

# MONITORING REPORT ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN PROGRAMS SEPTEMBER 2021



AVR PROGRAMS IN MEXICO AND NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA COUNTRIES  
No. 8

## INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the findings of surveys<sup>1</sup> conducted by the IOM Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) Program in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Each of the 57 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.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this monitoring exercise is to capture the experiences of the beneficiaries of IOM AVR programs<sup>3</sup> in Mexico and North of Central America Countries, thus gaining a deeper understanding of how they reintegrate after returning to their countries of origin, as well as to inform the donor, stakeholders and IOM personnel of trends which could shape future programming.

Obtaining qualitative data, in addition to demographic descriptors, provides important insights into the nature of migrants' experiences in countries of destination and origin. The surveys also reveal information about any plans to re-migrate, mental and physical health status, financial security, employment, physical safety and post-arrival assistance received, if any.

## I. SURVEY RESULTS

### a. Demographic profiles of respondents

During the months of August and September 2021, AVR monitoring teams interviewed 57 beneficiaries who returned to their countries of origin between July 1-August 23, 2021. The respondents had consented to participation in the survey prior to departure. Just over three-quarters (43 or 76%) of respondents were assisted by AVR Mexico, 12 per cent (7) by AVR Guatemala, 5 per cent (3) by AVR Belize, 5 per cent (3) by AVR Honduras and the remaining 2 per cent (1) by AVR El Salvador.

Beneficiaries surveyed by AVR Mexico were returned to Guatemala (25), Honduras (14) and El Salvador (4). Respondents assisted by AVR Guatemala returned to Honduras (7), by AVR Honduras

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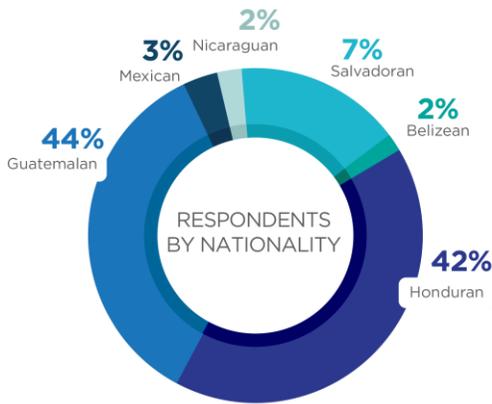
<sup>1</sup> The Survey includes Programme/RA satisfaction survey from the AVRR institutional package.

<sup>2</sup> AVR Mexico surveyed 43 out of 88 beneficiaries from July, AVR Guatemala 7 out of 40 beneficiaries from August. Three out of 7 beneficiaries of AVR Honduras from July and August answered the survey, AVR Belize interviewed 3 out of 8 beneficiaries from July. AVR El Salvador surveyed 1 out of 20 beneficiaries from August.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

to Mexico (2) and Belize (1). Beneficiaries from AVR Belize came from Honduras (3) and the one individual assisted and surveyed by AVR El Salvador was Nicaraguan.

**Figure 1. Respondents by nationality**



Therefore, as seen in **Figure 1**, the composition of this respondent cohort was 44 per cent Guatemalan, 42 per cent Honduran, 7 per cent Salvadoran, 3 per cent Mexican, 2 per cent Nicaraguan and 2 per cent Belizean.

**Figure 2. Shares of respondents, by age and sex**



Fifty-six per cent of respondents were males (men and boys) and 44 per cent were females (women and girls). One was a transgender woman.

Most respondents were adults (70%), but AVR monitoring teams also interviewed children and adolescents<sup>4</sup> to record their experiences as returnees.<sup>5</sup> **Figure 2** shows the shares of respondents by age and sex.

**b. Migratory profiles of respondents before return**

Fourteen respondents (25%) reported being stranded prior to being assisted with AVR in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, with the highest number stranded in Guatemala (seven persons). Migrants assisted by AVR Mexico who were subject to the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP) as well as those not registered under MPP, but who wanted to return to countries of origin, were categorized as “other”. There were 43 such individuals or 75% of the total.

The majority of beneficiaries surveyed (67%) returned individually. Of these solo returnees, Guatemalans totaled 23, Hondurans 11, Salvadorans three and one Nicaraguan. The remaining (33%) returned within a family unit.

Sixty-eight per cent of respondents (39 beneficiaries) were in transit before receiving AVR assistance (24 adults and 15 children and adolescents). Most such beneficiaries were assisted by AVR Mexico

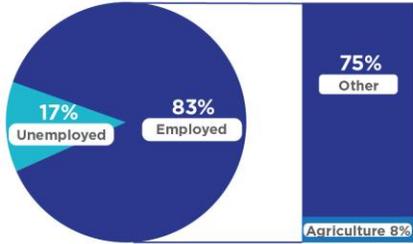
<sup>4</sup> 15 of them were unaccompanied and only 2 were accompanied.

