

Between Rootedness and the Decision to Migrate

PUSH AND RETENTION FACTORS OF MIGRATION IN GUATEMALA



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Introduction

In the past five years, northward migration from Central America has sharply increased. As the number of migrants grows, the profile of migrants has also shifted, with an increase in the number of migrants from vulnerable populations. While the traditional migrant profile is a young, single male, recent years have been more women, unaccompanied minors, and even entire families migrating north in search of asylum, better opportunities, and a more dignified life.

As migrants' profiles and migratory patterns shift, so too have the motivations and circumstances that drive people from their homes.

WHY DO A STUDY ON ROOTEDNESS AND MIGRATION?

Driving and retention factors, as well as people's motivations, attitudes and expectations around migration are in a continuous process of transformation as the contextual conditions of the communities of origin, transit, and destination change. Having up-to-date information on the migration phenomenon is useful for institutions and organizations that develop projects and design public policies. This is especially vital in situations of accelerated change, such as the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Against this backdrop, in May and June of 2020, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) commissioned a large study in communities in Guatemala where CRS implements programs to better understand the profile of the 'new migrant.' Compared to many analyses of the past, the study examined not only the causes that drive people to leave but more critically, the factors that encourage them to stay in their communities. The low perceived risk by study participants of the U.S. border patrol, detention camps, and a global pandemic demonstrates that migration will persist despite these risks, and that punitive measures are ineffective to quell the flow of migration.

The research included quantitative and qualitative components.

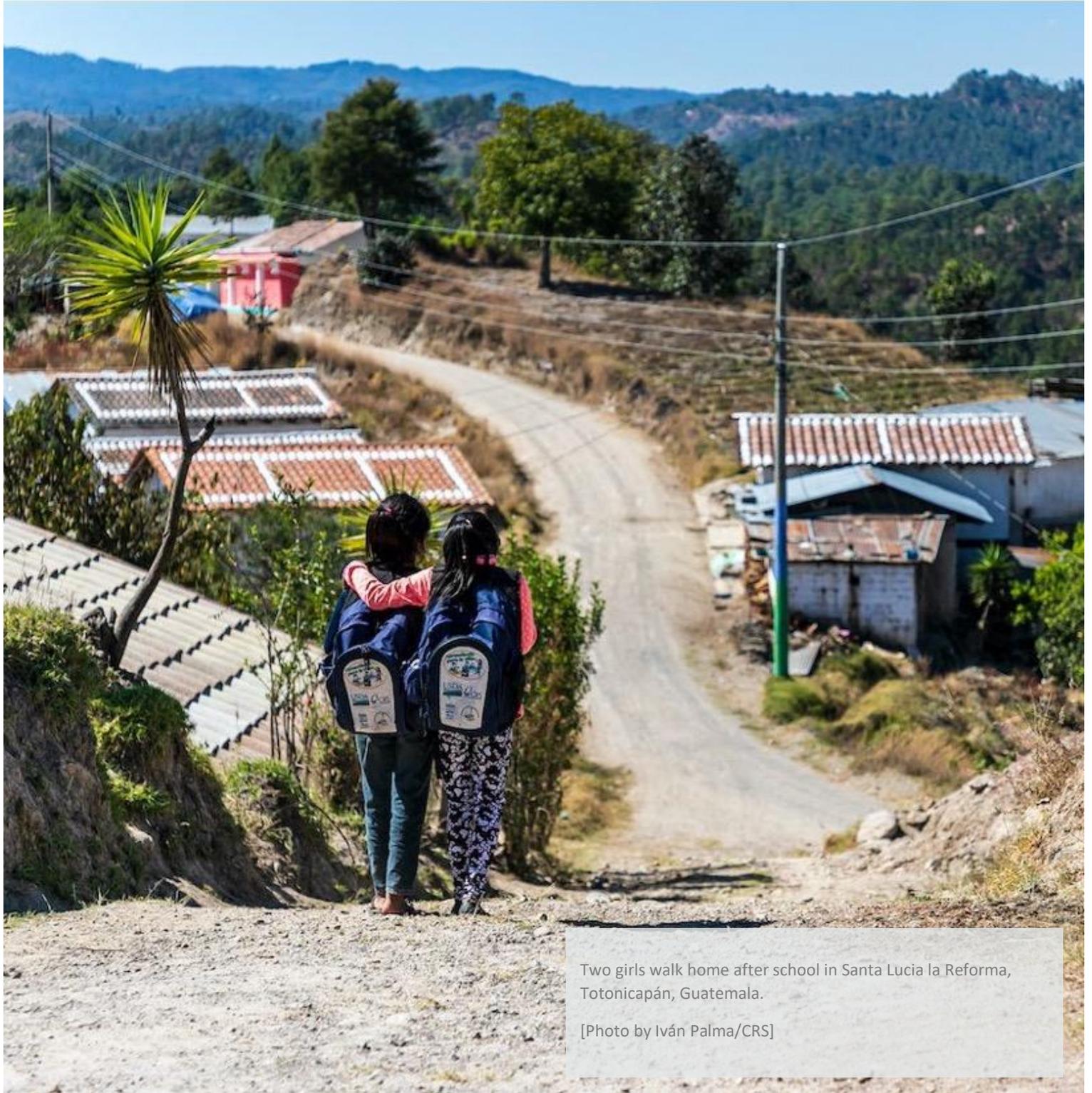
For the quantitative aspect, there were two samples: the first sample of 785 people, representative of rural communities with the presence of CRS in the country, in which 179 people declared having participated in projects of CRS or its partners. The second sample of 89 urban young people aged 18-30 residing mainly in the municipality of San Juan Sacatepéquez, in which 75 young people declared having participated in CRS projects. The urban youth sample was not statistically representative.

The qualitative tools implemented consisted of semi-structured interviews, 84 of which were conducted with people with relevant experiences of migration or rootedness residing in the communities included in the quantitative surveys, and another 12 interviews with survey respondents from organizations that work on migration issues in the country.

The research findings demonstrate the various circumstances that affect the migratory intention at a personal and structural level. The results of the study can guide future development programs and public policies to serve populations in vulnerable situations.

By better understanding and investing in the factors that help people stay and thrive in their communities, we can address migration in a more effective and humane way.

The names of survey respondents referenced in this summary have been withheld to protect the individual's privacy.



Two girls walk home after school in Santa Lucia la Reforma, Totonicapán, Guatemala.
[Photo by Iván Palma/CRS]

Methodology

QUANTITATIVE TOOLS

- A household survey conducted with 785 people, representative of rural communities with CRS and partners in the country. The household were randomly selected from 73 rural communities in the departments of Chiquimula, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Quiché, San Marcos, and Totonicapán.
- A survey carried out with 89 urban young people between 18 and 30-years-old residing mainly in San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala.

With the set of factors and variables collected in the survey (sociodemographic, socioeconomic, driving and retention factors, and personality factors), analyzed both individually and in groups, various statistical analyzes were carried out to determine the factors with greater influence on the intention to migrate or to remain of the surveyed population.

TYPES OF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The research team performed factorial analysis, binary logistic regression, discriminant analysis, and PLS regression (Partial Least Squares Regression). To develop migrant and non-migrant population profiles, Self-Organizing Maps (SOM) based in Artificial Intelligence were used, which allow both statistical characterization of each of the profiles as well as evaluation of the differentiating characteristics' robustness. These analyses allowed, on one hand, to compare the predictive power of different groups of variables on the intention to migrate, as well as to explain the correlation between the factors found and the different variables that compose them, with the intention to migrate or to remain.

