

This third monitoring report presents the survey results from Belizean and Costa Rican beneficiaries assisted by IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programs in El Salvador, Guatemala/Belize and Honduras. The survey purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of how migrants reintegrate upon return to their origin countries. To date, IOM has produced two AVR monitoring reports covering North of Central America Countries (Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) ([June 2020](#) and [August 2020](#)).

In total, 73 beneficiaries (11 Costa Ricans under AVR El Salvador, 44 Costa Ricans under AVR Guatemala/Belize, 18 Belizeans under AVR Honduras) featured in this report consented to sharing their migration and reintegration experiences. IOM staff conducted surveys by phone to mitigate risks of the COVID-19 pandemic. This 32- question survey encompassed feedback on IOM assistance during return, migrants' experiences during travel and transit, on reception as well as post-arrival assistance, and life upon return. This and previous IOM AVR surveys and monitoring reports have an important role in checking AVR beneficiaries' safety, physical and mental health, as well as understanding the challenges they face after returning.

Three key findings emerged from the latest round of IOM AVR surveys are presented in this report. Firstly, the majority of respondents felt safe upon return to their origin countries, although some expressed COVID-19 health concerns. Secondly, with job opportunities a primary driver of migration, more than half (54%) of respondents reported financial worries upon return. Thirdly, the vast majority of respondents did not intend to re-migrate – a sharp contrast to surveys of Hondurans and Nicaraguans reported in the June and August monitoring reports.

With most of the 73 surveyed beneficiaries stranded as a result of COVID-19, it reflects a recent overall increase in similarly stranded migrants as AVR beneficiaries within the mixed migration flows across North of Central America countries and other parts of Latin America. Although there is no legal definition of the term 'stranded migrant', academics and international organizations refer to "a migrant who for reasons beyond their control has been unintentionally forced to stay in a country."¹ Employed migrants were often the first to lose their jobs and means to stay in destination countries. At the same time, the survey results capture stranded migrants in destinations for short visits, such as for tourism, visiting family or medical treatment.



Figure 1: Nationality of respondents by program

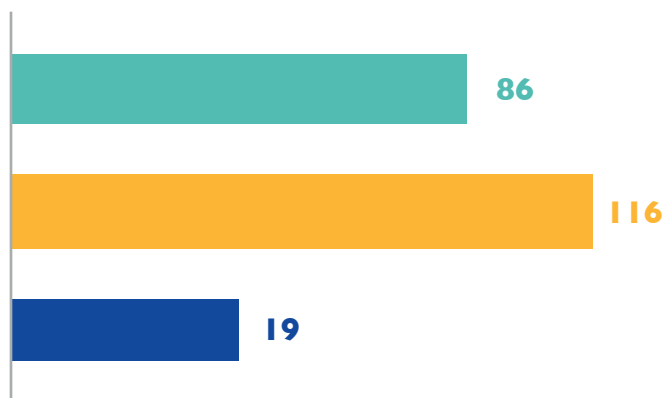
1. IOM's glossary gives a detailed description of "stranded migrants" as being unable to return to their country of origin, cannot regularize their status in the country where they reside, and do not have access to legal migration opportunities that would enable them to move onto another State. The term may also refer to migrants who are stranded because of humanitarian or security reasons in the country of destination, transit or origin preventing them from returning home while they are also unable to go elsewhere.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts on AVR Programs

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, AVR programs in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras received increasing numbers of requests from Central and South American embassies (including Argentina, Belize, Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua) to support their nationals stranded due to border closures. As of August 2020, a total of 221 stranded migrants had received AVR support, with the majority being Costa Ricans. IOM assisted those most vulnerable upon assessment through individual counselling to understand factors that contributed to individual and groups of migrants'²vulnerabilities as well as determining optimal responses.

As illustrated in Table 1, AVR programs have supported stranded migrants within inter-related flows between origin and destination countries. The AVR Guatemala/ Belize Program has supported 116 migrants (Belizeans, Costa Ricans and Salvadorans) to return, while 86 stranded migrants (Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans) reached home thanks to the AVR El Salvador team. AVR Honduras, meanwhile, helped 19 stranded Belizeans to return.

