**Discussion Forum of the Regional Conference on Migration with**

**Diaspora Organizations:**

**Toward the Strengthening of Investment and the Development of Communities through the Expedited, Safe and Cost-Effective Transfer of Remittances**

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**15 June & 16 June 2021[[1]](#footnote-2)**

CONTEXT

1. The Contribution of Diasporas at the Global Level

The diasporas, or the group of migrants or their descendants whose identity and sense of belonging stem from their migration experience and background, are a comprehensive part of development in their countries of origin and destination.[[2]](#footnote-3) The role of the diasporas as agents for development has been recognized by governments of countries of origin and host countries. These governments now seek greater involvement with the diaspora organizations and their members.[[3]](#footnote-4)

It is also relevant to highlight that policies and institutions related to diasporas have existed since the nineteenth century. An increasing number of governments and international organizations have implemented, since the 1990s, policies aimed at incorporating the populations of the diaspora in different areas.[[4]](#footnote-5) This is due to the growing recognition of the importance of diaspora communities as agents of development and that they can enhance social, economic and cultural ties between their countries of origin and destination.[[5]](#footnote-6)

While diaspora collaboration programs often aim at allocating the money from remittances to development, governments are increasingly fostering other types of relationships. Many countries have simplified the methods for members of diasporas to maintain or access nationality or they have developed new forms of belonging.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Although remittances have been seen as the main contribution of the diaspora and have been used as a tool for development, it is important to point out that they are not their only effects. Remittances also contribute to reducing poverty levels and to social, cultural and labor development of those residing in the country of origin. However, the impact of remittances depends to a large extent on the existing institutional structures in the countries of origin.[[7]](#footnote-8) The effects of remittances on welfare depend on the condition of the recipient households and, in general, it will be those households at very low levels of welfare who will benefit the most from sending remittances.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Beyond the direct contribution of diasporas through remittances, their contributions cover various areas. For example, in the civic and political area, high participation rates are commonly observed in national elections or the integration of new migrants in countries of destination. In the area of human capital, diasporas can contribute new skills and expertise to the public and private sector of the country of origin and facilitate access to new opportunities in the country of destination. In the economic area, diasporas can contribute through remittances, diaspora bonds, direct investment, creation of enterprises, establishment of binational chambers of commerce, as well as tourism and nostalgic trade, among other activities. This has become even more evident during the serious economic crisis derived from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Diasporas have been particularly active in responding to COVID-19 and developing new initiatives to address the health-related, social and economic challenges faced by their communities, both in the country of origin and the host country. Since the beginning of the pandemic, diasporas have developed transnational responses in support of communities of migrants at the global level. The behaviour of international remittances, even during the pandemic, is a clear indicator of the economic and social contribution of the diasporas in the region.

In April 2020, the World Bank projected a 19.3% reduction of the remittance flows to Latin American and Caribbean countries for 2020[[9]](#footnote-10). However, thus far the remittances that have been received in the main countries receiving remittances in the region (for which monthly data are available) have not experienced a drastic reduction.[[10]](#footnote-11)

In addition, in the socio-cultural area diasporas support other persons seeking to migrate to the same country and also help to disseminate artistic, food and culinary traditions. This not only refers to cultural fusion and culinary diversification in countries of destination but also to the culinary enrichment that takes place in countries of origin once migrants have returned[[11]](#footnote-12).

