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## Central American Migrants in Irregular Transit through Mexico: New Figures and Trends

BY ERNESTO RODRÍGUEZ CHÁVEZ



**Policy Brief** Series

POPULATION



# Central American migrants in irregular transit through Mexico: New figures and trends



ERNESTO RODRÍGUEZ CHÁVEZ<sup>a</sup>

## SUMMARY

The number of irregular Central American migrants in transit through Mexico to the United States, mainly from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador - the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) - has risen considerably over the past three years, totaling approximately 392,000 in 2014, just under the record set in 2005. The current flow almost tripled its annual average between 2008 and 2011, fluctuating around 135,000 migrants a year.

Two major changes can be observed in the flow of Central American migrants passing through Mexico between 2013 and 2015: the unprecedented participation of minors, both accompanied and unaccompanied, mostly adolescents; and the increasing numbers of women. The past five years have shown that although Guatemalans constitute the largest group of Central Americans apprehended while trying to cross the U.S. border from Mexico, their proportions have declined due to the growing share of Salvadorans and Hondurans.

The variety of routes and the short time it takes Central American migrants to cross Mexico make it difficult to measure the volume and characteristics of the flows, essential for decision-making in migration policy and management, as well as for the assistance and humanitarian aid that government and social organizations can provide to these people.

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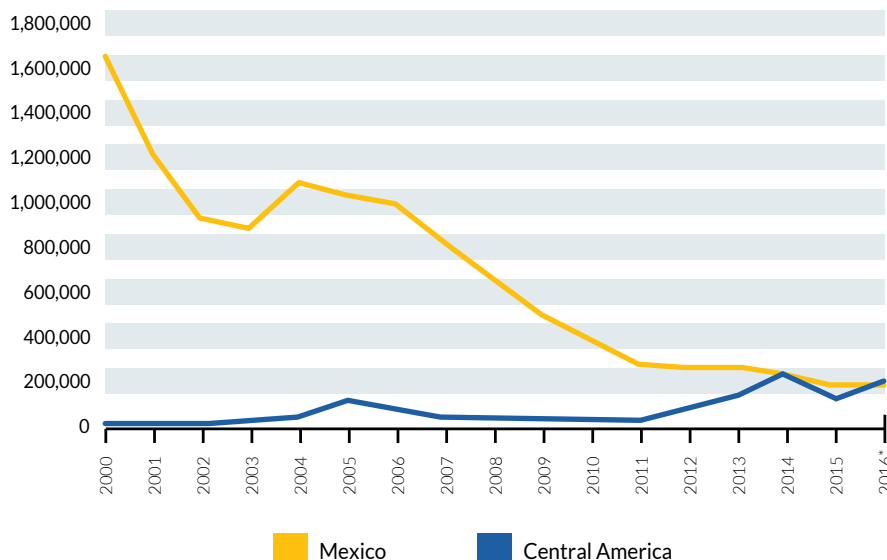
<sup>a</sup> El Colegio de la Frontera Norte (El Colef)/Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM)



**S**ince the summer of 2014, which saw the massive arrival of an unprecedented number of families with children and adolescents, as well as unaccompanied minors at border checkpoints in the southern United States, the volume and composition of the flow of Central Americans in transit through Mexico have engaged public opinion in both countries. That year, nearly 52,000 irregular unaccompanied Central American minors reached the U.S. border with Mexico, together with 61,000 family members including children and adolescents. This is 13 times the average for the period 2009-2011 and more than five times the volume in 2012.<sup>1</sup> The arrival of this number of minor migrants in a single year collapsed the detention and care system of migrants by the U.S. authorities.