QUALITATIVE TOOLS

- Semi-structured interviews with 84 people with relevant migration or rootedness experiences residing in the communities included in the quantitative surveys, specifically in Guatemala, Chiquimula, Quiché, Totonicapán, San Marcos, Huehuetenango, and Quetzaltenango.
- Semi-structured interviews with 12 survey respondents from organizations that work on migration issues in Guatemala, including members of the Church, academic, national and international NGOs, such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Guatemalan National Council for Attention to Migrants (CONAMIGUA), Casa del Migrante, Mercy Corps, World Vision, FLACSO, among others.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS TYPE

The qualitative information, grouped around the main categories of analysis, was tabulated and systematized in reading cards whose main findings were triangulated and integrated with the results of the quantitative analyzes, enriching, qualifying and expanding them.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study was carried out between May and June 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restriction, the research combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies with telematic tools.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SURVEYED POPULATION

The characteristics of the surveyed population are representative of the residents of rural communities in Guatemala with the presence of CRS projects or partners.

At the time of the survey:

- 52% were in a situation of extreme poverty¹
- 64% were moderately food insecure²
- 84% of the people knew how to read and write Spanish, about half had not reached the sixth grade of primary school
- The two main economic occupations of more than 50% are domestic workers and day laborers (agricultural, construction or domestic), respectively

¹ Calculado según el *Simple Poverty Scorecard (SPS)*

² According to the FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



This was the first photograph that this son sent to his parents from the United States, where he has been working for more than six years. [Photo by Eric Salguero/Cinema Studio for CRS]

Main Factors that Influence Migratory Intention

MIGRATORY PROFILES

Three new migrant profiles emerged from our survey and analysis: those with lesser migratory intention; the undecided; and those with the greatest migratory intention. These profiles have been drawn using Artificial Intelligence, based on quantitative and qualitative tools. The variables presented in each profile represent those characteristics with the greatest weight in the constitution of the profile and towards those that showed the greatest tendency.

The generation of these profiles is useful to design, guide and focus specific strategies based on the needs and specificity of each of the respondent groups identified.

LESSER MIGRATORY INTENTION

471 respondents out of 785 total



- They are mostly housewives and skilled workers
- Availability of employment in their communities of origin (with the exception of those who dedicate themselves to agricultural labor)
- They show lower levels of attraction to the migratory destination partly because they are informed of the risks
- They show higher levels of rootedness to the place where they live
- They participate in community activities promoted by development projects, such as self-savings
- They show greater fear of COVID-19

UNDECIDED

169 respondents out of 785 total



- Most of them are day laborers and workers who are unemployed or without formal jobs
- Higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of education
- Shows attraction to the migratory destination
- Their livelihoods depend on agriculture, which is increasingly affected by climate change and crop failure
- They are despondent about the future and are not very optimistic
- They show fear of detention on the migratory journey

GREATER MIGRATORY INTENTION

145 respondents out of 785 total



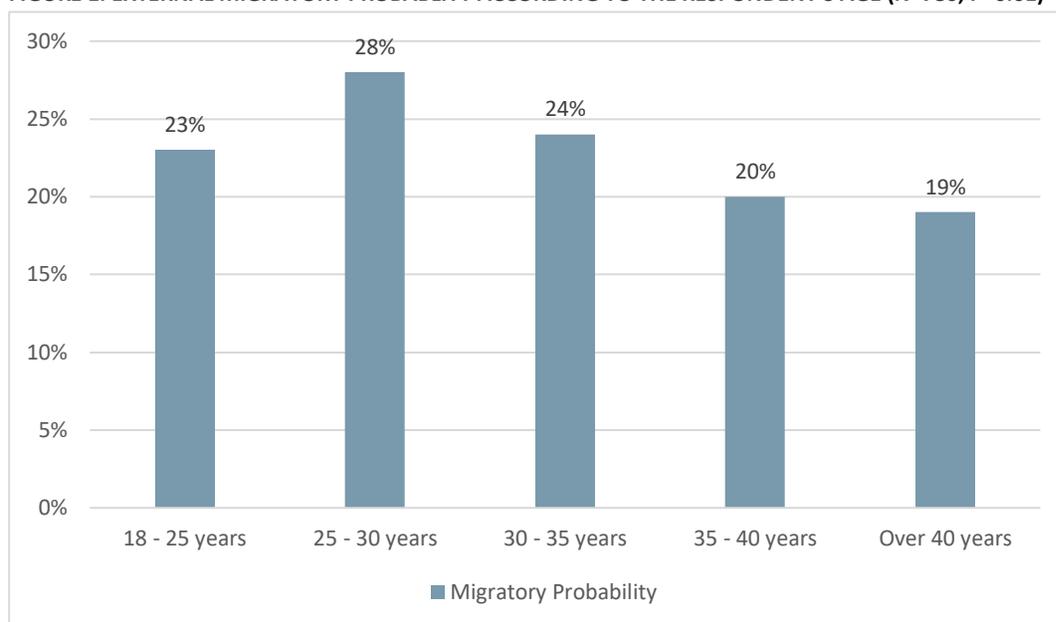
- They reached higher levels of schooling
- They are mostly young people
- They are relatively highly educated, but remain unemployed, largely because they are unable to obtain a job commensurate with their education
- They are optimistic about the future and their own ability
- They show a high level of attraction to the destination to complete a life project
- They have low levels of rootedness to the place where they live
- They exhibit less fear of COVID-19

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

The analysis of the profile of people with the greatest migratory intention shows that there is a significant trend towards younger migrants who have attained higher levels of education. In addition, although males are more likely to express intention to migrate overall (15% of men versus 9% of women), this significant gender disparity disappears among the population under 30, and especially for those with higher education, leading to a **feminization of migration** and a female brain drain.

The three above-referenced migrant profiles are consistent with other studies, such as the Development Plan of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.³ As can be seen in Figure 1, the probability of migrating decreases significantly with the increase in age of the people interviewed. The age group with the greatest desire to migrate abroad are young people between 25 and 30 years old.

FIGURE 1. EXTERNAL MIGRATORY PROBABILITY ACCORDING TO THE RESPONDENT'S AGE (N=780; P<0.01)⁴

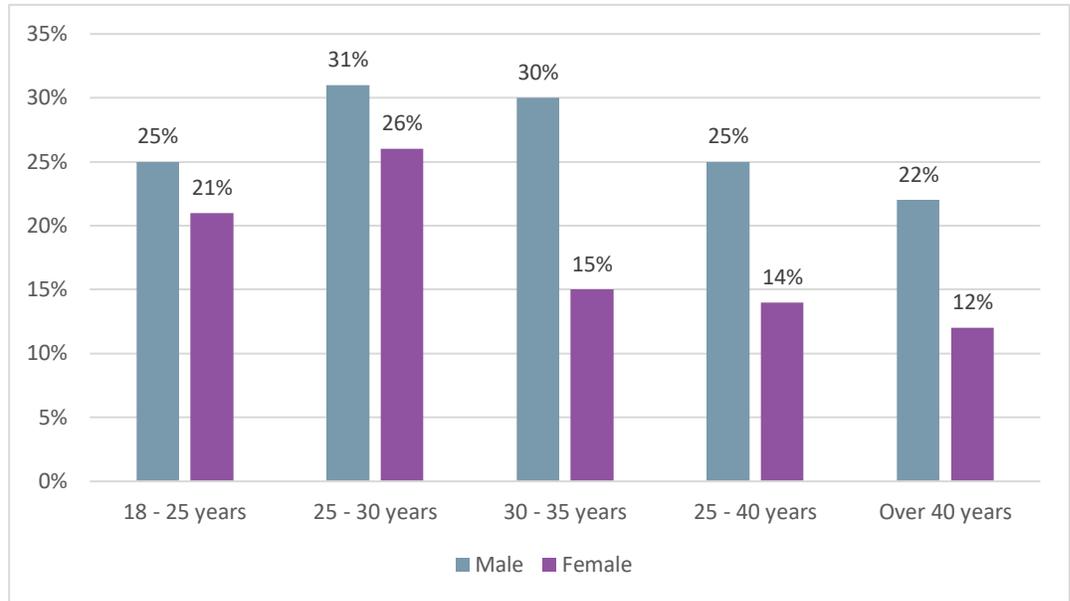


As can be seen in Figure 2, although the migratory probability of men exceeds that of women by 10-15 percentage points for those over 30 years of age, in the case of young people between 18 and 30 years of age, this difference did not exceed 5 percentage points.