<sup>5</sup> Children and adolescents were asked if they were studying in the countries of destination and origin, their perceptions of receptions received from families in communities of origin, their health, safety and financial concerns, plans to re-migrate, post-arrival experiences, and reintegration assistance.

(35), followed by AVR Guatemala (4). In terms of nationality, the group consisted of 24 Guatemalans, 12 Hondurans and three Salvadorans.

It is noteworthy that of the total number (17) of children and adolescent respondents (aged 12-17 years), 88 per cent (15 individuals) were in transit at the time of being offered support through the AVR programs. Of the two remaining individuals, both of whom were male adolescents, one (aged

Figure 3. Employment in country of destination



16 years) had been studying and the other had been working (aged 17 years) in the destination country.

As for adults not in transit (16) at the time of their return, four were engaged in activities such as studying before their AVRs.

The remaining 12 adults were queried about employment in the destination country prior to receiving AVR assistance and 17 per cent disclosed they had been unemployed. Of the 83 per cent employed, one worked in agriculture and nine others had a variety of jobs, such as street vendors,

grocery store workers or house cleaners.

c. Post-return conditions

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

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

1) Re-migration

*Of those surveyed, 37 per cent (21) stated they had plans to re-migrate.* The majority were Guatemalans (52% or 11).

When analyzing the information by nationality, 44 per cent of Guatemalans (11 out of 25), 25 per cent of Hondurans (6 out of 24) and a quarter of Salvadorans (1 out of 4) had plans to re-migrate.



*"It's not that you want to leave. You have to because of the situation here. Sometimes you are left with no other choice, and you have to make the decision to leave and try to go to the U.S."*

Honduran man returned from Guatemala (29 years old)<sup>6</sup>



*"Yes [intends to re-migrate], because I don't feel I will be able to work. I don't feel safe here. I would like to go anywhere to feel safe."*

Transgender woman returned from Honduras (35 years old)

## 2) Employment

There are a range of drivers for the decision to re-migrate, such as a lack of employment for returnees, which might be one of the factors that drove them to migrate in the first place.

*Forty-three per cent of adult respondents reported being unemployed in their country of origin following their return.*



*No, I'm not working right now. It's really tough here right now. Because of COVID-19, they ask for tests and vaccines."*

Honduran man returned from Guatemala (20 years old)

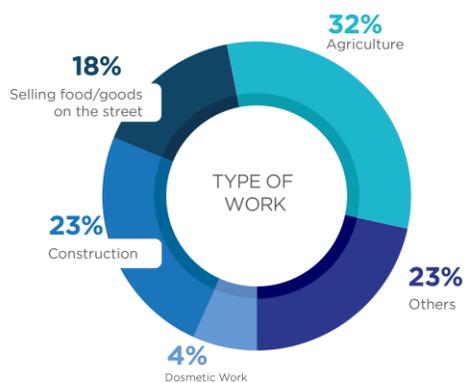


*"No, the truth is that this [finding a job] is very difficult."*

Honduran woman returned from Mexico (25 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.

Figure 4. Type of work, by percentage



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

As shown in Figure 4, of the 22 returnees who confirmed they were currently employed (representing 55% of adults), 32 per cent worked in the agricultural sector, 23 per cent in construction, 18 per cent sold food and goods on the street, and 4 per cent were domestic workers. The remaining 23 per cent were employed mainly in the service sector, including posts such as salespersons and security

guards. One adult reported she was studying.

<sup>6</sup> The respondents answered in Spanish. The quotes are translated to English for this report.



*"I help my sister selling food."*

Honduran woman returned from Mexico (39 years old)

While AVR beneficiary surveys focus on adult migrants and their reintegration into the labor market, monitoring teams are committed to understanding the unique needs and characteristics of migrant children and adolescents after return.

Though IOM does not support child labor,<sup>7</sup> these monitoring reports note cases of AVR children and adolescent beneficiaries who reported working upon return to origin countries. This information is particularly relevant considering that AVR programs in these countries do not currently include a reintegration component.

For this set of surveys, a total of five adolescents (all of whom were from Guatemala) reported that they were working upon return to the country of origin, including three working in agriculture, one as a domestic worker, and one as a car mechanic.

*"Now I am working in the fields. I help my family."*

Guatemalan adolescent male returned from Mexico (17 years old)



### 3) Financial concerns

***Migrants continue to face financial insecurity upon return.*** Fifty-six per cent of respondents were concerned about their finances.