This sharp increase contrasts with the fall in the number of irregular Mexican migrants seeking to enter the U.S. if the number of detainees in the border area is used as an indicator of irregular entries. In 2014, the U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border apprehended 239,897 Central Americans attempting to enter the U.S. without the required documents. For the first time ever, this figure exceeded that of Mexican migrants apprehended in the same conditions and area (226,771).<sup>2</sup> This situation was repeated in 2016, according to preliminary data.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1:** Mexican and Central American migrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol in the area adjoining Mexico (Southwest Border), by fiscal years 2000-2016



Source: Prepared by the author using data from the U.S. Border Patrol, Southwest Border. *Apprehensions of deportable aliens by country of citizenship.*<sup>2</sup>

Note: The same person may have been apprehended and counted more than once in a year.

\*2016 figures estimated on the basis of information from Statement by Secretary Johnson on Southwest Border Security.

*Between 2012 and 2015, Central Americans accounted for 92% of all migrants detained by Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) and 94% of non-Mexican migrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol in the Mexican border area*

In addition to Central Americans, undocumented migrants from other countries also travel through Mexico on their way to the U.S., albeit in much smaller numbers. The majority are from South Asia, China, the Horn of Africa, Central Africa, Cuba and Haiti. Between 2012 and 2015, Central Americans accounted for 92% of all migrants detained by Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) and 94% of non-Mexican migrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol in the Mexican border area. If one includes Mexican migrants among those apprehended in the area by the U.S. Border Patrol, until 2010, Central Americans accounted for no more than 10%, a proportion that rose to 50% in 2014, due to the decrease in the arrival of Mexicans and the rise in the number of Central Americans.<sup>4</sup>

## Volume and Composition of Central American Migrants in irregular transit through Mexico to the U.S.: Measuring the flow

Calculating the volume and composition of these constantly moving irregular migrants—who are attempting to escape the authorities' notice—is no easy task, because of three main issues.

The first is that 93% of these Central American migrants spend less than a month in Mexico<sup>5</sup> and are not registered in the migratory records of entries and departures unless they are retained by the authorities.

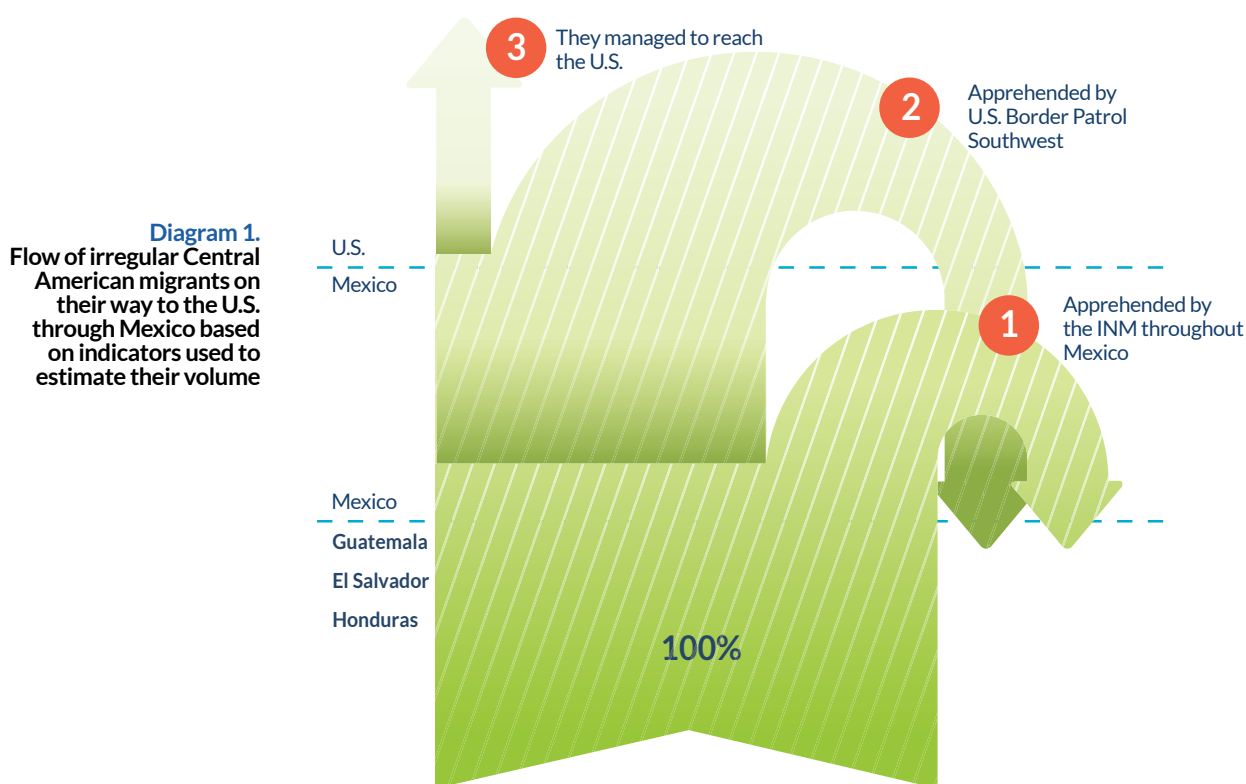
The second is that the number of migrants detained by the immigration authorities may vary, not necessarily because of the increase or decrease in the number of people in transit, but because of changes in policies and control procedures and the retention of migrants, the corruption of certain law

