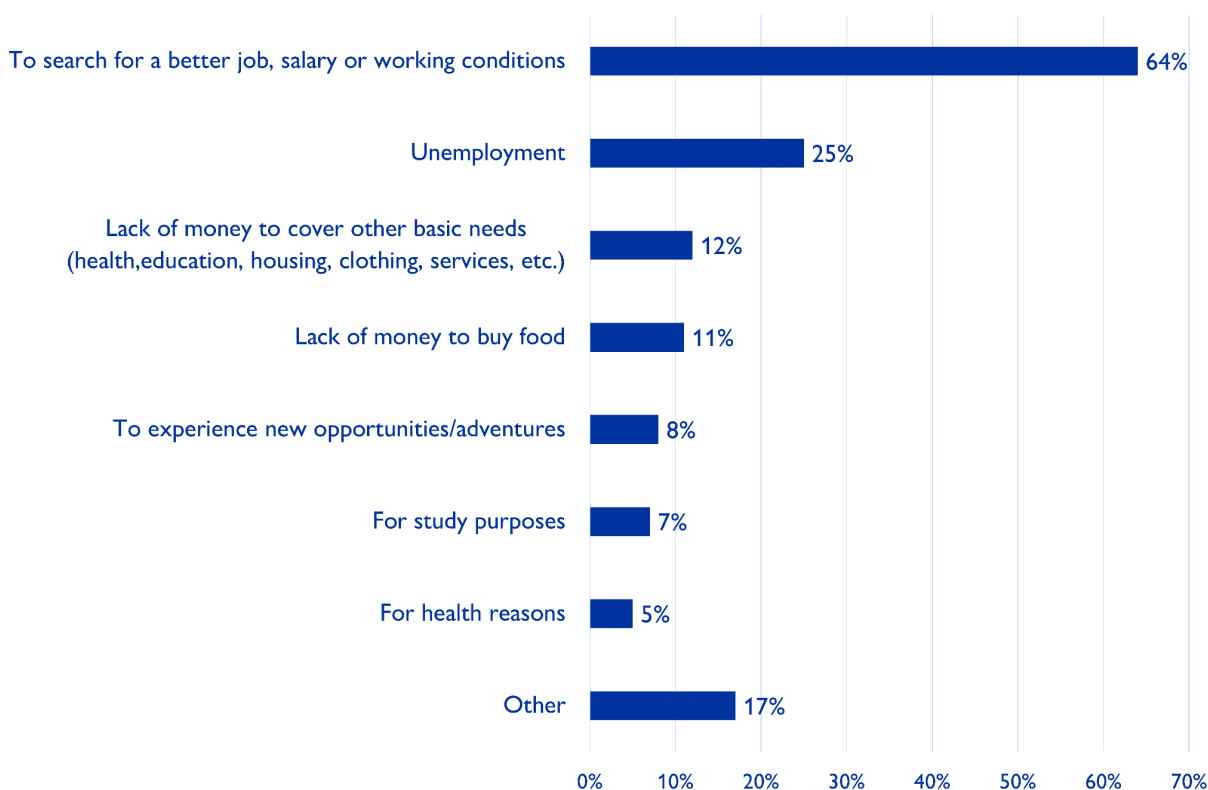
at least one member had engaged in internal mobility to another area within their own country in the five years prior to data collection. In Guatemala, these proportions reached four per cent in Huehuetenango, five per cent in Chiquimula and Alta Verapaz and six per cent in San Marcos. In Honduras, these proportions reached five per cent in Cortes, 14 per cent in Choluteca, 20 per cent in Francisco Morazan and 20 per cent in Yoro.

Of households reporting that at least one member had engaged in internal mobility toward another area within their own country in the five years prior to data collection, the vast majority (344, or 73%) reported that just one member had done so.

Among the 471 households with members who engaged in internal mobility, there were a total of 679 individuals identified. Of these 679 individuals, 183 (27%) were reported to have moved permanently, while 448 (66%) were reported to have engaged in internal mobility on a temporary basis.⁵⁰ Fifty-seven per cent (387) of these individuals were male, while 42 per cent (286) were female.⁵¹

Of all individuals reported to have engaged in internal mobility in the five years prior to data collection, 448 (two thirds) were reported to have travelled or moved to an urban area as their destination while 176 (26%) were reported to have travelled or moved to a rural area as their destination. Forty (6%) travelled/moved to both rural and urban areas.⁵² Figure 43 below shows the principal motivations cited by respondents for why individuals were perceived to have engaged in internal mobility in recent years.

Figure 43. Top eight motivations reported for why household members were perceived to have engaged in internal mobility to another area within their own country in the five years prior to data collection⁵³



Very few individuals were reported to have engaged in internal mobility due to natural hazards, insecurity and loss of land, all three of which did not appear among the top eight motivations cited by respondents.

The above is perhaps surprising given that Hurricanes Eta and Iota had occurred recently – which may reflect patterns of displacement and return not considered by respondents when answering this question. Otherwise, this may be perhaps because those displaced still remained within the boundaries of their departments of residence in Guatemala and Honduras (El Salvador did not witness large numbers of

⁵⁰ Respondents were not sure/did not provide a response for a total of 48 individuals for this question.

⁵¹ For six individuals respondents reported sex as other or did not disclose this information.

⁵² Respondents were not sure/did not provide a response for a total of 15 individuals for this question.

⁵³ n = 679.

internal displacements as a result of these weather events) (IOM, 2020). Cross-referencing displacement data from Eta and Iota with the present study shows that there were considerable levels of new displacements registered in many assessed departments in this study, specifically Yoro, Francisco Morazán, and Cortes (in Honduras) and Alta Verapaz (in Guatemala) (ibid.).

5.4.3 Household and individual profile – circular/pendular mobility to other countries

Out of a total of 4,998 households,

- 254 or five per cent of households reported that at least one individual had travelled back and forth on a recurring basis to another country in the five years prior to data collection.

Within these 254 households, a total of 336 individuals were identified. A greater number (171, or 51%) were female than male (162 or 48%).⁵⁴ Twenty individuals (6%) were minors (ages 0– 7) while 257 (76%) were between the ages of 18 and 64. A total of 59 individuals, or 18 per cent, were ages 65 and older. Respondents were asked to report on the main reasons why each individual was perceived to have travelled recurrently to and from another country. The majority were reported to have travelled recurrently back and forth for four main reasons:

- 40 per cent – visit relatives and friends
- 32 per cent – tourism
- 25 per cent – employment
- 6 per cent – business purposes

The vast majority of individuals who were reported to have recurrently travelled back and forth to another country in the five years prior to data collection were reported to have travelled to just five main countries:

- 63 per cent – United States
- 11 per cent – Mexico
- 11 per cent – Guatemala
- 5 per cent – El Salvador
- 2 per cent – Honduras
- 19 per cent – Other

The above information shows that, aside from being an important destination of migrants from NCA, the United States is also an important destination for recurrent circular mobility of NCA nationals, whether for business, tourism, employment or other purposes.

Many of the individuals reported to have travelled recurrently to Mexico were from Guatemala, most likely predicated on the close geographic proximity and economic relationship between the two countries. The prevalence of NCA countries in the top five shows that recurrent intraregional cross-border mobility between the three countries is still an important phenomenon.

Some of the other countries that were listed among destinations of recurrent international travel included Spain, Italy, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama and Belize.

⁵⁴ Three individual respondents reported sex as other or did not disclose this information.

6. MIGRATION INTENTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

6.1 OVERVIEW – INTENTIONS TO MIGRATE

This section briefly analyses responses to individual-level questions asked of respondents regarding their desires, plans and preparations to migrate, both internally and internationally. The section also presents the main reasons reported by respondents for why they had the desire to migrate as well as the reasons why other respondents reported the desire to remain in their current residence.

Migration intentions were measured using three key axes designed to distinguish between desires, plans and preparations (IOM, 2011). Firstly, respondents were asked a hypothetical question about whether:

- (1) if given the opportunity, they would like to move permanently to another country at some point in the future.

Then, those who responded affirmatively to this hypothetical question were asked whether:

- (2) they were actually planning to move permanently to another country within the next 12 months following data collection.

Finally, those who indicated that they were planning to move permanently to another country in the next 12 months following data collection were asked if:

- (3) they had already engaged in concrete preparations to do so by the time of data collection.

The same sequence of questions was repeated to inquire about desires, plans and preparations to migrate internally to another department in the same country as well (discussed in section 6.3).

According to the JRC of the European Commission, understanding the intentions of migration and distinguishing these actual intentions from general desires (which may or may not be acted upon) is important in helping to determine which potential migrants actually have the capabilities (financial or otherwise) to leave. Measuring this distinction is relevant in order to better anticipate migration movements and improve plans and programmes to manage migration in countries of origin, transit and destination (JRC, 2018).

Readers are informed that the vast majority of the respondents were non-migrant women, a situation that may skew the results and opinions regarding the intention to migrate, the reasons for wanting to migrate as well as the reasons for wanting to remain at their current residence.⁵⁵

6.2 DESIRES, PLANS AND PREPARATIONS TO MIGRATE INTERNATIONALLY

6.2.1 Overview of international migration intentions

This section covers findings on desires, plans and preparations to migrate internationally. Of the 4,998 respondents assessed across 12 departments in all three countries:

- 43 per cent (corresponding to a total of 2,153 respondents) reported that they would like to move permanently to another country at some point in the future if they had the opportunity, while
- 55 per cent (corresponding to 2,769 respondents) did not report the desire to do so.⁵⁶

Table 19 shows the breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans or preparations to migrate internationally by various characteristics.

⁵⁵ Male respondents, n = 1,322; female respondents, n = 3,675 (total = 4,998).

⁵⁶ Seventy-six (76) respondents reported “do not know / prefer not to answer”, corresponding to two per cent of the total sample.

Table 19. Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate permanently to another country by sex, age group and recent household migration profile⁵⁷

	% of respondents reporting the desire to migrate abroad at any point in the future	% of respondents reporting that they planned to migrate abroad in the 12 months following data collection	% of respondents reporting that they had already engaged in specific preparations to migrate abroad by the time of data collection
Total (yes)	43	6	3
Sex			
Female	42	6	3
Male	45	9	4
Age Groups			
18–34	55	9	4
35–44	49	7	3
45+	32	5	2
Household recent migration profile			
HHs with least 1 recent migrant	55	12	7
HHs without recent migrants	39	5	2

The above Table 19 reflects that while significant proportions of respondents expressed the desire to migrate, very few were actually planning on doing so in the 12 months following data collection (question 2) while just three per cent communicated that they had already engaged in specific preparations to do so (question 3). These results tend to align with existing migration literature highlighting that although many people express a desire to migrate, the number of people who actually prepare to migrate or have the means to do so is much lower (GMDAC, 2017).