*"What's bad is that I have a seasonal job. I sometimes stay without a job for six months. This was the fourth time I left Honduras [referring to his migration experience when assisted by AVR program]."*

Honduran man returned from Guatemala (19 years old)

*"I feel unsatisfied because I traveled [migrated] to have a better life. I came back here with nothing. But, I'm waiting to raise more money to [re-migrate]."*

Guatemalan man returned from Mexico (18 years old)



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

Out of the 17 child and adolescent respondents, only two teenagers (both aged 16 years) were studying.

### 4) Health conditions

Another potential driver to re-migrate is the physical and mental health conditions of returnees.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.iom.int/news/joint-statement-ilo-oecd-iom-and-unicef-child-labour-and-human-trafficking-remain-important-concerns-global-supply-chains>

Of the 57 beneficiaries interviewed, most (44 or 77%) considered themselves to be in good mental and physical health, while 12 (21%) were physically well, but in poor mental health. One was feeling well mentally, but felt physically unwell. From this data, it can be observed that the majority of respondents who reported feeling unwell were referring to poor mental health.<sup>8</sup>

## 5) Post-arrival assistance and reintegration support

*Only five respondents reported receiving immediate post-arrival assistance from IOM.*



*“When we arrived at Honduras, we received kits [hygiene, food and personal protective equipment] and money.”*

Honduran woman returned from Belize (42 years old)

Moreover, while unemployment and health conditions represent key challenges, returnees often fail to access the help they need in order to resettle and thrive.

*Only six respondents reported receiving reintegration support from their respective government or civil society organizations.* AVR programs do not currently include a reintegration component that could help ensure beneficiaries’ full assimilation back into communities of origin.

*“I was sent [by IOM] to a psychologist because I was depressed. It was with the Red Cross in La Ceiba.”*

Honduran woman returned from Belize (42 years old)



## 6) Security

The level of safety within communities and the reception which AVR beneficiaries receive from their families upon return influence reintegration, and therefore be drivers for future re-migration.

*Some returned migrants (7%) were concerned about safety,* with four returnees fearing violence in their countries of origin (1 Honduran, 1 Guatemalan, 1 Mexican and 1 Salvadoran).



*“Sometimes there is danger from the gangs.”*

Guatemalan adolescent male returned from Mexico (17 years old)

## 7) Reception from families and communities of return

*Overall, 96 per cent of surveyed migrants reported being positively received by their families and communities upon return.*

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<sup>8</sup> All AVR programs conduct medical fit-to-travel assessments and provide migrants with COVID-19 (PCR) tests before returning to their countries of origin. In contrast to previous months, fewer respondents mentioned COVID-19 as a health or security concern.

*"My family was very happy to have me back. I was sick and I wanted to come home. They thought they would not see me again. They were very worried".*

Honduran woman returned from Guatemala (42 years old)



The remaining 4 per cent (2) reported that their families were surprised by their return, as shared by a child beneficiary who had been assisted along with his mother:



*"[His family] was surprised, but I wanted to come back because I was afraid."*

Honduran boy returned from Mexico (12 years old)

Of those not planning to re-migrate, most were Hondurans (18), followed by Guatemalans (14), Salvadorans (3) and one Nicaraguan. As mentioned by one teenage beneficiary, opportunities for personal/professional development in countries of origin diminished the need to re-migrate:

*"No, I want to study something to be able to work."*

Guatemalan teenage girl returned from Mexico (15 years old)



The results of this Monitoring Report reveal that fewer respondents planned to re-migrate in contrast to findings from the previous reporting period (37% for the current report, as compared to 50%).

Improvement of conditions within the countries of origin as reported by AVR beneficiaries to the monitoring teams might explain the decrease in number of migrants expressing a desire to re-migrate. Fewer people were unemployed in the countries of origin following their return (43% in comparison to 57% in the last report) and fewer were concerned about their finances (56% in comparison to 69%). Also, a larger percentage perceived having both good physical and mental health (77% versus 70%).

However, the surveys revealed that little formal support is available to returned migrants in order to help them overcome their obstacles.

Another finding of interest is the number (17) of children and adolescents who participated in the survey. Most (15) were unaccompanied males who were in transit at the time of being offered assistance through AVR programs. Additionally, it should be noted that when interviewed in their countries of origin, only two were studying and five were working.

While AVR programs do not currently include a reintegration component, AVR teams have worked on developing referral mechanisms for stakeholders (government agencies, civil and international organizations) to provide support where possible, as well as strengthening partnerships and reinforcing the skills of counterparts as part of a holistic approach to returns.