³ CEPAL (2019). Hacia un nuevo estilo de Desarrollo. Plan Integral El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y México. México. CEPAL.

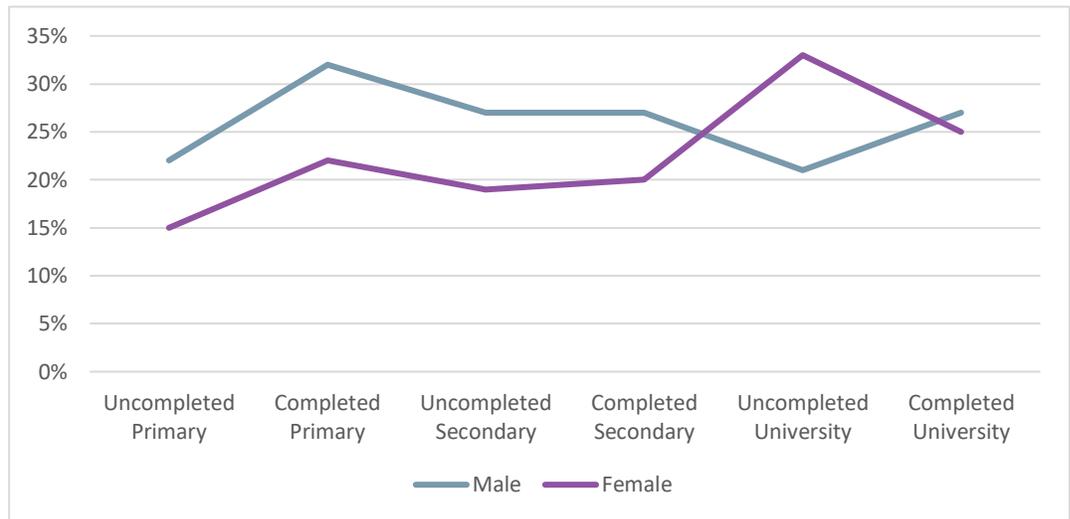
⁴ The graph shows the probability of migration abroad through an index in which the person who had already made preparations to undertake the migratory journey would have a 100% probability and the person who completely discarded migrating in the future of a 0% probability.

FIGURE 2. MIGRATORY PROBABILITY BY AGE AND GENDER (N=779)



Similarly, the study found that people with a greater intention to leave Guatemala showed higher levels of education compared to people who wanted to remain in their communities. This difference has also been identified in other studies carried out with migrants from the three countries, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, who live and work in the United States.⁵

FIGURE 3. MIGRATORY PROBABILITY BY GENDER AND HIGHEST LEVEL OF STUDIES ACHIEVED (N=701)



At the time of disaggregating the level of studies by men and women, it is observed that the trend towards a greater intention to migrate from the most educated sectors is accentuated in the case of women, which is why the “brain drain” in these rural communities of Guatemala would have an important female bias, to the point of diluting the difference with respect to men and the migratory intention that can be seen in the older age groups, with a lower degree of studies, or incomplete studies, as can be seen in Figure 3.

⁵ BID-USAID (2019). Tras los pasos del migrante. Perspectivas y experiencias de la migración de El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras en Estados Unidos.

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Regarding socioeconomic factors, the only factor with a clearly significant relationship with migratory intention was occupation ($n = 782$; $p < 0.01$). The distinct propensity to migrate among people of different trades is much more significant than that found among households with different rates of relative poverty.⁶ People who worked as day laborers (31.0%), mainly in agriculture but also in construction and as domestic workers, had the greatest intention of leaving Guatemala, followed by students (25.5%) and the unemployed (25.1%). Shared characteristics among those who most wish to migrate include: unemployment, poor job quality, labor poverty, and insecurity.

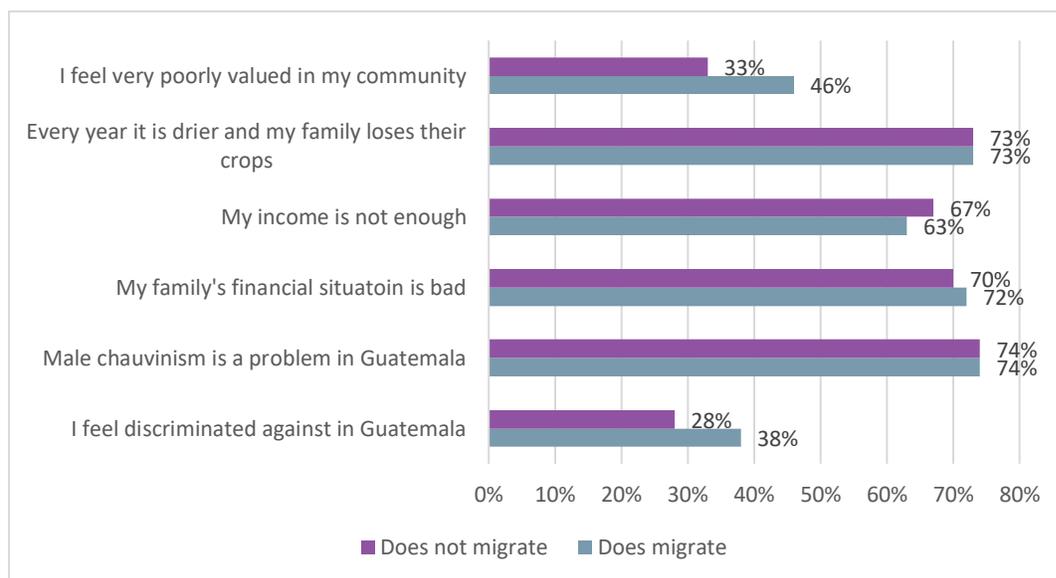
The study did not find a relationship between migratory intention and the economic and financial factors analyzed, such as the poverty index⁷, the perception of the family's economic situation and the impact on the family's financial situation as a consequence of COVID-19. None of these variables had a clear predictive capacity of the respondents' attitudes to their decision to migrate. In descriptive terms, respondents who showed intermediate poverty rates were more likely to migrate, as well as those who perceived their family economic situation as fair. These results are consistent with the fact that people who declare that they intend to migrate in the future would also, in general, have the possibility of realizing that migratory desire by having the minimum resources necessary for migration.

The results show that the variables related to work, aspirational and life project motivations have a more significant weight in the migratory intention of the subjects compared to the economic ones.

MIGRATORY INTENTION AND DISCRIMINATION

The research showed that perceived discrimination and feeling undervalued in the rural communities analyzed significantly increased the intention to migrate abroad. As can be seen in Figure 4, while almost half of those who had the intention of leaving Guatemala felt poorly valued in their communities, only one in three people who wanted to stay showed that they felt little appreciated in their residences and something similar occurs with the perception of discrimination.

FIGURE 4. DEGREE OF AGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENTS RELATED TO DRIVING FACTORS, BY MIGRATORY INTENTION (N=781)



⁶ In this regard, it is necessary to take into account the relative homogeneity in terms of poverty of the analyzed sample: all but one household are considered poor according to the Simple Poverty Scorecard.