enforcement officers responsible for these controls or the amount of human, technological or financial resources assigned for this purpose.

The third is that not all undocumented migrants in transit through Mexico are detained by the authorities since some of them manage to enter and reside in the U.S.

The results given below only refer to undocumented Central American migrants in transit through Mexico to the U.S. They use a unit of measure known as migrant-event per year (in other words, it does not matter if the same person is detained or apprehended on more than one occasion by the Mexican or U.S. migration authorities), using cumulative, residual methodology based on three indicators (Diagram 1):

1. Migrants detained or apprehended by Mexican immigration authorities.<sup>6</sup>
2. Migrants who managed to cross Mexican territory, but were detained or apprehended by U.S. immigration authorities.
3. Migrants who were not apprehended by immigration authorities in either country and entered the U.S.

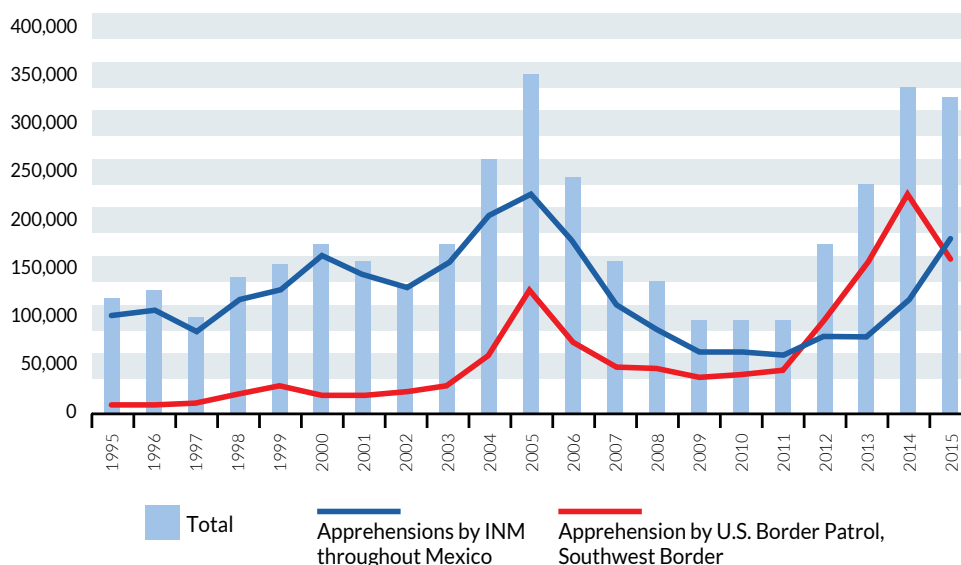


Note: The percentage distribution for each of the three indicators mentioned varies according to the period analyzed (see Figure 6)