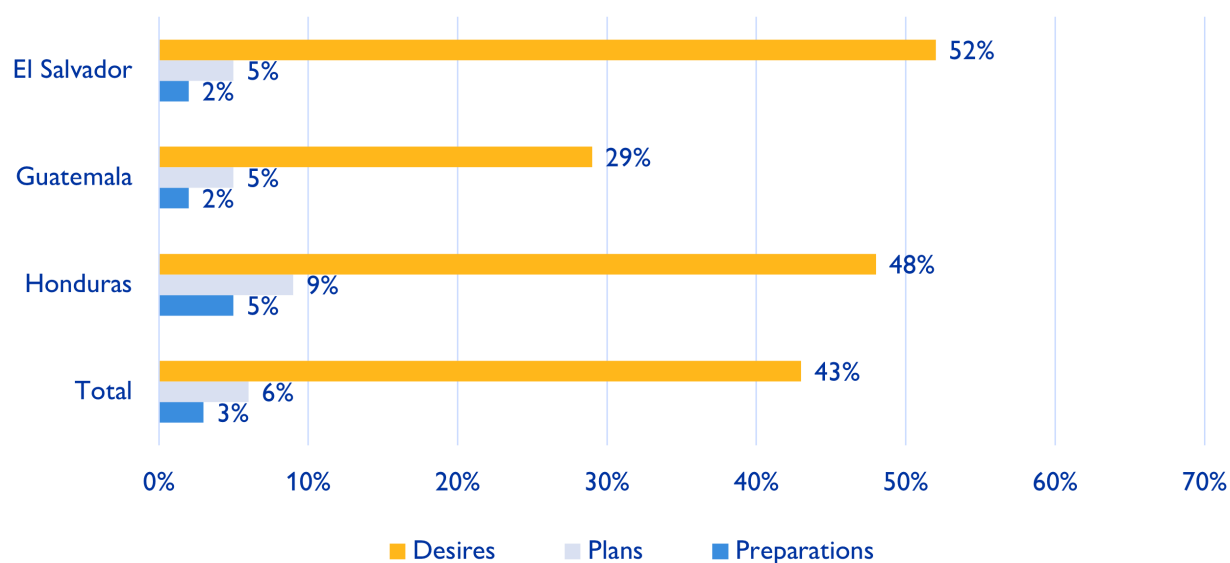
Proportions in Table 19 also reveal variations by sex, given that slightly higher proportions of male respondents (45%) reported that they desired, planned to or had already engaged in specific preparations to migrate internationally when compared to female respondents (42%). Regarding age, younger people (ages 18–34) were more likely to report desires, plans and preparations to migrate, with proportions expressing migration intentions decreasing among older respondents.

Another relevant aspect that influences the intention to migrate is having at least one member of the household who had migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection. The proportion of respondents reporting the desire to migrate was 16 percentage points higher for respondents living in households with at least one recent migrant when compared with households with no recent migrants. In addition, larger proportions of respondents from households with at least one recent migrant reported actually planning to migrate in the 12 months following data collection as well as having already engaged in preparations to migrate at the time of the survey, which suggests a greater concrete migration potential in the near future.

El Salvador was the country with the highest proportion of respondents in assessed zones who expressed the desire to migrate at some point in the future, reaching more than half of all respondents in the country (52%). However, while respondents in El Salvador were more likely to report desires to migrate, respondents in Honduras were slightly more likely to report that they were actually planning on migrating in the 12 months following data collection and/or that they had already engaged in concrete preparations to do so at the time of survey (see Figure 44).

⁵⁷ “Recent household migration profile” refers to whether or not the household reported that at least one member had migrated or attempted to migrate internationally in the five years prior to data collection.

Figure 44. Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate permanently to another country by country of origin⁵⁸



6.2.2 Reasons reported for the desire to migrate internationally

Respondents were also asked what the main reasons were for their desire to move permanently to another country at some point in the future (see Figure 45). Overall, most respondents who reported the desire to migrate internationally at some point in the future were motivated by economic conditions such as the search for a better job, unemployment and lack of money to cover basic needs.

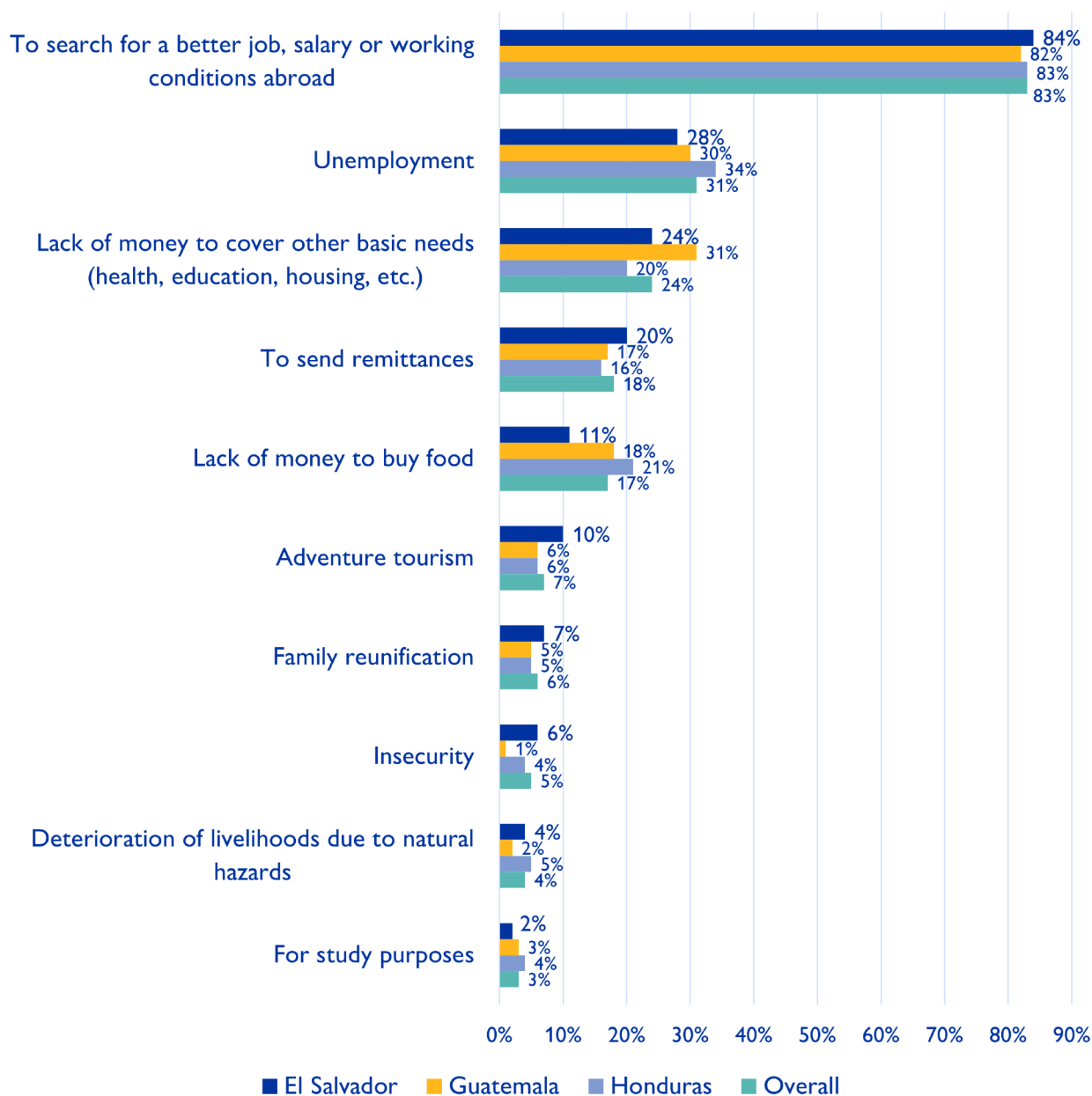
Of those respondents reporting the desire to migrate permanently to another country at some point in the future: approximately 80 per cent reported searching for a better job, salary or working conditions abroad as the main reason for wanting to do so.

Respondents in Honduras reported unemployment, lack of money to buy food and deterioration of livelihoods due to natural hazards as the main reasons for wanting to migrate at some point in the future in notably higher proportions when compared with respondents in El Salvador and Guatemala. On the other hand, respondents in El Salvador identified sending remittances (20%) and family reunification (8%) as the main reasons for wanting to migrate at some point in the future. The above may be explained by the vast Salvadoran diaspora in the United States (estimated at 2.8 million individuals as of 2019) which may likely be a strong pull factor for family reunification. (MPI, 2021). The lack of money to buy non-food basic needs (such as health or education) featured more prominently among respondents in Guatemala (31%) reporting the desire to migrate at some point in the future when compared with respondents in El Salvador and Honduras (see Figure 45).

Other reasons, such as insecurity, climate and environmental change (including land-use changes, the direct impact of natural hazards or degradation of means of subsistence due to natural hazards) and personal reasons, such as studying, were mentioned as potential reasons for moving to another country as well, but in far smaller proportions.

⁵⁸ Total respondents: 4,998 (desire, n = 2,153; planning, n = 322 and preparation, n = 160). By country: El Salvador, n = 1,703 (desire, n = 891; planning, n = 88 and preparation n = 42); Honduras, n = 1,565 (desire, n = 757; planning, n = 145 and preparation n = 76); Guatemala n = 1,730 (desire, n = 505; planning, n = 89 and preparation, n = 42).

