# Understanding Central American Migration:

The crisis of Central American child migrants in context[1]

This memo aims to inform the current debate surrounding the sharp increase in unaccompanied child migrants, particularly from Central America. It integrates data on issues triggering this outflow while also introducing the perspectives of the people and communities they affect.[2] Specifically, it draws on data from 900 municipalities to analyze migrant hometowns in relation to human development,[3] violence,[4] and education. In addition, it presents the results of a nationwide survey in El Salvador and a survey of Central American migrants residing in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

There has been a sharp increase in the number of unaccompanied migrant children from Central America attempting to enter the United States (Figure 1) in the past few years. This increase is also seen among adults, though to a lesser degree. As the United States, Mexico, and Central American countries struggle to address this crisis, debates have raged surrounding the humanitarian, legal, and political implications of any possible solution to this complex and troubling issue.

Figure 1: Apprehensions of Unaccompanied Migrant Children
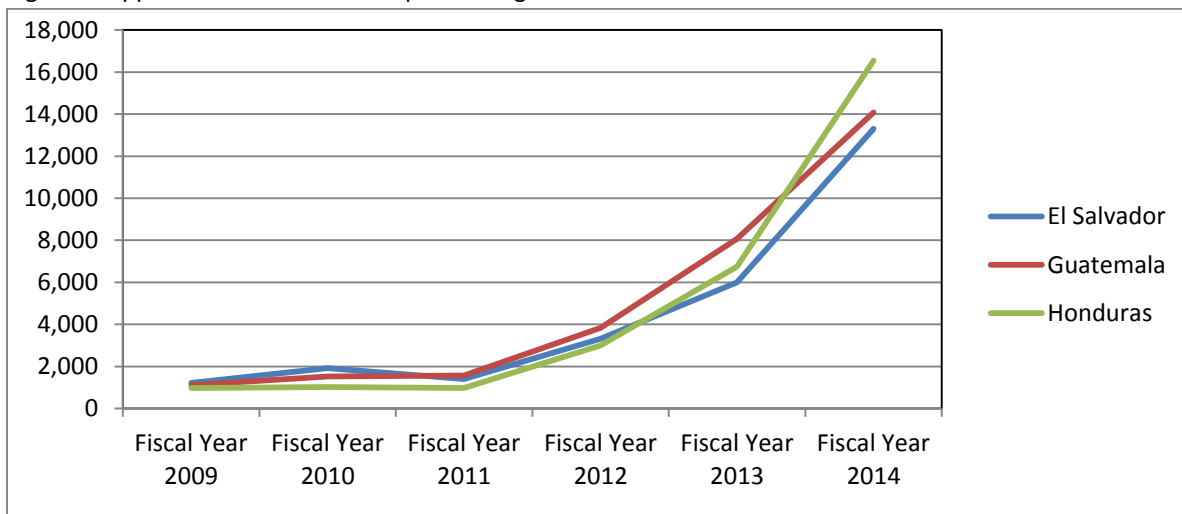
Source: "Unaccompanied Alien Children Encountered by Fiscal Year; Fiscal Years 2009-2013; Fiscal Year 2014 through June 30," US Customs and Border Patrol. Available at http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children

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[1] **Manuel Orozco and Julia Yansura, Inter-American Dialogue, August 2014. Important contributions to fieldwork and research were made by Laura Porras, Jean Coleman, and Brigid Carmichael of the Inter-American Dialogue.**

[2] In addition to surveys, this includes in-depth interviews with community organizations that are engaged with the issue as well with the mother of a child that recently entered the US. Extracts from this interview appear in textboxes throughout the report.

[3] The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite statistic comprised of life expectancy, education, and income indices. A higher number reflects a higher HDI ranking; for example, in 2013 the highest-ranking country in the world was Norway with an HDI of 0.944. For more information, see http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2014.

[4] For the purposes of this paper we use homicides as proxy for violence. However, we are mindful that violence, particularly in Central America, takes on many forms, including youth gang violence, extortion, kidnapping, political harassment, and sexual abuse, among others.

To respond to this crisis in an informed and humane manner, steps must first be taken to develop a clear, objective picture of the issues shaping it. This report aims to do just that, by analyzing the places that emigrants are leaving and the reasons why. Though country-level data can provide a rough approximation of root causes, the municipal data presented here allows for a much more fine-tuned approach, contributing important insights to the current policy debate surrounding short and long-term solutions to the issue of child migrants.

Our research considers various factors contributing to the increase in migration from Central America and finds that violence is the most powerful, immediate driver of emigration, but that it is linked in numerous and important ways to economic and human development. We also note that the perceptions of migrants accurately reflect the harsh realities prompting emigration.

Key findings include:
- An analysis of migrant hometowns indicates that migrants are coming from some of the most populous and violent municipalities in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala;
- Violence, measured in intentional homicides, emerges as a more powerful driver of international migration than human development, as measured by the Human Development Index;
- Half of Salvadorans know someone who has emigrated, and a quarter of Salvadorans say they would consider leaving home themselves, citing violence and lack of economic opportunities as key reasons;
- Most Central American migrants in the US attribute the rise in child migration to violence in their home countries, and nearly half (47%) know a recent child migrant;
- Solutions to the current problem require applying a human development lens to a longstanding reality of violence in the region and focusing on education.

A. Migration, Violence and Development in Central America

Central America's difficult history has included long periods of dictatorship and militarism characterized by structural problems such as economic and social inequality. As a result, emigration occurred primarily due to political instability in the 1970s and the 1980s, and then largely due to economic factors in the 1990s. Today, the region continues to experience large migratory movements, with over 100,000 Central Americans entering the United States each year, in many cases without legal status. These movements are related to shifting global dynamics, including a demand for low-skilled labor in agriculture and services, an increase in organized crime and violence between transnational gangs, and continued political violence.

In sum, the region has passed through at least three migratory periods from the 1970s to the present:
- Political migration: a result of repression and armed conflict (1970s-1980s)
- Economic migration: following the peace processes (1990-2000)
- Current migration: a result of transnational[5] dynamics (2000-present), with drivers such as violence, family reunification, labor, and economic growth.

Today, millions of Central Americans reside abroad, and of these, 80% live in the United States.