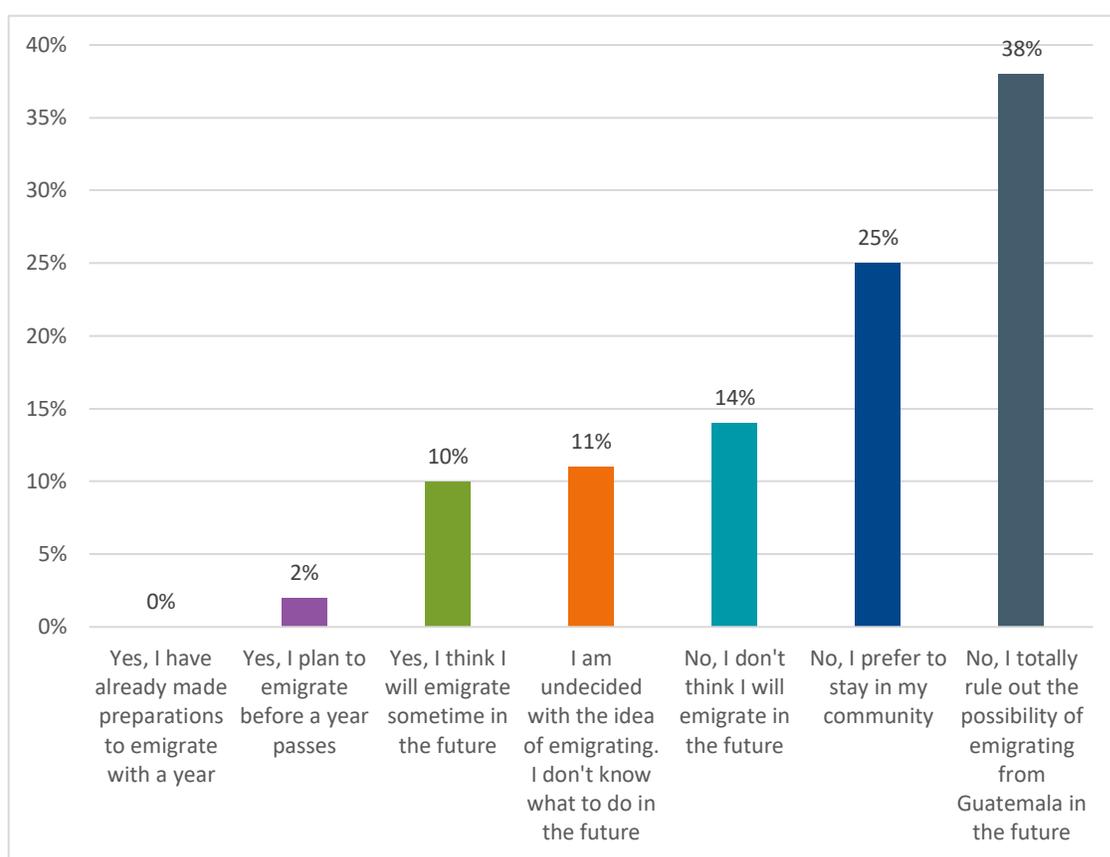
⁷ Simple Poverty Scorecard

If the migratory intention is analyzed as a continuum from the ‘certainty’ of migration⁸ to the total rejection of the migratory option⁹; the most important and statistically significant driving factor is related to processes of discrimination and exclusion within the communities. In generating a profile of those who claimed to feel discriminated against or undervalued in their communities, it was found that their sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics mainly included those residing in Chiquimula, those who identify themselves as Mayans instead of Latinos, those who are day laborers or self-employed, not literate, poorer and more food insecure.

MIGRATORY INTENTION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

One of the significant research findings is that the pandemic only postponed migration plans. As the two graphs below show, although 12% of the sample had the intention of migrating abroad, 27% of the sample had intention to migrate before the pandemic, but had given up, at least for the moment. The difference between these figures shows the, at least temporary, impact of the COVID-19 health crisis.

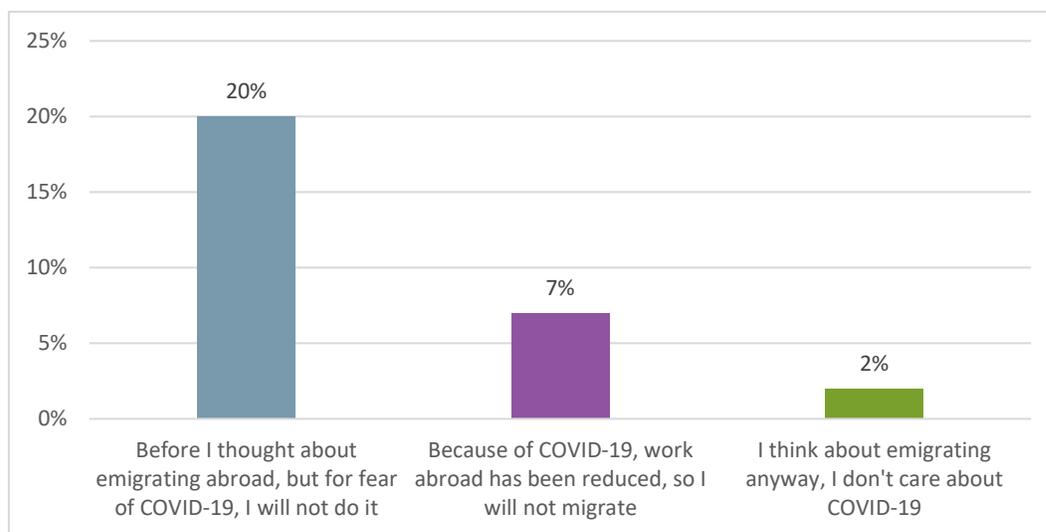
FIGURE 5. EXTERNAL MIGRATORY INTENTION (N=783)



⁸ Represented in the survey by having already made preparations for the trip.

⁹ Represented in the survey by totally ruling out the possibility of emigrating from Guatemala in the future.

FIGURE 6. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRATORY INTENTION (N=776)



