This monitoring report presents feedback received from 21 migrants who returned to Honduras from Guatemala and from El Salvador to Nicaragua through IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programs, funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

From November 2019 to May 2020, the AVR programs in Guatemala and El Salvador have assisted 280 migrants from Guatemala [265 Hondurans: 34 Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA), 194 Caravan, 37 other category and 15 El Salvadorans: ACA, Caravan, other category] and 60 migrants from El Salvador [48 Nicaraguans: stranded migrants and 12 Costa Ricans: stranded migrants] to return to their countries of origin in a voluntary, safe, and dignified manner.

In April 2020, IOM started case monitoring of its AVR beneficiaries who agreed to be contacted upon their return to participate in a survey. The IOM AVR global monitoring survey template as well as semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information. Out of a total of 265 Honduran migrants, 32 agreed to be contacted and the IOM team was able to reach 10 of them. From the 48 Nicaraguan migrants, 11 agreed to be contacted and the IOM team was able to reach all 11 of them. The teams faced challenges in reaching out to returned migrants as these beneficiaries often change their locations as well as contact information, in addition to having a general reluctance to be contacted upon return.

70% of Honduras respondents returned with family members.

81% of Nicaragua respondents returned alone.

100% of respondents arrived home safely and were satisfied with voluntary returns through IOM’s AVR programs.

0 respondents had received reintegration support to pursue livelihood options from their government or other stakeholders.

1 The monitoring exercise is an activity integrated under the AVR El Salvador program, which started in March 2020.

2 These AVR programs support the orderly and humane return of migrants by providing administrative, logistics and financial support to individuals who are unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

3 AVR beneficiaries do not always give their consent to be contacted and respond to the AVR monitoring survey. It is not possible for IOM to contact beneficiaries without prior consent.
Mrs. Moreno (not her real name), one of the 10 interviewed Honduran returnees, returned to the northern Honduras. She was transferred from the United States to Guatemala through the Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA). In Guatemala, she applied for IOM’s AVR program.

“Before I went to the United States, I was in Monterrey, Mexico with my 13-year-old son. I worked in a laundromat to earn money. I was transferred from the United States to Guatemala through the Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA). I applied for IOM’s AVR program in Guatemala to return to my country, Honduras. I have had a tough time since I came back. I was excluded from food distribution because I did not have connections with the authorities. My son had to be operated on for an appendicitis, and I cannot support him. I do not have a job; I used to sell coconut water. Because of the lack of public transport, I cannot go back to what I used to do. My plan is to go back to Mexico. I have a Mexican visa I obtained in Chiapas.”

Box 1: Testimony from a returned migrant

All Honduran and Nicaraguan respondents reported they arrived home safely and were satisfied with voluntary returns through IOM’s AVR programs. Seven out of 10 Hondurans returned with family members, while nine out of 11 Nicaraguans came back alone. Six Honduran respondents were women and five were minors. Among those adults, their ages ranged from 24-41 years. All Nicaraguan respondents were men aged between 21-50 years, with four in their twenties. They were all engaged in the agricultural sector in El Salvador.

All beneficiaries reported they received warm welcomes from family members, yet the majority of returnees did not have livelihood options at the time of interviews. The survey revealed that none of the respondents had received reintegration support from their government or stakeholders to pursue livelihood options. Semi-structured interviews also disclosed that a general lack of jobs, compounded by COVID-19 fears, meant most returnees were concerned about their immediate futures.

Similar to ‘Mrs. Moreno’, many other returned migrants struggle with everyday life. Northern Honduras is a region severely affected by poverty and a place of origin for many migrants who joined Caravans in the past. The COVID-19 situation has impeded the returnees’ ability to access local support mechanisms, job opportunities and other livelihood means. Interviews also revealed that returned migrants encountered discrimination within communities as they were perceived as being infected with this disease. IOM Honduras is currently implementing information campaigns against discrimination and hatred, specifically targeting returnees’ communities. While the COVID-19 situation has seen central and local governments increasingly reach out to returned migrants⁴, these authorities in general provide insufficient resources to support returned migrants as they try to rebuild their lives and determine their next steps. While different stakeholders such as IOM⁵, Red Cross, UNICEF and non-governmental organizations try to meet their immediate needs, significant service gaps remain for returning migrants, particularly regarding accessing employment⁶.

---

⁴ The Honduran Government, with the help of IOM, is implementing Temporary Quarantine Centers in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa where migrants are expected to stay during a 14-day quarantine. These centers are equipped to fit specifications of national health protocols and humanitarian principles. IOM and the government are coordinating actions to provide a safe and orderly its reception community process, personal protective equipment, meals, clothing, and hygiene kits upon arrival. Once a migrant completes the 14-day quarantine period, he or she is transported to its community.

⁵ IOM Honduras helped one AVR beneficiary set up a business by using the Peace Building Fund the mission implements.

Mr. Lopez (not his real name) is one of the 48 stranded migrants who returned to Nicaragua with help from the IOM El Salvador AVR program.

“When I returned, I was afraid that the community would reject me for having returned illegally. But, to my surprise, the situation was different, and I have been supported by my family and the community. However, I am concerned for my personal safety because I crossed the border irregularly. I had to change my phone number and lived the first few days in a relative's house in fear the authorities would come looking for me at my house.

My economic situation is very bad, without work or income. I am subsisting solely on family support. I was previously engaged in construction work in Nicaragua. Now, job opportunities have been reduced substantially, mainly by COVID-19. When the situation normalizes, I want to return to El Salvador via Honduras because despite irregular conditions to work, I found greater options for getting a job there.”

Along with other Nicaraguan migrants, ‘Mr. Lopez’ stayed four days at the border (the Honduran side) because the Nicaraguan authorities closed it without notice as a measure against COVID-19. They eventually crossed the border through blind spots with the help of human rights activists. ‘Mr. Lopez’ was concerned he would not be welcomed warmly by his host community. The political and economic situation in Nicaragua still remains challenging. IOM Nicaragua contacted 11 returned migrants as part of post-arrival assistance, that included providing food and hygiene kits during the 14-day quarantine period.

DISCLAIMERS
The opinions expressed in the report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries. IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

COPYRIGHT
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For more information, please contact Yuko Hamada, IOM Washington DC Email: yhamada@iom.int