Table 1: Central American Populations Abroad, 2010-2013

Migrant Populations (stocks)	2010	2011	2012	2013
Honduras	762,669	863,091	889,629	971,053
Nicaragua	361,317	393,858	379,346	407,088
Guatemala	1,011,218	1,082,881	1,171,888	1,250,926
El Salvador	1,015,479	1,047,034	1,121,904	1,149,006
Four countries	3,150,683	3,386,864	3,562,767	3,778,073

Source: Population Estimates, Manuel Orozco.[6]

*The variables that affect migration*

Migration cycles and macro-economic growth are easily associated with migration, but are not the only, nor necessarily the most useful, variables to understand the current crisis.

The reasons for the growth in migration from Central American countries remain somewhat elusive. Some suggest that, at the country level, the numbers of migrants correlate with migration cycles of previous migrants. However, Honduras, the country with the most recent history in terms of migratory flows, and where the phenomenon of international migration exploded in as recently as 1999 following Hurricane Mitch in 1998, has the highest percentage of its population abroad, larger than Guatemala, the country with the longest tradition of international migration. Additionally, there is no proportionality between migration from these countries and their overall population size, as the following figure shows.

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[5] Transnational dynamics are those that extend across borders, often including heightened social and economic interconnectivity.
[6] For more on this methodology, see Appendix B.

Figure 2: Central American Migrants as a Percentage of Country Population
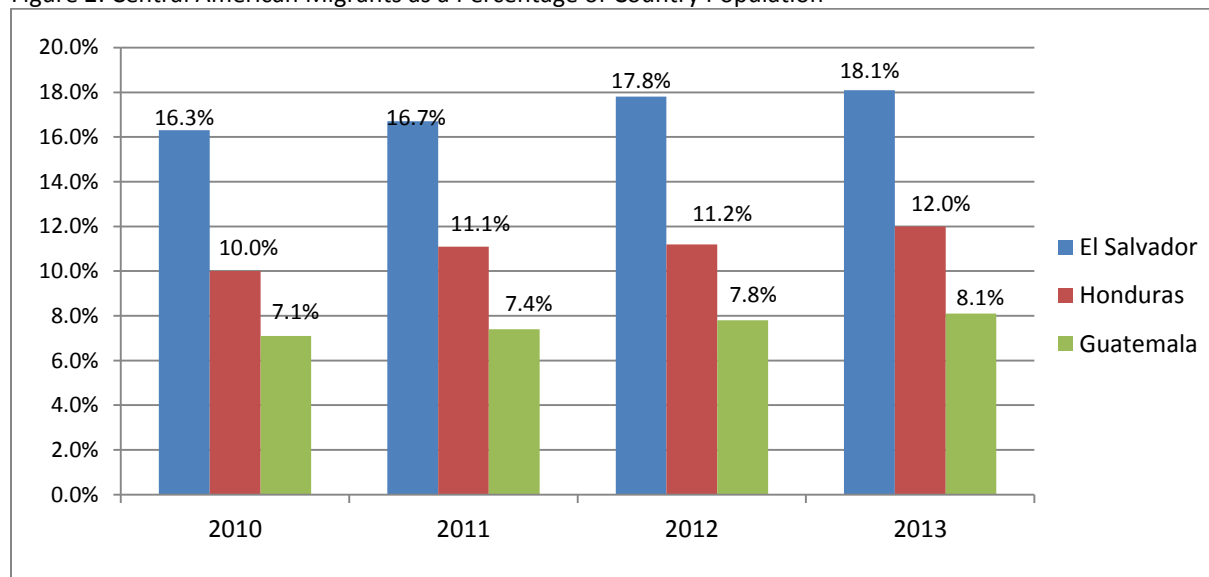
Source: Authors' calculations using migrant population estimates[7] and World Bank data for total populations.

At the macro level, it is hard to identify and generalize the impact of migration on economic growth, regardless of whether the country is an importer or exporter of its workforce. In fact, an analysis of migration and economic growth variables shows no convincing results to prove that people emigrate due to macro-economic factors,[8] though there is evidence that differences in income between two countries influence migratory movements.[9] Moreover, given that migration is a phenomenon that does not occur in a homogeneous manner throughout a country, a macroeconomic analysis does not necessarily offer all of the necessary tools to identify the motivators behind migration.

It is helpful, therefore, to see migration as a process rooted in a complexity of dynamics, in which growth and development in and of themselves do not offer sufficient explanations.[10] There are particular dynamics that propel migration, many of which have a strong local component, that are also associated with migratory networks and/or other factors, including the disruption of ordinary life by violent events. The following sections analyze these local factors.

Life in R.'s hometown in El Salvador grew worse. Increasingly, her community was caught in the crossfire of the Maras and other criminal groups. In 2005, she decided to leave. She managed to gather US$9,000 and paid a coyote to take her north, leaving her young children behind in the care of a family member.

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[7] For more on this methodology, see Appendix B.
[8] A regression model for 2000-2012 for the three countries using migration regressed on unemployment in the countries, unemployment in the US, growth rate, and inflation, showed inconsistent results.
[9] Ana Mayda, *International Migration: A Panel Data Analysis of Economic and Non-Economic Determinants*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 1590, 2005.
[10] Douglas S. Massey, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, J. Edward Taylor, "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal," *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3. (Sep., 1993), pp. 431-466.

Local Dynamics: An Analysis of Migrant Hometowns

An analysis of migrants' communities of origin can offer important insights into the reasons they are leaving.[11] These insights are particularly needed because migration from Central America, while not new, has grown significantly in recent years.

Table 2: Annual Migration from Select Central American Countries, 2010-2013

	2010	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Honduras	24,267	27,462	28,306	30,897
Nicaragua	5,828	6,353	6,118	6,566
Guatemala	32,175	34,455	37,287	39,802
El Salvador	23,079	23,796	25,498	26,114

Source: Migration Estimates, Manuel Orozco. For more on the methodology, see Appendix B.

The following tables, which draw from indicators collected for nearly 900 municipalities in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, shed light on the communities that migrants are leaving. They also provide insights into why migrants may be leaving, particularly with regards to violence and low levels of economic and human development.[12]

The table below compares municipalities that are experiencing emigration with those that are not.[13] As it shows, the communities of emigration are those with larger populations. They are also where the vast majority of homicides occur in each country. In Honduras, for example, nearly 90% of homicides occur in municipalities that migrants are leaving.

