

MONITORING REPORT ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN PROGRAMS

September to October 2021

AVR PROGRAMS IN MEXICO AND NORTH OF
CENTRAL AMERICA COUNTRIES No. 10



INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the findings of surveys¹ conducted by the IOM Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) Program in Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico.² Each of the 102 respondents was asked a series of 24 to 33 questions by destination country AVR teams one to three months after beneficiaries' returns to their countries of origin.

The purpose of these monitoring exercises is to capture the experiences of beneficiaries of IOM AVR programs³ in Mexico and North of Central America Countries to gain a deeper understanding of how they reintegrate upon return to countries of origin. The surveys also inform the donor, stakeholders and IOM personnel of trends that could shape future programming.

In addition to demographic descriptors, obtaining qualitative data provides essential insights into migrants' experiences in countries of destination and origin. The surveys also reveal information about any plans to remigrate and returnees' mental and physical health statuses, financial security, employment, physical safety and post-arrival assistance received, if any.

¹ The surveys include program/return assistance satisfaction survey from the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) institutional package.

² The results of surveys conducted by AVR Honduras and AVR El Salvador for beneficiaries who returned in September and October 2021 and September 2021, respectively were included in AVR Monitoring Report No. 9.

³ AVR programs support the orderly and humane return of migrants by providing administrative, logistical, and financial support to individuals who are unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

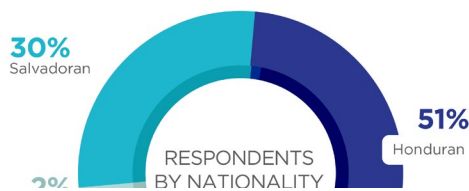
I. SURVEY RESULTS

a. Demographic profiles of respondents

AVR monitoring teams interviewed 102 beneficiaries who returned to countries of origin between September 1 and October 28, 2021.

The respondents had consented to participate in the survey prior to departure. AVR Mexico assisted 81 per cent of respondents, AVR Guatemala 11 per cent, and AVR Belize the remaining 8 per cent.

Figure 1. Respondents by nationality



As seen in Figure 1, the composition of this respondent cohort was 51 per cent Honduran, 30 per cent Salvadoran, 17 per cent Guatemalan, and 2 per cent Nicaraguan.

Fifty-eight per cent of respondents were males (adults and



Figure 2. Shares of respondents, by age and sex

boys), and 42 per cent females (adults and girls).

Most respondents were adults (91%), but AVR monitoring teams also interviewed children and adolescents to better understand their experiences as returnees.⁴ Figure 2 shows the shares of

respondents by age and sex.

b. Migratory profiles of respondents prior to return

Eighty-six respondents (out of 102) were in transit before receiving AVR assistance, comprised of 78 adults and eight accompanied children or adolescents.

⁴ Children and adolescents were asked if they were or had been studying in countries of destination and origin, their perceptions of receptions from families in communities of origin, their health, safety, any plans to remigrate, post-arrival experiences and reintegration assistance. AVR Mexico also queried them about any financial concerns.

The majority of surveyed beneficiaries (58%) returned alone, with the remainder (42%) traveling within a family unit. The solo group was made up of Hondurans (27), Guatemalans (14), Salvadorans (16) and Nicaraguans (2).

Adults were queried about employment in the destination country before receiving AVR assistance. It is noteworthy that seven adults in transit countries reported being temporarily employed. Of the adults who answered this question (23 out of 93), 43 per cent disclosed they had been unemployed in the destination country. Of the 57 per cent (13 beneficiaries) employed, six worked in sales, three in construction, two as street vendors, one as a cook and one as a technician.

Of the total number (9) of children and adolescent respondents (aged 9-17 years), eight received some education through programs at shelters where they were living, but not necessarily education corresponding to the standard school grade. The remaining adolescent was not studying at the time he was offered support through the AVR program.

c. Post-return conditions

In addition to obtaining demographic data, migrants were asked about their experiences throughout the AVR process, their perceptions of how communities had received them, their assessment of their mental, physical and financial states, and levels of security from violence once re-established within the countries of origin.