## Migrants apprehended by Mexican and U.S. immigration authorities

Migrant events involving Central Americans apprehended by immigration authorities anywhere in Mexico, and by the U.S. authorities on the border with Mexico are the most effective indicator to approach of the annual volume of undocumented Central American migration in transit through Mexico (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2.**  
Undocumented Central American migrants apprehended by the Mexican INM or the U.S. Border Patrol, Southwest Border, by calendar year (1995-2015)



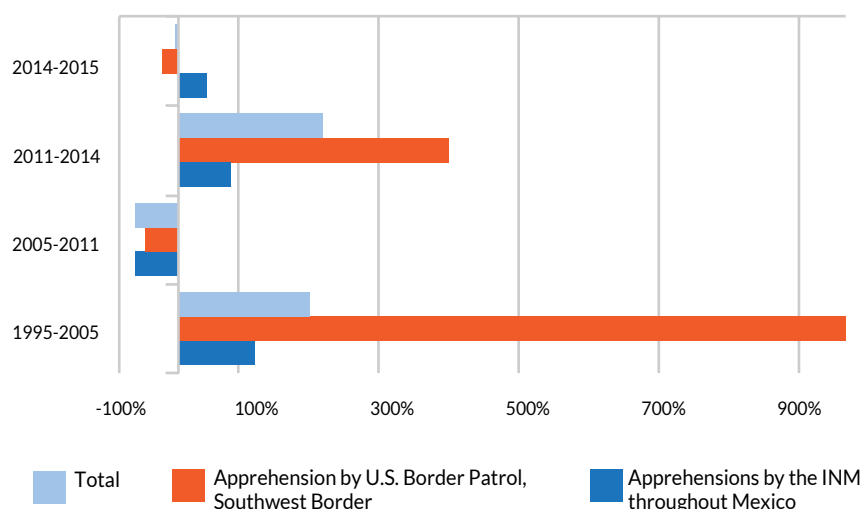
Source: Prepared by the author based on data from Mexico's SEGOB, UPM, INM: *Boletín de estadísticas migratorias* and U.S. Border Patrol, Southwest Border: *Alien Apprehensions by Citizenship* (unpublished data).  
Note: The same person may have been apprehended and counted more than once in a year.

As can be seen from Figure 2, migrant events involving migrants apprehended by Mexico and the U.S. followed similar upward and downward trends between 1995 and 2009. In 2010, these trends began to be modified, with more Central Americans being apprehended by U.S. authorities between 2012 and 2014. This may indicate greater permissiveness by Mexican immigration authorities between 2010 and 2013 or else the avoidance of controls by smugglers who manage to take migrants, particularly women and minors, to the U.S. border.

The ratio of migrants apprehended by each authority was reversed once again in the second half of 2014 and throughout 2015 as a result of Mexican government's implementation of the Integral Program for the Southern Border.



**Figure 3.**  
Variation in the number  
of Central American  
migrants apprehended  
by Mexican and U.S.  
immigration authorities  
between 1995 and 2015  
(calendar years)



Source: Prepared by the author based on data from Mexico's SEGOB, UPM, INM: *Boletín de estadísticas migratorias* and U.S. Border Patrol, Southwest Border: *Alien Apprehensions by Citizenship* (unpublished data).

An analysis by country of origin of NTCA migrants apprehended by the U.S. in the border area with Mexico shows that the three Central American countries have similar trends in long-term annual volumes, with Hondurans being the largest group until 2008. In 2009, they were overtaken by Guatemalans, who have been the most numerous group ever since except in 2014. Despite the spike in the number of Hondurans reaching the southern U.S. border between 2013 and 2014, an examination of the variation in each country between 2012 and 2015 shows that Salvadorans experienced the highest growth rate during this three-year period.