Table 1: Number of stranded migrants assisted by AVR programs from March 2020 to August 2020



AVR El Salvador/ AVR Guatemala/Belize/AVR Honduras
Source: IOM Situation Report (September 4, 2020)

Profile of respondents

Some 73 respondents (55 Costa Ricans and 18 Belizean beneficiaries) agreed before and after they returned to their origin countries to be contacted upon return. This reflects a high response rate of migrants willing to be contacted upon return (84% of Costa Ricans and 94% of Belizeans). The majority of respondents were aged between 19 and 59 years, with 12 per cent below 19 years and 19 per cent above 60 years old. This differed from the typical younger age group (20-40) of Caravan and Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA) migrants that AVR programs assisted in the past, as well as Nicaraguan beneficiaries who participated in August's monitoring report.

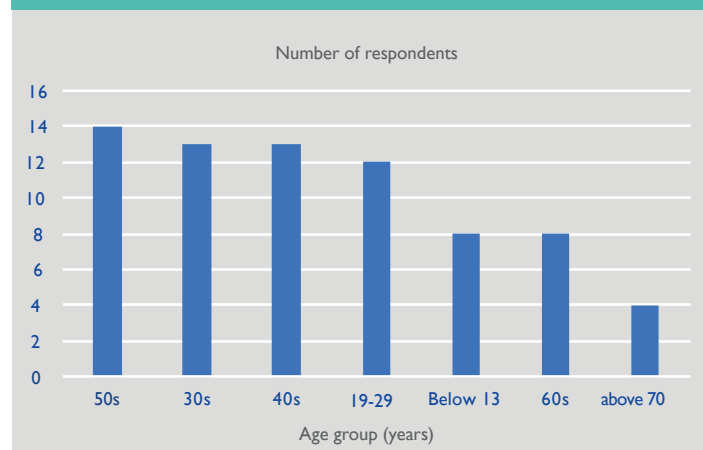


Figure 2: Gender breakdown

Table 2: Respondents by nationality and gender

Returned from	Nationality	Male	Female	Number of respondents
Belize	Costa Rican	1	2	3
El Salvador	Costa Rican	3	8	11
Guatemala	Costa Rican	17	24	41
Honduras	Belizean	7	11	18
Total		28	45	73

Figure 3: Respondents by age group

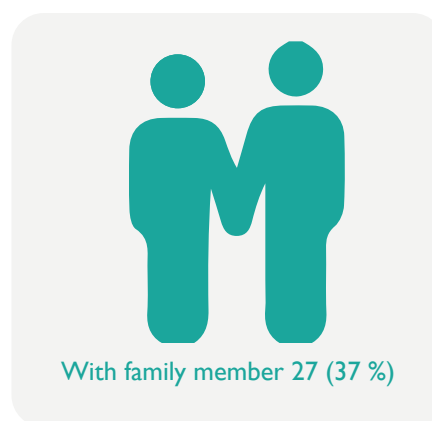
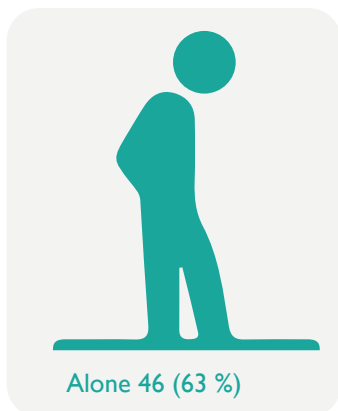


² https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/DMMI/AVRR/a_framework_for_avrr_online_pdf_optimized_20181112.pdf

Did you return by yourself?

Some 46 persons (63%) reported that they returned alone, many of whom had jobs prior to the pandemic in destination countries. A higher percentage of stranded Costa Rican migrants were traveling with family members compared to the number of Honduran and

Nicaraguan migrants previously surveyed. This is a result of many migrants visiting relatives or family members abroad. A small number were in destination countries for medical treatment or sightseeing.



Why did you seek AVR Program support?

Most migrants stranded by border closures as a result of the pandemic were referred for AVR support by embassies or consulates in destination countries. The comparatively high number of stranded migrants from Costa Rica is a result of their embassies conducting intensive searches for nationals stranded in regional destination countries. The survey respondents were stranded in Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras due to border closures since March 2020. Some were working in these four countries until their contracts were cancelled and with no means of subsistence,

they decided to return to Belize or Costa Rica. Due to the closure of international airports, they were unable to return home. Having exhausted all financial resources, they were left in limbo with little means to survive until the borders re-opened to Belize or Costa Rica. Their return was only made possible with the help of IOM, with special permission from embassies to enter origin countries. Some had urgent medical needs. Yet, without insurance, treatment was not possible in El Salvador, Guatemala or Honduras.

