

Covid-19 and (Im)mobility in the Americas

EL SALVADOR

1. **Poverty rate:** 61% out of the total population.¹
2. **Migration data**
 - a. Sending country: about 1.2 million Salvadorans reside abroad, or 25% of the population, mainly in the United States (89%), Mexico (4%), and Belize (2%).
 - b. Destination country: around 95,000 immigrants or 0.64% of the total population live in El Salvador. The main countries of origin are Honduras (27.77%), Guatemala (21.13%) and Nicaragua (18.61%).
 - c. Transit country: Honduran migrants, and to a lesser extent Nicaraguan migrants, and migrants from Caribbean, South American, Asian, and African countries transit El Salvador en route to the United States.
 - d. In 2019, El Salvador, unlike Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala, signed a cooperation agreement on immigration with the US as part of "a strategy to combat organized crime and reduce smuggling and human trafficking, as well as forced migration". It is not a "Safe Third Country" as it cannot provide asylum.
3. **Impact of COVID-19² (as of July 14, 2020)**
 - a. Registered cases: 10,303
 - b. % of cases out of the total population: 0.15%
 - c. Number of deaths: 278
4. **State measures**
 - Border closures and increased surveillance measures.
 - Border security is increased to prevent irregular movements of migrants.
 - El Salvador adopted new migration control measures on airlines to identify coronavirus cases and create an epidemiological fence.
 - More than 39 Health Surveillance centers have been created nationwide to contain the spread of the virus and allow citizens to remain in quarantine at home.
 - The President decrees that people who enter the country through blind spots will face judicial charges, with the exception of the nationals.

¹<https://www.economista.net/actualidad/Guatemala-afrenta-una-pobreza-multidimensional-del-61-20191126-0028.html>

²<https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/el-salvador>
<https://www.laprensagrafica.com/internacional/El-Salvador-es-ruta-de-africanos-y-asiaticos-en-transito-hacia-Norteamerica-20140401-0061.html>; <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-49777229>

³ John Hopkins University (2020). "Coronavirus Resource Centre". <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

To cite this entry:

El Salvador. Covid-19 e (In)movilidad en las Américas. <https://www.inmovilidadamericas.org> [retrieved date of information]

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- The border controls have been reinforced to prevent people coming in from blind spots. There have been 270 people arrested.
- Deported Salvadorans have arrived on deportation flights from Mexico and the US. Upon arrival, they are being isolated, monitored, and quarantined.
- So far, no explicit measures have been taken to support Salvadoran migrants abroad.

5. At risk populations:

- *Salvadoran deportees* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
 - o Before the pandemic:
 - Salvadorans were handcuffed and sent on deportation flights from the US to El Salvador. Others were returned by land from Mexico by Mexican immigration authorities.
 - o During the pandemic:
 - Deportation flights from the US have continued without the implementation of health protocols to prevent Salvadoran deportees infected with COVID-19 from flying.
 - Deportations from Mexico by land have continued. In mid-April, the National Institute of Migration (INM) left more than 500 Honduran, Guatemalan and Salvadoran migrants abandoned and stranded in Talisman, at the border of Mexico and Guatemala. Guatemalan agents refused to accept the migrants for fear of contracting COVID-19. Migrants managed to get off from the bus and continue the journey to their countries of origin.
- *Irregularized migrants in transit, mainly Central American, but also from South American, Caribbean, Asian and African countries* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
 - o Before the pandemic:
 - Irregularized migrants lived under constant threat of deportation and detention and had limited access to health services.
 - They were the target of abuse and of multiple kinds of violence along the way.
 - **The situation for irregularized migrants in transit has NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks have possibly been exacerbated, which directly affects the lives of irregularized migrants in El Salvador.**
 - o During the pandemic:
 - The vast majority have been stranded and waiting until the borders are opened in order to continue their transit north.
 - The conditions in which they migrate are very precarious.
 - They do not have a place to socially distance or quarantine at home.
 - Many do not have a source of income, since they are in transit.

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- Due to their condition of irregularity, they not only face the threat of deportation but if they do become ill, they have limited access to health care.
- The majority live in unhealthy conditions in overcrowded places.

6. Social responses

- *Migrant struggles:*
 - Around 500 irregularized Central American migrants that were stranded at the Guatemala-Mexico border on INM buses, protested by getting off the bus to continue the journey to their communities of origin.
 - Irregularized transit migrants returned to their countries of origin:
 - Salvadoran and Honduran migrants have changed course and travel south through Guatemala to return to their countries of origin and protect their health.
- *Civil Society:*
 - Lawyers have raised concerns about the legality of detentions during the pandemic and the abuses committed in detention centres.

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*For more detail go to the digital archive that we created:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1o00O4-LalYs9FNi0PIRRz99hinvqVWgT>