

# » Atlas

of migration  
in Northern  
Central America



UNITED NATIONS

ECLAC



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

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of migration  
in Northern  
Central America



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

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This document was prepared by the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in the framework of the Alliance for addressing the causes of migration and building opportunities in rural areas of Mesoamerica, established jointly by the ECLAC subregional headquarters in Mexico and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The document was prepared by Paulo Saad, Chief of CELADE-Population Division of ECLAC, and Jorge Martínez Pizarro and Zulma Sosa of the same Division, who guided and supervised the work of the consultants Claudia Arellano and Cristián Orrego, who compiled data and prepared the infographics and maps. Assistance was provided by the consultant Jorge Dehays.

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United Nations publication • LC/PUB.2018/23 • Distribution: L • S.18-01071  
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This publication should be cited as: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Atlas of migration in Northern Central America* (LC/PUB.2018/23), Santiago, 2018.

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# Foreword

Over the past few months the political agendas and television screens in our region have been filled with images of seas of people fleeing from despair. Many of them have chosen to trek 3,700 km with their children on their backs, cross two or three borders irregularly and ford torrential tropical rivers, rather than resign themselves to the certainty of a hostile world in their towns and communities. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) view this state of affairs as unacceptable and something that we aim to help change.

In the period between the 2000 and 2010 census rounds, the number of Latin Americans living in a place other than that of their birth increased by about 32%. For the Central American subregion this increase was 35%, while in Northern Central America (NCA)<sup>1</sup> it averaged 59%. Honduras stands out in this latter grouping, with a 94% jump in the number of emigrants between 2000 and 2010. Furthermore, there are signs that this uptrend has not eased since that date.

Today, migration is more complex than ever in Central America. There are larger numbers of migrants in transit, returnees, unaccompanied minors and asylum-seekers, as well as whole families and highly conspicuous caravans journeying through Mexico and the NCA countries. Migration has become a matter of the highest priority on development and political agendas.

There are several factors behind the intensification and greater complexity of migration. Some are global in nature, such as the financial crisis of 2007–2008, which reduced Latin American and Caribbean migration to countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) —especially to the United States and Spain— and drove increases in intraregional flows, reflecting significant improvements in some of the region’s own economies. Differences between countries in terms of political stability exert a powerful influence on migration. Broader options for transport and communication, as well as more open and diverse labour markets in some countries, are also relevant factors.

In the case of Central America, particularly in the NCA countries, there are additional factors. A fundamental consideration is poverty in countries of origin, especially in Honduras and Guatemala, whose poverty rates stand at 74% and 68%, respectively. Emigrants from NCA come mainly from rural areas, particularly in the cases of Honduras and Guatemala, where rural poverty is as high as 82% and 77%, respectively. Extreme vulnerability —particularly in rural areas— to climate events such as hurricanes, earthquakes and droughts combines with poverty to virtually decimate the livelihoods of millions of people. Family reunification and networks in transit and destination countries are also contributing factors, given that a high percentage of migrants from NCA have relatives in the United States. Lastly, but no less importantly, violence and insecurity significantly increase the cost of remaining in countries of origin, although these may also occur in transit countries, as evidenced by the dozens of migrant deaths and the incalculable numbers who have suffered violence en route.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Northern Central America (NCA)” as it is used here refers to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

The recent proposal by the United Nations of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to serve as a general framework for migration to take place in a safe, orderly and regular manner comes in response to the situation described. In July 2018, the States Members of the United Nations finalized the text of the Global Compact, the first ever global agreement to better manage international migration, address its challenges, strengthen migrant rights and contribute to sustainable development. The document includes 23 objectives and is intended to tackle the causes and consequences of migration in contemporary society, framing a proposal for understanding and governance of the phenomenon based on the perspective of social and human development and placing human security and migrants' rights at its core, in order to create the conditions for safe, orderly and regular migration. The agreement will be submitted for formal adoption by Member States at the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which will be held in Marrakesh, Morocco, on 10 and 11 December.

The countries of Northern Central America have a growing body of studies and analyses on migration issues. However, there are still significant gaps in regular, up-to-date statistical data on migration in those countries. Yet migration has never been afforded the importance and significance that it has acquired today, especially in relation to new conditions at points of departure (violence, political instability, drought and natural disasters, poverty and inequality), in transit migration through Mexico (human rights violations, organized crime, extortion and risks to migrants' health and lives) and upon arrival and integration into the United States (mass deportation policy, criminalization of undocumented migration, racism and xenophobia, among other things).

ECLAC and FAO intend this Atlas, which groups and organizes the best statistical data available, as a contribution to the characterization of migration patterns in the countries that make up NCA. We hope that it will serve as an input for designing policies, programmes and various forms of action to benefit safe, orderly and regular migration in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

ECLAC and FAO are working together on further studies on migration dynamics and characteristics in the countries of Northern Central America. We are focusing on movements across multiple countries, both within NCA and in relation to Mexico, as well as on human security, the study of rural areas from which migrants depart, and the linkages between migration processes and the development strategies of the NCA countries.


The collaboration between ECLAC and FAO has the primary objective of providing better policy and technical advisory services, based on our highly complementary mandates, competencies and areas of expertise, which enable us to garner a holistic response to the questions and demands raised by the countries.

**Alicia Bárcena**

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and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

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Deputy Director-General and Regional Representative  
for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Food and  
Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

A large crowd of people is walking along a dirt path in a rural, hilly landscape. The image is overlaid with a blue tint. The crowd is dense and extends far into the distance. The background shows rolling hills and a clear sky.

Today, migration is more complex than ever in Central America. There are larger numbers of migrants in transit, returnees, unaccompanied minors and asylum-seekers, as well as whole families and highly conspicuous caravans journeying through Mexico and the NCA countries. Migration has become a matter of the highest priority on development and political agendas.