What were you doing in destination countries?

Out of 73 respondents, 44 per cent (24 Costa Ricans, 8 Belizeans) reported working in Belize, El Salvador,

Guatemala or Honduras. The remainder were tourists, visiting family or seeking medical treatment.

Costa Ricans who returned from El Salvador

Six out of 11 respondents reported being in El Salvador for personal reasons, such as visiting family or friends.

The remainder said they worked in El Salvador, such as in engineering, health or tourism.

- ▶ "My wife and I were visiting, and due to the closure of the airports for the COVID-19 situation, we could not return to our country." (male, 67 years old)
- ▶ "I was working for a Costa Rican enterprise and due to the closure of the airports, I could not return." (female, 42 years old)
- ▶ "I was a nurse in El Salvador, but my contract finished during the pandemic." (female, 52 years old)
- ▶ "I was working as an aviation mechanic." (male, 45 years old)
- ▶ "I was visiting my family and working on a construction project." (female, 59 years old)
- ▶ "I was visiting a friend in El Salvador. I was in training and working in a tourism consultancy." (female, 30 years old)

Costa Ricans who returned from Guatemala

Eighteen out of 41 Costa Ricans who returned from Guatemala were working, while others were there for tourism, family or medical purposes.

- ▶ “I was working in the hotel industry.” (male, 31 years old)
- ▶ “I am a businessman and I travel between Costa Rica and Guatemala. My business stopped because of COVID-19 and I was stranded.” (male, 44 years old)
- ▶ “I had a beauty salon in Guatemala. My business went down because of the pandemic and I had to go back to Costa Rica.” (female, 39 years old)
- ▶ “I was visiting my family in Guatemala.” (male, 50 years old)
- ▶ “I was in Guatemala so my daughter could receive an operation because of her Nager syndrome.” (female, 42 years old).

Costa Ricans who returned from Belize

- ▶ “I was a tourist in Belize.” (female, 23 years old)
- ▶ “I was taking my son to visit his father.” (female, 29 years old)

Belizeans who returned from Honduras

Eight Belizeans out of 18 respondents said they worked in Honduras.

- ▶ “I worked in a hotel as a cook.” (female, 46 years old)
- ▶ “I worked in the education sector.” (female, 23 years old)
- ▶ “I was in the health sector.” (female, 43 years old)
- ▶ “I worked in video production.” (male, 41 years old)

Are you currently working or managing your own business?

Around half (49%) of respondents said they were currently unemployed, while a quarter reported being employed. The majority of those unemployed had jobs in destination countries and found it challenging to land a job at home – compounded by the pandemic and associated economic fallout. Upon return to Costa Rica, nine confirmed they were unemployed and seeking work. Two were reportedly

retired. Nine Costa Ricans who returned from Belize and Guatemala said they were currently working (7 males and 2 females), while 21 were unemployed (7 males, 14 females). The remainder were retired, housewives or minors. Nine Belizeans who returned from Honduras now had jobs, while six were unemployed.

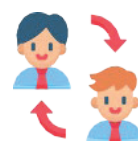
Overview of employment status



36
Unemployed



18
Employed



19
Other

Table 3: Employment status of respondents by nationality/destination countries

	Unemployed	Employed	Others (retired, housewives, students, minors)	Total
Costa Ricans returned from Guatemala	20	8	13	41
Costa Ricans returned from El Salvador	9	0	2	11
Costa Ricans returned from Belize	1	1	1	3
Belizeans returned from Honduras	6	9	3	18
Total	36	18	19	73

Costa Ricans returned from El Salvador

"I'm unemployed, because my contract was suspended." (male, 45 years old).

"To make ends meet, I produce handicrafts and do some painting." (female, 35 years old).

Costa Rican returned from Belize

"I'm working in customer service." (female, 23 years old).

Costa Ricans returned from Guatemala

"I am working in a meat business near my home." (male, 31 years old)

"I am a government official, currently working under the teleworking modality." (male, 48 years old).