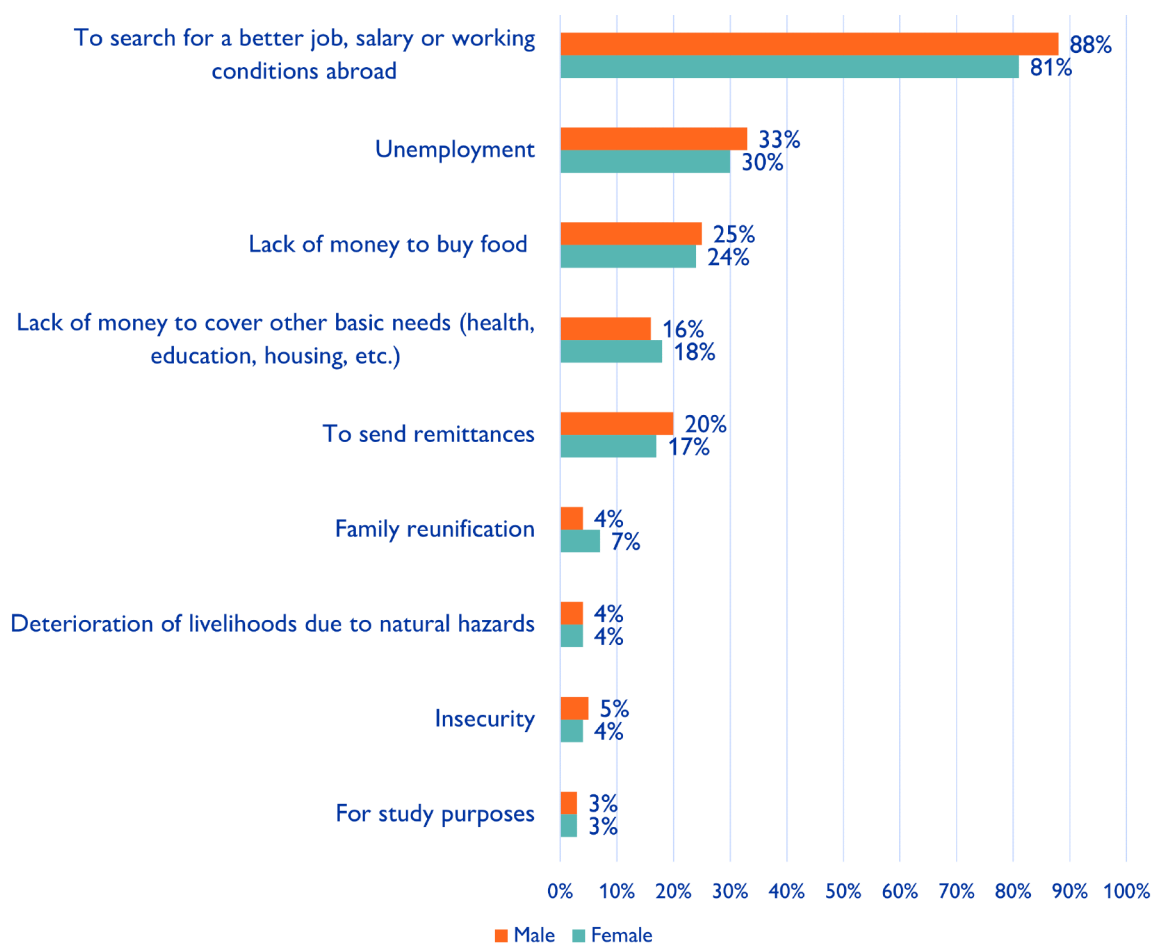
Figure 45. Of respondents reporting the desire to move permanently to another country at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main motivations for wanting to do so (by country of origin and overall)⁵⁹



In regard to the sex of the respondents, both males and females stated that the main reasons for wanting to move permanently to another country at some point in the future were the search for better jobs, salary and working conditions (88% and 81%, respectively), unemployment (33% and 30%, respectively) and lack of money to cover basic needs such as health, education and housing (25% for males and 24% for females). Higher proportions of male respondents reported sending remittances (20%) as an important reason for migrating while female respondents more frequently mentioned lack of money to buy food (18%) and family reunification (7%) as reasons for wanting to migrate (see Figure 46).

⁵⁹ The figure is out of all respondents reporting the desire to migrate permanently to another country at some point in the future; in total, n = 2,153; by country: El Salvador, n = 891; Honduras, n = 757 and Guatemala, n = 505. Respondents could choose multiple options.

Figure 46. Of respondents reporting the desire to move permanently to another country at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main motivations for wanting to do so by sex⁶⁰



6.2.3 Preparations to move to another country

Those respondents who reported that they had already engaged in specific preparations to move permanently to another country by the time of data collection (corresponding to 160 respondents, or three per cent of the total) were asked what kind of preparations they had engaged in.

- The vast majority of the respondents in this group – approximately 50 per cent – reported having saved money as their main preparation to move to another country.

Additionally, many respondents reported having contacted people in the country of destination (amounting to 24% of those who reported having engaged in specific preparations) as another type of preparation, especially among Salvadoran respondents. This was followed by preparing and obtaining documentation for travel (reported by 17% of respondents in this group). In smaller proportions, respondents also reported taking out loans to finance migration costs as well as having contacted a coyote to arrange travel.⁶¹

6.2.4 Respondents who expressed the desire to migrate internationally but did not plan on doing so in the next 12 months

Many of the respondents who reported the desire to migrate permanently to another country at some point in the future reported that they were not planning on migrating within the 12 months following data collection. Those falling in this category reached 1,812 respondents, or 84 per cent of the 2,153 respondents who expressed the desire to migrate internationally at some point in the future. Individuals falling within this subset were subsequently asked about the main reasons for why they did not plan on migrating despite

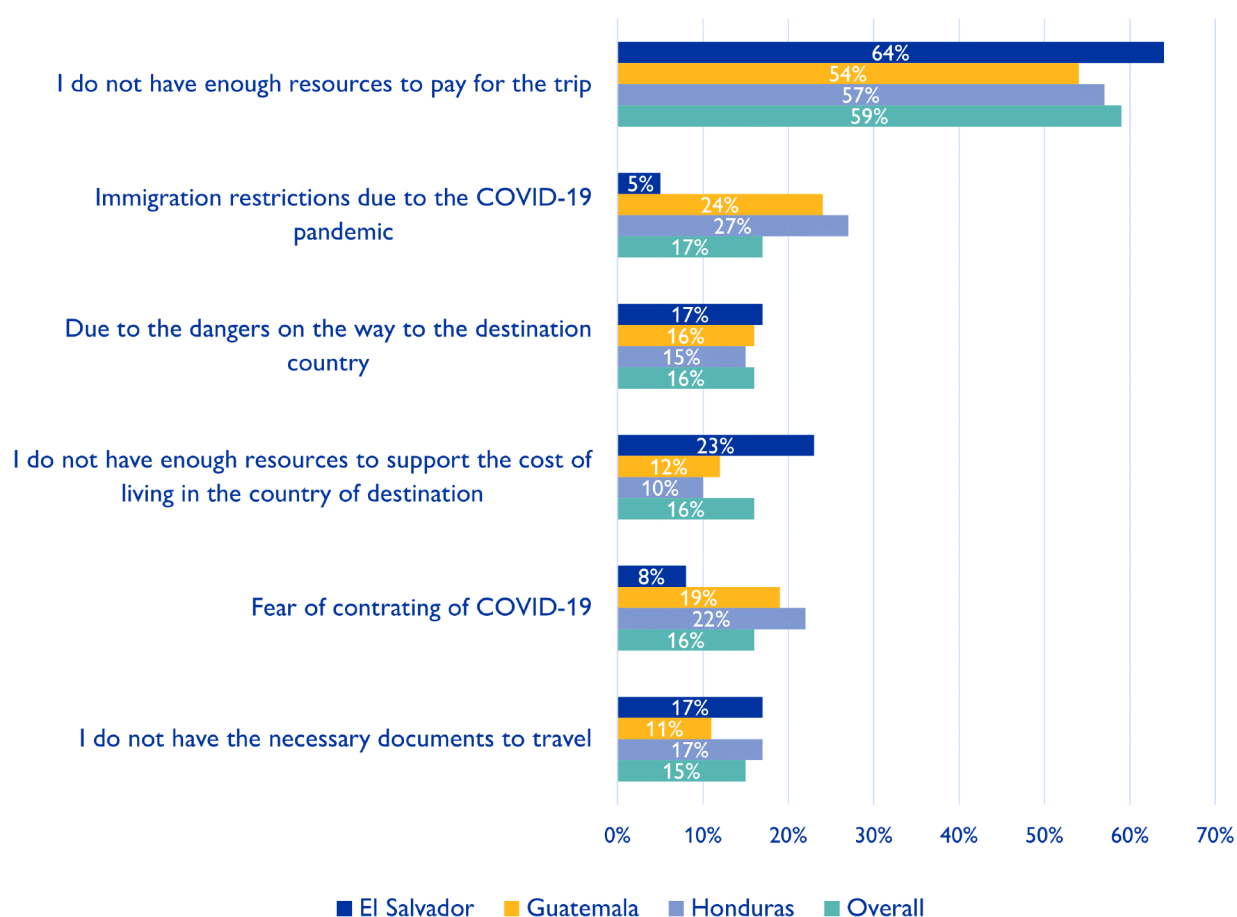
⁶⁰ The figure is out of all respondents reporting the desire to migrate permanently to another country at some point in the future; in total, n = 2,153; male, n = 596 and female, n = 1,557. Respondents could choose multiple options.

⁶¹ A coyote is a local colloquial term often utilized in the region to refer to an individual who assists in the smuggling of migrants.

having the desire to do so (see breakdown in Figure 47). In large part, most individuals falling within this group – 59 per cent – reported the lack of resources to pay for the trip as the main reason that prevented them from planning to migrate in the 12 months following data collection. This was by far the main reason cited by respondents across all the three countries, especially in El Salvador, where the proportion reached 64 per cent.⁶²

Moreover, it is relevant to highlight that the current pandemic caused by COVID-19 played an important role in influencing migration plans and preparations. Among the respondents in Guatemala and Honduras, restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were the second most frequently reported reason, corresponding to 24 and 27 per cent of respondents in this group, respectively. Another relevant reason reported by respondents in all three countries was the lack of resources to support the cost of living in the country of destination as well as the dangers present during the journey to the country of destination (reported by 16% of all respondents in this group).

Figure 47. Of respondents reporting that they did not have plans to migrate abroad in the 12 months following data collection despite expressing the desire to migrate abroad at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main reasons why (by country and overall)⁶³



6.3 DESIRES, PLANS AND PREPARATIONS TO MIGRATE INTERNALLY

6.3.1 Overview of internal migration intentions

Aside from desires to migrate internationally, respondents were also asked similar questions regarding whether they would like to migrate internally to another department in their own country of origin.

⁶² Corresponding to 515 respondents out of 802 in El Salvador.

⁶³ This figure is out of all respondents who reported that they did not have plans to migrate in the 12 months following data collection despite expressing the desire to migrate at some point in the future: In total: n = 1,821; by country: El Salvador, n = 802; Honduras, n = 598 and Guatemala, n = 421. Respondents could choose multiple options.

- One in four respondents – 24 per cent – reported that they would like to migrate internally to another department in their country at some point in the future, with the proportion reporting the desire to do so being relatively equal when disaggregated by sex (24% among female respondents and 23% among male respondents).
- Three-fourths (75%) of respondents reported that they did not have any desire to migrate internally at some point in the future.⁶⁴

The proportion of respondents reporting the desire to migrate internally was higher among respondents who reported that another member of their household had already engaged in internal mobility to another part of their country in the five years prior to data collection (38%) compared to respondents living in households where no members had engaged in internal mobility to another part of their own country of origin in the specified period (22%).

The highest proportions of respondents expressing the desire to migrate internally at some point in the future were in El Salvador (where 30% of respondents reported the desire to do so). However, higher proportions of respondents in Honduras and Guatemala reported actually planning on doing so in the 12 months following data collection and having already engaged in concrete preparations at the time of the survey (see Table 20). Respondents in Honduras showed the greatest propensity to have made internal migration plans.

