

Covid-19 and (Im)Mobility in the Americas

GUATEMALA

October - December 2020

1. **Poverty Rate (defined by unsatisfied basic needs):** 59.3% of total population¹
2. **Migration Facts** ²
 - a. Emigration: about 1.2 million Guatemalans, or 7% of the population, reside abroad mainly in the US (89%), Mexico (4%), and Belize (2%).
 - b. Immigration: around 95,000 immigrants or 0.64% of the total population live in Guatemala. The main countries of origin are El Salvador (24.50%), Mexico (22.39%), and the US (11.03%).
 - c. Transit country: Honduran and Salvadoran migrants, and to a lesser extent Nicaraguan migrants, as well as migrants from Caribbean, South American, Asian, and African countries transit Guatemala en route to the US. From October 2019 to March 2020, it was estimated that some 45,000 migrants in transit crossed the country towards the northern border with Mexico.
 - d. Refugees: 390 is the number of registered refugees in Guatemala as of October 2018.
 - e. Return migration: In 2019, a total of 105,512 deportations of Guatemalans were registered (52% from the US and 28% from Mexico). In 2020, due to restrictions related to the pandemic, the number of events fell to a total of 45,572 deportations (54% from Mexico and 46% from the US).
3. **State Measures**
 - By mid-September (September 18), [La Aurora Airport and the country's borders were reopened](#). The Guatemalan Migration Institute and the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance updated biosafety protocols, sanitary measures, and restrictions to enter Guatemala.

¹ Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida (Encovi 2014) realizada por el Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE). Véase nota de prensa “Pobreza sube a 59%: son 9.6 millones de guatemaltecos los afectados”:

<https://www.prensalibre.com/economia/se-dispara-a-593-la-pobreza-96-millones-de-guatemaltecos-viven-en-pobreza/>

²<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/inmigracion/guatemala;>

<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/guatemala;>

[https://www.vaticannews.va/es/mundo/news/2019-02/caravana-migrante-guatemala-mexico-eeuu.html;](https://www.vaticannews.va/es/mundo/news/2019-02/caravana-migrante-guatemala-mexico-eeuu.html)

[https://www.acnur.org/guatemala-abre-la-puerta-a-un-nuevo-comienzo.html;](https://www.acnur.org/guatemala-abre-la-puerta-a-un-nuevo-comienzo.html)

[https://igm.gob.gt/informe-estadistico-2017-2/;](https://igm.gob.gt/informe-estadistico-2017-2/)

<http://igm.gob.gt/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/INFORME-GENERAL-CORRESPONDIENTE-AL-MES-DE-DICIEMBRE-2020-FINAL-.pdf>

- At the beginning of October, [President Alejandro Giammattei decreed a state of prevention](#) (martial law, curtailing rights of movement and expression) for 15 days in the departments through which thousands of Hondurans travel in a migrant caravan, he also ordered the detention and return of the migrants. Alternative media indicated that the measures to deter the caravan were very aggressive and opposed to the rights of migrants.
- By December, arguing that the migrants in the caravan were not carrying negative PCR tests or identification documents, [the Guatemalan National Police carried out an operation three kilometers from the Aguas Calientes border checkpoint](#), between Honduras and Guatemala. This operation prevented the advance of the migrant caravan that left San Pedro Sula for the United States.
- [Border externalizations operations by the United States Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#) were carried out through October in Guatemala. One of those operations included the return of Honduran *caravineros* to their country of origin, without considering unaccompanied children and adolescents and without thinking about the separation of families.

4. Migrant Situation Alerts

Deported Guatemalans (population with extreme vulnerability to covid-19)

- Even in the context of a pandemic from October to December 2020, [Guatemalan migrants continued to be deported or returned from the United States and from Mexico](#). The places with the highest number of returned people are San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, and Quiché. There is a lot of stigmatization and fear associated with the contagion of covid-19 by the populations of origin.

Irregular migrants (largely Central Americans) in transit by caravan, but also including South Americans, Carribbeans, and Asians.

- Migrant caravans from Honduras were strongly discouraged by the Guatemalan government on the grounds of avoiding a health crisis.
- The borders were militarized, and many migrants went through irregular passages. Only those who carried negative covid-19 tests and identity documents were allowed to pass.
- Strong military and police repression was registered.
- The vast majority of migrants were stranded with the hope that borders would be opened so that they might continue their transit north.
- People emigrate in highly precarious conditions.

Asylum/Refugee requests

- Asylum seekers continue to be returned from the United States and Mexico, many of whom wait a long time to achieve this status.

5. Social Responses

- *Migrant resistance*
 - o Migrants continue to move with the help of civil society and in caravans despite strong state restrictions.

- *Solidarity networks*
 - o As part of the care and dignity for returned migrants and their families, the National Council of Attention to the Migrant of Guatemala (Conamigua) [launched a radio campaign to avoid the stigmatization of nationals returned from the United States or from Mexico](#), during the Covid-19 emergency. The campaign consisted of spots recorded in four languages: Spanish, Kiche, Kaqchikel and Mam.
 - o Civil society organizations (about 70 from various countries in the region) denounced the externalization of the border by the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in Guatemala and demanded an immediate investigation.

- *Xenophobia*
 - o [Xenophobic statements by the President of Guatemala](#) referring to the migrant caravan from Honduras: “We are not going to allow foreigners who are using illegal means to contaminate and put Guatemalans at risk.” In addition, he accused the migrants of being violent and using children as a shield.