Table 3: Migration from Central America: Indicators by Migrant Hometown

		El Salvador	**Guatemala**	**Honduras**
Municipalities with Emigration[14]	Homicides in 2013	2,025	5,086	6,073
	% All country homicides occurring in these municipalities	81.6%	99.8%	89.8%
	Ave. municipal HDI	.7051	.5921	.6146
	Total population of municipalities	4,780,412	15,731,694	7,157,631
	% All country population	79.2%	99.4%	82.0%
	Ave. municipal population	40,858	48,555	47,090
Municipalities	Homicides in 2013	456	12	690

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[11] This data includes the Human Development Index, homicide counts for adults and children, and the number of emigrants for each municipality. Additional data collected includes population size, school enrollment in the municipality and survey data on perceptions of violence. The database also includes payment points where remittances can be received. Our surveys confirm that, in the vast majority of cases, the migrant sends remittances to the town that he or she is from.

[12] For an explanation of sources and methods, see the appendix.

[13] This categorization uses remittance payout as a proxy for migration. Drawing from data provided by money transfer companies, it is possible to divide municipalities into those receiving flows of money from migrants, and those that do not and have not received flows.

[14] See note 13.

With Minimal or No Emigration[15]	% All country homicides occurring in these municipalities	18.4%	0.2%	10.2%
	Ave. municipal HDI	.6677	.5531	.5886
	Total population of municipalities	1,258,361	92,750	1,567,650
	% All country population	20.8%	0.6%	18.0%
	Ave. population size	8,678	10,306	10,737

Source: Orozco, Manuel. For indicators, see Appendix A.

Moreover, a statistical analysis confirms the important role of violence in emigration. As can be seen in Table 4, homicide rates are statistically significant for all three countries, as is population. Local development is negative, but not significant for Guatemala and Honduras. The spread of HDI within each country is very small (a standard deviation of 0.07 for 0.62 average HDI), and thus this indicator may not be capturing all the determinant factors of development's impact on migration, and further analysis may be required.

Table 4: Regression Results: Migration, Homicides, Human Development, and Population

	Central America	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Indicators of Interest				
Share of homicides in municipality (% of country)	0.891***	1.543***	1.063***	0.234***
HDI by municipality	0.004	-0.034***	-0.001	-0.004
Population in municipality as share of country	0.392***	0.554***	0.095***	1.091***
Statistical Parameters				
r2	0.8	0.64	0.84	0.938
n=	897	262	333	298
Constant	-0.004	0.019	0	-0.001***

Source: Orozco, Manuel. For indicators, see Appendix A.
* Statistically significant at the 10% level
**Statistically significant at the 5% level
***Statistically significant at the 1% level

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[15] This categorization uses remittance payout as a proxy for migration. Drawing from data provided by money transfer companies, it is possible to divide municipalities into those receiving flows of money from migrants, and those that do not and have not received flows.

The Case of Child Migrants

Child migration is not a new phenomenon, but one that has grown exponentially in the last four years.[16] The recent rise in child migration from Central America should also be understood in the context of local dynamics, much like adult migration. An analysis of the hometowns of over 15,000 unaccompanied minors apprehended by the US Border Patrol from January through May, 2014 provides additional insights into the factors causing the crisis.[17]

The data shows relatively similar patterns to adult migration, with homicides constituting a key push factor. As Table 5 shows, the towns that child migrants are leaving are among the largest and most violent municipalities in each country. In Honduras, for example, these municipalities are where 70% of homicides occur. They are also towns from which sizable migrant communities have already left. In the case of Honduras, the municipalities with child emigration are also the municipalities of origin for 77% of all emigrants (adult and child).

Table 5: Child Migrants: Key Indicators by Hometown

Key Indicators by Municipality			El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Municipalities with Child Emigration	Violence	Homicides in 2013	747	887	4,664
		% Total homicides by country	30.1%	17.4%	69.0%
	Development	Ave. HDI by municipality	.7237	.6242	.6586
	Emigration	Est. Number of Emigrants	700,883	354,539	750,502
		% of Total Emigrants for country	61.0%	28.3%	77.3%
		Ave. number of emigrants by municipality	46,726	39,393	30,020
	Population	Total population	1,647,949	1,621,489	4,459,322
		% Population by country	27.3%	10.2%	51.1%
		Ave. population size	109,863	180,165	178,373
Municipalities with minimal or no child emigration[18]	Violence	Homicides in 2013	1734	4211	2,099
		% Total homicides by country	69.9%	82.6%	31.0%
	Development	Ave. HDI by municipality	.6821	.5901	.5967
	Emigration	Emigrants	448,123	896,387	220,552
		% total emigrants by country	39.0%	71.7%	22.7%
		Ave. migrants	1,814	2,767	808
	Population	Total Population	4,390,825	14,202,955	4,265,960
		% Population by country	72.7%	89.8%	48.9%
		Ave. Population size	17,777	43,836	15,626

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[16] "Unaccompanied Alien Children Encountered by Fiscal Year; Fiscal Years 2009-2013; Fiscal Year 2014 through June 30," US Customs and Border Patrol. Available at http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children

[17] See Methodology section for additional details.

[18] The category "minimal or no child migration" indicates that fewer than 100 unaccompanied child migrants were apprehended by US Border Patrol for that municipality during the period January-May 2014. This data comes from a map by the Department of Homeland Security showing the number of apprehended unaccompanied child migrants coming from specific hometowns in Central America. A copy of the map is available at http://adamisacson.com/files/dhsuacmap.pdf .

The statistical regression also confirms the relationship. As Table 6 shows, the correlation between violence, measured in the number of homicides occurring in a municipality during 2013, and child migrant home towns is stronger than the correlation between the HDI of those municipalities and the number of apprehended child migrants from those municipalities. In the case of El Salvador, the statistical results are similar to those of adults. For Guatemala, homicides and migration in remittance recipient locations are the strongest predictors. In Honduras, violence is also the strongest factor. What these results point to is that aside from homicides, there are additional factors affecting the migration of minors.

Table 6: Regression Results: Child Migration, Homicides, Human Development, and Population

	Central America	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Indicators of Interest				
Share of homicide in municipality as percent of country	1.278***	1.727***	1.035***	1.383***
HDI by municipality	.002	-.059***	.003	.015**
Migration in the municipality		0.9***	1.9***	0.2***
Population in municipality as share of country	-.077	.493***	.168	-.406**
Statistical Parameters				
r2	0.50	0.54	0.315	0.87
n=	889	260	330	298
Constant	-.002***	.036***	-.003***	-.009***

Source: Orozco, Manuel.
* Statistically significant at the 10% level
**Statistically significant at the 5% level
***Statistically significant at the 1% level

A comparison of the results of Table 4 and Table 6 suggest that child migration and adult migration are occurring for some of the same reasons. However, there is an even stronger relationship between violence and child emigration than between violence and overall emigration.