The latter considerations are of particular interest, as persistently unstable conditions in countries of origin may influence AVR beneficiaries to remigrate, as revealed in this and previous monitoring surveys.

1) Remigration

*Of those surveyed, 40 per cent stated they had plans to remigrate.*⁵ The majority were Hondurans (51% or 21).

When analyzing the information by nationality, almost 60 per cent of Guatemalans (10 out of 17), 40 per cent of Hondurans (21 out of 52), and both Nicaraguans reported plans to remigrate.



“Yes, I plan to go back to Guatemala soon because it's impossible to live here.”

Nicaraguan man returned from Guatemala (34 years old)⁶

2) Employment

A range of drivers is behind any decision to remigrate, such as a lack of employment which might be one of the factors that drove them to migrate in the first place.

⁵ Remigration plans are not the same as preparations to migrate or actual migration.

⁶ The respondents were interviewed and answered in Spanish. The quotes were translated into English for this report.

Thirty-three per cent (31 out of 93) of adult respondents reported being unemployed in their country of origin following their return.

“The truth is I have not been working for a while.”
 Honduran man returned from Mexico (21 years old)

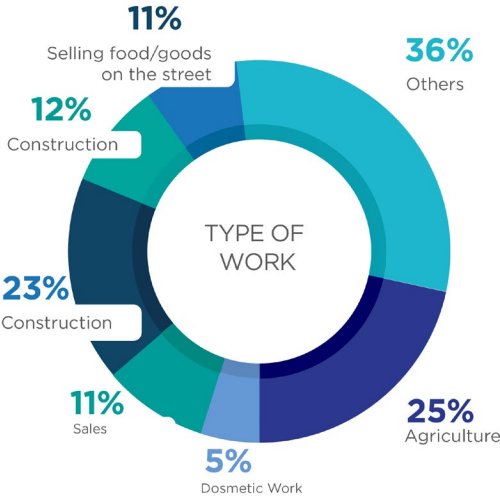


“I’m not working; there is no work here.”
 Honduran man returned from Guatemala (27 years old)

Several factors could explain the lack of employment for surveyed returnees, such as limited job opportunities or the narrow window between returning and being interviewed, as well as the ongoing economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region.

Those employed often face unstable, informal, or temporary jobs that do not secure their basic needs and financial stability.

Figure 3. Type of work after return, by percentage



As shown in Figure 3, of the 62 adults and three adolescent returnees who confirmed they were currently employed, 25 per cent (16) worked in the agricultural sector, 12 per cent (8) were construction workers, 11 per cent (7) sold food and goods on the street, 11 per cent (7) worked in sales and 5 per cent (3) were domestic workers. The remaining 36 per cent (23) were employed in various posts, such as car mechanics, hairstylists, kitchen assistants, cashiers and cleaners.



“I’m working in a textile company right now.”
 Salvadoran woman returned from Belize (37 years old)

3) Financial concerns

Migrants continue to face financial insecurity upon return. Forty-six per cent (46 out of 102) of respondents were concerned about their finances.⁷

⁷ AVR Guatemala did not ask the adolescent respondent about his finances.

"I am concerned. There are always financial problems. My husband works on a daily basis and my job is temporary, of only two months."

Salvadoran woman returned from Belize (37 years old)



While adults struggled to find employment and remained financially insecure upon return, some children and adolescent respondents reported not attending school.

For this set of surveys, of the total number of children and adolescents (9), four reported studying after their return, three were working, and two were neither studying nor working.

4) Health conditions

Other potential drivers to remigrate include returnees' physical and mental health conditions. All AVR programs conducted medical fitness-to-travel assessments and screened migrants with COVID-19 (PCR) tests before returning to countries of origin.

Of the 102 beneficiaries interviewed, most (79 or 77%) considered themselves in good mental and physical health. Sixteen per cent were physically well, but in poor mental health. Five per cent of respondents reported having poor physical and psychological health.

Salvadoran respondents (25 out of 31) represented the highest percentage of returnees reporting good mental and physical health. In contrast, nearly 30 per cent of Guatemalans (5 out of 17) felt physically robust, but weak mentally.



"I'm not ok; it would have been better not returning [to El Salvador]."