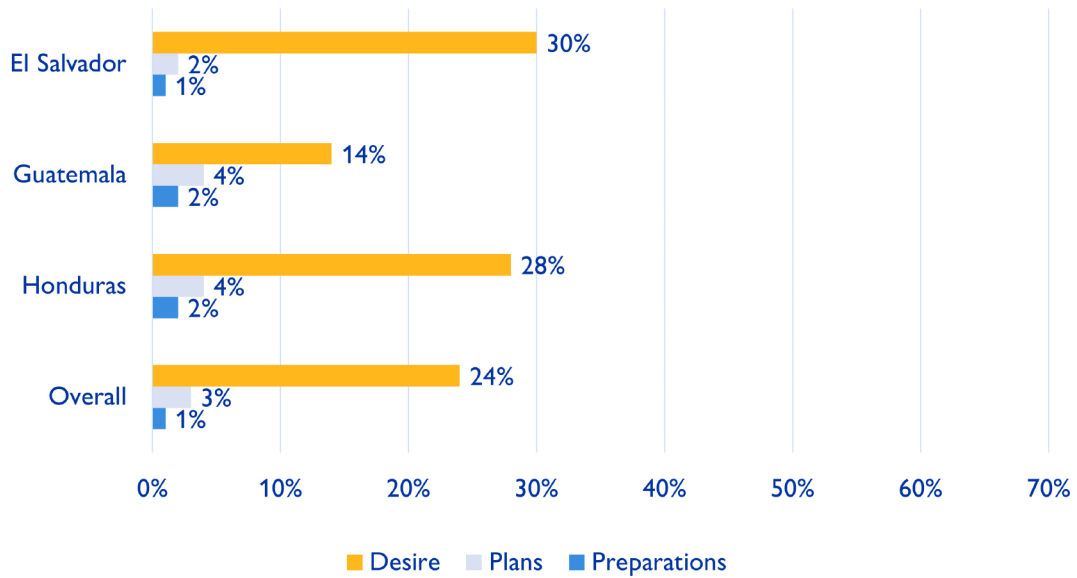
Table 20. Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate internally to another department in their country by sex, age group and recent household internal mobility profile⁶⁵

	% of respondents reporting the desire to migrate internally at any point in the future	% of respondents reporting that they planned to migrate internally in the 12 months following data collection	% of respondents reporting that they had already engaged in specific preparations to migrate internally at the time of data collection
Total (yes)	24	3	1
Sex			
Female	24	3	1
Male	23	4	2
Age Group			
18–34	29	4	1
35–44	27	4	1
45+	19	3	1
Household recent internal mobility profile			
HHs with least one 1 member who engaged in recent internal mobility	38	10	5
HHs without members who engaged in recent internal mobility	22	3	1

⁶⁴ A total of 62 respondents (1%) selected “do not know/prefer not to answer”.

⁶⁵ “Recent household internal mobility profile” refers to whether or not the household reported that at least one member had engaged in internal mobility to another department in their own country in the five years prior to data collection, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. See explanation in section 5.4.1 for further information.

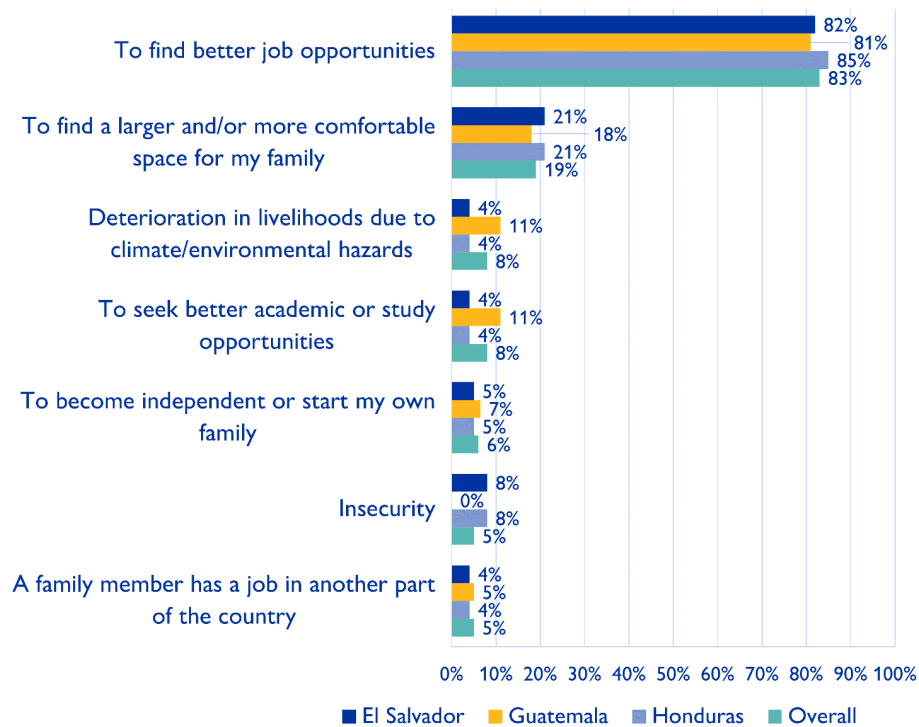
Figure 48. Breakdown of respondents reporting desires, plans and/or specific preparations to migrate internally to another department in their country, by country of residence and overall⁶⁶



6.3.2 Reasons reported for the desire to migrate internally

Among the respondents who reported the desire to migrate internally at some point in the future, the majority (83%) reported wanting to do so in order to obtain better job opportunities, while a smaller yet notable proportion reported wanting to find a larger/more comfortable space or home for themselves and their families. Others cited climate and environmental motivations while some reported wanting to migrate internally to pursue academic/study opportunities. There was no significant variation in reasons for wanting to migrate internally when disaggregated by respondent sex.

Figure 49. Of respondents reporting the desire to migrate internally to another department in their country of origin, percentage (%) by main motivations for wanting to do so by country and overall⁶⁷



⁶⁶ Total respondents: 4,998 (desire, n = 1,183; planning, n = 163 and preparation, n = 66). By countries: El Salvador, n = 1,703 (desire, n = 507; planning, n = 33 and preparation, n = 9); Honduras, n = 1,565 (desire, n = 433; planning, n = 66 and preparation, n = 29). Guatemala, n = 1,730 (desire, n = 243; planning, n = 64 and preparation, n = 28).

⁶⁷ Total no. of the respondents reporting desire, n = 1,183; by country: El Salvador, n = 507; Guatemala, n = 243; Honduras, n = 433 and by sex: male, n = 301 and female, n = 882. Respondents could choose multiple options. One per cent (1%) of respondents reported "do not know/prefer not to answer" when asked this question.

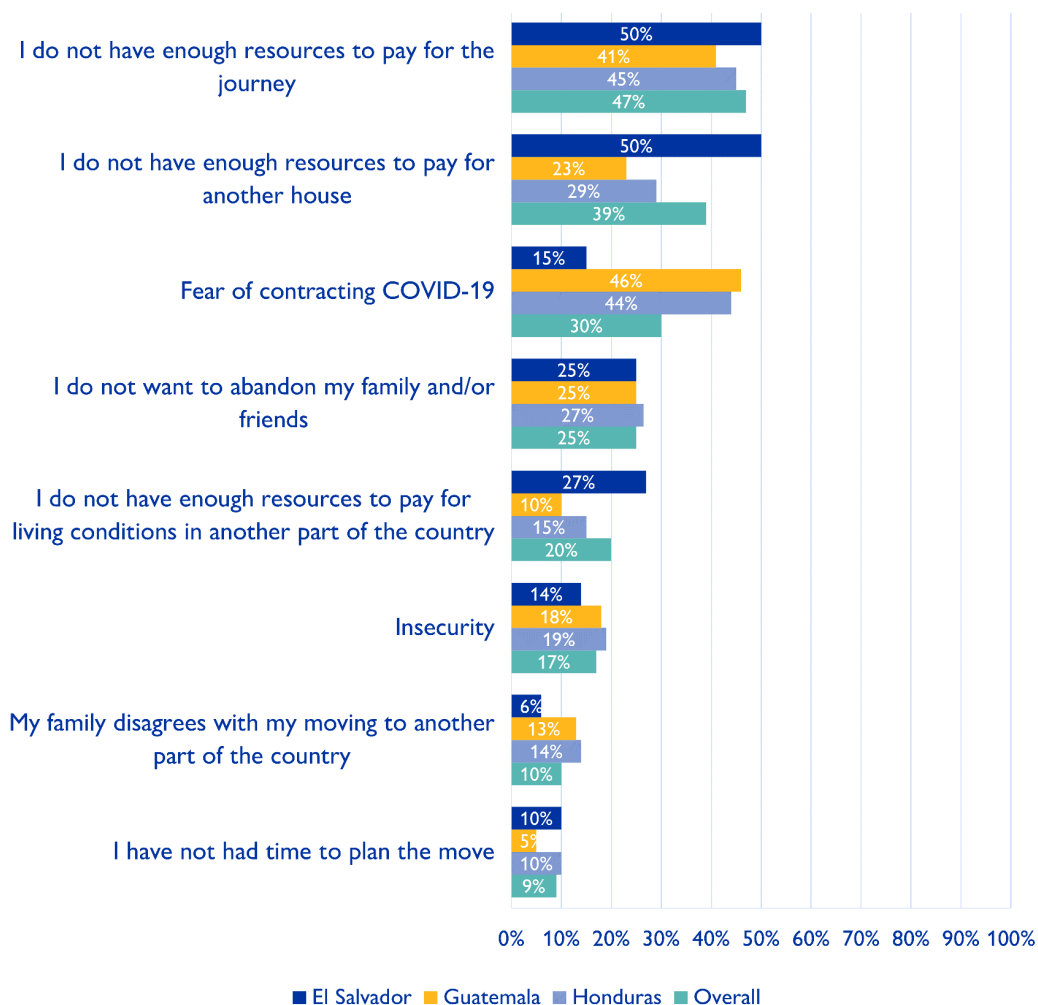
6.3.3 Preparations to migrate internally

Among the 66 respondents who reported having engaged in specific preparations to move to another part of the country at the time of data collection, the vast majority, 40 (corresponding to 61 per cent) reported having saved money as their main form of preparations, while nine respondents (14% of this group) reported having taken out loans. Other preparations included renting a house (6 respondents, or 9%).

6.3.4 Respondents who expressed the desire to migrate internally but did not plan on doing so in the next 12 months

A total of 1,004 respondents, equating to 85 per cent of those respondents who reported the desire to migrate internally to another department in their country of origin at any point in the future, reported that they did not plan on doing so in the 12 months following data collection. Respondents falling within this group were asked to report the main reasons why they did not plan on migrating internally within this period. Of the respondents falling within this group, 38 per cent reported a lack of resources to pay for the move while 31 per cent reported that they did not have enough resources to pay for another house. Higher proportions of respondents in El Salvador reported the aforementioned two reasons whereas the fear of contracting COVID-19 featured much more prominently amongst respondents in Guatemala and Honduras. Other common reasons reported across the three countries for not planning on migrating internally in the 12 months following data collection (despite the desire to do so) were insecurity and the feeling of abandoning one's family and friends (see Figure 50).