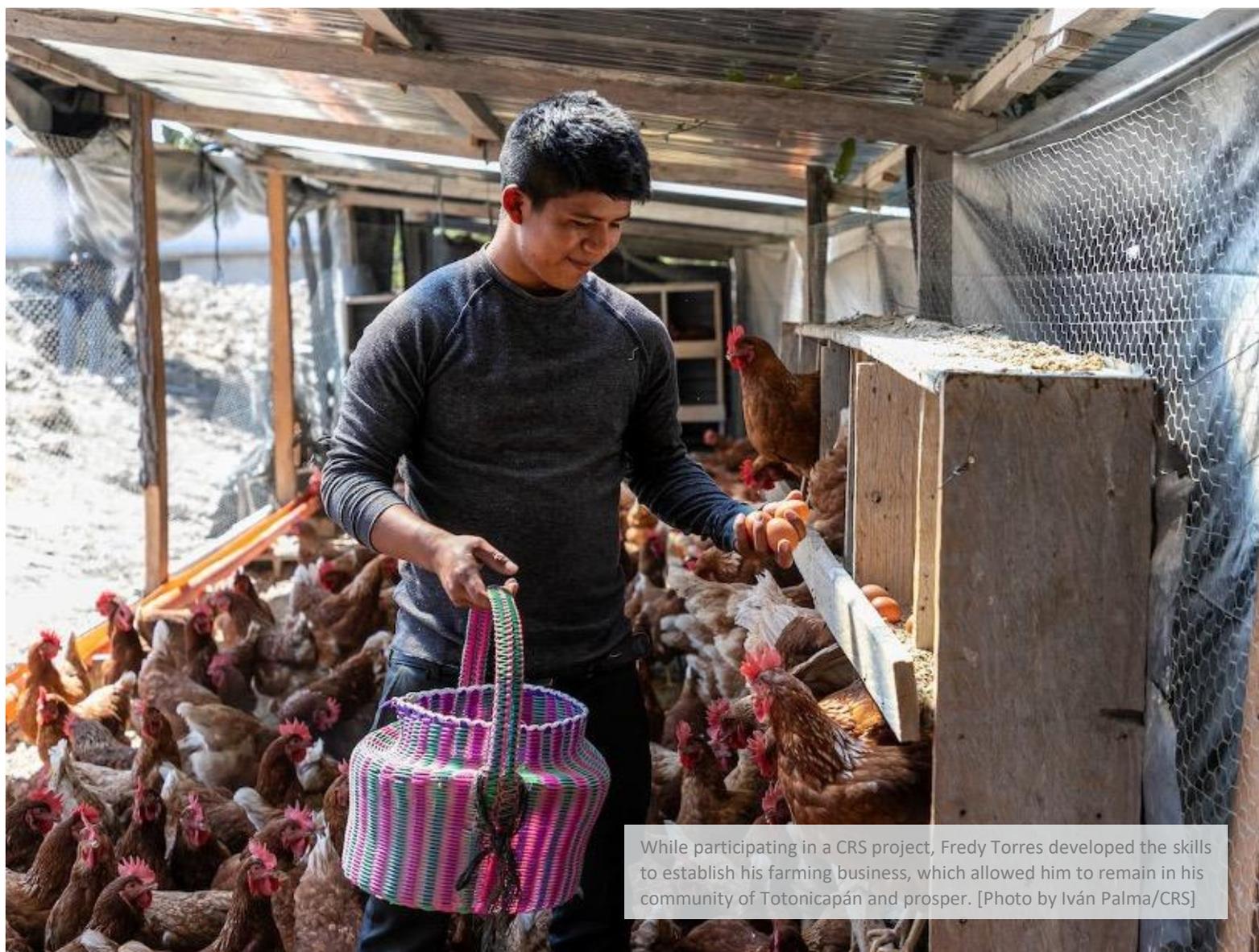
If we compare this data with the 27% of the migratory intention of Guatemalans as measured by the Gallup poll in 2016¹⁰, we verify that the migratory intention is relatively low, almost half compared to 2016, while the population that planned to migrate and/or had made plans for it had remained relatively stable, going from 3% in the Gallup poll in 2016 to 2% at the time of the study.

The reasons why migratory intention seems to decrease over the course of 2020 are diverse: the closure of international borders; the consequent impossibility of regular travel abroad; the risks and obstacles added to the already dangerous, irregular migratory journey; and the deteriorating economic prospects in potential destination countries.

However, this trend may be transitory, due to worsening living conditions of the surveyed families as a consequence of the health crisis and the uncertainty of future family support.

Perhaps most importantly, based on our interviews with survey respondents, there will likely be an increase in migratory volume once the mobility restrictions associated with the health crisis are relaxed.

¹⁰ The Gallup World Poll is a survey that is carried out continuously among residents in more than 140 countries, representing 95% of the adult population through random representative samples that allow, therefore, to make comparisons in relation to key issues collected in the survey globally.



While participating in a CRS project, Fredy Torres developed the skills to establish his farming business, which allowed him to remain in his community of Tonicapán and prosper. [Photo by Iván Palma/CRS]

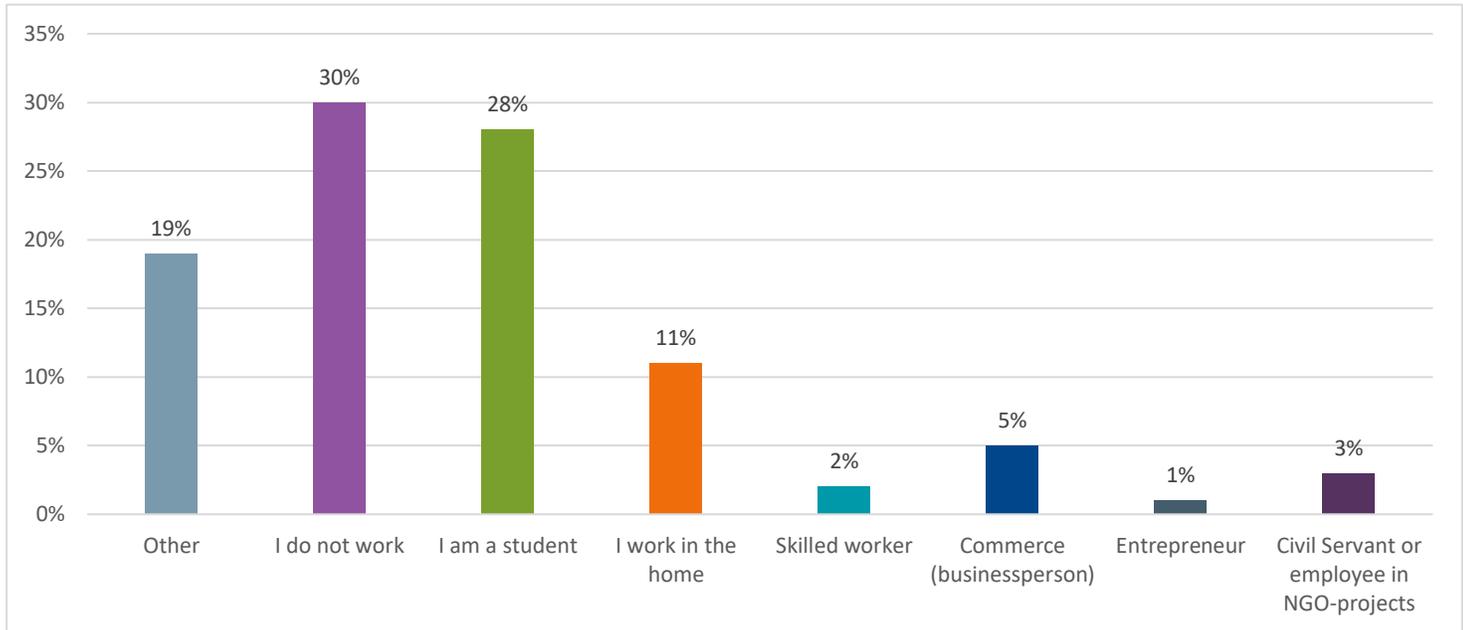
Main Factors of Rootedness and Retention

Of 785 people we surveyed, 77% had little or no intention to migrate from their communities. Among this population, we identified shared factors that promoted rootedness or the desire to remain in one's community of origin.

1. ACCESS TO FORMAL AND STABLE JOBS, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, FAVORS ROOTEDNESS

The research found that the lack of job opportunities commensurate with the level of training and studies of Guatemalan youth explains why students and the unemployed think of migration as one of the few, or the only, ways to develop their skills and knowledge and to get out of the job stagnation to which the Guatemalan labor market condemns them, even in urban areas. Among young people under 30 years of age interviewed in the department of Guatemala in San Juan Sacatepéquez municipality, Figure 7 shows that only 11% had formal jobs despite having levels of education much higher than those of the young population in the rural areas. Their jobs corresponded to specialized worker, merchant, entrepreneur, civil servant, or non-governmental organization (NGO) worker.