Salvadoran man returned from Belize (50 years old)

5) Post-arrival assistance and reintegration support

Only nine respondents reported receiving reintegration support from their respective governments or from civil society organizations. While unemployment and health conditions represent key challenges, returnees often fail to access the help they need to resettle and thrive.

AVR programs do not currently include a reintegration component that could help ensure beneficiaries' assimilation into communities of origin.

For the most in-need beneficiaries, IOM assisted them upon arrival, as reported by *45 respondents (17 Hondurans, 9 Guatemalans and 19 Salvadorans)*.

"When we arrived at the hotel, it [IOM] gave us a food basket."

Salvadoran woman returned from Belize (29 years old)



6) Security

The level of safety within communities and the reception that AVR beneficiaries receive from their families upon return may also influence reintegration.

Eight returned migrants were concerned about safety, with seven fearing violence in their countries of origin, and one voicing political concerns (4 Hondurans, 2 Salvadorans, 1 Guatemalan and 1 Nicaraguan).



"It's dangerous here because of the political problem. The police stop you and want to know what your political position is."

Nicaraguan man returned from Guatemala (34 years old)

7) Reception from families and communities of return

Overall, 92 per cent of surveyed migrants reported being positively received by their families and communities upon return.

Of those not planning to remigrate (61 out of 102), Hondurans made up 31, Salvadorans (23) and Guatemalans (7). One beneficiary mentioned a willingness to remigrate, but through a legal pathway.



"I prefer not to [remigrate]. At least I would think twice before leaving. If I could migrate legally, I would do it."

Honduran man returned from Guatemala (40 years old)

Another factor influencing beneficiaries' decision not to remigrate is the danger they experienced during their previous migration experience.

"No, because it is a challenging path."
Honduran man returned from Mexico (41 years old)



The results of this Monitoring Report reveal that 86 per cent of respondents were in transit. Therefore, most adult respondents were not working at the time of being offered AVR assistance.

Most of those employed had low-skilled jobs or were part of the informal economy. As for the children and adolescents, those living in a shelter (8) were offered classes that did not necessarily correspond to the individual's level of education according to either their age or most recent level of formal schooling.

Almost all respondents were nationals of North Central America Countries and were assisted by AVR programs in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. Four-in-10 respondents reported thinking about remigrating, with unemployment upon return one of the reasons. Although the results of this report

show a decrease in unemployment (33% versus 47%) and financial concerns (46% compared to 69%) compared to Monitoring Report No. 9, plans to remigrate remained steady at around 40 per cent.

Of those employed (64 out of 102, including three adolescents), more than half reintegrated into informal economy labor markets finding work as street vendors (11%), or in low-skilled employment, such as agriculture (25%), construction (12%) and domestic services (5%).

Although respondents did not refer to COVID-19 as a factor in discrimination against returnees or of concern in returning to their countries of origin, the increase in the number of cases reported in the Americas since mid-November could change this scenario.⁸ The pandemic may again pose challenges for the AVRs and reintegration of beneficiaries, as previously observed in 2020 and the beginning of 2021.

As for health perceptions, 77 per cent of respondents cited having good mental and physical health, a 17 per cent increase compared to the previous report.

Mental health can be affected by safety issues and in this regard, eight of the respondents cited concerns about violence and the political environment in their communities of return.

Regardless of conditions in the country of origin upon return, the surveys revealed that little formal support is available to AVR beneficiaries to help them overcome obstacles. Nine respondents reported receiving reintegration support from their respective government or civil society organizations. This limited support offered to returnee migrants compromises their reintegration and might contribute to future remigration.

While AVR programs do not include a reintegration component, IOM personnel in countries of origin offered short-term post-arrival assistance to 45 in-need respondents upon their return. To contribute to the reintegration of beneficiaries, AVR teams collaborate continuously with local non-governmental organizations, governments, and international organizations to facilitate beneficiaries' referrals to a variety of services, such as healthcare and vocational training.

⁸ <https://www.paho.org/es/noticias/24-11-2021-ops-pide-precaucion-ante-aumento-numero-casos-covid-19-region-americas>