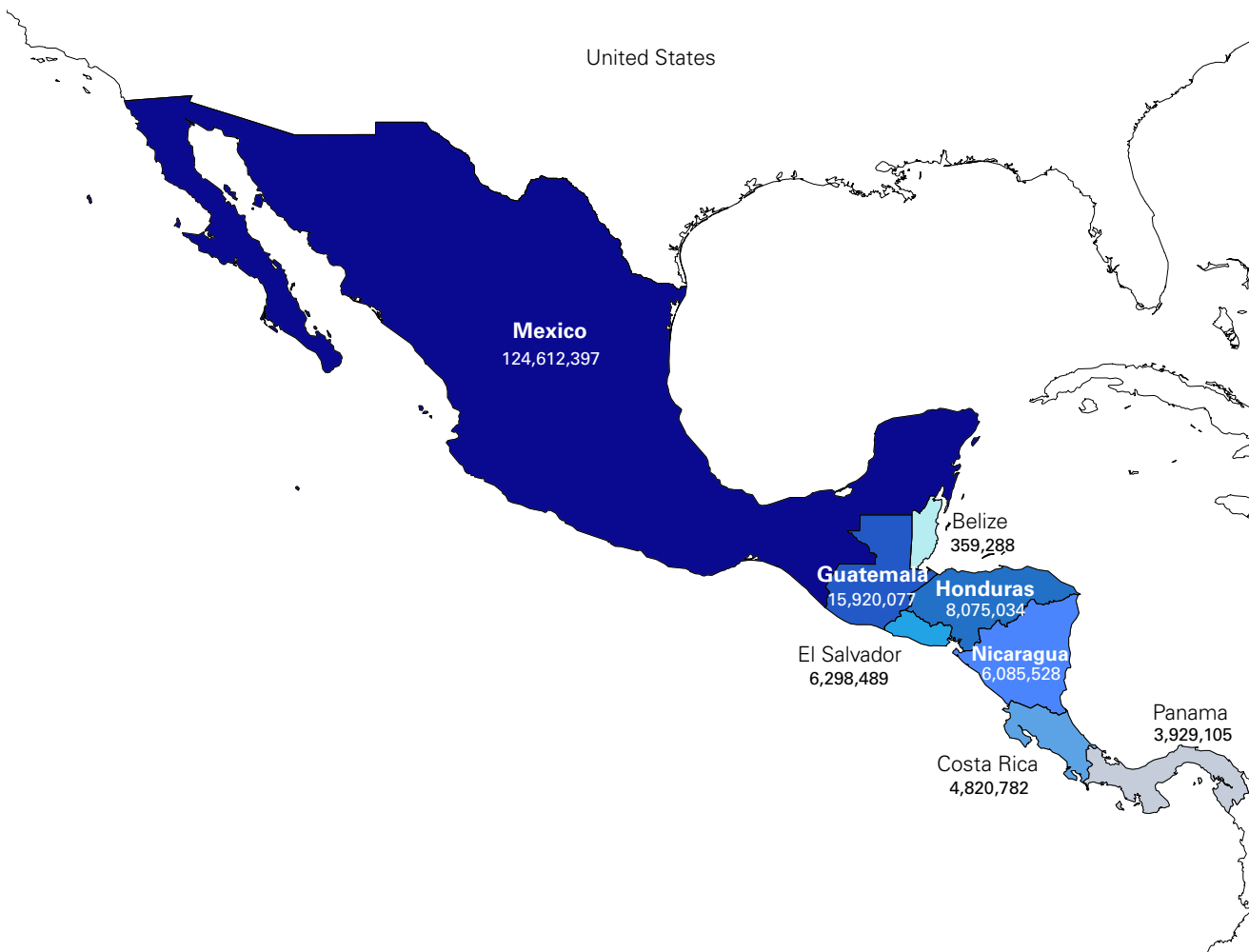


# Situation in countries of origin of Northern Central America (NCA)

## I.1 Demographic and economic characteristics of the countries comprising NCA

**Map I.1**

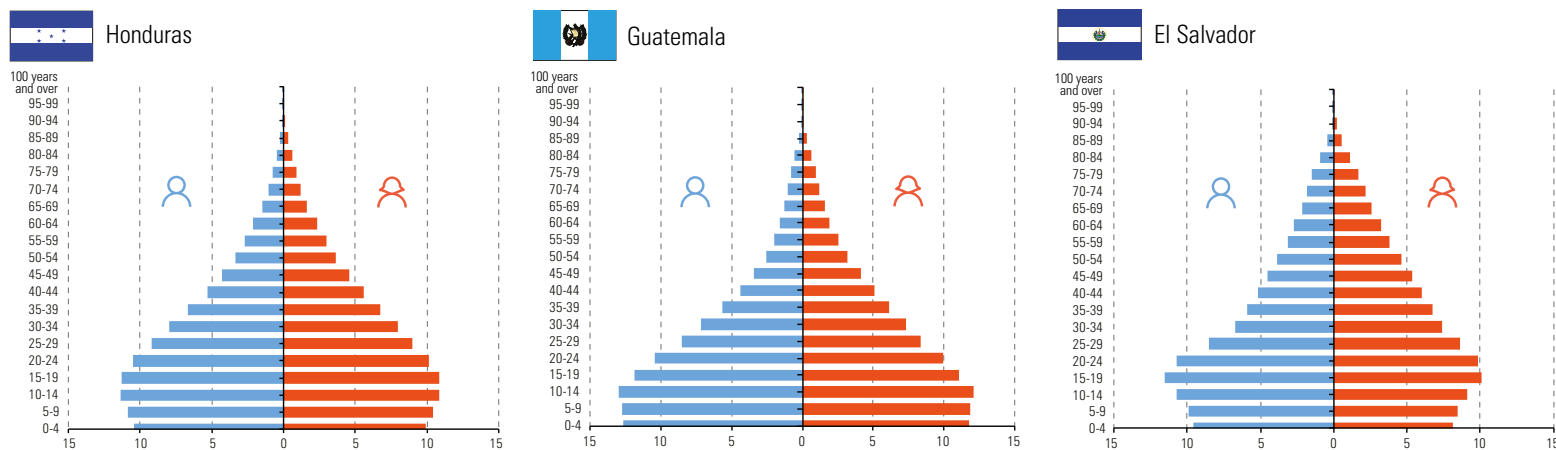
Total population of Mexico and Central American countries, 2015



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of CEPALSTAT [online database] <http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>.

## Population dynamics

**Figure I.1**  
Northern Central America: age structure of the population, 2015  
(Percentages)

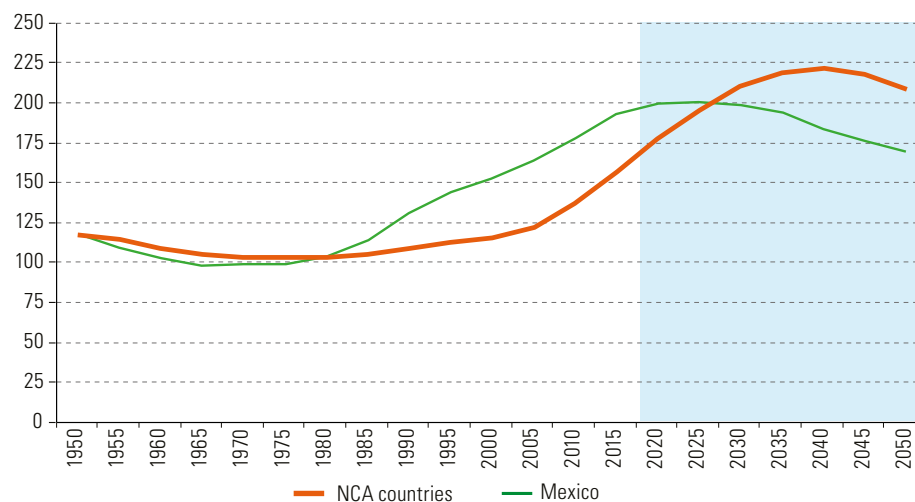


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of CEPALSTAT [online database] <http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>.

Population dynamics in Mexico and the NCA countries are currently in a favourable period of the demographic dividend, in which the population of working age is increasing relative to the population of non-working age (children and older persons).

However, if the economic and industrial structure of the NCA countries continues to fail to produce sufficient good-quality jobs, much of the working-age population will continue to migrate, possibly to other latitudes.

**Figure I.2**  
Mexico and countries of Northern Central America: persons of working age per 100 persons of non-working age, 1950–2050  
(Number of persons)

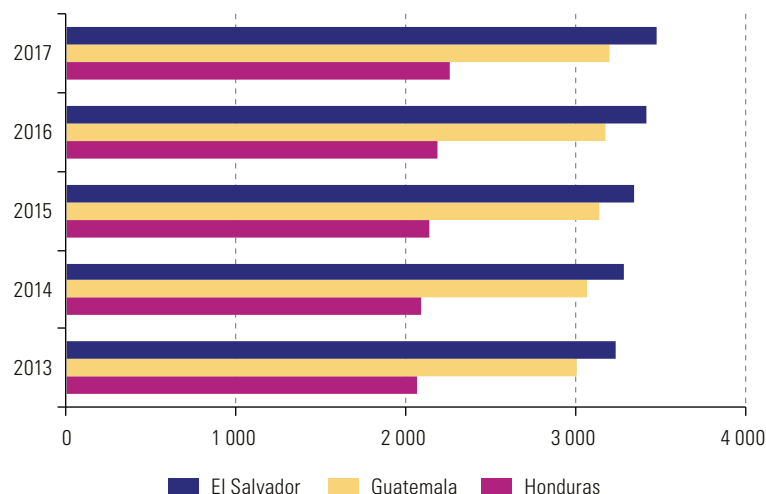


Source: A. Canales and M. Rojas, "Panorama de la migración internacional en México y Centroamérica. Documento elaborado en el marco de la Reunión Regional Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Expertas y Expertos en Migración Internacional preparatoria del Pacto Mundial para una Migración Segura, Ordenada y Regular", Population and Development series, No. 124 (LC/TS.2018/42), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2018.

Note: Persons of working age are defined as those aged between 15 and 64 years; persons of non-working age are defined as those aged between 0 and 15 years and those aged 65 years or over.

## Economic growth and remittances

**Figure I.3**  
Countries of Northern Central America:  
per capita GDP, 2013–2017  
(Dollars at current prices)



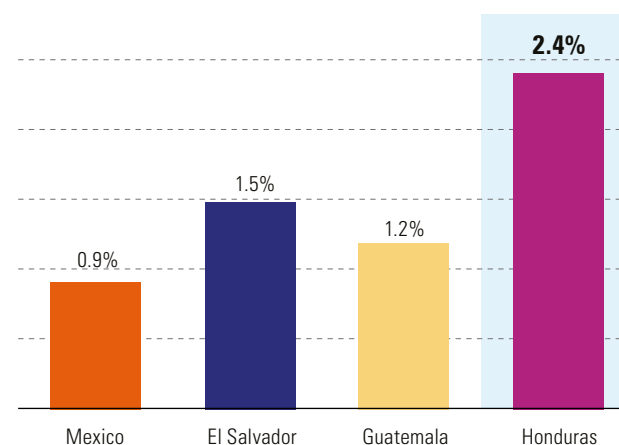
**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of CEPALSTAT [online database] <http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>.

**Table I.1**  
Central America: indicators showing the weight of remittances, 2016  
(Percentages)

Country	Percentage of GDP	Percentage of exports	Percentage of imports
Costa Rica	0.9	4.9	3.3
El Salvador	17.1	108.6	50.4
Guatemala	10.4	66.1	43.1
Honduras	20.2	49.0	35.3
Nicaragua	9.5	39.3	20.3
Panama	0.8	3.9	2.2
Central America <sup>a</sup>	7.5	37.6	22.8