B. A Closer Look at the Case of El Salvador

In each country, unique factors are at play, shaping migratory trends for adults and children. A closer look at the case of El Salvador helps to understand the complex relationships between migration, violence, and development.

El Salvador has had a difficult trajectory in terms of economic growth and development. Since 2004, economic growth rose slightly, only to fall to -3% during the economic recession of 2009. While it has recovered modestly since then, it has yet to reach pre-recession levels and has actually seen a downward trend since 2011.[19] Moreover, El Salvador's export market produces a small number of products for a relatively small number of countries, with approximately 40% of the total value of exports generated by only 10 firms that deal in a handful of products.[20] This level of concentration leaves the economy vulnerable to external shocks. Finally, the country's growth model leaves many Salvadorans economically excluded and/or vulnerable: between 2007 and 2008 the percentage of people in poverty increased from 34.6% to 40%.[21]

El Salvador has also experienced some of the highest levels of violence in the Central American region. The country experienced relatively low levels of violence in the 1990s after the peace agreement in 1992.[22] In subsequent years, violence increased along with a heightened presence and activity of organized criminal groups. The homicide rate in El Salvador has decreased somewhat in recent years to levels slightly below that of Honduras, but it remains above 40 homicides per 100,000 people (see Figure 2), and the per capita homicide rate in the capital city of San Salvador is among the highest in Latin America.[23] The deportations of Salvadoran gang members from the United States to El Salvador may also be linked to the rise in violence in El Salvador.[24] Data from the Department of Homeland Security shows high levels of deportations of Salvadorans with criminal backgrounds[25] at the same time that criminal organizations were emerging in El Salvador, which supports this connection.[26]

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[19] World Bank Development Indicators, GDP Growth (annual %).

[20] "INT Encourages Countries to Diversify Exports," Inter-American Development Bank. Available at http://www.iadb.org/en/topics/trade/int-encourages-countries-to-diversify-exports,9764.html

[21] El Salvador Overview, World Bank. Available at http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/elsalvador/overview

[22] El Salvador Overview, World Bank. Available at http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/elsalvador/overview

[23] Global Study on Homicide, UNODC, 2011. Available at http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Homicide/Globa_study_on_homicide_2011_web.pdf

[24] Mary Helen Johnson, "National Policies and the Rise of Transnational Gangs," Migration Policy Institute, April 2006. Available at: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/national-policies-and-rise-transnational-gangs/

[25] Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (2012 and 2003). Department of Homeland Security. Available at: http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_yb_2012.pdf

[26] For more on this, see Clare Ribando Seelke, "Gangs in Central America," Congressional Research Service, 2014. Available at http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34112.pdf

Figure 3: Intentional Homicides per 100,000 in El Salvador, 2004-2012

Intentional homicides per 100,000 people
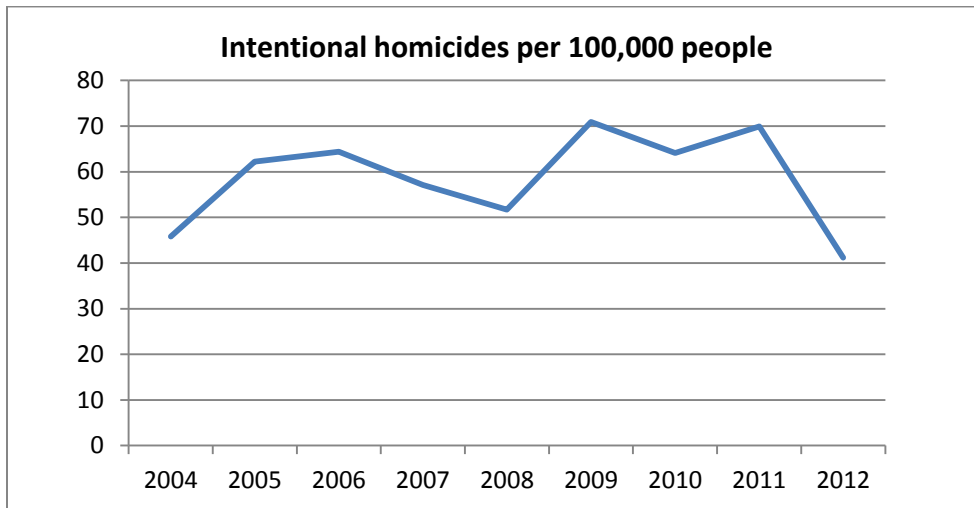
Source: Homicide counts and rates, time series 2000-2012. UNODC. http://www.unodc.org/gsh/en/data.html

As mentioned above, El Salvador is a country with a history of violence, poor economic growth and outward migration. The continuity of violence and lack of opportunities constitute important triggers for migration. As this section argues, Salvadorans feel unsafe in their own country and in many cases lack the economic opportunities they need. Half of Salvadorans know someone who has left the country, and most of those who have left have done so crossing borders without legal documentation. Regardless of the ways in which people leave, they almost never plan to return. A quarter of Salvadorans would consider leaving their home country, citing violence as a key reason.[27]

> *R., a recent migrant who brought her child to the US, says she is certain that the violence in El Salvador will continue to get worse and that no one – no authority, police, or government – will do anything to change it.*

Salvadorans see violence and insecurity as the main issues facing their country, closely followed by unemployment and the cost of living. In their own families, however, Salvadorans say that the main problems they face are economic, including high cost of living and unemployment, suggesting an important interplay between economic and security concerns.

Responses also vary by demographic group. For example, respondents from the country's capital, San Salvador, identify security as the principal problem both at the household and national level[28] at higher rates than respondents from other municipalities. Respondents from lower educational and income brackets were more concerned with the cost of living, while respondents in the upper-middle income range were much more concerned with security than their low-income, mid-income, or high-income counterparts. Among male and female respondents, the principal problems identified were very similar.

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[27] Survey of Salvadorans in El Salvador, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.
[28] 29% and 79%, respectively.

Table 7: Perceptions of Principal Problems Facing Country and Household

Principal Problem	Principal problems facing country (% all column responses)	Principal problems facing respondent and family at this time (% all column responses)
Security	**46%**	12%
Cost of Living	13%	**28%**
Unemployment	16%	23%
Low Salaries	2%	5%
Corruption	9%	3%
Poverty	4%	5%
Economic Situation	6%	12%
Education	2%	2%
Other	3%	11%

Source: Survey of Salvadorans in El Salvador, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

It is important to note that even when economic problems (cost of living, unemployment, low salaries, poverty, and general economic situation) are combined, they are still considered to be less important than security problems at the national level (41% to 46%).