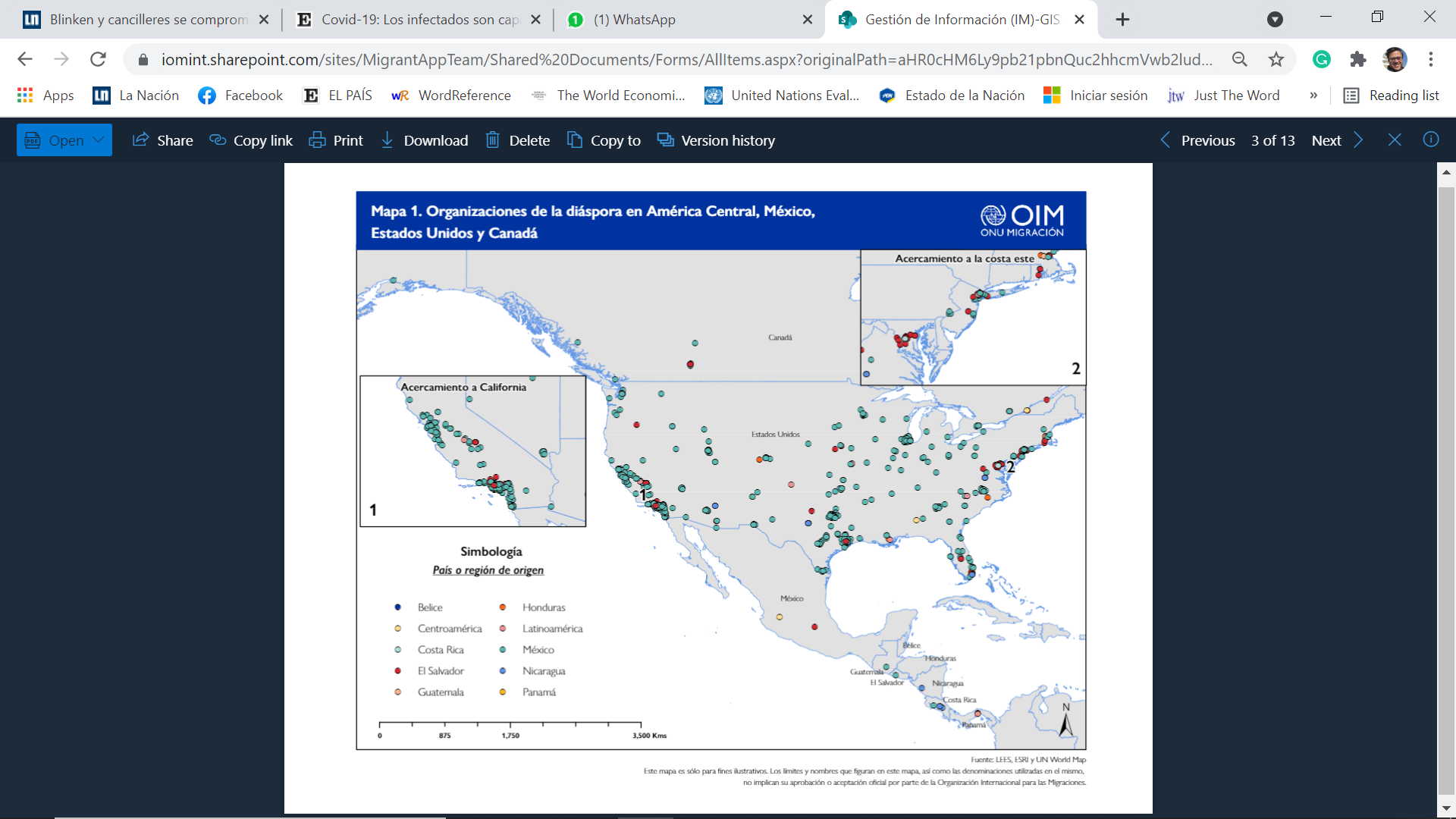
Furthermore, it is important to take into account that the contributions of diasporas can reflect more strongly at the subnational level; for example, through contributions to the development of communities of origin or participation of diasporas in tourism in the urban areas, where they could have relatives, friends and other links. As such, it is essential to measure all these economic investments at all levels and in all the communities of a given country.[[12]](#footnote-13) In conclusion, it is necessary to point out that diasporas are agents of economic, cultural, social and labor development in both countries of origin and destination.

1. Regional Trends

For Central America and Mexico, emigration is mainly oriented toward the US, with an estimated 15,231,504 persons coming from Central America and Mexico in 2019, according to data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)[[13]](#footnote-14). The main countries of origin of these migration flows are Mexico (11,489,684), El Salvador (1,429,155), Guatemala (1,070,743) and Honduras (655,995). To a lesser degree, Mesoamerican emigration is also oriented toward Canada, Costa Rica, Panama and Belize and more recently, Mexico[[14]](#footnote-15).

