

MONITORING REPORT ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN PROGRAMS JUNE-JULY 2021

AVR PROGRAMS IN MEXICO AND NORTH OF CENTRAL AMERICA COUNTRIES
No. 7

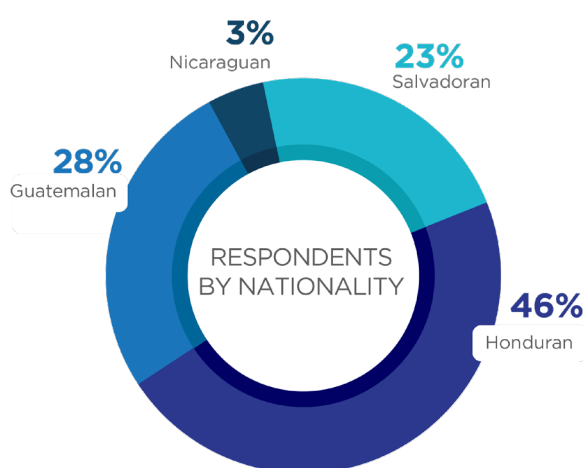
INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the findings of surveys conducted in June-July 2021 by the IOM Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) Program in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and El Salvador¹ with 67 AVR beneficiaries supported during May-July 2021.² Each respondent was asked a series of 24 to 33 questions by destination country AVR teams one to three months after their return. Obtaining qualitative data in addition to demographic descriptors provides important insights into the nature of migrants' experiences in countries of destination and origin as well as any plans to re-migrate, mental and physical health status, financial security, employment, physical safety and any post-arrival assistance received. Survey findings are used to better understand how returned migrants reintegrate into origin countries and communities as well as inform the donor, stakeholders and IOM on future AVR programming.

I. SURVEY RESULTS

a. Demographic profiles of respondents

Figure 1. Respondents by nationality



During June-July 2021, AVR monitoring teams interviewed 67 beneficiaries who returned to countries of origin between May 5-July 27, 2021 (representing 18% of beneficiaries during this period) and consented before departure to participate in the survey. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents were assisted by AVR Mexico, 10 per cent by AVR Guatemala, 8 per cent by AVR Belize, and the remaining 3 per cent by AVR El Salvador.

As seen in [Figure 1](#), the composition of this respondent cohort was 46 per cent Hondurans, 28 per cent Guatemalans, 23 per cent Salvadorans and three per cent

Nicaraguans. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents were male (men and boys) and 43 per cent were

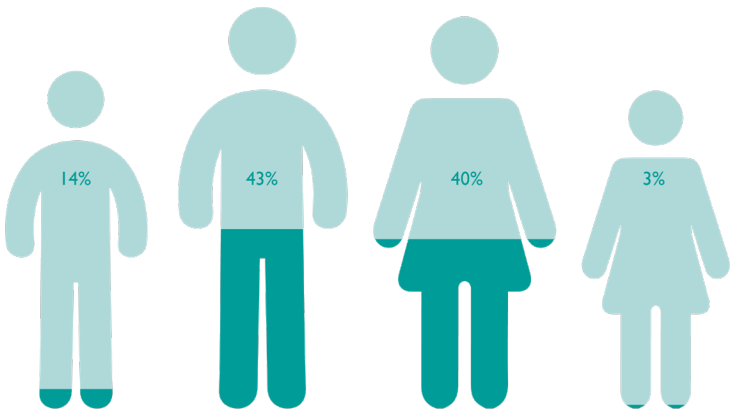
¹ The AVR program in Honduras did not conduct surveys during this period.

² The AVR program in Guatemala surveyed one beneficiary who returned in April, 2021.

female (women and girls). Most respondents were adults (83%), but AVR monitoring teams also interviewed children and adolescents to record their experiences as returnees.³

Figure 2 shows the shares of respondents by age and sex.