"I am working in a restaurant." (female, 49 years old).

Belizeans returned from Honduras

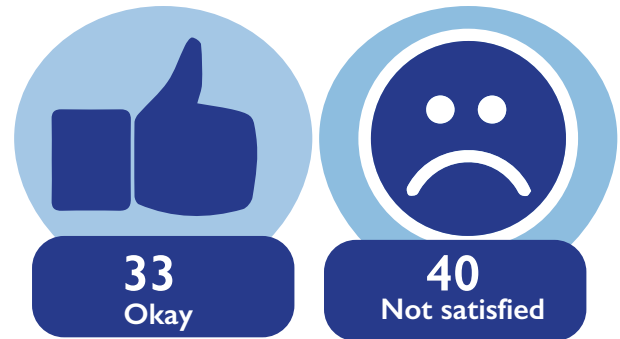
"I am working in a real estate business part time." (female, 36 years old).

"I was working in a car workshop, but right now it is really difficult to find a job." (male, 67 years old).

"I am a part-time accountant." (male, 35 years old).

Are you satisfied with your current financial situation?

More than half (54%) of respondents reported their current financial situation was challenging. Of Costa Rican respondents, 29 (75%) said their financial situation was challenging due to the loss of jobs in Belize, El Salvador or Guatemala. Eleven Belizean respondents were in a similar predicament. The remainder reported their financial situation was “okay”, but expenditure was carefully managed.

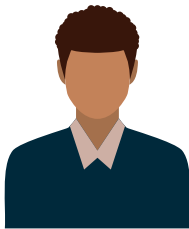


Do you feel safe in the community you returned to?

Most respondents said they felt safe in the communities they currently lived in, while 10 (14 %) expressed concern about the pandemic in Costa Rica. For those who felt unsafe, health concerns were the primary driver.



Returnees from El Salvador



“I live in a calm environment in my home community. My country’s perspective, I think depends on people’s hygiene habits in relation to COVID-19.” (male, 45 years old)

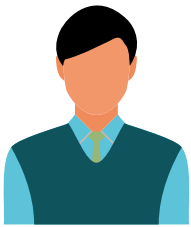


“I feel safe in X, however, the COVID-19 situation makes me [feel] insecure.” (female, 30 years old)

Returnees from Guatemala



"I feel safe because the community I'm in has strict measures handling the pandemic." (male, 38 years old)



"I feel good as I don't feel at risk of being infected by the virus." (male, 51 years old)

Returnees from Belize



"I came back to a rural area and there are not many people here. So I feel safe from COVID-19." (female, 29 years old)

Returnees from Honduras



"I have been living here for a long time and I've never experienced a problem." (female, 60 years old)

How are you feeling physically and mentally?

While the majority (59%) of respondents reported they felt in good mental and physical shape, some expressed concern about unemployment and the pandemic.



Costa Ricans returned from El Salvador

- ▶ *"I consider my mental health to be fine. However, my asthmatic state influences my physical condition." (female, 35 years old).*
- ▶ *"I don't feel well at all, because my chronic asthmatic condition is constant, as well as bronchitis that accompanied me since the return trip to El Salvador." (female, 42 years old).*
- ▶ *"I am physically worn out. I think my immune system is affected by stress and lack of work." (female, 30 years old).*

Costa Ricans returned from Belize

- ▶ *"My son and I feel fine." (female, 29 years old)*

Costa Ricans returned from Guatemala

- ▶ *"I feel good, but I have experienced a little anxiety in the last few days." (male, 64 years old).*
- ▶ *"I feel good physically, but I am anxious about unemployment." (female, 49 years old).*
- ▶ *"I suffered from episodes of anxiety and stress in Guatemala, but I am much better in the company of my family in Costa Rica." (male, 19 years old)*

Belizeans returned from Honduras

- ▶ *"Not so good. I feel mentally exhausted because of the pandemic. I was stranded in Honduras for five months." (female, 35 years old).*
- ▶ *"I was diagnosed with depression due to the situation I experienced in Honduras [being stranded]. I was dealing with a lot of stress before returning." (male, 66 years old).*
- ▶ *"I am motivated to move forward." (female, 40 years old).*

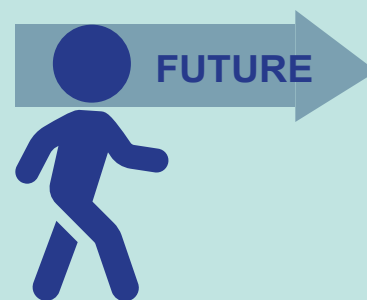
Future plans?