FIGURE 7. URBAN YOUTH OCCUPATIONS (N=88)



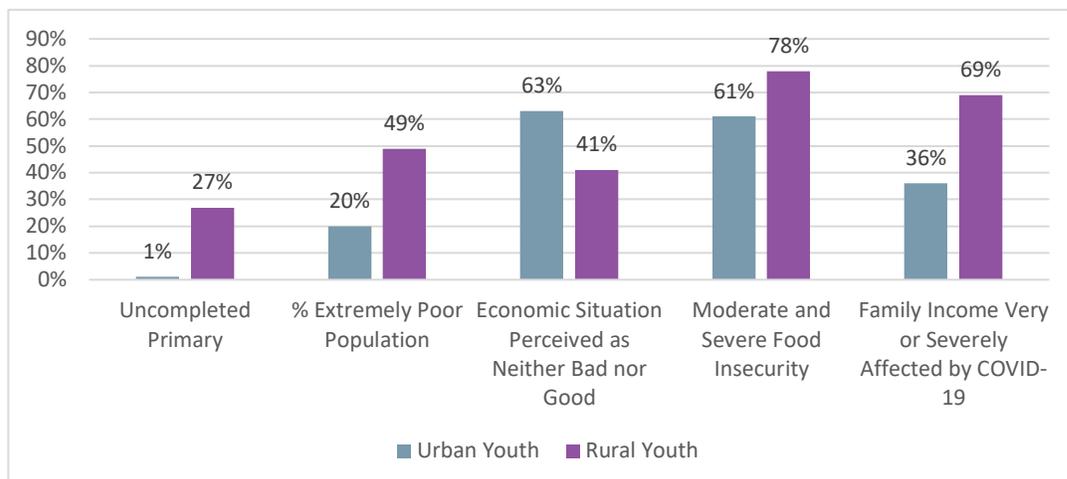
The absence of formal employment that offers the minimum social guarantees even in urban areas, the lack or almost total absence of employment opportunities in rural communities or in the areas close to them, as well as the excessive bureaucratization perceived in the scarce processes of recruitment, turn potential job opportunities abroad into a highly attractive alternative.

“From trying so hard to look for work, my decision was leave (migrate). From one moment to the next I made the decision, and the trip was planned, and we left (I migrated). But, as I said, on the way it gets a little complicated because you worry about the family, you know that you are alone on the road, there are risks that may arise throughout the journey while you are traveling.”

- CRS SURVEY RESPONDENT

The relationship between the desire to migrate and the possibility of developing a life project that is not only sustainable but desirable partly explains why urban youths' intention to migrate abroad is much greater than that of rural youth. While in rural areas 14% of those under 30 had the intention of migrating abroad, in urban areas 24% wanted to do so despite the fact that the socioeconomic conditions of urban youth were significantly better than those of their rural peers.

FIGURE 8. SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF URBAN AND RURAL YOUTH



Urban Youth: educational level: n=88; poverty index: n=89; Perception of the economic situation: n=89; Level of food insecurity: n=89; Affection by COVID-19: n=88; Rural Youth: educational level: n=343; poverty level: n=359; Perception of the economic situation: n=360; Level of food insecurity: n=360; Affection by COVID-19: n=360

Rural youth, in fact, could contemplate the possibility of migrating to urban centers within Guatemala to seek the desired employment that they did not find in their communities. However, for urban youth who already reside in Guatemala City, migrating out of the country would seem like the only possible option to satisfy their aspirations for the future.

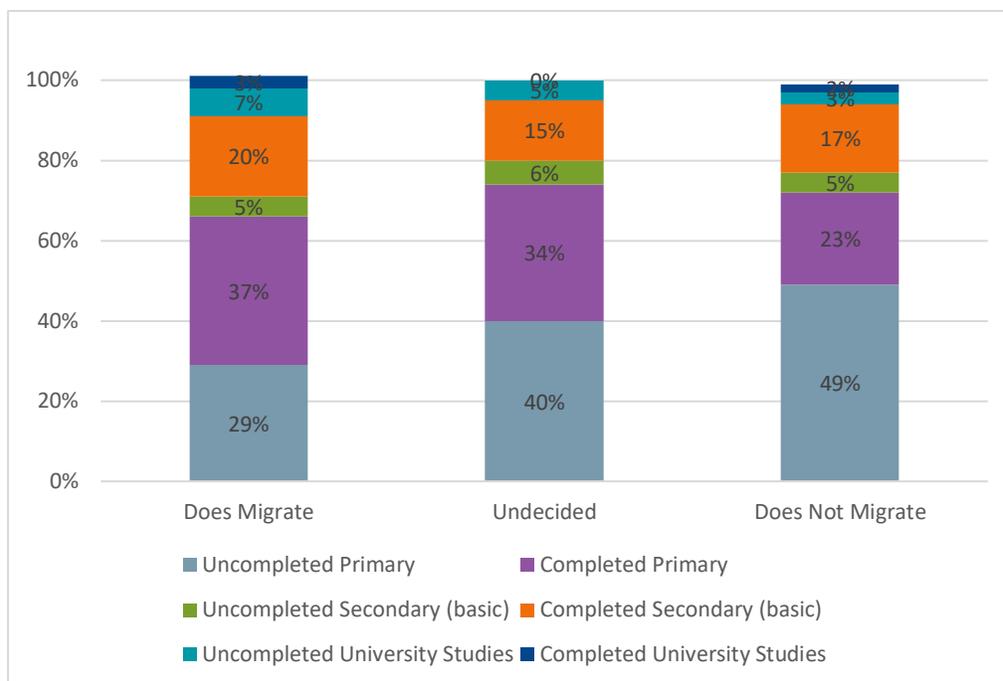
2. ACCESS TO FORMAL EDUCATION AND OTHER TYPES OF TRAINING IS A ROOTEDNESS FACTOR IF IT IS LINKED TO OPPORTUNITIES TO GENERATE INCOME.

Formal education is an essential requirement for employability in the formal economic sphere in Guatemala, which makes access to education an important factor of rootedness and retention as long as the studies are linked with decent employment opportunities. Young people, and people with higher levels of education, want to migrate to a greater extent because they have no hope of being able to develop their life projects and aspirations in their country. What's more, they're tired of trying to find work. Being able to continue and complete studies is a necessary condition to be able, at least temporarily, to imagine a better future in Guatemala.

The research found that people with the greatest migratory intention had, with a higher probability, completed primary or secondary educational, while those with the least interest in leaving Guatemala had not completed primary and secondary school. Furthermore, despite the fact that 84% of the surveyed population knew how to read and write, the proportion of non-literate people among those who did not intend to migrate is significantly higher than among those who do wish to migrate in the future.¹¹

¹¹ The migratory probability among people who can read and write is 23% compared to that of non-literate people, which stands at 19%, and this difference is statistically significant.

FIGURE 9. LEVEL OF STUDIES BY MIGRATORY INTENTION (N=704; P<0.05)



In the stories of the migrants, the ease and speed of finding work in the United States contrasts not only with the absence of formal employment in Guatemala but also with the requirements and procedures necessary to meet the requirements to access these jobs in the country, even in the case of jobs that do not require qualification.

The impossibility of finding jobs commensurate with a higher level of training, especially in the case of young people, explains the greater migratory intention of population groups with higher educational levels.

3. THE OWNERSHIP AND ACCESS TO PRODUCTIVE LAND (AND WAYS TO IMPROVE IT) IS A ROOTEDNESS FACTOR IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Guatemala is among the 10 countries in the world most threatened by climate change. There is evidence that shows the migratory flows from Guatemala to the United States increasingly come from rural areas, especially those that are part of the Dry Corridor.¹² Loss of crops and livelihoods, along with worsening food conditions in areas affected by climate change and extreme weather, will likely be the key drivers of migration in the future. In the rural communities analyzed, these hypotheses were confirmed since a significant link was found between the effects of natural disasters, such as droughts and floods, to food insecurity and migratory intent.

¹² Tesfaye, B. et al. (2019). Subsist or Persist? Assessing Drivers of Migration and Effects of Foreign Assistance Programs on Migration from the Northern Triangle. Mercy Corps.