In light of these problems, one out of every four Salvadorans has considered emigrating. Demographics appear to play an important role, with young and male respondents more interested in emigration, as the figure below shows.

Figure 4: Salvadorans Considering Emigration, by Age Range and Gender
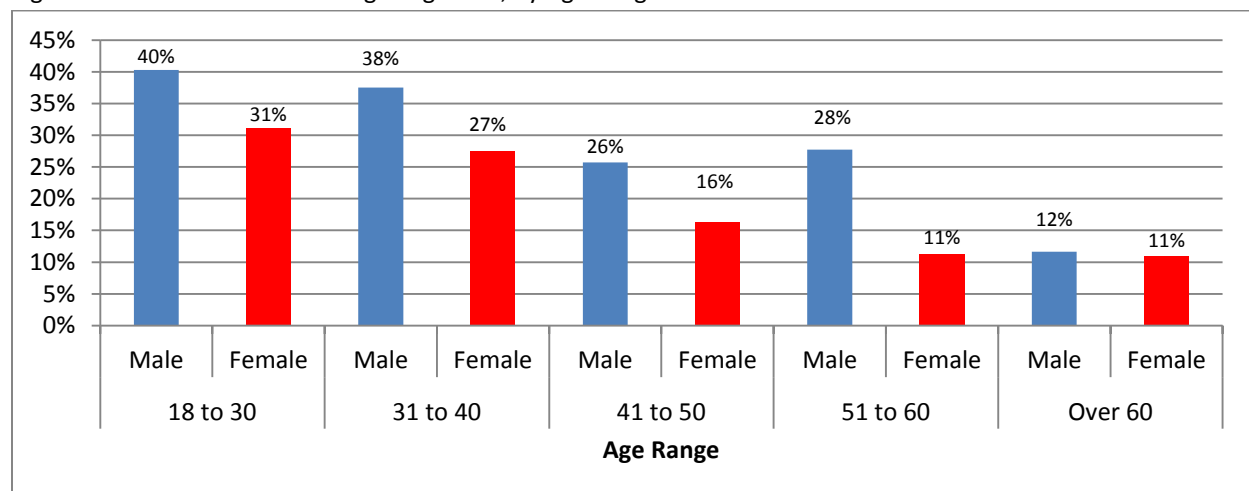
Source: Survey of Salvadorans in El Salvador, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

The table below provides detailed demographic factors as they relate to respondent's interest in migration. For example, those in the mid-low income brackets, those with family members in the United States, and those in certain occupations are among those most interested in emigration.

Table 8: Demographic Profile of Salvadorans Considering Emigration

Demographic Factors	Description	Has Considered Emigration (column % demographic factor)	Has Not Considered Emigration (column % demographic factor)
Gender	Male	58%	48%
	Female	42%	53%
Average household income (monthly)	Less than $200	31%	35%
	$200 to $400	52%	43%
	$400 to $600	11%	12%
	$600 to $1000	3%	4%
	More than $1000	4%	6%
Average Age		38 years	47 years
Current Occupation (select occupations)	Agricultural Worker	8%	5%
	Homemaker	18%	34%
	Business person	12%	10%
	Unemployed	9%	7%
	Student	9%	7%
	Day laborer	5%	3%
Family members abroad	In US	61%	43%
	In other country	2%	2%
	No family abroad	38%	54%
Remittances	Receives remittances	26%	14%
	Does not receive remittances	74%	85%

Source: Survey of Salvadorans in El Salvador, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

Salvadorans who have considered emigration say that the principal reason they would leave is the lack of opportunities in their home country (47%), followed by crime and violence (28%), work opportunities in the United States (13%), and family reunification (9%).

Table 9: Among Salvadorans Who Consider Emigrating, Principal Reasons Why

Reasons	% All Reasons Mentioned
Lack of Opportunities	47%
Crime and Violence	28%
Work opportunity in the US	13%
Family Reunification	9%
Other	3%

Source: Survey of Salvadorans in El Salvador, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

The decision to emigrate may also be connected to whether these potential migrants already have family or friends abroad. Among Salvadorans in El Salvador, 50% have a family member abroad.[29] Considering some of the closest family relationships, 5% have a parent in the United States, 8% have a child in the United States, and 20% have a sibling in the United States. Of those with family abroad in the United States, 81% say they are there without legal status and 72% do not plan to return any time soon.

One third of Salvadorans know someone who has left the country in the past 12 months. In some municipalities (El Rosario, Usulután, Anamorós, San Pedro Masahuat, and Ilobasco), the majority of people know someone who has left recently. In most cases, the recent emigrant entered the US by crossing the border illegally, as the figure below shows.

Figure 5: Salvadorans Who Know a Recent Migrant
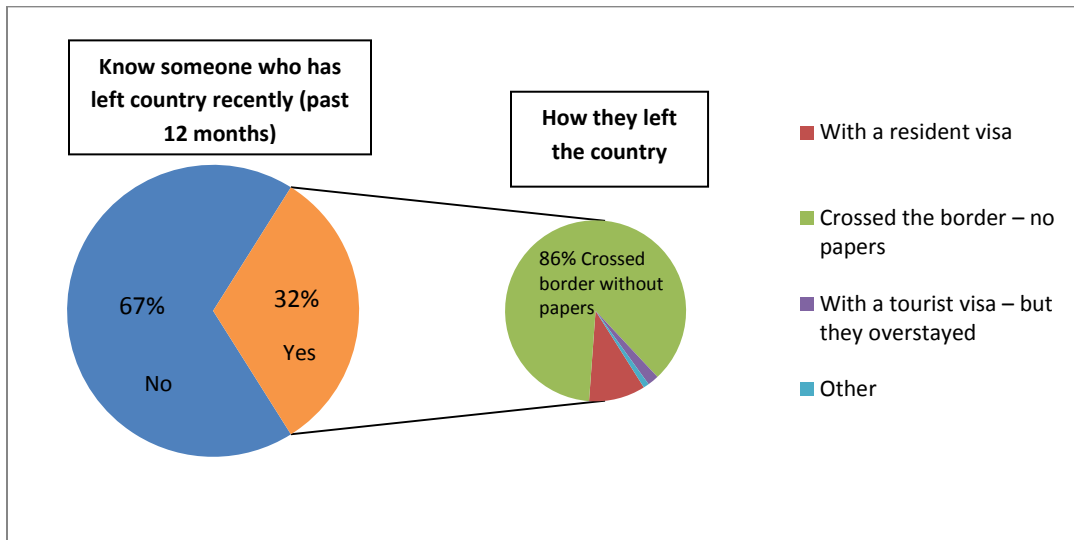
Source: Survey of Salvadorans in El Salvador, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

Having family or social networks in the US may affect Salvadorans' decision to migrate, but it alone does not appear to be a primary driver of the current waves of emigration from the region. As the following table shows, Salvadorans with family and acquaintances in the US are considering emigration at higher rates. However, it is important to note that the majority of Salvadorans with family or acquaintances in the US have not in fact considered emigration.