**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official figures.  
<sup>a</sup> Weighted averages.

**Figure I.4**  
Countries of Northern Central America and Mexico:  
per capita GDP growth rate, 2000–2015



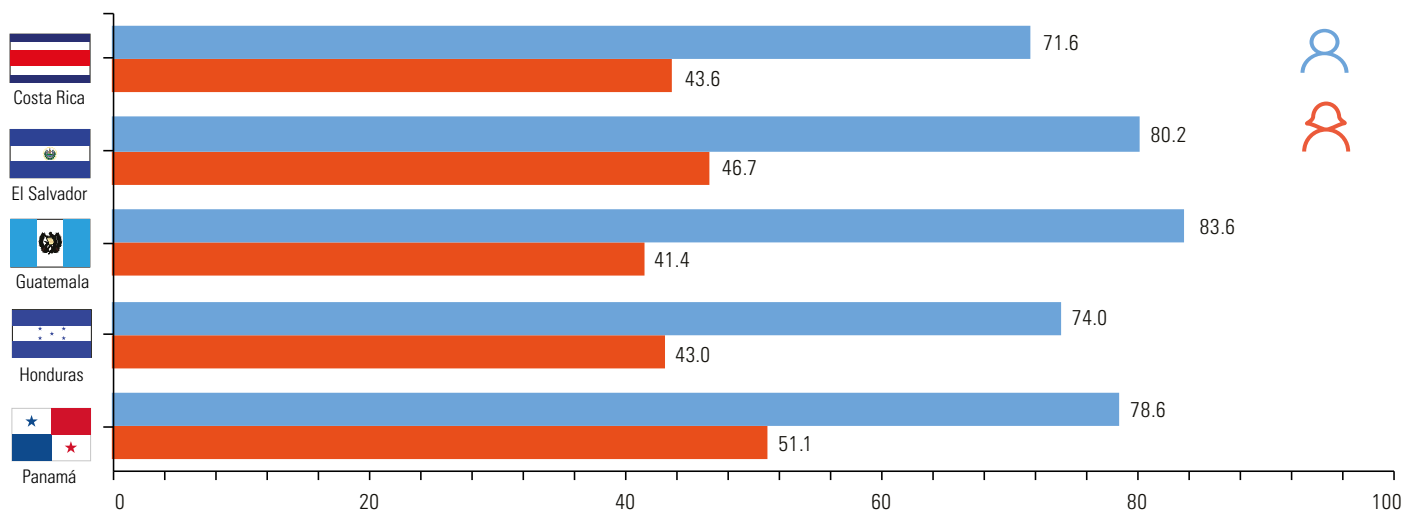
**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of CEPALSTAT [online database] <http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>.

The NCA countries have a lower per capita GDP than their neighbours, at just a third of the average for the Latin American region overall. Honduras, the NCA country with the lowest per capita GDP, nevertheless posted the fastest growth in this indicator in 2000–2015 (2.4%). A considerable share of the GDP of the NCA countries comes from remittances sent by migrants abroad to their families at home.

The contribution of remittances to GDP shows the significance of these inflows in supporting family economies. Migration, or seeking work in another country, represents an opportunity for households in NCA countries. It is precisely these countries that receive the largest remittances—both by absolute volume and by percentage of GDP—compared to other countries in the region. This situation also reflects a high degree of dependence on income generated abroad and the lack of other sources of income.

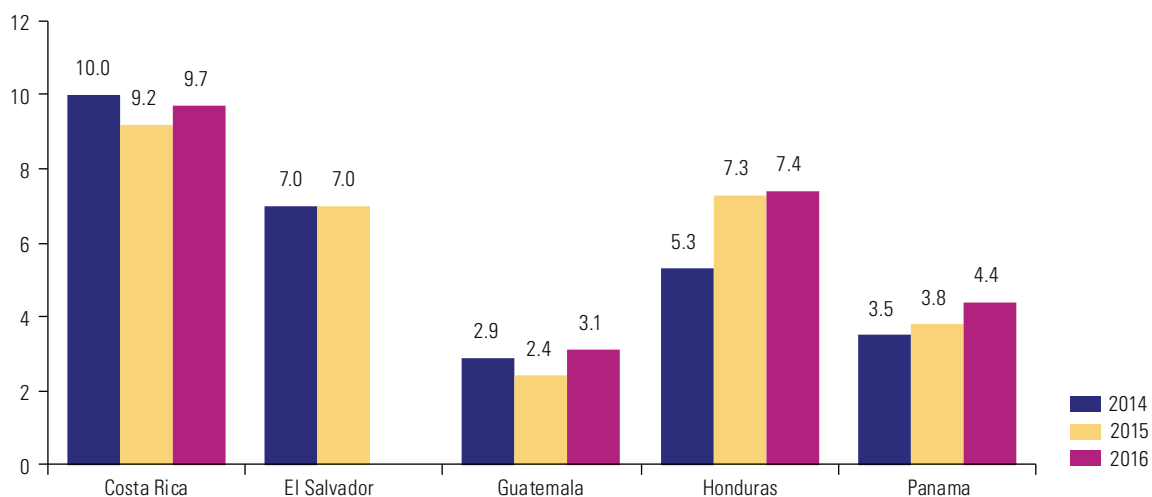
## Labour market participation

**Figure I.5**  
Central America: labour market participation rate by sex, 2016  
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official figures.

**Figure I.6**  
Central America: open unemployment rate, latest period available, 2014–2016  
(Percentages)



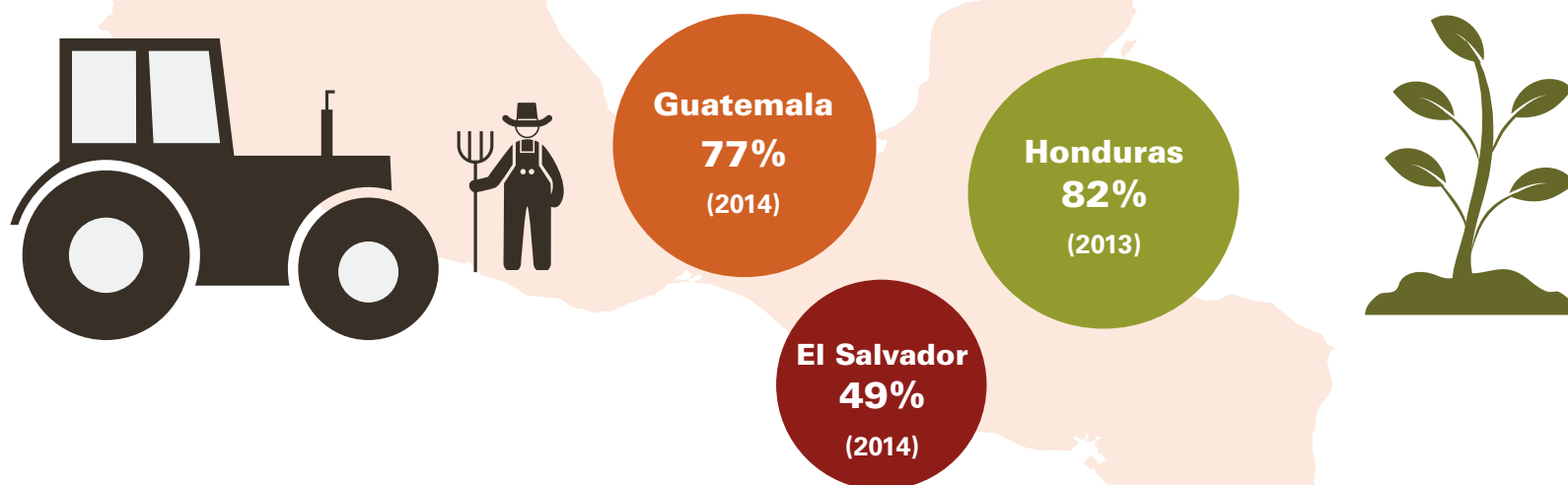
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official figures.

The Central American countries show very low rates of female labour market participation and varied unemployment figures. Guatemala, which has the lowest unemployment rate in NCA (around 3.0% over the past three years), has the widest gap in labour market participation by sex, with the employment rate for men doubling the rate for women. This trend is replicated, albeit less markedly, in the other NCA countries (El Salvador and Honduras).

## Rural poverty

The proportion of the population living in poverty in the NCA countries has risen in the past few decades and has reached critical levels in rural areas.