The majority of respondents told IOM they planned to remain in their countries of origin and not re-migrate. Such responses may, in part, be a reflection of current border closures due to the pandemic. Some respondents (10 persons, 14 %), who were in destination countries for labour migration purposes, said they could seek employment abroad in the future. The vast majority of Costa Ricans reported feeling safer in their country due to the government's COVID-19 response than being in El Salvador or Guatemala.

Returnees from El Salvador

Three responded they intended to return to El Salvador or other Latin American countries to find work. Two said they wanted to return to El Salvador for tourism, while the remainder had no plans to migrate and wished to settle in Costa Rica.

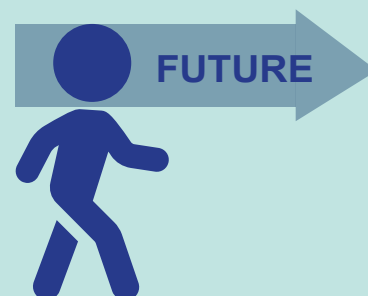
- ▶ *"I depend on future opportunities, but nursing and charity are part of my life project. I would like to serve professionally throughout Latin America." (female, 52 years old).*
- ▶ *"I plan to return to El Salvador because of economic commitments in Costa Rica, that is to leverage resources. But I don't rule out a local job opportunity." (male, 50 years old).*
- ▶ *"I do not plan to migrate in the long term. At the moment, I hope to get a new job opportunity in Costa Rica." (female, 35 years old)*



Returnees from Guatemala

Most Costa Rican respondents who returned from Guatemala intended to settle in Costa Rica. Seven out of 41 respondents intended to return to Guatemala to continue employment or studies. This implies Costa Ricans have more security in terms of employment, health and less drivers to leave.

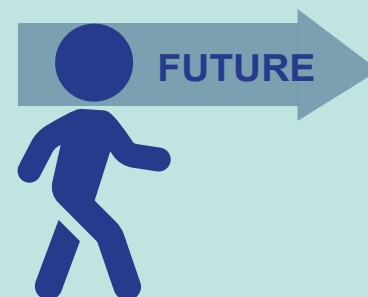
- ▶ "I want to settle down in Costa Rica and continue working in customer service." (female, 23 years old).
- ▶ "I am going to finish university. If there is an opportunity, I would like to visit Guatemala to see my relatives." (female, 34 years old).
- ▶ "I was planning to settle down in Guatemala with my family. But because of this pandemic, this was not possible." (male, 48 years old)
- ▶ "I would like to go back to Guatemala to finish my studies." (female, 55 years old)



Returnees from Belize

Two Costa Ricans from Belize had no intention to return to Belize.

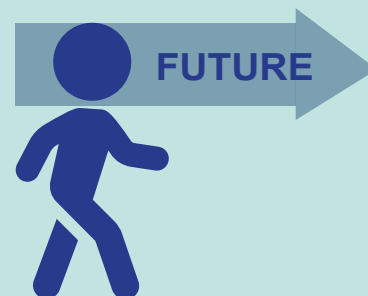
- ▶ "I will settle in Costa Rica and will continue working in customer service." (female, 23 years old).
- ▶ "I don't have plans to migrate due to everything that I experienced." (female, 29 years old)



Returnees from Honduras

No respondent intended to return to Honduras or migrate to other countries. However, some said this was possible post-pandemic.

- ▶ "I want to return to Honduras. But I don't think I can soon because of the pandemic." (female, 54 years old).
- ▶ "I am not thinking about migration. First, we have to see the situation." (female, 45 years old).
- ▶ "My plan is to get a place to live and get into the coast guard in Belize. I will keep visiting my sister and parents who live in Honduras." (male, 21 years old)
- ▶ "It depends. If I found myself in a situation in which I had to do it, I would do it." (male, 21 years old)



No help received after return

None of the respondents reported receiving any assistance upon return. They all self-quarantined at home for 14 days as a COVID-19 precaution.



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