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[29] 48% report having a family member in the United States, and 2% report having a family member in a country other than the US.

Table 10: Family and Friends in the US in Relation to Emigration

Having family and friends in US	Have considered emigrating (row %)	Have not considered emigrating (row %)
Have family members in US	32%	67%
Do not have family members in US	19%	80%
Know recent migrant (past year)	36%	64%
Do not know recent migrant (past year)	20%	79%
Average	25%	74%

Source: Survey of Salvadorans in El Salvador, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

C. Here, not There: Immigrant Perceptions of Migration and Violence

The issue of unaccompanied child migrants strikes a chord for many in the migrant community. Oscar Chacon, Executive Director of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities, sees the issue as a "humanitarian crisis" that highlights issues with the current US immigration system as well as with development and security in migrants' home countries.

According to surveys, the vast majority (95%) of Central American immigrants are aware of the issue, having heard of it in the news or more directly, through the stories of people they know. Moreover, nearly half (47%) of Central American migrants know a recent migrant from their country who is a minor.

Table 11: % Central American Migrants who Know a Recent Migrant, by Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Know a recent migrant from their country (%)	Know a recent child migrant from their country (%)	How long ago did recent migrant arrive (in months)
El Salvador	50%	45%	12.9
Guatemala	52%	35%	3.8
Honduras	67%	60%	5.0
Average	54%	47%	9.9

Source: Survey of Central American Migrants in the US, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

The issue is particularly resonant – and painful – among the many transnational families in the United States and Central America in which parents, children, siblings, or other family members live apart from each other, often under difficult circumstances and for extended periods of time. For example, surveys of Central Americans in the US show that 38% have at least one child living in their home country; this percentage is even higher (49%) among migrants who are undocumented.

Oscar Chacon of the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities sees the influx as caused by "not one factor, but rather, a combination of factors."

When M. turned 14, the Maras in her hometown in El Salvador began to pressure her, sending her suggestive "notes" from the jail near her house and trying to recruit her into the organization. Because of this pressure, M. was not able to attend school, nor was she able to stay home alone. Her old brother had no other choice but to bring her to work with him and have her wait there all day. A year later, the situation looked no better. Her older brother called their mother in the United States and asked her to arrange to bring M.

Though he sees violence as an "immediate trigger," he notes that other factors, including poverty, insufficient opportunities in migrants' home countries, and issues with the US immigration system have contributed to the crisis.

In surveys, Central American migrants in the US identified two primary factors behind the recent influx in child migrants: violence in their country of origin and lack of economic opportunity.[30] For Salvadorans and Hondurans, violence in their country of origin was by far the leading push factor, while for Guatemalans it was both violence and the lack of opportunities. Family reunification, though an important factor, is seen as secondary to the more immediate and pressing issues of violence and poverty.

Table 12: Causes of Child Migration (First Cause Mentioned) by Country of Origin and Gender

Causes Identified	First responses (Column %)				
	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras	Female	Male
Violence in Country of Origin	**59%**	**38%**	**42%**	**58%**	**44%**
Lack of Opportunities in Home Country	18%	**35%**	29%	16%	31%
Family Reunification	12%	14%	16%	13%	13%

Source: Survey of Central American Migrants in the US, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

The percentage of respondents who identified violence as the primary cause of migration was higher if they knew a recent migrant. This relationship was strongest for Salvadoran migrants, with 76% of respondents who knew a recent migrant citing violence as the cause of the crisis of child migrants compared to 42% among those who did not know a recent migrant. Among Guatemalans, 47% of those who knew a recent migrant pointed to violence, compared to only 29% of those who did not know a recent migrant, and for Hondurans, the figures were 43% and 4%.

Considering all causes mentioned — and not just the first cause — violence remains the leading issue (36%) followed by a lack of economic opportunity (29%). The two causes are closely linked and difficult to separate. In many cases, respondents would list them both in quick succession, rather than state one as unequivocally being the cause.

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[30] Survey of Central American Migrants in the US, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014

Children Entering US along Dangerous, but Increasingly Inexpensive Routes

Changes in paths and mechanisms by which migrants cross borders are a relevant issue in need of further study. Child migrants, both accompanied and unaccompanied, are using many of the same border crossing routes as adult migrants. According to US Border Patrol data for Fiscal Year 2013, the most heavily used corridors are the Rio Grande Valley (including Rio Grande City, Reynosa, and Brownsville, TX) and Tucson (a rural border stretch that includes Nogales and Douglass, AZ). Unfortunately, the routes that child and adult migrants take to enter the US illegally are often the most dangerous routes, creating significant concerns about migrants' security.

In light of this, many migrants and child migrants are brought into the US by a coyote with the hope that the coyote will help them navigate the terrain and arrive safely in the US. According to surveys of Central American migrants in Washington DC, the average price that migrants paid for using a coyote, or a people smuggler, was $6,626, with Salvadorans paying the most at $6,879 and Guatemalans paying the least at $6,250.

The price has decreased in the past year, from $7,000 before this year to an average of $5,783 for those who came within the past 3 months. This may reflect migrant children and families increasingly intentionally turning themselves in at the US-Mexican border, rather than trying to reach US cities beyond the border. This is easier for the coyote (and therefore may be less costly for the migrant).

Migration Time Period and Cost of Coyote

Time of migration	Ave. Payment to Coyote (US $)
Not within past year	$7,000
Within past year	$6,420
Within past 6 months	$6,047
Within past 3 months	$5,783

Sources: "Sector Profile – Fiscal Year 2013," US Border Patrol. Available at http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/U.S.%20Border%20Patrol%20Fiscal%20Year%202013%20Profile.pdf; Survey of Central American Migrants in the US, the Inter-American Dialogue, July 2014.