Figure 50. Of respondents reporting that they did not have plans to migrate internally in the 12 months following data collection despite expressing the desire to do so at some point in the future, percentage (%) by main reasons why (by country and overall)⁶⁸



⁶⁸ This figure is out of all respondents who reported the desire to migrate at some point in the future but who did not have plans to do so in the 12 months prior to data collection (n = 1,004). Respondents could choose multiple options. Two per cent (2%) of respondents selected "do not know/prefer not to answer".

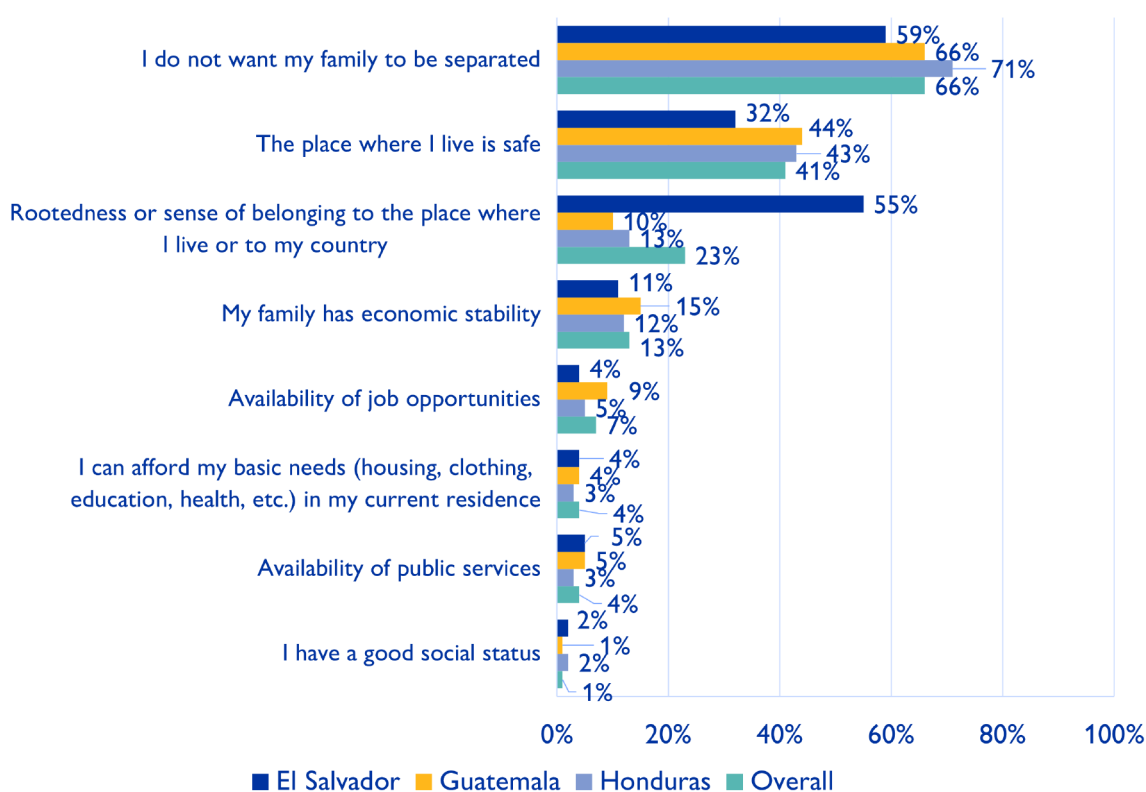
6.4 THE DESIRE TO REMAIN

During the study, a total of 2,486 respondents – 50 per cent – reported not having the desire to migrate internally or internationally. Rather, these respondents expressed the desire to remain in their area of residence at the time of data collection. Consequently, respondents in this group were asked to give the reasons for not wanting to migrate internally or internationally.

By far the main reason reported by the respondents for desiring to remain was to avoid family separation (reported by 66% of respondents in this group in Guatemala, 71% in Honduras and 59% in El Salvador). Particularly among respondents in El Salvador (55%), possessing a sense of rootedness or belonging in their place of residence/in their country was another frequently reported reason for wishing to remain.

Other common reasons reported by respondents who did not express the desire to migrate internally or internationally included feeling safe in their place of residence (approximately 40% overall) and having economic stability in their place of residence (cited by 23% overall). There was no notable variation in reasons to remain when disaggregated by respondent gender.

Figure 51. Of respondents reporting the desire to remain, percentage (%) by main reasons for wanting to do so by country and overall⁶⁹

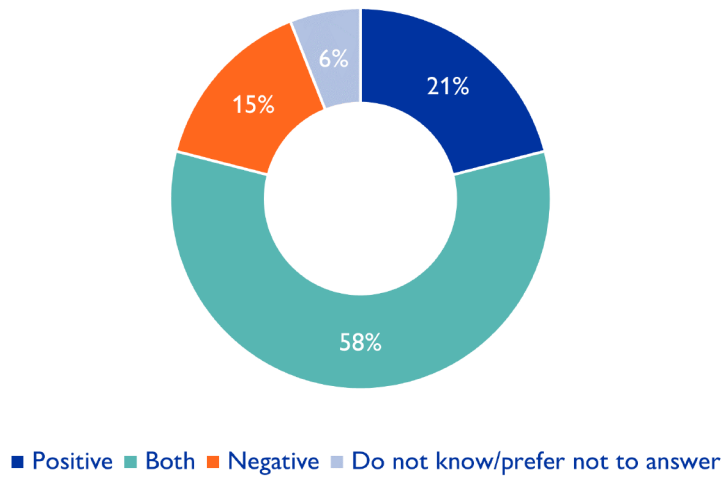


6.5 PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION

Another component of the survey was to identify the views that the respondents held regarding migration, specifically regarding the consequences of international migration on families. This information can be a useful indicator to identify attitudes towards migration and migrants (IOM, 2015). First, all respondents were asked if they considered that migration abroad carried (1) positive consequences; (2) negative consequences; or (3) both. Of the 4,998 respondents, 2,275 – corresponding to 58 per cent of all respondents – reported perceiving that migration abroad brought both positive and negative consequences to families. There was a slightly higher proportion of respondents reporting that they perceived migration to bring mostly positive consequences (21%) compared to 15 per cent of respondents who perceived that migration would bring mostly negative consequences.

⁶⁹ Total respondents: 2,486; by country: El Salvador: 651; Guatemala: 1,126 and Honduras: 709. Respondents could choose multiple options. Four per cent (4%) of respondents selected “do not know/prefer not to answer”.

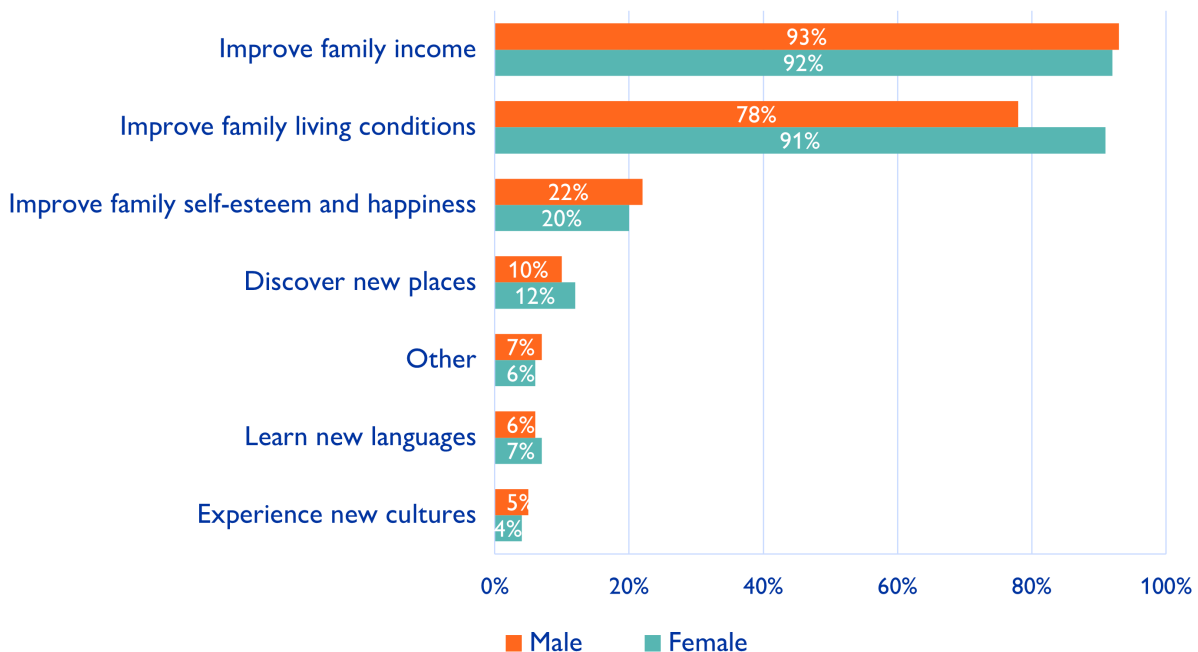
Figure 52. Percentage (%) of respondents reporting their opinion regarding the consequences that migration abroad would bring to families in the assessed zones in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras⁷⁰



6.5.1 Positive consequences

Regarding the positive consequences of migration, improving family income levels and family living conditions were the two most frequently reported positive consequences of migration, followed by improvements in family self-esteem and happiness. There was no notable variation by respondent sex, nor by country of origin (see Figure 53).

Figure 53. Percentage (%) of respondents reporting their opinion regarding the positive consequences that migration abroad would bring to families by sex⁷¹