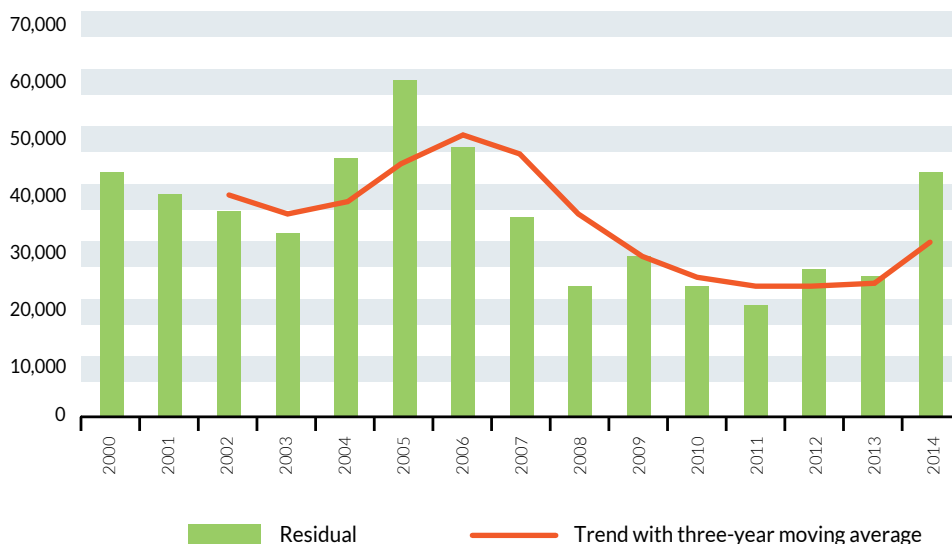
The containment policy implemented by U.S. authorities on the Mexican border (based on a direct system of deportation by air to each migrant's country of citizenship), in addition to the distance to be covered (on the way back) and the high cost of the journey as well as the risks involved in travelling through Mexico from Central America and crossing the U.S. border, limit migrants' possibilities of re-entry in the same year. According to the 2015 Emif Sur survey for migrants deported to NTCA countries who had spent less than one year in the U.S., 87% said they had only been apprehended and returned once in the past 12 months.<sup>7</sup>



## Central Americans who managed to settle in the U.S.

Despite the checkpoints in both countries, a number of migrants manage to cross Mexico and the southwest U.S. border. This can be explained by a number of factors that have changed over time, ranging from the use of the migrant, weapon and drug traffickers controlling many of the routes to previous experience of migration, available resources and the level of organization of these individuals or groups of migrants for making the crossing, together with social and family networks in the areas of origin, transit and destination.

**Figure 4.**  
Estimated number  
of Central American  
undocumented  
migrants who  
managed to settle in  
the U.S., 2000-2014



Source: Author's estimates based on U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Current Population Survey (CPS); U.S. DHS, Immigration Statistics y Border Patrol, Southwest Border.<sup>8</sup>

Note: Trend with three-year moving average refers to the average figure for the year drawn from figures for the previous three years, making it possible to smooth annual fluctuations in the short term to approximate estimated residual data.