Preliminary Conclusions

Our research has considered various factors contributing to the increase in migration from Central America and found that violence is the most powerful, immediate driver of emigration. Just as people left Central America escaping violence in the 70s and 80s, now in the 21st century youth are being persecuted by paramilitary forces, gangs, cartels, arms traffickers, and extortionists.

And yet, violence and development are linked in a number of ways. First, the study used homicide as a proxy for violence. But this violence is a byproduct of an ecosystem consisting of crime networks operating underground economies based on extortion, gang violence, intimidation, political harassment, kidnaping, and trafficking. The opportunity costs of joining criminal activity are such that it becomes a viable choice. Thus, violence in the region is linked back to economic development and poor economic performance. Second, poverty does not drive migration, but lack of development does: when there are

insufficient opportunities for a modern society, emigration becomes an attractive option. The region's mid-level HDI means that it is experiencing mediocre economic performance: income below $300 per month, education of 6 years, and low life expectancy, for example. But these indicators are a reflection of greater realities, such as the obsolete nature of the agro-export model, or the existing inequalities that rule the region. Third, migration is connected to labor market integration with the United States. People migrating are following foreign labor market demands for construction, agriculture, domestic work and other services in the hospitality industry.

In light of these facts, solutions to the current problem require applying a human development lens to the longstanding reality of violence in the region. At the core of solutions to the issues facing the region is an asset building approach that simultaneously creates opportunities and wealth while offering protection from harm. Specifically, this approach tackles the needs of the labor force over that of other production factors. If youth and the labor force are at risk, or are seeking to move, strengthening their condition should be a priority.

Aside from a security strategy, for a region that is informal, underpaid, unskilled and uneducated, strategies need to converge within the context of asset building for youth and the labor force in ways that offer solutions to these four core equity issues.

Table 13: Labor Force Conditions in Central America

	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
Informality[31]	57%	64%	71%
Skilled labor	27%	25%	32%
Tertiary educated population	11%	6%	7%

Source: "Evolución de los principales indicadores del mercado de trabajo en Centroamérica y República Dominicana, 2006-2010," International Labor Organization, 2011. Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/---sro-san_jose/documents/publication/wcms_206030.pdf

An asset-building strategy tackles social inclusion, economic modernization, transnational engagement and negative disruptions. Stronger assets will create economic opportunities in the local communities where migration currently takes place as a necessity rather than a choice. These opportunities can come in the form of better paid jobs, more businesses, a better skilled labor force, better educated youth, and more financially independent communities with means to invest in education, business or other assets.

First, and as a short-term strategy, education and existing education structures may constitute the best tool for promoting change. Experiences show that certain strategies can increase student retention and strengthen quality of education, as well as promoting secure and engaged communities.[32] These include increasing time in school by adding extracurricular and after-care programs, providing tutoring to select groups of students, offering snacks and meals during the school day, engaging with parents and

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[31] This is measured as the informal labor force divided by the total labor force.

[32] See, for example, World Bank, "Crime and Violence in Central America: A development challenge," 2011 and
David J. Hawkins and David P. Farrington, "Reducing Violence through the Schools," in *Violence in American Schools: A New Perspective* by Delbert S. Elliott, Beatrix A. Hamburg, and Kirk R. Williams (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 1998.

encouraging them to invest in their children's education, and increasing community involvement in school activities. Schools can also promote and host other community groups.

Second, and as a medium-term strategy, as the economics of migration have not yet been leveraged for development, they can constitute a silver lining in the current crisis. Immigrants engage in a number of transnational economic activities, such as family remittances, that are accompanied by several processes or engagements that together form a value chain. Remittances increase disposable income and create a strong savings capacity among households. Migrants also consume billions of home-country products that create and nurture a value chain that increases productivity in the region. Therefore, given the range of engagement, it is important to create incentives and initiatives that leverage migrant engagement to further promote development. The impact of these efforts is manifold, and can further support those strategic initiatives mentioned in the first point.

Table 14: Diaspora Engagement and Development Potential

	Scope	**Barriers**
Savings from remittances	60% of 3 million migrant and remittance recipient households save US$1,200.	Limited financial access and investment choices; much of this savings remains outside the formal financial system.
Entrepreneurship	5% of migrants and families at home have small, mostly informal businesses.	Legal restrictions, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited financial access make it difficult to register, operate and/or manage a business.
Investment	5% of migrants and their families invest US$5,000 (mostly informally) in real estate or other activities.	Limited knowledge of investment opportunities as well as barriers to credit and entry into financial entities.
Nostalgic trade	90% of migrants consume US$1500 in nostalgic[33] commodities.	Limited access to international markets.
Philanthropy	10% of migrants donate US$200 to philanthropy in their home countries.	Little knowledge of available partners and opportunities to donate to successful development projects.

Source: Orozco, Manuel.

Thus, in order to build assets in the short term, it is imperative to organize public-private partnerships with banks in Central America, as 65% of money transfers are paid by commercial banks. Additionally, partnerships should be fostered with money transfer operators to develop savings and investment strategies both in individual communities and nationwide. This strategy involves mobilizing the savings of remittance recipients, which can in turn be used for credit in local economies. Currently 60% of

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[33] There is extensive demand among migrant communities for home-country, "nostalgic" products. These may include food, beverages, clothing, music, or other items that are imported from migrants' home countries. For more on this, see Manuel Orozco, "Tasting Identity: Trends in Migrant Demand for Home-Country Goods," USAID Diaspora Networks Alliance, 2008. Available at: http://www.thedialogue.org/PublicationFiles/DNA%20Paper%20Series%20-%20Tasting%20Identity_11-18-08-Summary_FINAL.pdf

remittance recipient households are able to save, but as a result of poor financial access, a large majority of people keep those savings "under the mattress." [34]

Third, and as a long-term strategy, Central America will benefit from global efforts to integrate economic growth with equity. The current economic growth model relies on low-skilled labor working in agriculture or in a labor force servicing small markets. This is not a competitive model. The international community must work in tandem with the region's governments and businesses to strengthen the entrepreneurial skills of small businesses and widen the skills of the labor force.

This approach to education and economic inclusion not only helps to build assets in households and communities, but also strengthens countries' competitive position.

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[34] For a country like Honduras, with 900,000 remittance recipient households, 600,000 of which have savings of $1,000, this amounts to US$600,000,000 that is mainly held in informal savings.