These regional trends are reflected in the level of coordination and activities of Mesoamerican diaspora organizations. According to a study conducted by IOM in 2020 with 1,014 Mesoamerican diaspora organizations, 76% are of Mexican origin (770) and 13% are of Salvadoran origin (131). Honduras (with 31 organizations), Nicaragua (24) and Guatemala (16) are the three countries with the highest number of identified organizations, after the above-mentioned countries[[15]](#footnote-16). It should be noted that the majority of the organizations are located in the United States of America (964) and Canada (29), as shown in Map 1.

Map 1: Diaspora organizations in Central America, Mexico, the United States and Canada



*Source:* IOM (2021) El involucramiento de las diásporas de América Central y México: oportunidades y desafíos. Interactive map available at: <https://idiaspora.org/es/connect/get-advice>

1. Challenges of the Diaspora Organizations

Although the Mesoamerican diasporas have strong links with their countries and communities of origin, as reflected by the steady flow of remittances to their families, which represents more than 20% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of countries such as Honduras and El Salvador[[16]](#footnote-17), significant challenges exist which affect the empowerment of the diasporas as agents for comprehensive development. Recently, IOM finalized a study entitled “El involucramiento de las diásporas de América Central y México: oportunidades y desafíos” (Engagement of the diasporas of Central America and Mexico: Opportunities and Challenges), identifying various challenges that are summarized below:

1. Identification of diaspora organizations (without identifying them, the contributions of the diaspora cannot be recognized and their needs cannot be addressed appropriately);
2. Designing sustainable public policies for development, linking the diaspora with all strategic sectors in the country of origin (sustainable cooperation);
3. Lack of financial and human resources;
4. Designing an adequate plan for the dissemination and communication of the public policy.
5. Incorporation of the diaspora in the host country (required element to enable diasporas to contribute to development).[[17]](#footnote-18) Migrants must be included in the plans related to the building of citizenship and the social fabric.[[18]](#footnote-19)

In line with the strategic approach of IOM, these challenges can be addressed through three main lines of action: Enable, Engage and Empower the diasporas as agents for development[[19]](#footnote-20).

RATIONALE

In the current context of reconstruction due to the health emergency, a comprehensive approach needs to be adopted for the economic and social recovery of the region. An essential part of the reconstruction is recognizing the transnational nature of our societies, whose members contribute to multiple communities simultaneously[[20]](#footnote-21). Although the diaspora organizations and their members have been essential actors for the economies of countries of origin through the regular sending of remittances[[21]](#footnote-22), this aspect only represents a part of the contributions that these transnational communities can make to their communities of origin and host communities. It is essential to enable these organizations and their members as agents for development and social investors in order to address the current challenges, leverage new opportunities for development and shape more harmonious and resilient societies.

The Member Countries of the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) are part of a region that has been particularly affected by the health emergency. Leaving aside the structural and economic issues that have had an impact on the management of this emergency, 84% of the persons postponed their migration plans and one out of every five migrants considers returning to the country of origin if the economic situation in the host country does not improve[[22]](#footnote-23). This involves a challenge for countries of origin and destination in regard to the needs of the labour market, recruitment practices, attracting investment, etc. In this case, the competencies and entrepreneurship of the diasporas as well as their contributions need to be leveraged to improve the emergency response capacity.

For this reason, in view of the aforementioned challenges and in order to understand the perspective of diaspora organizations and facilitate a dialogue with the governments of the RCM Member Countries, the RCM Labor Migration Working Group proposes to carry out the discussion forum to address these opportunities and challenges, with diaspora organizations in two virtual sessions, aimed at enhancing the capacity of diasporas to strengthen investment and community development through expedited, safe and cost-effective transfer of remittances.

OBJECTIVES

**General Objective**

To promote the exchange of experiences at the regional level among the governments of the RCM Member Countries and diaspora organizations in terms of engagement strategies, with the aim of leveraging the role of the latter as agents for economic and social development.

**Specific Objectives**

1. To identify regional challenges and opportunities for governments and diaspora organizations relating to the adoption of effective linkage strategies.
2. To share best practices in the identification of/linkage with and integration of diasporas into development plans in their communities of origin.
3. To discuss actions that can be implemented at the regional level to facilitate the expedited, safe and cost-effective transfer of remittances.