**Image I.1**  
Percentage of the rural population living in poverty (latest year recorded)

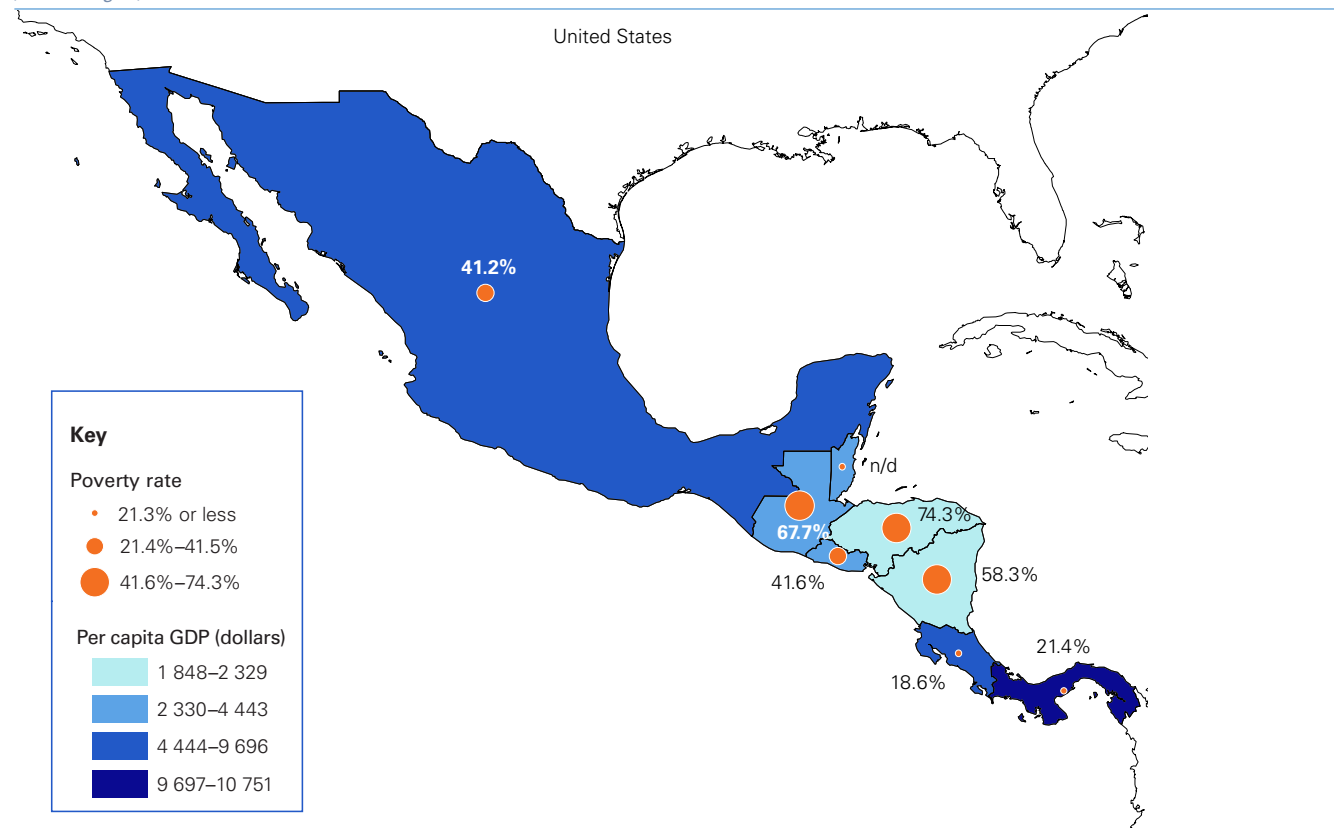


**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of CEPALSTAT [online database] <http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>.

Of all the population, the rural poor are the most sensitive to economic, political and even climatological crises owing to the vulnerability of areas devoted to agriculture, the main source of economic activity for the labour force in NCA countries (33.3% in Guatemala and Honduras and 34.5% in El Salvador). The crises and food insecurity caused by droughts in the Central America Dry Corridor directly affect the rural population in the three NCA countries and Nicaragua, which, in turn, has affected other indicators related to rural poverty, such as the prevalence of chronic malnutrition in children under age 5, which in Guatemala reached 59.6% of the rural population and 65.9% of the indigenous population in the period 2004–2012.

## Economic factors and emigration

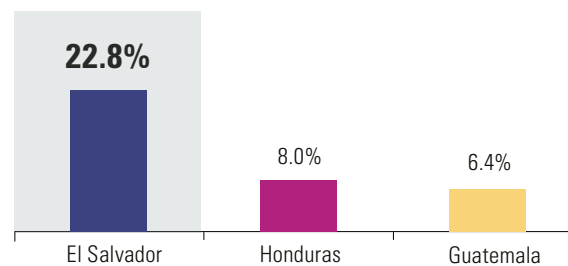
**Map I.2**  
**Mexico and Central America: poverty and per capita GDP, 2015**  
*(Percentages)*



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of CEPALSTAT [online database] <http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/portada.html?idioma=english>.

Although El Salvador registers a lower poverty level and higher per capita GDP than the other countries in Northern Central America, it has the highest percentage of native-born population residing abroad, suggesting that other factors may be behind its high levels of emigration.

Percentage of the native-born population residing abroad



## Other factors driving emigration



Various factors may be driving the high rate of emigration from the **countries of Northern Central America**



### Environmental or climatic factors

The NCA countries have been hit by hurricanes, earthquakes and drought in the past few decades, which has left the population in these countries more vulnerable



### Family factors

82% of migrants from NCA countries have family members in the United States, providing networks that support migration



### Rights, violence and insecurity

Although records are scarce, violence suffered by NCA emigrants both in their countries of origin and during transit has been explicitly identified as a determining factor in the forced departure of part of the population

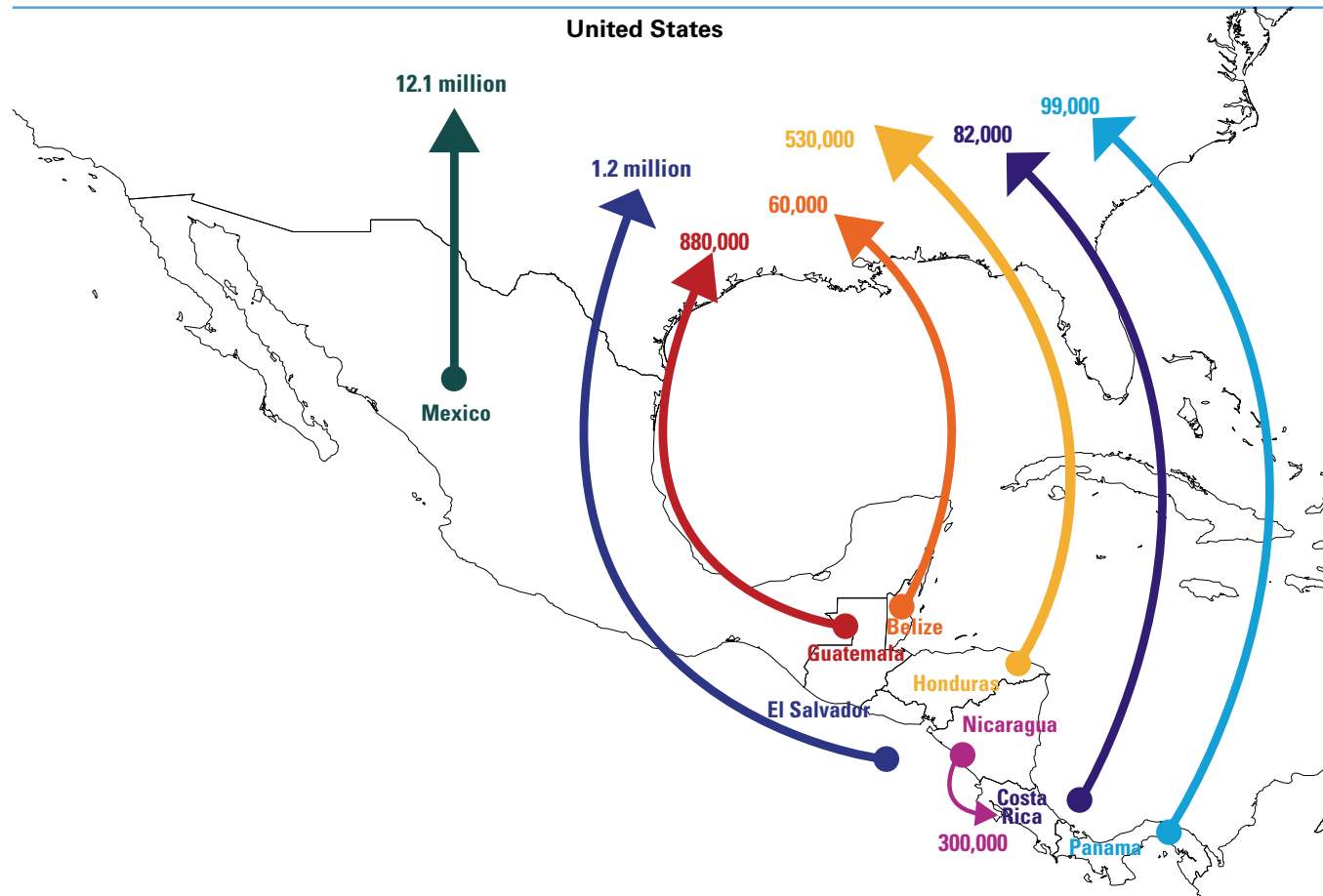


## Main migratory flows

### Map I.3

#### Mexico and Central America: native-born population residing abroad and main migration destinations, 2015

(Number of persons)



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division of ECLAC, Investigation of International Migration in Latin America (IMILA) [online database] <https://celade.cepal.org/bdcelade/imila/> (ECLAC, 2018b).

Any change in migratory trends in NCA will need to be underpinned by development sustainability. Economic, environmental and social factors need to be improved, and the situation of increasing violence and political crisis resolved, as an essential condition to raise living standards and thus make migration into an informed choice, and not a forced option.

### Violence in the countries of Northern Central America

**NCA migrants come from contexts with high levels of violence and are also vulnerable to violence during transit through Mexico towards the United States**

**Image I.2**  
Homicide rate in 2017  
(Homicides per 100,000 inhabitants)



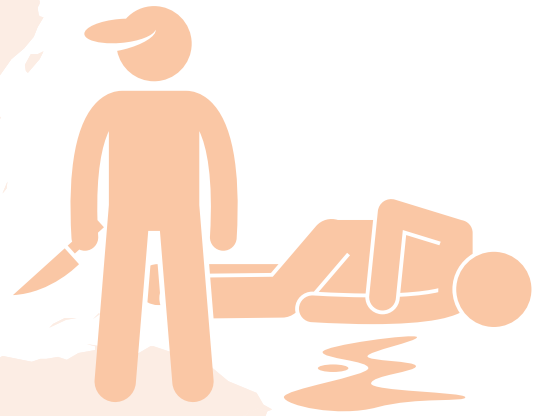
**Guatemala**  
**26**  
Equivalent to 4,409 victims



**Honduras**  
**43**  
Equivalent to 3,791 victims



**El Salvador**  
**60**  
Equivalent to 3,947 victims



**These three countries have Central America's highest homicide rates**

Source: InSight Crime, "InSight Crime's 2017 homicide round-up", 19 January 2018 [online] <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/2017-homicide-round-up/>.