Appendix A: Methodology

This memo draws from a number of sources, including surveys of Central American migrants in the US, surveys of Salvadorans in El Salvador, in-depth interviews with migrants about their experiences bringing their children to the United States, in-depth interviews with community organizations working on the issue, and a database of municipal demographic, economic, social, and security indicators for three Central American countries of particular interest, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Surveys of Central American Migrants in the US
Survey teams were stationed in areas with heavy foot traffic in the Columbia Heights neighborhood of Washington, DC throughout the month of July, 2014. They greeted potential respondents and explained that the aim of the survey was to understand the current immigration situation. If the respondent was not originally from El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras, the survey was discontinued. Surveys were conducted in Spanish for Spanish speaking participants. Surveys were completely voluntary, anonymous, and lasted approximately five minutes each.

Survey respondents were primarily Salvadoran (141), reflecting the large Salvadoran presence in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Guatemalans (29) and Hondurans (45) were also surveyed. The surveyed population was 60% female and 40% male, and respondents had lived in the United States on average 13.1 years. While 53% of respondents were undocumented, the percentage of undocumented respondents varied with the country of origin. The table below provides additional demographic details for the survey group.

Country of Origin	# Respond-ents	Ave. Age	% Male	% Female	Ave. Years in US	% Undoc-umented
El Salvador	141	39.5	34%	66%	14.9	40%
Guatemala	29	35.9	45%	55%	10.9	76%
Honduras	45	37.2	56%	44%	9.5	76%
Grand Total	**215**	**38.5**	**40%**	**60%**	**13.1**	**53%**

Survey in El Salvador
From July 21st through July 27, 2014, a national survey was carried out in 68 municipalities of El Salvador. Of the 1010 survey respondents, 50% were male and 50% were female. The average age was 44. The table below provides additional demographic indicators for the survey participants.

		Gender		Highest Educational Degree			Ave. monthly income (US$)		
# Respondents	Ave. Age	% Male	% Female	Primary	Secondary	University	Less than $200	$200 to $600	Over $600
1,010	44	50%	50%	43%	43%	14%	34%	57%	9%

Analysis of Unaccompanied Child Migrant Hometowns

A database of migrant and child migrant hometowns in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala was created in order to better analyze the push factors and other details associated with the current influx of children migrating to the United States from Central America. The database included population information, violence indicators, the Human Development Index (HDI), remittance payout points, and education statistics broken down by municipality. Wherever possible, information was taken from official government sources such as the census, central bank, police agencies, and ministries of education. Information was also gathered from intergovernmental organizations such as the UNDP and the World Bank, academic institutions, NGOs, and in the case of remittance payout points, from the Inter-American Dialogue's 2012 remittance scorecard, "The Market for Money Transfers: 2012 Scorecard Report."

Indicator	Source El Salvador	Source Guatemala	Source Honduras
Total Population	2007 Census	2002 Census	2001 Census
Population projections 2014	Ministerio de Economía. "El Salvador: Estimaciones y Proyecciones de Población. Nacional 2005-2050, Departamental 2005-2025."	Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Guatemala. "Guatemala: Estimaciones de la Población total por municipio. Período 2008-2020."	Dialogue calculations based on the "Resumen de la Proyección de Población de Honduras 2001-2015." Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Honduras.
Population growth	Dialogue calculations based on 2007 Census data multiplied by the departmental growth rate 2007-2014	Dialogue calculations based on data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Guatemala.	Proyecciones de Población de Honduras 2001-2015, CPV 2001, INE
Remittance payout points	Sum of payout points, "The Market for Money Transfers: 2012 Scorecard Report," Inter-American Dialogue, 2012.	Sum of payout points, "The Market for Money Transfers: 2012 Scorecard Report," Inter-American Dialogue, 2012.	Sum of payout points, "The Market for Money Transfers: 2012 Scorecard Report," Inter-American Dialogue, 2012.
AUC (Alien Unaccompanied Child) Apprehensions	AUC Apprehensions Jan - May 2014	AUC Apprehensions Jan - May 2014	AUC Apprehensions Jan - May 2014
HDI	UNDP Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano El Salvador 2005.	UNDP Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano Guatemala 2011.	UNDP Informe sobre desarrollo humano Honduras 2006.
% who thought of leaving their neighborhood due to violence	The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). 2012.	The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). 2012.	The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). 2012.
Homicides	Homicides 2013, IML	Policia Nacional Civil, 2013	IUDPAS-UNAH Observatorio de la Violencia, Homicidios Según Municipios, 2013.
Child Homicides	Child Homicide Rates 2012, IML	Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Guatemala. 2012.	IUDPAS-UNAH. Homicidios Niños(as) Según Municipios. 2013.
Total educational enrollment	Censo 2010 Matricula tradicional por Municipio y Grado (Ministerio de educación)	"Matrícula Inicial Municipal." Ministerio de Educación, Guatemala. 2012.	"Matricula Inicial." Resumen Histórico de Estadísticas. Secretaria de Educación, Honduras. 2009.

In-Depth Interviews with Community Organizations and Migrants

Multiple in-depth interviews were conducted with sources close to the issue. We discussed the influx of child migrants with several NGOs who actively work with migrants. Additionally, we interviewed a recent

migrant who had brought her daughter to live with her. This interview was completely voluntary and anonymous, and names have been changed in order to protect the subject's privacy. The interview with the recent migrant is interspersed throughout the report in text boxes.

Appendix B: Estimates of Migrant Population

Various sources are used to estimate the migrant population. For all migration, we use monthly remittance transfer flows adjusted to survey data from those remitting the same year they entered the host country (typically 3 percent). We factor that number to a coefficient of an immigrant's propensity to remit. Additional sources for estimating come from the US State Department and the CIS Annual Yearbook of Immigration that completes the entire migration process. Comparing estimates of annual migration to legal forms of migrating, as well examining figures on those detained and deported at the border, helped to establish the size of the population that moves without papers. The number of migrants equals those receiving immigrant visas at Consular offices plus those undocumented individuals. The number of undocumented migrants is obtained from an estimate of people caught at the border and those crossing it. According to Cornelius, "fewer than half are caught [38 percent], and those caught eventually cross," thus undocumented border crossers = {[number of deported x 62%]/ number of people caught}.[35]

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[35] For more information on this methodology, see Orozco and Yansura, "Migration and Development in Central America: Perceptions, Policies, and Further Opportunities," Inter-American Dialogue, 2013. Available at http://thedialogue.org/uploads/IAD9337MigrationEnglish_v6.pdf