6.5.2 Negative consequences

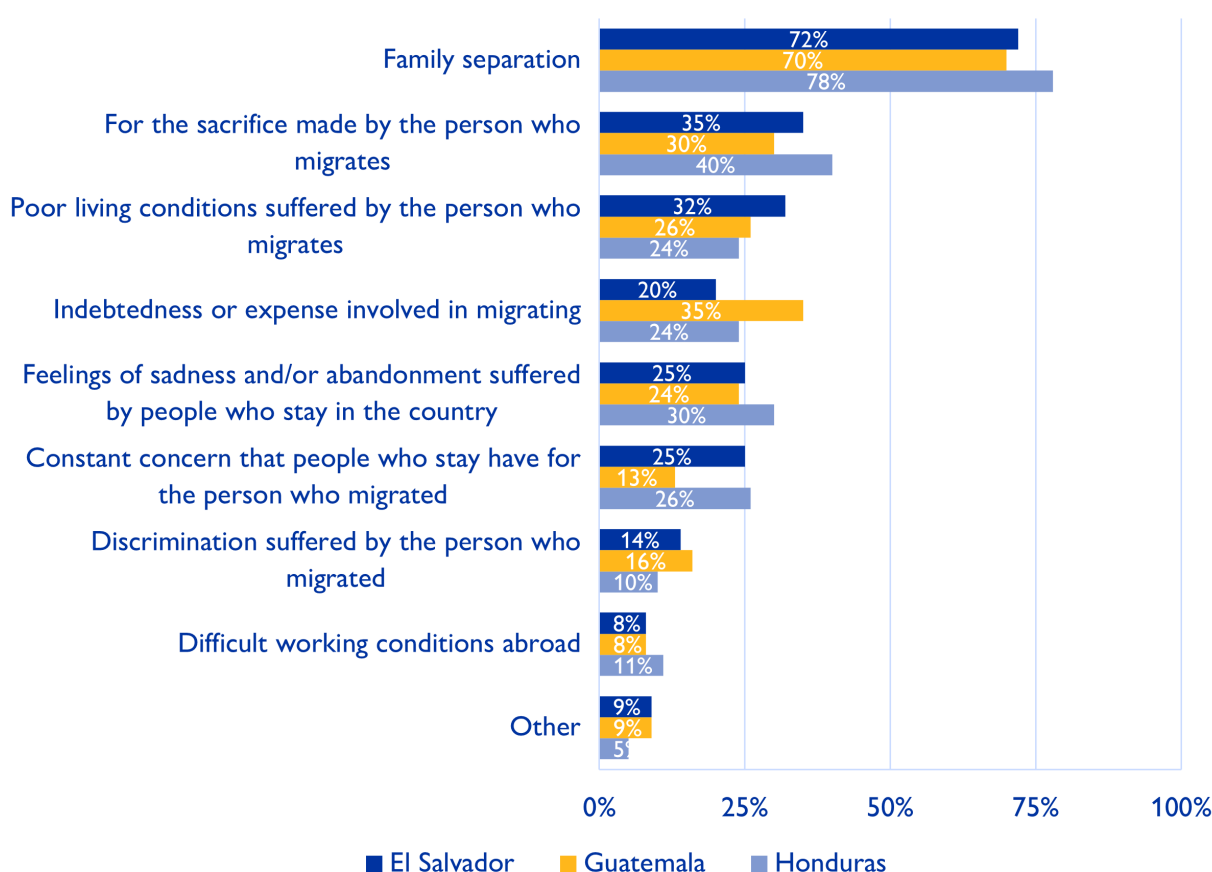
Regarding the negative consequences reported by respondents, among the three countries and for both men and women, family separation was the most frequently reported negative consequence of migration (73% overall). The other reasons varied across the three countries. For instance, respondents in Guatemala

⁷⁰ Total respondents: 4,998. Positive: 1,054; negative: 768 and both: 2,887. Do not know/no response: 289.

⁷¹ Total respondents: 3,329. Female: 2,446 and male: 883. One per cent (1%) of respondents selected “do not know/prefer not to answer”. Respondents could choose multiple options.

reported debt and costs incurred to migrate (38%) and the feeling of sadness or abandonment (24%) as the second- and third-most common negative consequences of migration. In Honduras, the second- and third-most common negative consequences of migration perceived by respondents were the sacrifice of the person who migrated (39%) and the feelings of sadness or abandonment (28%). Thirty-five per cent (35%) of respondents in El Salvador reported the sacrifice and poor living conditions of the person who migrated as a negative consequence of migration abroad. Overall, answers to this question and questions on the positive consequences of migration show a difficult balance between significant gains in economic conditions and quality of life that can be experienced through migrating but with possible tolls on family and individual mental health and social dynamics/cohesion.

Figure 54. Percentage (%) of respondents reporting their opinion regarding the negative consequences that migration abroad would bring to their families by country⁷²



⁷² Total respondents: 3,043. By country: El Salvador: 1,150; Guatemala: 943 and Honduras: 950. One per cent of respondents reported "do not know / prefer not to respond" in El Salvador and one per cent in Guatemala.

7. EXPLORING VARIATION IN MULTISECTORAL HOUSEHOLD INDICATORS BASED ON HOUSEHOLD MIGRATION PROFILE

7.1 OVERVIEW

The objective of this chapter is to explore findings from statistical relationship testing to determine whether variation in outcomes on certain multisectoral household indicators – ranging from income and livelihoods, protection, household characteristics, shelter and non-food items, exposure to natural hazards, household geographic location and community perceptions, among others – demonstrated a correlation with whether or not households had at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate **internationally** within the five years prior to data collection.

This exploratory analysis was conducted based on chi-square bivariate tests for independence. While chi-square tests are useful in determining whether two categorical variables are related or not, relationships do not necessarily imply that one variable has a causal effect on the other, nor do they determine the magnitude of the association between two variables. However, the analysis may shed light on the nexus of factors that may be influencing recent migration from the subregion, which is central to this study.

Table 21 presents a list of some of the key indicators that were tested, by relevant sector, and the result for each independence test. A result of “No” indicates a lack of a statistically significant relationship between the specified variable and recent household migration profile (allowing one to reject independence given that there was no association). A result of “Yes” means there was a statistically significant relationship observed between the specified variable and recent household migration profile (that is, there was statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis of independence, suggesting association). Relationships were determined to be statistically significant if the p-value (which reflects the probability that any correlation between two variables could be due to random change) was low – typically, less than or equal to 0.05, or five percent.

Table 21. Multisectoral household-level indicators and association with the household recent migration profile

Sector(s)	Indicator	Association ⁷³
Income and livelihoods/ COVID-19	Whether any household member was reported to have lost jobs or income due to the COVID-19 pandemic	Yes
Household characteristics	Female single-headed household	Yes
Shelter and NFI	Whether or not the household reported having electricity at the time of data collection	Yes
Income and livelihoods	Whether or not households reported being satisfied with standards of living at the time of data collection	Yes
Income and livelihoods	Whether or not households reported having any savings at the time of data collection	Yes
Income and livelihoods	Whether or not the household reported having outstanding debts at the time of data collection	Yes

⁷³ Based on chi-square independence test results at a significance level of 0.05 or lower. “Recent international migration profile” is understood as whether or not the household reported at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection.

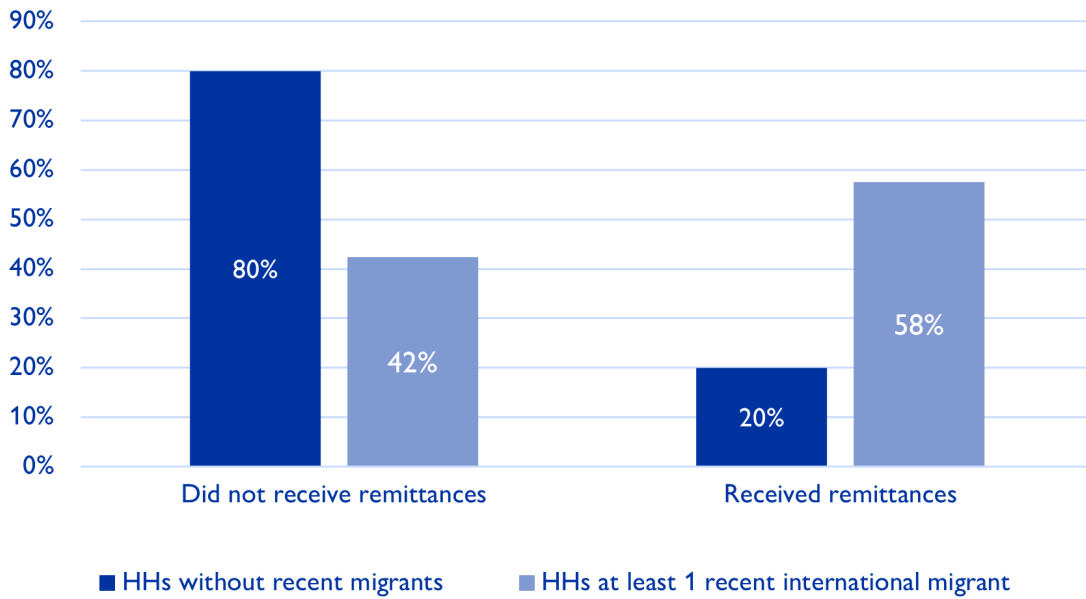
Income and livelihoods	Whether or not the household reported that they were surviving or living comfortably on their levels of income at the time of data collection	Yes
Income and livelihoods / Shelter and NFI	Whether or not the household reported having enough income to cover non-food essential needs (transport, housing, utilities, communication, fuel, hygiene products, etc.) at the time of data collection	Yes
Income and livelihoods/ food security	Whether or not the household reporting having enough income to buy food at the time of data collection	Yes
Income and livelihoods	Whether or not the household reported receiving remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection	Yes
Natural hazards	Whether or not the household reporting being impacted by the coffee rust in the three years prior to data collection	Yes
Income and livelihoods/ COVID-19	Whether or not COVID-19 was reported to have impacted household income	No
Location	Whether the household was based in a rural or urban setting	No
Community perceptions	Whether or not the household was satisfied with the area where they were living at the time of data collection	No
		No
Natural hazards	Whether or not the household reported being directly impacted by natural hazards in the three years prior to data collection	*Although there was a significant correlation with respondent migration intentions (see section 7.2.3)

7.2 RESULTS – TESTING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE HOUSEHOLD RECENT MIGRATION PROFILE AND MULTISECTORAL HOUSEHOLD INDICATORS

This section describes selected results from the relationship testing mapped in Table 21 above, particularly those relationships where notable variation in outcomes was witnessed between the two strata (households with or without recent migrants) and which carried important operational/programmatic implications.

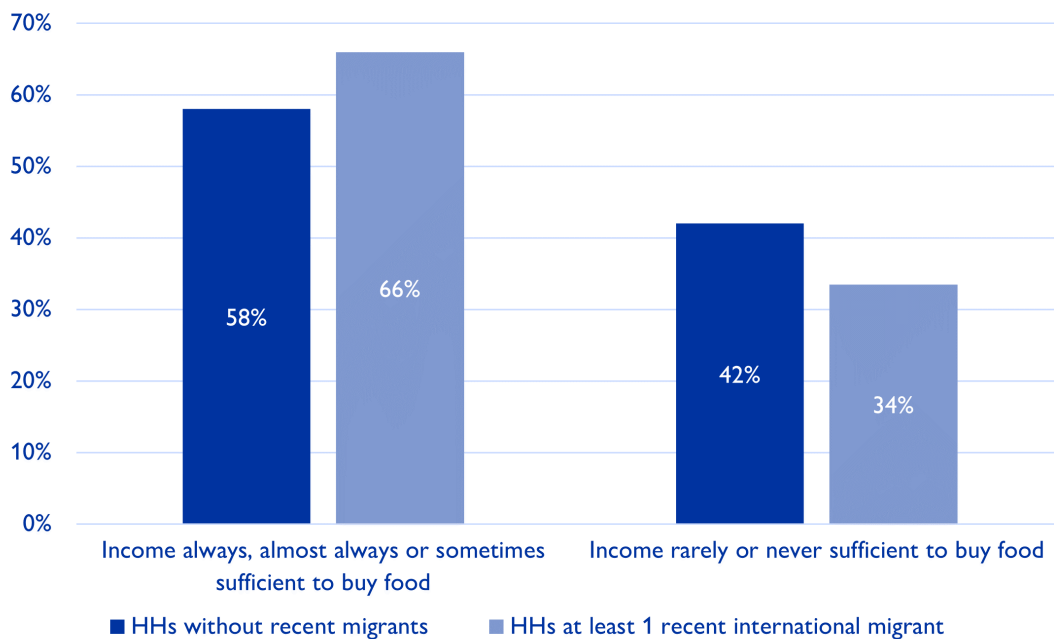
Statistical relationship testing between the household remittance profile and recent migration profile showed a strong correlation. Logically, households reporting at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection were far more likely to report having received remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection. Overall, 29 per cent of households reported receiving remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection. However, when broken down by recent migration profile, the proportion of households receiving remittances was nearly three times greater for households with at least one recent migrant when compared with households with no recent migrants (Figure 55).