METHODOLOGY

The discussion forum of the RCM and diaspora organizations will be conducted through a combination of various activities, such as presentations by experts, group work, spaces for dialogue and presentations by representatives from the RCM Member Countries, in two virtual sessions.

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| --- | --- |
| Virtual Session 1 | Virtual Session 2 |
| The first virtual session will focus on Specific Objective 1, to analyse the dynamics between governments and diaspora organizations in order to identify the challenges and obstacles perceived by both groups of actors with the aim of establishing stronger links. The session includes the following:   * Presentation of the study of IOM (2021) “El involucramiento de las diásporas de América Central y México: oportunidades y desafíos” (Engagement of the diasporas of Central America and Mexico: Opportunities and Challenges). * Group work: Recommendations to improve the links between governments and diaspora organizations. | The second virtual session will focus on Specific Objectives 2 & 3, relating to the exchange of best practices and lessons learned by diaspora organizations and governments of the RCM Member Countries in regard to the identification, linkage and integration of diasporas, as well as actions aimed at facilitating the expedited, safe and cost-effective transfer of remittances.  The session includes the following:   * Presentation of the guide “IOM (2020) [Contributions and counting: Guidance on Measuring the Economic Impact of your diaspora Beyond Remittances](https://publications.iom.int/books/contributions-and-counting-guidance-measuring-economic-impact-your-diaspora-beyond-remittances)”. * Panel with representatives from the RCM Member Countries, experts and representatives from the financial sector. |

PARTICIPANTS

The proposed participants of the discussion forum are **7 representatives** from each country (probably heads of departments from the public sector and presidents or directors of diaspora organizations), distributed as follows:

* 3 representatives from ministries of foreign affairs and immigration (offices of consular affairs);
* 2 representatives from organizations or departments in charge of the identification, establishment of links or integration of diasporas;
* 2 representatives from diaspora organizations.

The observer organizations of the RCM and the Regional Network for Civil Organizations on Migration (RNCOM) who wish to participate will be welcome.

**PRELIMINARY AGENDA**

**15 June 2021**

|  |  |  |
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| Virtual Session 1 | | |
| Time (GMT-5) | Activity | Lead |
| 10:00-10-10 | **Welcoming remarks**   * Pro tempore Chair of the RCM: Ing. Luis Gutiérrez Reyes, Titular Del Instituto De Los Mexicanos En El Exterior * Michelle Klein Solomon, IOM’s Regional Director for Central America, North America and the Caribbean | RCM Executive Secretariat |
| 10:10-10:35 | Presentation of the study “IOM 2021: El involucramiento de las diásporas de América Central y México: oportunidades y desafíos” (Engagement of the diasporas of Central America and Mexico: Opportunities and Challenges) | IOM |
| 10:35-10:55 | Participants’ questions  Instructions for the group work | RCM Executive Secretariat |
| 10:55-11:00 | Coffee break |  |
| 11:00-11:30 | **Group work**: Recommendations to strengthen the links with diaspora organizations and their financial contribution.   * Group 1: Links with countries of origin * Group 2: Integration in countries of destination * Group 3: Sending and productive use of remittances   Each working group discusses and agrees on a minimum of three recommendations related to the topic in question. A member of each group presents the proposed recommendations in a plenary session | PPT and IOM facilitate the working groups |
| 11:30-11:45 | **Plenary session:** Presentations by the groups of the recommendations to strengthen the links with diaspora organizations and their financial contributions | Coordination of the Working Group and IOM facilitate the working groups. |
| 11:45- 11:55 | Summary of the proposed actions to be implemented at the regional level to strengthen the contribution of diasporas to development | PPT-Mexico |
| 11:55-12:00 am | Closing of Virtual Session 1 | RCM Executive Secretariat |