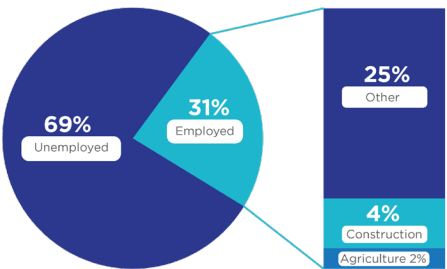
Figure 2. Shares of respondents, by age and sex.



b. Migratory profiles of respondents before return

Fourteen migrant survey respondents (21%) reported being stranded before assisted with AVRs in Belize, El Salvador and Guatemala, with the highest number in Guatemala (7 persons). In terms of nationality, Salvadorans were the most commonly stranded (7 persons), followed by Hondurans (5) and Nicaraguans (2). AVR Mexico’s respondents were classified as “other”. This program assisted migrants subject to the Migration Protection Protocols (MPP) and those not registered under MPP, but who wanted to return to countries of origin, were categorized as “other”.

Figure 3. Employment in country of destination



The majority of beneficiaries surveyed (34 or 51%) returned within a family unit, while (33 or 49%) returned alone. Of the solo returnees, Hondurans totaled 13, Guatemalans 12 and Salvadorans 8.

When queried about employment in the destination country, 49 adult respondents answered and 69 per cent revealed they were unemployed. Of the 31 per cent employed, two persons had jobs in construction and one in agriculture. Twelve others had a variety of roles, such as selling food, clothes, shop and electricity sector workers.

³ Children and adolescents were asked if they were studying in the country of destination and upon their return, their perceptions about the reception of their family and communities of origin, their health, concerns about their safety, plans to re-migrate, post-arrival and reintegration assistance. AVR Mexico also asked them about any financial concerns.

Of the seven remaining adults, five were in transit at the time of being assisted by the AVR program. As for the 11 children and adolescents, one was accompanying her mother and assisted in El Salvador. Four others were supported in Belize, two of whom were unaccompanied and in transit on route to Mexico, and two others were Belizean siblings who returned with their mother to her country of origin. The six remaining children were AVR beneficiaries in Mexico; two of whom out of 11 child and adolescent respondents overall studied at countries of destination, in these cases online.

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 as well as their mental, physical and financial states and 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, half stated they had plans to re-migrate

The bulk were Hondurans (45%), followed by Guatemalans (33%) and Salvadorans (18%).



“Yes, I want to make the trip again, but to do it better with planning. Not yet, [as] I have to get the means. But, I will plan it.”

Honduran man returned from Guatemala (33 years old)

“Yes, I would go back to Belize, but not right now. They told me they would let me know when there was work back there, and my children are citizens there so I would go back.”

Salvadoran woman returned from Belize (38 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 their migration in the first place.

Fifty-seven per cent of adult respondents reported being unemployed in their country of origin following their return.



“I feel bad because I’m looking for work and can’t find it. I have to eat.”

Guatemalan woman returned from Mexico (32 years old)

In addition to unemployment, some beneficiaries face financial losses due to expenses incurred prior and during their mobility.

"I feel worried because it seems that we threw the money into the trash because we did not arrive in the United States. We did not stay in Mexico and we are here without work."

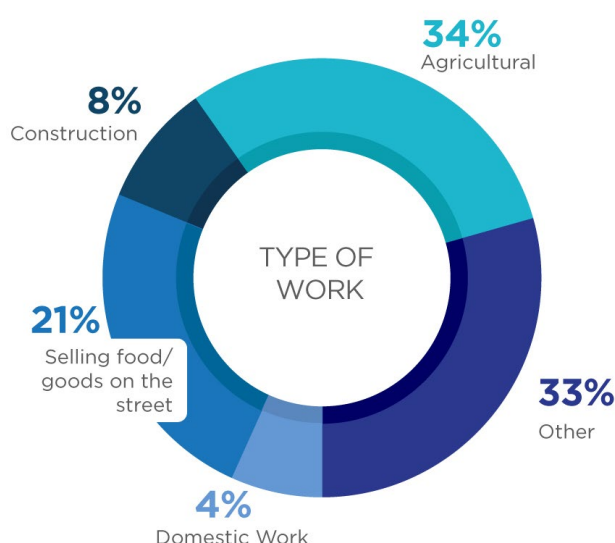
Honduran man returned from Mexico (27 years old)



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

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

Figure 4. Type of work, by percentage



As shown in Figure 4, of the 24 returnees who confirmed they were currently employed, 34 per cent worked in the agricultural sector, 21 per cent sold food and goods on the street, 8 per cent worked in the construction sector, and 4 per cent were domestic workers. The remaining 33 per cent were mainly in the services sector, such as customer service representative, masseuse, stylist and mechanic. Although employed, some respondents revealed their income was insufficient to cover basic needs.