## Violence against women in Northern Central America

**Femicide rates in the NCA countries are the highest in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and represent 87% of all femicides in Central America in 2017**

**Image I.3**

**Femicide rates in 2017**

*(Gender-based homicides of women aged 15 years and over, per 100,000 women)*

**Guatemala**



2.6

**Honduras**

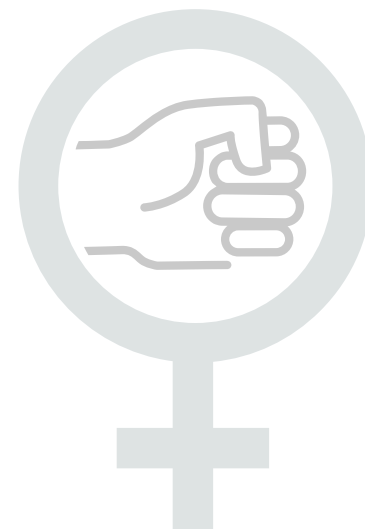


5.8

**El Salvador**



10.2

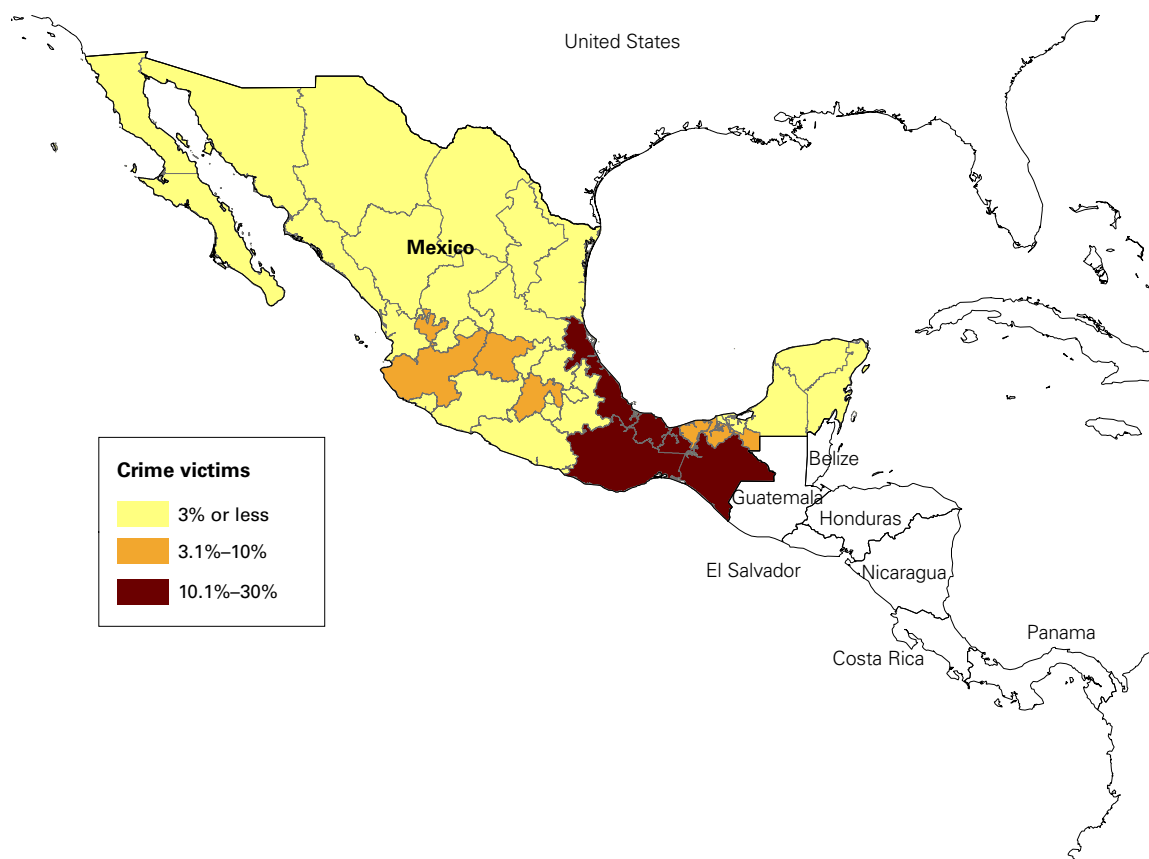


**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Femicide or feminicide", Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-feminicide>.

## Migrant crime victims during transit through Mexico, 2017

### Map I.4

Migrants passing through shelters or meals facilities documented by the Migrant Protection Organizations Documentation Network (REDODEM) who declared having suffered or witnessed a crime during their journey through Mexican territory



Most crimes against migrants in transit in Mexico are committed in States near the southern border: Chiapas, Oaxaca and Veracruz. An intermediate incidence of these crimes occurs in the States of Tabasco in the south of the country and Guanajuato, Jalisco and Mexico in the centre-west. Recently, migrants have been changing their routes to avoid falling victim to crime (REDODEM, 2018).

**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes (REDODEM), *El Estado indolente: recuento de la violencia en las rutas migratorias y perfiles de movilidad en México*, Mexico City, 2018.

## Violence during transit



**8 times  
higher**

**Central Americans' risk of being kidnapped during transit through Mexico compared to Mexicans**

(Canales and Rojas, 2018)



**3 of every  
4 crimes**

**suffered by NCA migrants in transit are robberies**

(REDODEM, 2018)



**1 of every  
4 Honduran migrants**

**has been the victim of some sort of crime or abuse, making this nationality the most vulnerable during transit**

(SEGOB, 2012)

## I.3 Effects of climate change

### Rural conditions and emigration in Northern Central America

#### Agricultural workers and migrants

- One of the main groups migrating from NCA to Mexico and the United States consists of rural families who rely on agriculture for their livelihood.
- Most of them grow basic grains such as maize, beans, rice and coffee, as well as gourdes, in the Central America Dry Corridor.



Image I.4  
Percentage of rural population per country, 2015

#### Guatemala



58%

**64%**  
of deported  
unaccompanied  
Salvadoran minors  
come from rural  
households in 2016

(IOM, 2017a)

#### Honduras



58%

**50.5%**  
of Guatemalans  
receiving  
remittances from  
abroad in 2016  
were living in  
rural areas

(IOM, 2017b)

#### El Salvador

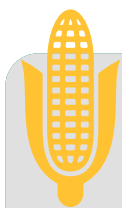


38%

**43%**  
of Honduran  
returnees in 2015  
came from rural  
localities

(INE, 2016)

## Impacts of climate change on migration in Northern Central America



Climate change has direct impacts on agriculture, one of the main sources of work and family subsistence for the population of NCA countries, because of drought and other phenomena that affect crops, mainly grains such as maize, beans, rice and coffee, as well as gourdes, and this threatens food security and sovereignty.



The rural population devoted to these activities has been forced to migrate out of the region and seek wage work, because the impacts of climate change extend throughout the Central America Dry Corridor.



The Central America Dry Corridor is a subregion of dry tropical forest that spans the countries of NCA and Nicaragua (and, in a smaller proportion, parts of Costa Rica and Panama). The population of the Corridor is estimated at 10.5 million, most of it in the NCA countries (FAO, 2012).



The Central America Dry Corridor, in particular Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, is experiencing one of the worst droughts of the past decade; as a result, over 3.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (FAO, 2016).



Other disaster risks, such as hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, floods, fires and, especially, the prolonged effects of the El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) in the droughts of 2009 and 2015, have left many families critically short of food, especially the most vulnerable populations, such as indigenous communities and women and children living in poverty.



## Impacts of the El Niño phenomenon on the countries of Northern Central America around 2015



**Source:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "Dry Corridor Central America: situation report", June 2016 [online] <http://www.fao.org/3/a-br092e.pdf>.

Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996).

The funding gap refers to the lack of public and private mechanisms that capture the public good dimension of food security (FAO, 2016).





# Hallmarks of migration and migrants

## II.1 General overview of transit, destination and return

### Migration in transit



In 2015, the number of Central American migrants in transit northwards was estimated at 417,000. Most of them came from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras and aimed to reach the United States (Canales and Rojas, 2018).