Figure 55. Percentage (%) of households that reported receiving remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection by household recent migration profile ($p = 0.0001$)



There also appeared to be a correlation between household recent migration profile and whether or not households reported being able to afford their food needs. Of households reporting at least one recent migrant, two-thirds (66%) reported that income was always, almost always or sometimes sufficient to buy food in the 30 days prior to data collection. In contrast, among households with no recent migrants, 57 per cent reported that income was always, almost always or sometimes sufficient to buy food in the 30 days prior to data collection. While it is not possible to determine the direction of relationships with chi-square tests, it may be hypothesized that the remittances and other support sent from recent migrants abroad help to ease household economic burdens and can constitute an important foundation for household food security.

Figure 56. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether income was sufficient to buy food in the 30 days prior to data collection by household recent migration profile ($p = 0.0001$)

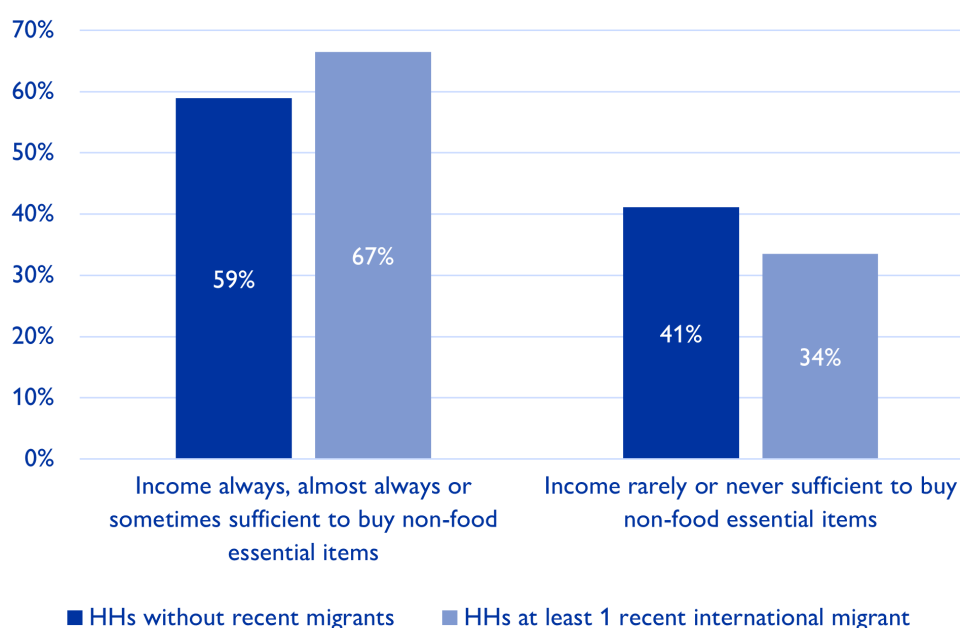


Further proof of the impact of remittances on household income can be seen when limiting the analysis exclusively to households with at least one recent migrant. Among households with at least one recent migrant that did not report receiving remittances in the 12 months prior to data collection ($n = 507$),

just 48 per cent reported that household income was always, almost always or sometimes sufficient to buy food in the 30 days prior to data collection. In contrast, among households with at least one recent migrant who did report receiving remittances in this period ($n = 689$), the proportion reporting that their income was always, almost always or sometimes sufficient to buy food was far higher, reaching 60 per cent. Chi-square tests revealed this to be a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.0001$).

Furthermore, recent household migration profile was tested against whether (1) households reported that income was rarely or never sufficient to buy non-food essential items (such as transport, housing, utilities, hygiene items, etc.) in the 30 days prior to data collection, versus (2) households reporting that income was always, almost always or sometimes sufficient to afford these non-food essential items in the aforementioned period. Overall, households with at least one recent migrant appeared slightly more likely (eight percentage points higher) to report being able to afford essential non-food items when compared with households without recent migrants (see Figure 57).

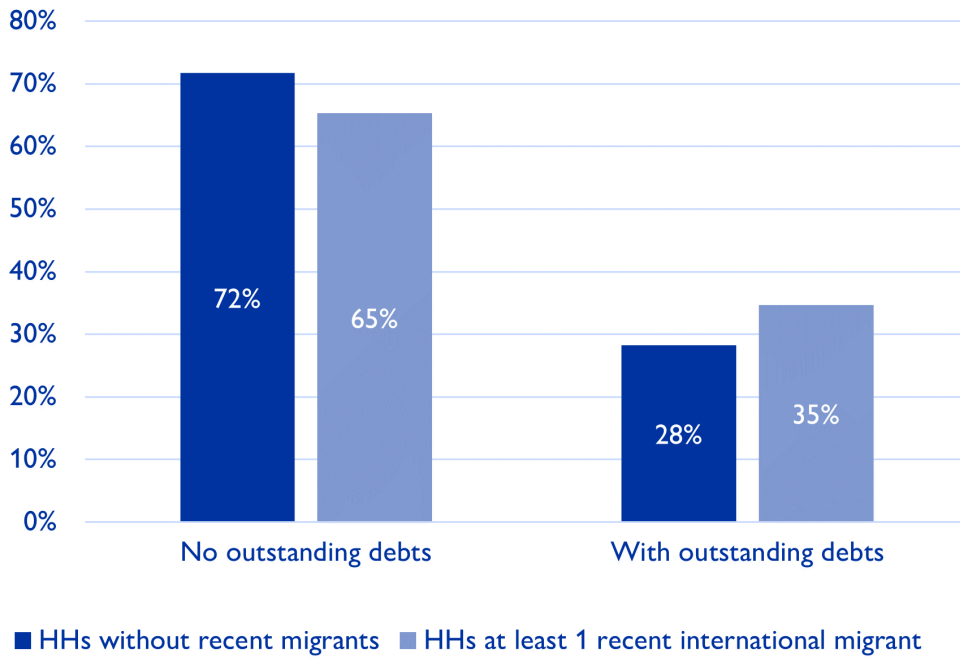
Figure 57. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether income was sufficient to buy non-food essential items (such as transport, housing, utilities or hygiene items) in the 30 days prior to data collection by household recent migration profile ($p = 0.0001$)



During the present assessment, households were asked whether they had any savings at the time of data collection. Relationship testing revealed that, while statistically significant ($p = 0.0001$), the variation in savings by household recent migration profile in practical terms was quite insignificant. Between both groups (households with recent migrants versus households without), savings rates were low (at 10% of households overall).

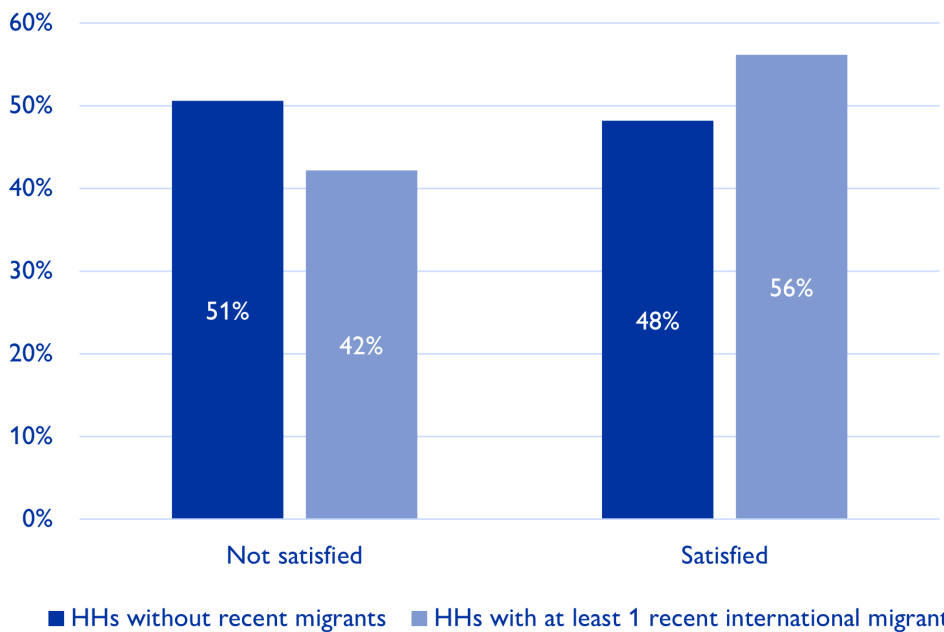
Although the variation was less pronounced, statistical relationship testing also revealed that households with at least one recent migrant were slightly more likely to have had outstanding debts to pay off at the time of data collection when compared with households without recent migrants (Figure 58).

Figure 58. Percentage (%) of households reporting that they had outstanding debts to pay off at the time of data collection by household recent migration profile (p = 0.0001)



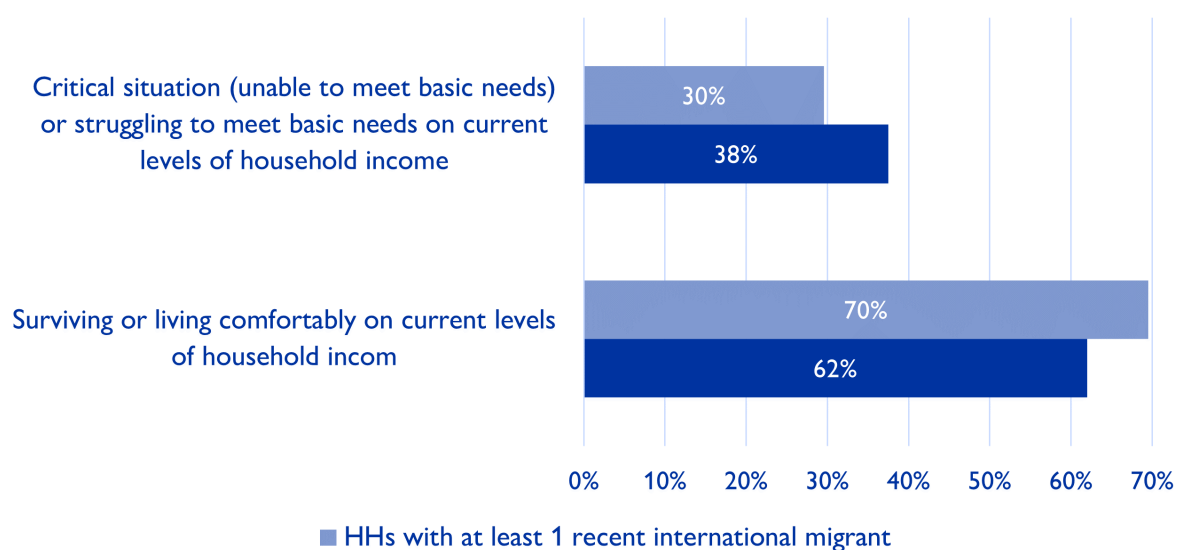
Furthermore, households were asked whether they were satisfied or not satisfied with their standard of living at the time of data collection (specifically, with what they could buy and do at their current standard of living). As shown in Figure 59, there was notable variation in outcomes on this indicator when analysed with household recent migration profile. Namely, households with at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection appeared slightly more likely to be satisfied with their standard of living at the time of data collection.