"The salary is not enough, barely enough to cover food [costs]."

Salvadoran woman returned from Mexico (30 years old)



3) Financial concerns

Therefore, migrants continue to face financial insecurity upon return. Out of 62 respondents asked about perceptions of their finances,⁴ 69 per cent were concerned.

All Salvadorans (11) and the majority of Hondurans (21 or 68%) and Guatemalans (10 or 53%) surveyed on this matter reported financial concerns.

⁴ AVR teams in Belize and El Salvador did not ask this question to respondents under 18 years old.



"No, my situation is not good. I would like to improve it, but here in Honduras, things are not okay with the government. And with the pandemic, there is not much work. But, it's enough to get by and sustain myself."

Honduran man returned from Guatemala (33 years old)

"Here in Honduras, you work for the day only, just for the daily food. It's tough sometimes, but you do whatever it takes to help your family."

Honduran man returned from Guatemala (37 years old)



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

Out of the 11 child and adolescent respondents, only two were studying at the time of interview⁵ by continuing online studies started in the country of destination.

4) Health conditions

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

Of the 67 beneficiaries interviewed, most (47 or 70%) reported good mental and physical health, while 18 were physically well but in poor mental health.

From this data, it can be observed that the majority of respondents reporting feeling unwell were referring to mental health.



"I felt really bad, but the psychologist they referred me to is helping me a lot. I felt depressed and desperate. Now I am starting to understand that life is not over for me."

Salvadoran woman returned from Guatemala (45 years old)

5) Post-arrival assistance and reintegration support

No respondent reported receiving immediate post-arrival assistance.

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

Only eight 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 fully assimilate back into communities of origin.

⁵ Numbers reflect student status at the time of interview. As standard academic calendars for each country of origin and the time elapsed between date of return and beneficiary interview vary, it is important to consider that the date of interview may have preceded upcoming enrollment in school.

"I was referred to the Usulután hospital and San Miguel. And FUNITER for a psychologist."
Salvadoran woman returned from Guatemala (45 years old)



Noteworthy is the experience of one beneficiary who, although receiving information about reintegration programs, could not meet the expenses required to follow up this assistance.



"Yes, they gave me some information. But, I don't have money to spend on buses to go looking for the places."

Salvadoran man returned from Guatemala (28 years old)

6) Security

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

Some returned migrants (18%) were concerned about safety, with 12 returnees fearing violence in their countries of origin (7 Hondurans, 4 Guatemalans and 1 Salvadoran).

Several respondents underlined that ongoing violence in home countries continued to exacerbate feelings of insecurity.

"I don't feel safe and I'm afraid that something is going to happen to me."
Guatemalan man returned from Mexico (23 years old)



"Inside the house I feel safe. The problem is when you go out. That's why I only go out to do what I need to do and go back to my house."

Honduran woman returned from Mexico (23 years old)

7) Reception from families and communities of return

Overall, 90 per cent of surveyed migrants reported being positively received by their families and communities upon return.

"[My family] told me it was best to come back if everything was going wrong and be together."

Honduran woman returned from Mexico (43 years old)



The remaining 10 per cent reported their families were surprised by their return and not overly welcoming due to money spent on the perceived unsuccessful migration abroad.

Survey findings show that any decision not to re-migrate could be linked to improving living conditions upon returns.



"I feel safe and through my pregnancy. I am now insured."
Nicaraguan woman returned from El Salvador (25 years old)

Of those not planning to re-migrate, most were Hondurans (15) followed by Salvadorans (9) and Guatemalans (8). As mentioned by one teenage beneficiary, opportunities for personal/professional development in countries of origin diminished the need to re-migrate:

"I want to study, that's first. I have not thought about making the trip again. My family was desperate, they were it was very worried. My mom was trying to find a way to get me back."
Salvadoran woman returned from Belize (16 years old)



In conclusion, this monitoring report found that half of respondents planned to re-migrate. This is a result of returnees struggling to reintegrate into countries and communities of origin, particularly due to employment, income and security challenges. However, the surveys revealed that little formal support is offered to returned migrants to overcome these obstacles. While AVR programs do not currently include a reintegration component, our teams work to refer beneficiaries to stakeholders to provide support where possible.