FIGURE 10. MIGRATORY INTENTION AND NATURAL DISASTERS (N=780; P<0.05)

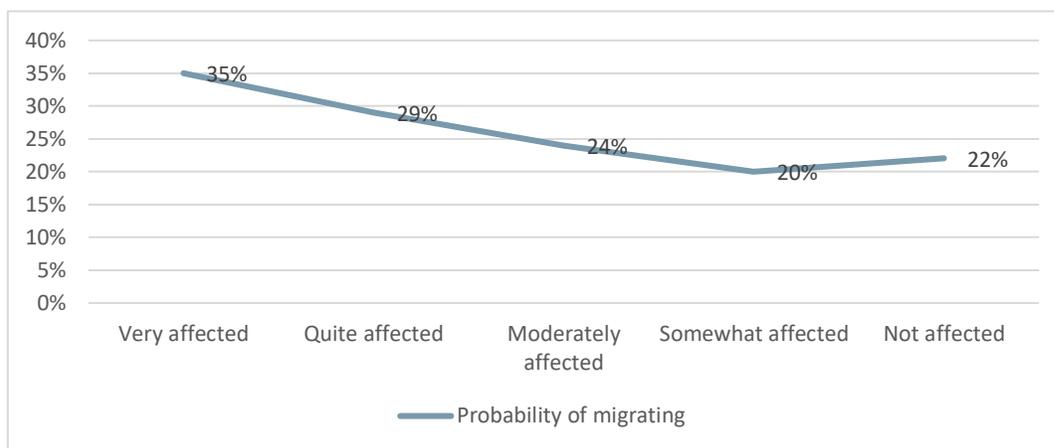
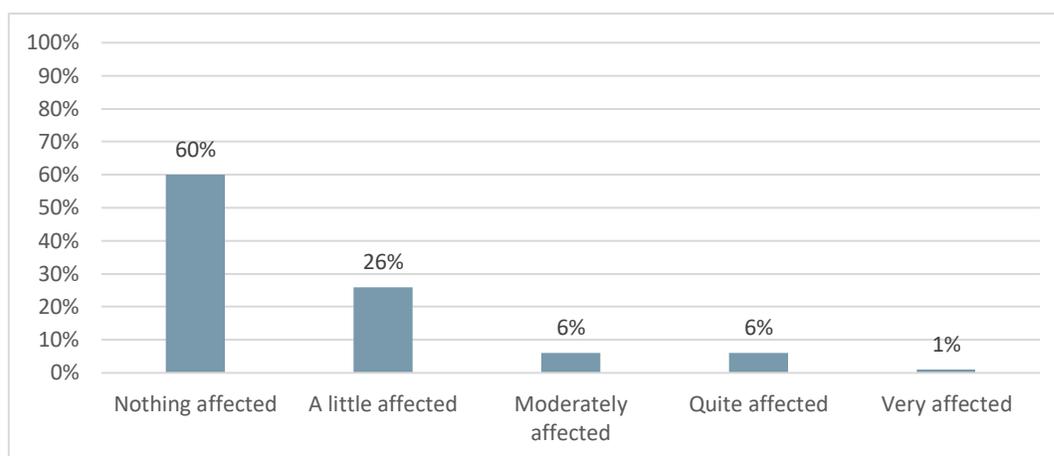


FIGURE 11. IMPACT OF NATURAL DISASTERS ON LIVELIHOODS (N=782)



As shown in Figure 11, 40% of the people interviewed had been affected to a greater or lesser extent by climatic events in the last year, with 7% seriously affected.

The qualitative interviews showed that the impact of these climatic events is aggravated by the limited availability and ownership of productive land by families, and by the government’s abandonment of rural communities, especially after natural disasters.

The absence of sufficient owned land in the case of farmers; the impossibility of investing in irrigation systems and inputs to improve production; the absence of access to formal credit under favorable conditions; and the precariousness, informality and low remuneration of the day’s work do not only result in higher levels of poverty but they make migration one of the main coping strategies. This option is considered even more intensely by families in crisis situations, especially in the case of families that have the minimum resources to face the trip.

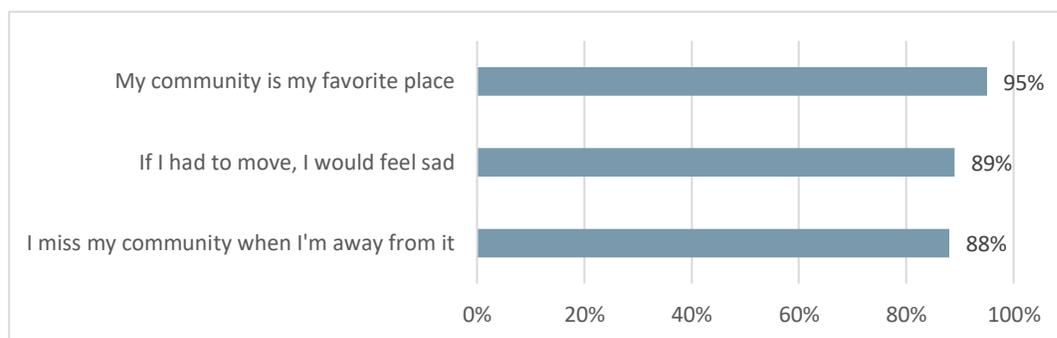
According to the experience of the associations that work in the field, possession and access to arable land, as well as the possibility of making productive investments to trust in the future improvement of the families’ living conditions, are determining factors that would allow the attachment to territories and communities of residence.

4. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION CAN GENERATE ROOTEDNESS IN THE COMMUNITIES AS LONG AS IT GENERATES HOPE FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIVELIHOODS AND FUTURE LIVING CONDITIONS

Social participation can generate rootedness and promote permanence in the communities as long as it generates hope in the improvement of living conditions. This is especially relevant for those participatory processes that are perceived by those who join them, as capable of influencing the local context or are focused on supporting the specific and particular needs of vulnerable groups such as returnees, or victims of violence.

According to the results of the research, migration from rural communities in Guatemala, the social network in communities, as well as dependence and attachment to the place of residence, appear to have a very limited impact on migratory intention. However, the levels of rootedness, measured in this case in terms of attachment and dependence on the place and social attachment to family, friends and neighbors, were generally very high in the communities analyzed, with 95% of the people surveyed indicating that their community is their favorite place to live, and stating that they feel very attached to their family in their community. Meanwhile, 88% indicated that they miss their community when they are away (n=782).

FIGURE 12. PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE AGREEING WITH THE STATEMENTS RELATED TO THE LEVEL OF DEPENDENCE TO PLACE (N=782)



The desire to keep family together and to value social relationships within the community, as well as attachment to the homeland, its worldview and lifestyle, are feelings shared by most of the members of the analyzed rural communities. However, evidence from qualitative interviews shows that this place attachment does not translate into retention unless it occurs in confluence with other factors, such as having a minimum livelihood, access to basic services such as health and education, and the ability to imagine a desirable life project for the future.

Especially in the case of women, the expansion of their social networks, as well as their greater presence in decision-making spaces, can favor rootedness. According to the surveys, women who reported participating in CRS projects had greater participation in community committees and presented a greater sense of attachment to their communities. In general, however, women showed lower levels of attachment to their communities and community social participation than men, as shown in Figures 14 and 15.

According to qualitative interviews with survey respondents, participation in social organizations and local development projects is another factor that can motivate people to stay as long as it is accompanied by sustainable livelihoods. If not, such participation's measurable effect on the intention to remain is diluted. If social participation generates confidence in the possibility of influencing the local context and thereby improving the living conditions of the communities, it may have a greater effect on the intention to migrate or remain in the potential migrants' territories of origin.