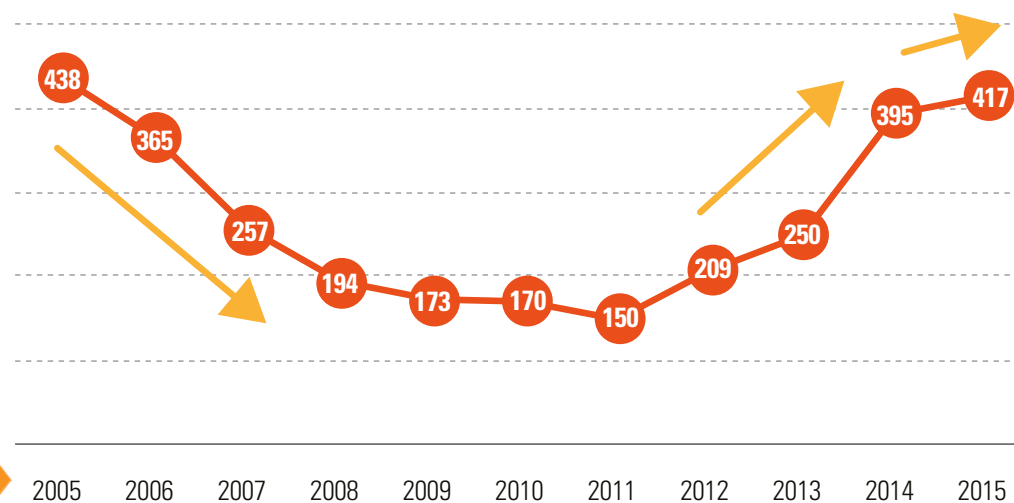


57% of migrants in transit through Mexico resorted to “coyotes” or other similar arrangements to cross into the United States (El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and others, 2017).



Only 19 of every 100 migrants who began the journey to the United States arrived there without being stopped by the Mexican or United States authorities (Canales and Rojas, 2018).

**Figure II.1**  
Total migrants in transit through Mexico, 2005–2015  
(Thousands of persons)



**Source:** A. Canales and M. Rojas, “Panorama de la migración internacional en México y Centroamérica: documento elaborado en el marco de la Reunión Regional Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Expertas y Expertos en Migración Internacional preparatoria del Pacto Mundial para una Migración Segura, Ordenada y Regular”, *Population and Development series*, No. 124 (LC/TS.2018/42), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2018.

## Migration at destination



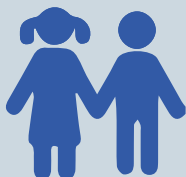
**3.5 million** migrants from Northern Central America were residing in the United States in May 2017

(Canales and Rojas, 2018)

**35%**

growth in the population of NCA residents<sup>1</sup> in the United States between April 2009 and May 2017

(Canales and Rojas, 2018)



Of the total NCA population eligible for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme,<sup>2</sup> 56% applied; however, only 9% obtained this benefit. Of the children accepted under DACA, 78% were Mexican

(Canales and Rojas, 2018)

**60%**

of NCA migrants working in precarious employment in the United States had irregular migratory status in 2015

(Canales and Rojas, 2018)

<sup>1</sup> Residents are defined here as persons born abroad who have resided for over a year in the United States, regardless of migratory status.

<sup>2</sup> The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme is intended to protect and regularize the situation of children arriving with irregular migratory status.

## Return migration



**51%** of returnees to NCA between January and June 2017 and in the same period in 2018 came from Mexico, while **49%** came from the United States

(IOM, 2018b)



Guatemala represents the largest proportion returning from the United States between January 2016 and September 2018 (46% of all NCA returnees), followed by Honduras (34%) and El Salvador (20%)<sup>3</sup>

(IOM, 2018a)



**68%** of Mexican residents returning from the United States had been detained on the street or at the border

(El Colegio de la Frontera Norte and others, 2017)



Deportations of NCA migrants by United States courts increased by **56%** between February and June 2018

(IOM, 2018b)

<sup>3</sup> Return migration is a stage of the migratory process, but not necessarily the last one. It refers to the movement, voluntary or otherwise, of people returning temporarily or permanently to their country or origin.

## II.2 Characteristics of migrants in transit, at their destination and upon return

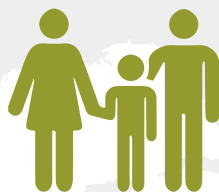
### Profile of migrants from the countries of Northern Central America

#### Migrants in transit



- Men outnumbered women by 26% among migrants from NCA countries in 2015
- Half of recent migrants<sup>4</sup> are aged under 24, and 25% are children and young people under the age of 20 (Canales and Rojas, 2018)
- 58% of recent migrants in 2015 had not completed secondary education (Canales and Rojas, 2018)
- 82% of migrants have family members in the United States (SEGOB, 2012)

#### Migrants at their destination



- In 2015, 89% of migrants from El Salvador, 87% of those from Guatemala and 82% of those from Honduras were residing in the United States
- 56% of immigrants from NCA countries, i.e. 1,750,000 people, had irregular (undocumented) status in the United States in 2016 (Canales and Rojas, 2018)
- In 2015, 55% of NCA residents in the United States had not completed secondary school (Canales and Rojas, 2018)

#### Return migrants



- 359,000 migrants returned to NCA countries between 2016 and 2017 (IOM, 2018a)
- 85% of returnees in 2017 were men, 15% were women (IOM, 2018a)
- Only 11% of Honduran returnees and 15% of Mexican returnees lived in main cities in their countries of origin; the rest came mainly from rural areas and smaller towns (Canales and Rojas, 2018)

<sup>4</sup> Recent migration refers to migratory flows from 2010 onward.

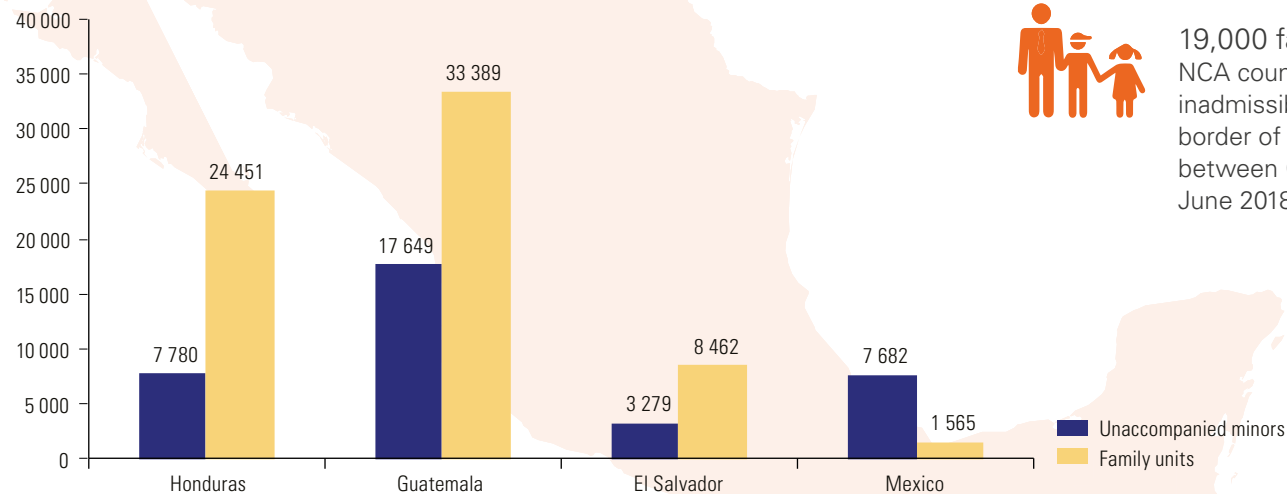
## Migrants returning to Northern Central America



**Source:** International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Triángulo Norte: retornos", Northern Triangle Migration Information Initiative (NTMI), 2018 [online] <https://mic.iom.int/webntmi/triangulo-norte/>.

## Migration barriers and restrictions

**Figure II.2**  
Unaccompanied minors and family units: detentions on the south-west border of the United States, October 2017–June 2018



Between 2007 and 2016 over 840,000 migrants from NCA countries were deported (Canales and Rojas, 2018)



19,000 family units from NCA countries were ruled inadmissible on the south-west border of the United States between October 2017 and June 2018 (IOM, 2018b)

**Source:** International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Migration Flows Report in Central America, North America, and the Caribbean N° 7 (April–June, 2018)*, San José, Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean, 2018.

**Image II.1**  
Detentions by Mexican authorities by NCA country, April–June 2018



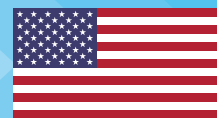
59% increase in detention of NCA migrants by Mexican authorities between April–June 2017 and the same period in 2018

**Source:** International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Migration Flows Report in Central America, North America, and the Caribbean N° 7 (April–June, 2018)*, San José, Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean, 2018.

## II.3 Unaccompanied minors migrating from Northern Central America



### Unaccompanied foreign minors heading towards the United States



Migration by unaccompanied minors in the region refers to all foreign minors under 18 years of age who are separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so, as well as those left alone after entering the country

(Martínez Pizarro and Orrego Rivera, 2016)

### Unaccompanied minors in transit

**180,000** unaccompanied minors were stopped on the south-west border of the United States between 2013 and 2017  
(IOM, 2018b)

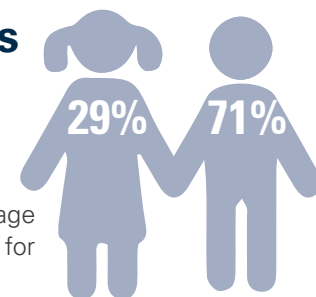


**45,000** unaccompanied minors from NCA countries were registered in Mexico between 2015 and 2016  
(SEGOB, 2016)

## Northern Triangle Migration Management Information Initiative (NTMI)

The aim of the initiative is to strengthen the capacities of governments to manage, collect, analyse and share information on migration, in order to support humanitarian action and protect vulnerable populations in Northern Central America (IOM, undated).