**16 June 2021 (International Day of Family Remittances)**

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| Virtual Session 2: High-Level International Panel | | |
| Time (GMT-5) | Activity | Lead |
| 10:00-10:05 | Welcoming remarks and a summary of the first session | RCM Executive Secretariat |
| 10:05- 10:20 | Introduction to the topic: Economic Measurement of the Contribution of Diasporas | Roberto Cancel (IOM) |
| 10:20-10:45 | Recent development of international remittances | Invited expert from the World Bank |
| 10:45- 10:55 | Participants’ questions |  |
| 10:55-11:45 | Panel with international experts: How can the transfer and productive use of remittances be improved?   * Representatives from the Global Forum on Remittances * A representative from the Bank of Mexico * A representative from the diaspora (Miguel Arévalo, General Director of Community Services for Migrants and Refugees in Canada) * Academia: Luicy Pedroza (COLMEX) * Mtra. Isabel Cruz, Presentación Proyecto Banco del Migrante. | Michela Macchiavello (IOM) |
| 11:45 11:55 | Participants’ questions |  |
| 11:55- 12:005 | Summary and closing of Virtual Session 2 | PPT, RCM Executive Secretariat |

1. The International Day of Family Remittances will be celebrated on 16 June. Additional information is available at: [www.familyremittances.org](http://www.familyremittances.org) and <https://www.un.org/en/observances/remittances-day> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. IOM (2019) International Migration Law No. 34 – IOM Glossary on Migration, available at

   <https://publications.iom.int/books/international-migration-law-ndeg34-glossary-migration> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. IOM (2012) Developing a Road Map for Engaging Diasporas in Development: A Handbook for policymakers and practitioners in home and host countries, available at: <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/diaspora_handbook_en_for_web_28may2013.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Gamlen Alan, Diaspora Institutions and Diaspora Governance, July 19, 2018, disponible: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/imre.12136> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Portal de datos mundiales sobre Migración, Diaspora, disponible en: <https://migrationdataportal.org/es/themes/diasporas#tendencias-recientes> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Dovelyn Rannveig Agunias et al., Engaging the Asian Diaspora, 2012, Migration Policy Institute, disponible en: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/engagingdiasporas.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Mora Rivera, et al. Remesas y pobreza: una revisión teórica y empírica , 2018, disponible en : <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325931212_Remesas_y_pobreza_una_revision_teorica_y_empirica/link/5ba681e545851574f7dfba7c/download> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Ibidem. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. World Bank, World Bank predicts sharpest decline of remittances in recent history, 2020. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2020) Tendencias migratorias durante la Covid-19 en Centroamérica, Norteamérica, y el Caribe. Available at: <https://rosanjose.iom.int/site/sites/default/files/Reportes/tendencias_migratorias_durante_la_covid-19_en_centroamerica_norteamerica_y_el_caribe_-_oim_.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. IOM (2020) World Migration Report 2020, available at

    <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Further information at : <https://publications.iom.int/books/contributions-and-counting-guidance-measuring-economic-impact-your-diaspora-beyond> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019): International migrant stock 2019, available at: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. IOM (2021) El involucramiento de las diásporas de América Central y México: oportunidades y desafíos. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Source: World Bank (2020) Remesas de trabajadores y compensación de empleados recibidas (% del PIB), available at:

    [Remesas de trabajadores y compensación de empleados, recibidas (% del PIB) | Data (bancomundial.org)](https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. OCDE (2015) Connecting with Emigrants: A Global Profile of Diasporas 2015, disponible en

    [Connecting with Emigrants | READ online (oecd-ilibrary.org)](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/connecting-with-emigrants_9789264239845-en#page19) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Source: IOM (2021) El involucramiento de las diásporas de América Central y México: oportunidades y desafíos. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. IOM (2021) *IOM’s Strategy to Enable, Engage and Empower Diaspora*), available at: [IOM’s Strategy to Enable, Engage and Empower Diaspora | Diaspora and Development](https://diaspora.iom.int/ioms-strategy-enable-engage-and-empower-diaspora) . [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Source: IOM (2020) *Contributions and counting: Guidance on measuring the economic impact of your diaspora beyond remittances,* available at:

    <https://publications.iom.int/books/contributions-and-counting-guidance-measuring-economic-impact-your-diaspora-beyond-remittances> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Source: IOM (2020) World Migration Report 2020, available at:

    <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2020> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. OIM (2020) Effects of COVID-19 on Migrants – Survey in Central America and Mexico (June 2020), available at:

    [Effects of COVID-19 on Migrants- Survey in Central America and Mexico (June 2020) | Flow monitoring (iom.int)](https://migration.iom.int/reports/effects-covid-19-migrants-survey-central-america-and-mexico-june-2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)