FIGURE 13. PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES BY AGE (N=784; P<0.01)

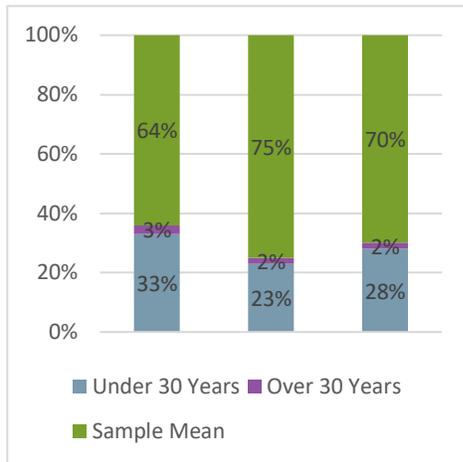
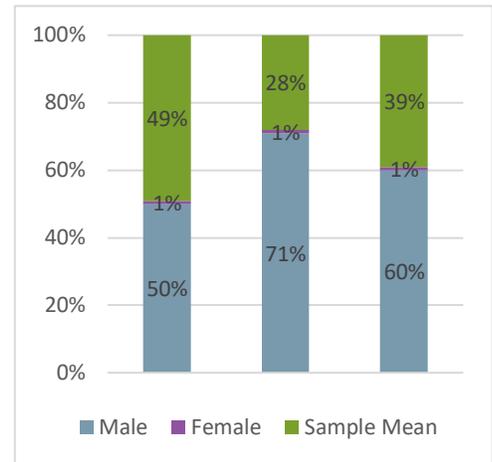
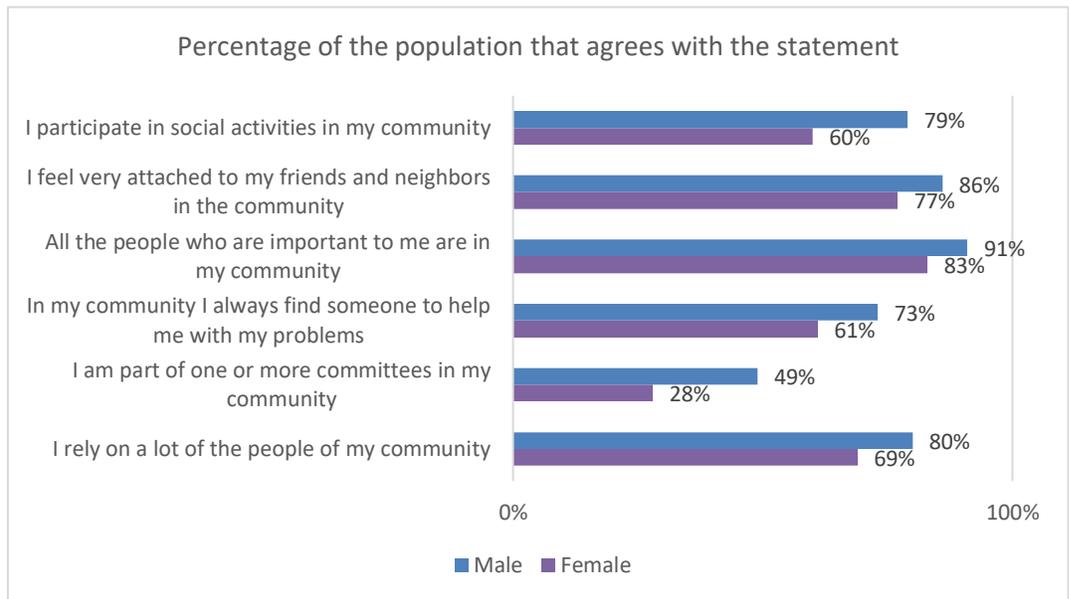


FIGURE 14. PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY COMMITTEES BY GENDER (N=782; P<0.01)



The traditional exclusion of women from decision-making spheres, in mixed and/or traditionally male organizations, and the greater weight of domestic and reproductive work that falls on them would explain their lower levels of social participation and, therefore, their greater isolation and atomization, which, in turn, would be related to the lower levels of social attachment shown in general terms by women who participated in the survey.¹³

FIGURE 15. ROOTEDNESS INDICATORS BY GENDER (N=782; P<0.01)



¹³ The fact that women have been living in the community for less time compared to men, explained at least in part by the traditionally patrilocal residence of married or partnered women, would help to explain their lower levels of social attachment to their current communities.

Conclusion

Of 785 people surveyed, 77% had little or no intention to migrate from their communities. Among this population, we identified the shared factors that promoted rootedness or the desire to remain in one's community of origin:

- Access to basic health and educational services and stable and formal jobs, especially for young people
- Access to formal education and other types of training when linked to profitable job opportunities
- Access and management of fertile land and the ability to sustain harvests and adapt to climate change to improve agricultural productivity
- Community participation and leadership when linked to opportunities that directly improve living conditions

It is important to note the conditionality of the findings. Education and community leadership/engagement alone do not promote rootedness; they must be attached to economic and social development opportunities. These conditions should push policy makers and implementers alike to design comprehensive, outcome-based programs that promote the factors that contribute to community rootedness.

Recommendations

1. DEVELOP A JUST AND HUMANE MIGRATION STRATEGY.

The U.S. administration should develop a strategy toward the northern countries of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) that prioritizes addressing the push factors of migration and promoting the rootedness factors. While such programs to increase rootedness will primarily target those who are more educated and well-off, the strategy should also address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable communities and prioritize robust consultation with local, national, and international stakeholders, including faith-based organizations.

2. INCREASE HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT FUNDING IN THE REGION FOR PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS PUSH FACTORS AND PROMOTE ROOTEDNESS FACTORS.

Evidence generated from CRS programs and this migration study demonstrate that programs that invest in growing formal job opportunities, gender equity (especially in decision-making spaces), climate adapted agricultural practices, job-relevant education and training, and social inclusion of the most marginalized populations (women, indigenous, youth, among others) in decision-making spaces can decrease the intention to migrate by increasing rootedness factors. Rather than focusing on deterring migration, Congress and the Administration should appropriate and allocate resources to build prosperous and safe communities where people can achieve a dignified life for themselves and their families.

3. THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION SHOULD REQUEST, AND THE U.S. CONGRESS SHOULD PROVIDE SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19.

COVID-19 and exacerbated all the factors that push people to migrate and yet fear of catching the virus has not reduced migrant flows significantly. The secondary impacts of the pandemic on food security, poverty, and unemployment have yet to be realized in Central America. Any additional funds appropriated should focus on the groups most vulnerable to the economic hardship and lost opportunities produced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. FOCUS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES ON IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH.

In partnership with local organizations and large-scale development agencies like CRS, and in alignment with USAID country development cooperation strategies (CDCS), U.S. assistance should add youth and gender-sensitive components and outcomes to its primary programming. Youth are the most likely to migrate and women are migrating at an increasing rate. While many initiatives currently prioritize youth and women, tying them to specific outcomes like formal employment and community engagement/leadership to increase development opportunities will more effectively promote rootedness.

5. SUPPORT INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS THAT INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

Increase investment in job placement programs that broker connections between young people, vocational training, and stable job opportunities. Incorporating partnerships with the private and public sectors to provide a pipeline of stable employment is critical for helping youth remain in their home countries by creating prosperous and dignified careers.

6. PROMOTE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/LEADERSHIP AS A TENET IN ALL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.

While nearly all participants felt tied to their communities, it did not prevent migration unless community participation inspired opportunities for social and economic development. Funding should be allocated to local community leadership programs to increase community social capital. Additional funding should be allocated to promote greater community engagement and leadership for women and youth.