

Covid-19 and (Im)mobility in the Americas

GUATEMALA

1. **Poverty rate:** 49% out of the total population.¹
2. **Migration data**²
 - a. Sending country: about 1.2 million Guatemalans, or 7% of the population, reside abroad mainly in the US (89%), Mexico (4%), and Belize (2%).
 - b. Destination country: 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, and 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. Host country for refugees: 390 is the number of registered refugees in Guatemala as of October 2018.
3. **Impact by COVID-19³ (as of July 15, 2020)**
 - a. Registered cases: 29,742
 - b. % of cases out of the total population: 0.16%
 - c. Number of deaths: 1,244
4. **State measures**
 - Border closures and increased surveillance measures.
 - Guatemala signed an agreement with the US to be a “Safe Third Country”, but the asylum determination procedures are suspended due to the pandemic.
 - Border security is increased to prevent transit of irregularized migrants
 - In early March and before the arrival of a migrant caravan, sanitary controls were installed at the border with Honduras.
 - The migration authorities reinforced border control to stop the movement of Salvadorans.
 - Initially, agreements with the US to receive flights with Guatemalan deportees were suspended. But after the US government threatened to eliminate tourist visas for Guatemalans, the cooperation agreement was immediately resumed. Therefore, during the pandemic the

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

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

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

country has continued to receive flights with Guatemalan deportees from the US, some of them infected with COVID-19.

- There is a lack of clear protocols for assistance and testing for COVID-19 for Guatemalan deportees arriving in the country.
- The President ordered Guatemalan deportees to quarantine arriving in the country in designated places. However, these places have substandard conditions. People sleep on mattresses on the floor in a guarded place, and those who have tested positive for COVID-19 have been taken to health shelters.
- As the pandemic has advanced, Guatemala is preparing shelters at the airport for returnees that have come back from the US because of the pandemic.
- So far, no explicit measures have been taken to support Guatemalan migrants abroad.

5. At risk populations:

- *Guatemalan deportees* (this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
 - o Before the pandemic:
 - Guatemalans were detained in the US and sent to Guatemala in handcuffs on deportation flights. Others were returned by land by Mexican immigration authorities.
 - o During the pandemic:
 - Deportation flights from the US have continued without the implementation of health protocols to prevent Guatemalan 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, 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 Americans, 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 has NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks have possibly been exacerbated, which directly affects the lives of irregularized migrants in Guatemala.**

- 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 during their journey.
 - Due to their condition of irregularity, they not only face a threat of deportation but if they do become ill, they have limited access to health care.
 - The majority live in overcrowded conditions that endanger their health.
 - Migrants continue to cross the Guatemala-Mexico border at the Peten crossing en route to Mexico.
- *Asylum seekers or refugees* (legal limbo, this population is extremely vulnerable to COVID-19)
 - Before the pandemic:
 - Asylum seekers are experiencing protracted waiting in the context of Guatemala as a “Safe Third Country” until asylum applications processing to the US are resumed.
 - They also experience highly precarious living conditions, such as low income, limited access to housing, without decent sources of employment, and exploitation in precarious jobs.
 - **The situation for asylum seekers has NOT changed during the pandemic. Risks have possibly been exacerbated, which directly affects the lives of asylum seekers in Guatemala.**
 - During the pandemic:
 - Due to border closure, new cases are not processed confining asylum seekers and their families to protracted waiting and legal limbo.
 - Shelters for migrants in transit and asylum seekers are surpassing their capacity, and have started to close.
 - Due to quarantine, there is a loss of direct social assistance within different networks.

6. Social responses

- *Migrant struggles:*
 - Around 500 irregularized Central American migrants that were stranded at the border of Mexico and Guatemala on INM buses, rebelled in protest and managed to get off the buses and return to their communities of origin on their own.
 - There have been irregularized transit migrants returning to their countries of origin:
 - Salvadoran and Honduran migrants have returned to their countries of origin through Guatemala.
- *Solidarity Networks:*

- Guatemala's Episcopal Conference demanded to stop deportations of Guatemalans from the US and Mexico due to its inhumane nature during the coronavirus pandemic.
 - The Banrural Bank donates clothing kits to Guatemalan deportees.
- *Rejection to Guatemalan deportees:*
- Portrayed publicly as carriers of COVID-19 from Mexico or the US, deportees have experienced social rejection. In various municipalities around the country, especially at the border and in the capital city, Guatemalan citizens refuse to provide shelters for deportees. Indigenous communities in Guatemala organize themselves to combat of COVID-19 and build a checkpoint to restrict entrance to their communities.

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

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1o00O4-LalYs9FNi0PIRRz99hinvqvWgT>

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