## Unaccompanied minors by sex and age

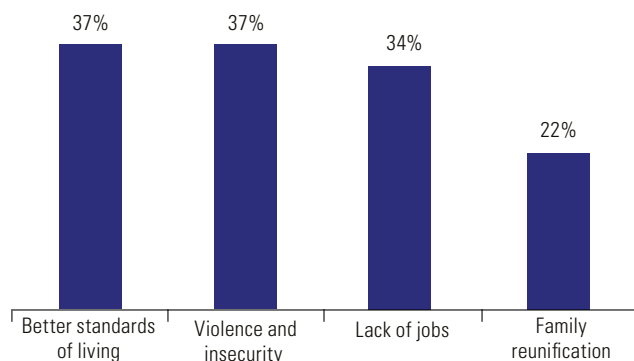


Among unaccompanied minors, the average age is 15.5 years for girls and 14.3 years for boys (IOM, 2017a, 2017c and 2017d).

# 72%

increase in migration by unaccompanied girls in 2017, compared to 2016  
(REDODEM, 2018)

## Main factors in migration by unaccompanied minors<sup>5</sup>



**Source:** International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Niñez y adolescencia migrante no acompañada retornada en el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica: El Salvador 2016*, vols. 1 and 2, San Salvador, 2017; IOM, *Niñez y adolescencia migrante no acompañada retornada en el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica: Guatemala 2016*, vols. 1 and 2, Guatemala City, 2017; IOM, *Niñez y adolescencia migrante no acompañada retornada en el Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica: Honduras 2016*, vols. 1 and 2, Tegucigalpa, 2017.

## Causes of migration by unaccompanied minors

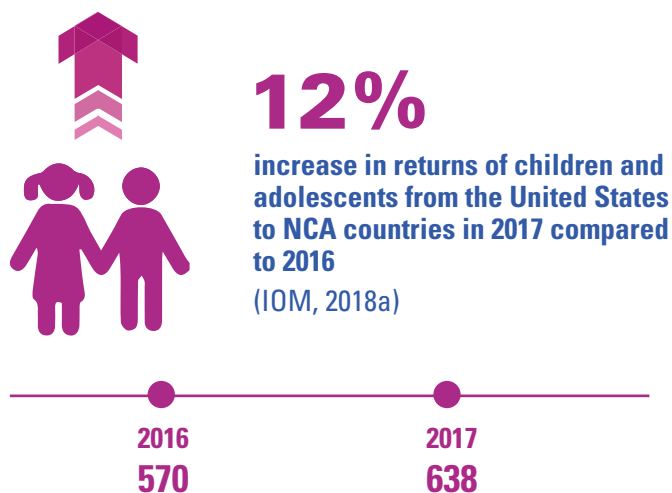
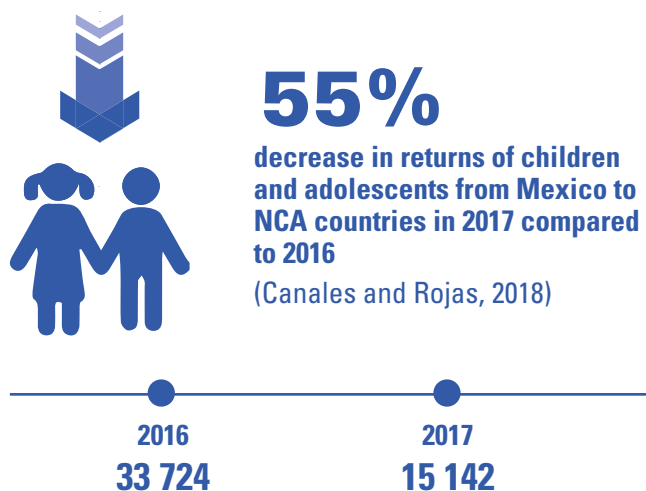
This is a multi-causal phenomenon, in which the main factors have to do with lack of social protection for minors in NCA (IOM, 2017a, 2017c and 2017d).



<sup>5</sup> The Northern Triangle Migration Management Information Initiative Human Mobility Survey treats the parents or guardians of returnee children as informants.



## Returns among the child and adolescent population in 2016 and 2017



### Regional and global framework for the protection of unaccompanied minors

- Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development (2013)
- Regional Conference on Migration
- New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016)
- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018)

**In absolute terms, much larger numbers of children return from Mexico than from the United States.**



## II.4 Contributions of migration in countries of origin and destination: remittances and labour force

### Labour force

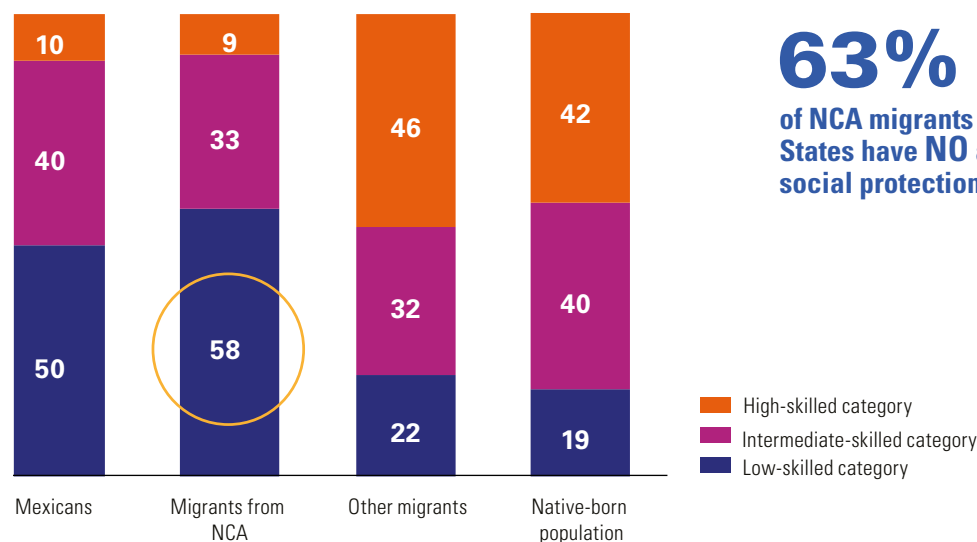
**Figure II.3**  
United States: level of occupational category by migratory origin, 2016  
(Percentages)



**70%**

of the economically active population of NCA residing in the United States has a job  
(Canales and Rojas, 2018)

**NCA migrants show a marked occupational segregation, with most employed in low-skilled occupations.**



**63%**

of NCA migrants in the United States have **NO** access to social protection

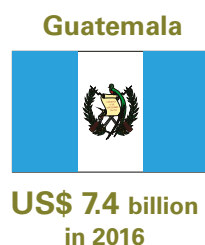
**Source:** A. Canales and M. Rojas, "Panorama de la migración internacional en México y Centroamérica: documento elaborado en el marco de la Reunión Regional Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Expertas y Expertos en Migración Internacional preparatoria del Pacto Mundial para una Migración Segura, Ordenada y Regular", *Population and Development series*, No. 124 (LC/TS.2018/42), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2018.

## The role of remittances

Because of their magnitude, constancy and recurrence, remittances form a foreign-exchange flow that has different impacts at the macroeconomic level and the microsocial level of recipient families and communities (Canales and Rojas, 2018).



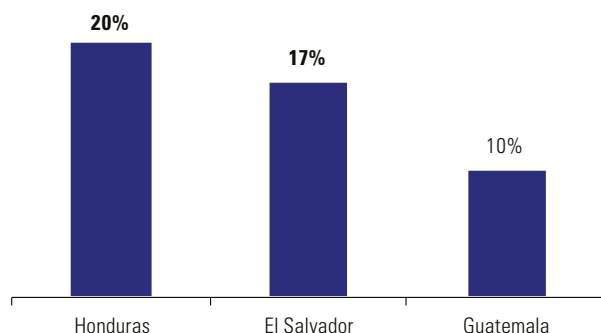
**In 2016, remittances exceeded US\$ 18 billion for the first time in the Central American countries. 88% of these went to NCA countries.**



**Source:** A. Canales and M. Rojas, "Panorama de la migración internacional en México y Centroamérica: documento elaborado en el marco de la Reunión Regional Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Expertas y Expertos en Migración Internacional preparatoria del Pacto Mundial para una Migración Segura, Ordenada y Regular", *Population and Development series*, No. 124 (LC/TS.2018/42), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2018.

- The predominant role acquired by remittances is basically due to structural weakness in the recipient economies.
- The underlying question is not the positive impacts of remittances, but the structural failings in the economies of recipient countries.
- Remittances are basically wage funds made up of parts of migrants' earnings that they send home to their families and communities.
- Remittances are much more stable and regular over time than other macroeconomic variables, such as foreign direct investment, manufacturing exports and other foreign-exchange inflows, and they are less sensitive to economic cycles (ECLAC, 2017).

### Remittances as a percentage of GDP



Honduras and El Salvador are heavily dependent on the resources generated by migration to the United States (ECLAC, 2017)

**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Centroamérica y la República Dominicana: evolución económica en 2016 y perspectivas económicas para 2017. Balance preliminar* (LC/MEX/TS.2017/2), Mexico City, 2017.

# Challenges of migration-related vulnerability in Northern Central America: links with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Central America is one of the subregions with the greatest social and economic lags, and this is especially true of the NCA countries. This poses challenges that transcend the national and regional sphere and require global governance to tackle the factors driving migration.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is thus extremely important, as a first attempt to manage migratory flows in an integrated manner, at the international level and on the basis of the protection of the human rights of all migrants.

## Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration



### 3 Principles

- Common understanding
- Shared responsibilities
- Unity of purpose



### 23 Objectives



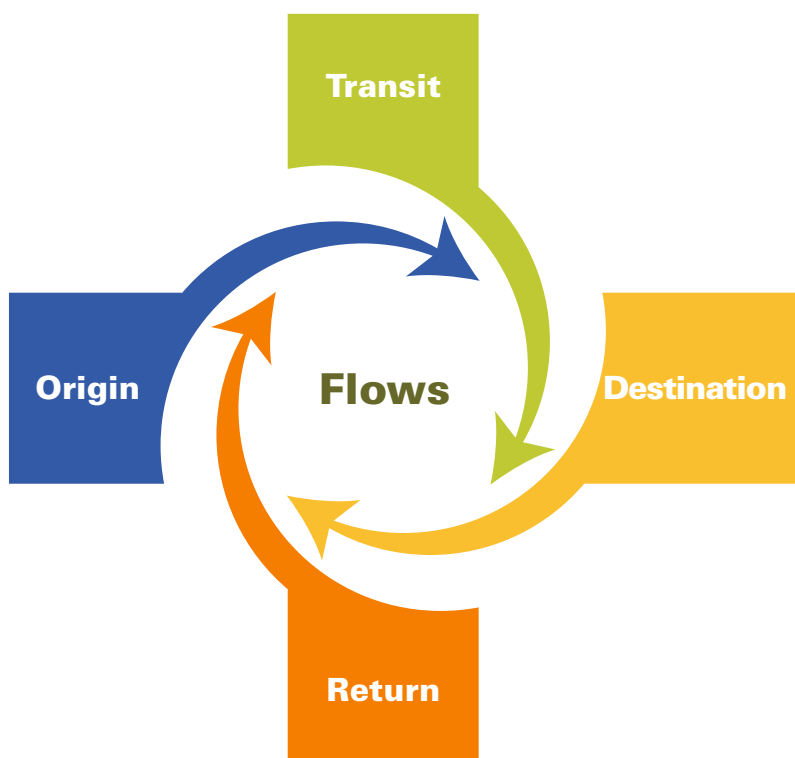
## Migration cycle and structural factors

The challenges assumed in the Global Compact are fully relevant in NCA.

Two dimensions are key:

- (i) the focus on the migration cycle
- (ii) the structural factors that shape movements and compel migration

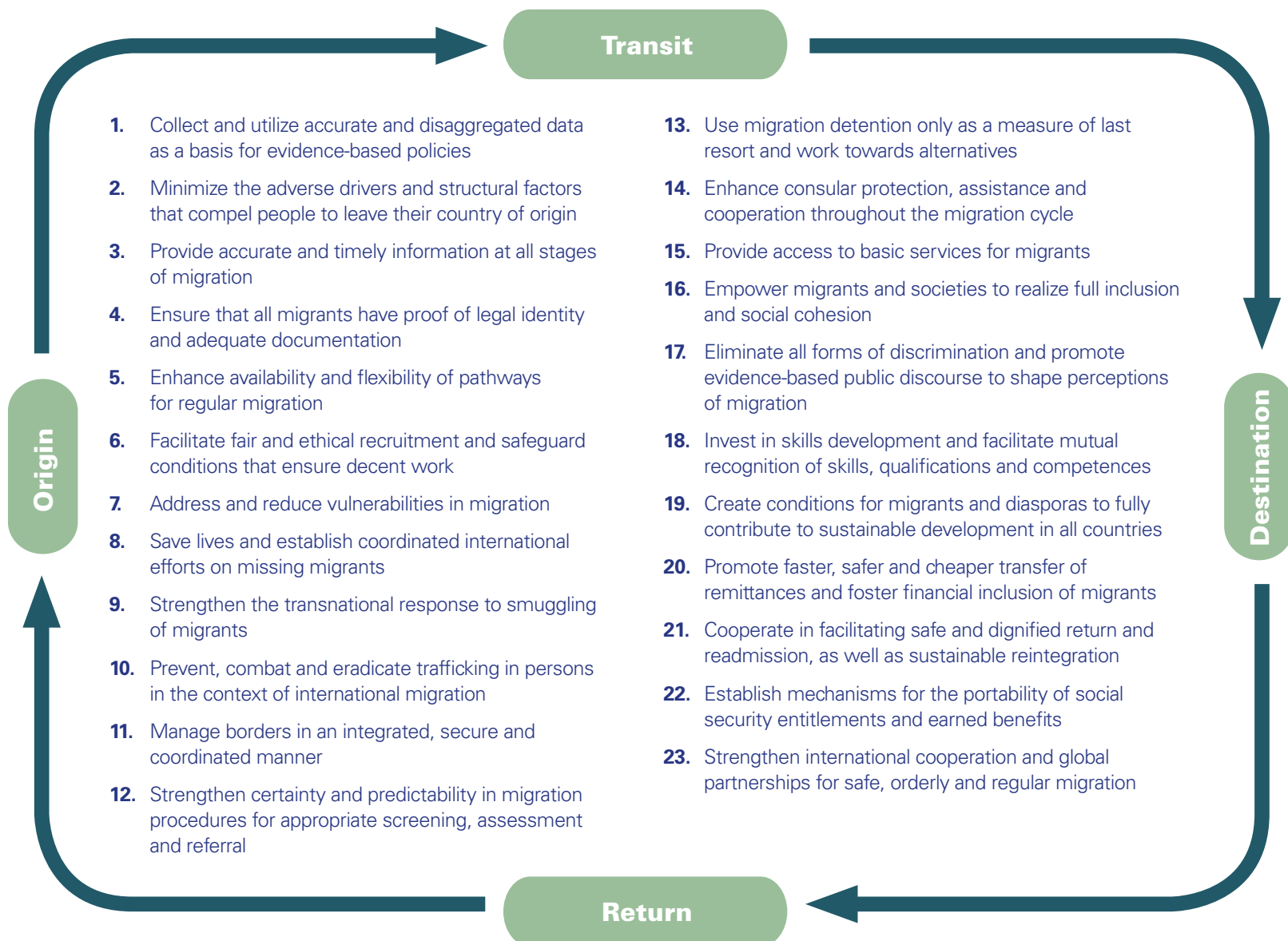
### The migration cycle



### Main factors driving migration in NCA



## Objectives of the Global Compact: global commitments for the benefit of all



## Influencing the drivers of migration

To act on the factors driving migration, it is necessary to act on development, on the protection of human rights and on well-being throughout Central America, on the basis of an integrated strategy that includes:



### Social challenges

- Reduce the effects of restrictive policies in transit and destination countries
- Promote human rights as a central principle throughout the migration cycle
- Eradicate high levels of poverty, especially in Honduras
- Achieve universal health services and ensure the right to them
- Establish systems of child care and food security
- Identify and protect unaccompanied migrant minors
- End the association between irregular status and criminalization
- Promote reentry to the education system, employment reintegration and financial inclusion



### Economic challenges

- Support industrial transformation to reduce the heavy dependence on remittances
- Reduce the large gender differences in labour market participation
- Strengthen agricultural activity as a source of employment
- Promote the development of human capital through training and skills certification



### Environmental challenges

- Reduce the vulnerability of areas at high risk of out-migration
- Boost the main return territories: rural areas and small towns
- Promote mechanisms to compensate and insure small farmers against agricultural losses owing to environmental changes



## Security challenges

- Reduce violence and insecurity, especially as it affects women, children and young people
- Eradicate violence in transit, especially crimes of robbery and extortion
- End child detentions



## Institutional challenges

- Promote a single regional system of migration data with basic criteria agreed upon between countries
- Set up regional partnerships to promote NCA migration towards countries to the south
- Strengthen governments' capacities to manage, collect, analyse and share information
- Promote cross-border development and facilitate trade between Mexico and NCA countries
- Reduce deportations from Mexico to NCA countries
- Expand the options for legal transit
- Reduce insecurity and high human and financial costs and ease strict migration requirements
- Strengthen inter-institutional cooperation (government, civil society and international agencies) to combat and eliminate smuggling and trafficking
- Conduct ongoing regularization programmes, which should not be selective as to nationality or groups of migrants







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Throughout history, international migration has held opportunities for migrants, their families and communities, and the countries involved. However, these —sometimes symbolic— potential gains are often undermined by objective adversities faced by migrants on their travels, at their destinations, during their return journey and while in transit through intervening territories. Migration from the countries of Northern Central America (NCA), comprising El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, is shaped by economic factors such as wage and production gaps between countries, by natural disasters and by the first impacts of climate change, especially in rural areas. All this intersects with the insecurity and structural violence that have beset these countries for years. Accordingly, the major —and recently increasing— migration flows in NCA countries are the result of a close and complex interaction between lack of options in places of origin and the opportunities differential migrants see between these places and their intended destinations. This document is meant for decision makers, academics, civil society and the wider public with an interest in contemporary migration. It examines the main aspects and salient features of migration from NCA countries using maps, infographics and text, including some references to other countries of the subregion. It considers the main migration destinations, the transit stage and the places from where return migration is initiated: Mexico and the United States. The work draws on a number of sources and studies, particularly those by the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)—Population Division of ECLAC.