Figure 59. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether they were satisfied with their standard of living at the time of data collection by household recent migration profile (p = 0.0001)



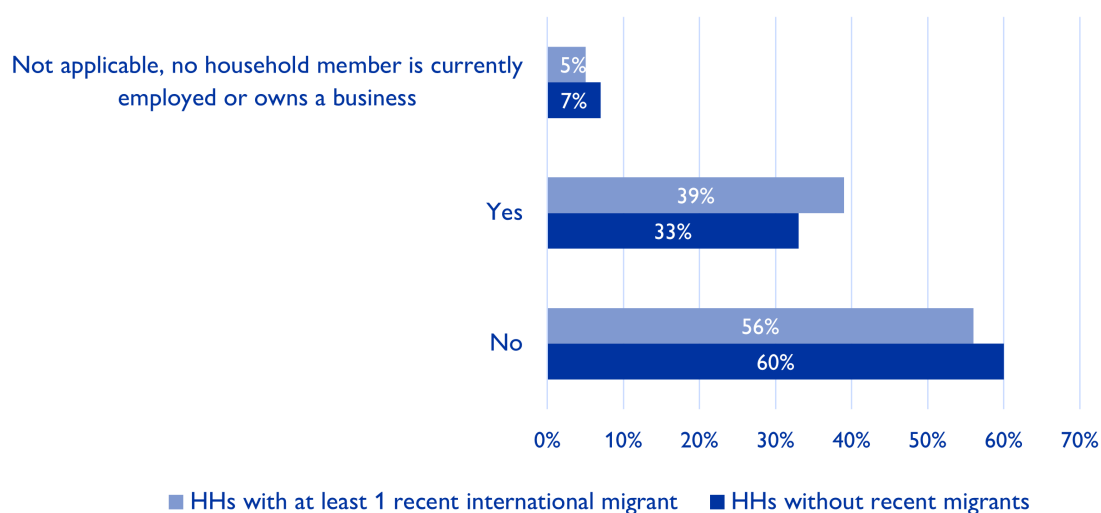
Similarly, when households were asked whether or not they could live comfortably on levels of household income at the time of data collection, it would appear that larger proportions of households with recent migrants reported living comfortably or surviving on current levels of household income when compared with households with no recent migrants (Figure 60).

Figure 60. Percentage (%) of households reporting whether or not they could live comfortably on levels of household income at the time of data collection by household recent migration profile ($p = 0.0001$)



While the difference was modest, it appears that households with at least one recent migrant were slightly more affected by unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic when compared with households without recent migrants (at the time that the survey was conducted in spring 2021). The cause for this difference is unknown but could be due, perhaps, to households with recent migrants having different sociodemographic, labour market and occupational profiles in countries of origin. It was also not established whether household respondents were including former household members living abroad as part of their response.

Figure 61. Percentage (%) of households reporting that at least one member lost their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic by household recent migration profile ($p = 0.001$)



One key household-level indicator related to shelter characteristics showed statistical significance with recent household migration profile – whether or not households reported having electricity at home ($p = 0.0001$). However, while statistically significant, the variation in outcomes on this indicator by household recent migration profile in practical terms was minimal, while overall electricity coverage was high between both groups (households with recent migrants and households without). Overall, 91 per cent of households reported having electricity at the time of data collection.

Finally, as discussed in the literature review, environmental hazards (both rapid-onset and slow-onset) are expected to have some direct or indirect influence on migration dynamics in the subregion. Overall, nearly 40 per cent of the surveyed households reported having experienced the impact of one or more natural hazards in the three years prior to data collection.

However, when tested for correlation with household recent migration profile, there was no significant observable difference in outcomes. The proportion remained at approximately two in five, or 40 per cent of households, regardless of whether the household had at least one recent international migrant or not.

In addition, the different hazards were examined one at a time, such as floods, landslides, hurricanes/tropical storms, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, drought, coffee rust or pests. The only variable that presented any significance in the chi-square test and which resulted in a dependency with the household recent international migration profile was the coffee rust hazard. However, the tabulation of the data showed a low quantity of households overall that were impacted by coffee rust in the three years prior to data collection, close to two per cent in the entire sample (and 3% among households with migrants) ($p = 0.025$). Consequently, the likelihood of outcomes defined as a ratio of probabilities was calculated in order to better understand the magnitude of this relationship. The ratio of probabilities resulted in a likelihood for households exposed to coffee rust equal to 1.652. This means that households with at least one recent migrant were 65.2 per cent more likely to have been impacted by the coffee rust in the three years prior to data collection when compared with households without recent migrants.

Furthermore, these estimates were carried out at the country level, where it was found that the result is highly significant in Guatemala but not in El Salvador or Honduras. Specifically, for the communities under study in Guatemala, the likelihood of having a recent migrant in the household is 91 per cent higher for households exposed to coffee rust when compared to households without recent migrants. It is important to highlight that the percentage of households affected by coffee rust in the sample from Guatemala represents only two per cent. In other words, 32 cases out of 1,730 of the respondents were impacted. Consequently, it is not possible to generalize the results from this finding and further research/exploration is encouraged.

However, while no significant correlation was observed between exposure to natural hazards and household recent migration profile, there was a meaningful association between exposure to natural hazards and whether or not household respondents reported the desire to migrate at some point in the future if given the opportunity to do so. The estimates of relative probabilities revealed the following insights:

- The estimated likelihood of wanting to move to another country was 23 percentage points higher for respondents living in households that had been exposed to hurricanes/tropical storms in the three years prior to data collection versus those who were not affected ($p < 0.0001$).
- Also, the likelihood of wanting to move to another country was 11 percentage points higher for respondents living in households that had been affected by floods in the three years prior to data collection when compared to those who were not affected ($p = 0.046$).

7.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS

This analysis has taken an exploratory approach to identify potential relationships between categorical variables; therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution and should not be used to directly inform policy responses, but rather to direct further research and be used as an important source to triangulate findings from other studies. Specifically, some limitations were as follows:

- There were difficulties in making true comparisons/analyses between subsets (households with at least one member who migrated or attempted to migrate in the five years prior to data collection versus households without) given that the survey is a snapshot in time and not a view of changes over time. Specifically, there were difficulties in checking for multiple conceptual overlaps, specifically regarding time-frames – migrants who left more than five years ago in households where someone did migrate in the last five years, migrants who left more than five years ago in households where no one migrated in the last five years, and so forth.

- Given the methodological limitations of the sample and scope, this research refrains from trying to model the significance of relationships in the population and refrains from providing answers on the likelihood of an outcome occurring, for example, generalized linear models such as logistic regression.
- One of the advantages of the chi-square test of independence is that it is considered a non-parametric test. The term “non-parametric” refers to the fact that chi-square tests do not require assumptions about population parameters, nor do they test hypotheses about population parameters. It is worth noting that chi-square analysis tests where results did not meet the requirement of at least five data points per cell were excluded in the analysis presented in this chapter. In such cases, these chi-square tests would not be reliable.

8. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that a multiplicity of factors continues to drive migration from NCA. Throughout the report, it was shown that households in departments with high rates of migration in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras face dire conditions, in terms of food insecurity, income opportunities, lack of safety and security, the impacts of natural hazards and more, in some cases with the absence of social assistance. Many gaps in key indicators related to household wellbeing also appeared to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With this backdrop, migration has and continues to serve as a critical coping mechanism for many households in the subregion who are unable to meet basic needs. Evidence from the study points to positive economic effects of remittances on household wellbeing, thanks to the ability to spend this vital source of external financing on food, improved shelter conditions, healthcare and other essential needs. Individuals who do succeed in migrating are perceived to have better income levels and work opportunities and improved overall living conditions for themselves and their families.

The survey also revealed the potential negative externalities of migration and the migration process when it takes place in adverse contexts. In particular, migrants face significant protection concerns during their journeys northward, particularly in a backdrop of high levels of irregularity, high migration costs (which are often financed by debt) and the continued reliance on smuggling networks. Many respondents noted the toll of family separation and the dangers of migration journeys as key concerns. Aside from addressing the adverse root causes of migration, the findings point to the need for coordinated efforts to reduce vulnerabilities that migrants face during the entire migration cycle – including while in transit – as well as national and international coordination to ensure that migration takes place in a safe, orderly, regular and humane manner. Particular focus should be placed on the needs of women, children, LGBT individuals, indigenous populations and other vulnerable groups on the move, many of whom may be in need of international protection.

The significant proportions of recent migrants who were returned to their countries of origin during the study period also highlights the need for effective and multi-sectoral return and reintegration programmes and policies in order to improve living conditions and reduce adverse pressures for re-migration in the future.

In the study, it was uncovered that although desires to migrate are significant among the surveyed population, very small proportions actually planned on migrating in the near future and even smaller proportions had already engaged in specific preparations. The significant costs of migration journeys, as well as ongoing barriers and limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to be the main factors preventing people who wanted to migrate from doing so at the time the survey was conducted. Those who maintained desires to remain in their current residence mainly reported doing so in order to avoid family separation, or because they are among the proportion of respondents that reported feeling that their levels of income and safety were adequate. Others reported feeling a sense of rootedness or belonging in their communities.

Adverse economic drivers feature most prominently amongst the factors influencing recent migration, although natural hazards may play an indirect role in the migration process. Insecurity did not feature prominently among the factors influencing people to leave their countries of origin in the five years prior to data collection. Correlational analysis revealed that respondents living in households exposed to natural hazards in the three years prior to data collection were more likely to report the desire to migrate.

Overall, the findings suggest that set of policies to address the adverse drivers of migration from the subregion should consider economic factors and the material conditions in the places of origin of migrants, plus the indirect impact of natural hazards on livelihoods. In the shorter term, a set of policies aimed to curb irregular migration through the creation of regular pathways should be considered. Furthermore, it is important to expand the evidence base in order to fine tune the policy recommendations and to have continued access to up-to-date information. Topics that may be explored through further research include the intersection between gender and migration decisions and processes, detailed labour profiles of potential migrants, the nexus between internal and international migration, as well as the ongoing health needs of migrants on the move, among other themes.

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