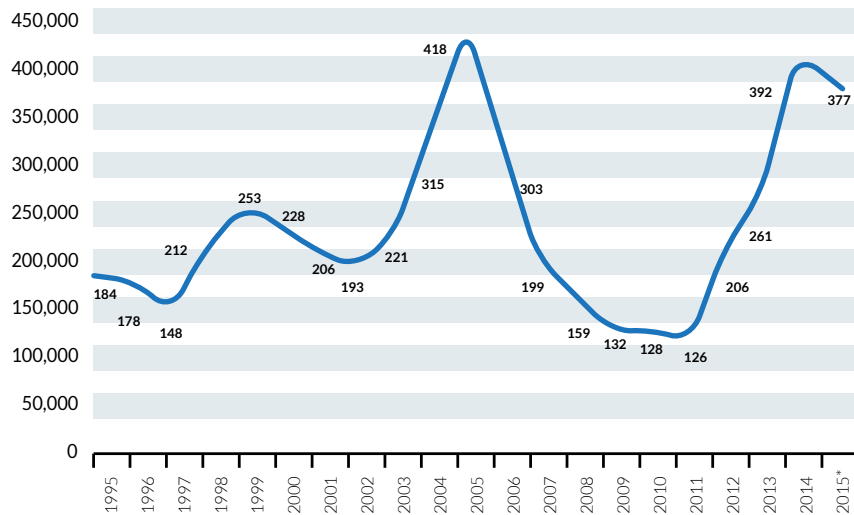


## Trends in the total flow of irregular Central Americans in transit through Mexico

It is estimated that 392,000 Central American migrants crossed Mexico irregularly in 2014 on their way to the U.S. This figure is the result of integrating the three indicators explained earlier,<sup>9</sup> with nearly all the migrants (98%) belonging to the NTCA. It is the highest number observed in the new upward trend in these flows since 2012. The unprecedented participation of minor migrants, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by a family member, accounts for a significant share of this number.

The volume calculated for 2014 approaches the record set a decade ago, when 418,000 events were registered in 2005.

**Figure 5.**  
Estimated number  
of Central American  
migrants in irregular  
transit through Mexico  
to the U.S., 1995-2015



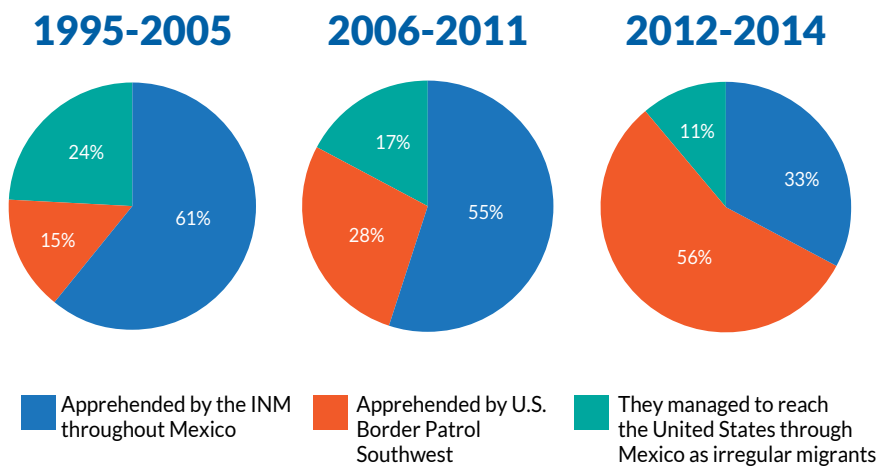
Source: Prepared by the author based on data from Mexico's SEGOB, UPM, INM: *Boletín de estadísticas migratorias*. U.S. Border Patrol, Southwest Border: *Aliens apprehended by country of citizenship* (unpublished data). More residuals based on: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS and CPS: Foreigners recorded in the survey who were living abroad a year earlier and U.S. DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics: Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status.  
\*2015 preliminary data

Figure 5 shows three well-defined stages in the general trends in the flow of Central Americans through Mexico in the past 20 years:

- **First stage (1995-2005): Growth.** With a 126% variation in the annual flow over a decade and intermediate oscillations ranging from a minimum value of 148,000 events in 1997 to a maximum of 418,000 events in 2005.
- **Second stage (2006 to 2011): Continuous decline,** lasting half as long as the previous stage, with values reaching the lowest point in the entire period analyzed, with 126,000 events in 2011, a 70% drop since 2005.

- **Third stage (2012 to the present): Sharp increase.** In just three years, the number of events rose to 392,000 in 2014, meaning that the volume tripled in comparison with 2011. Preliminary data for 2015 show a slight decline since the previous year, a trend that could disappear by 2016 due to the increase in the number of minor migrants.

**Figure 6.** Structure of the estimated volume of Central American migrants in irregular transit through Mexico to the U.S., by proportion of each indicator for selected periods



Source: Prepared by the author using the data for each indicator compared to the total estimated from the sources in Figure 5.

Note: The periods were selected on the basis of upward or downward trends in the total flow.

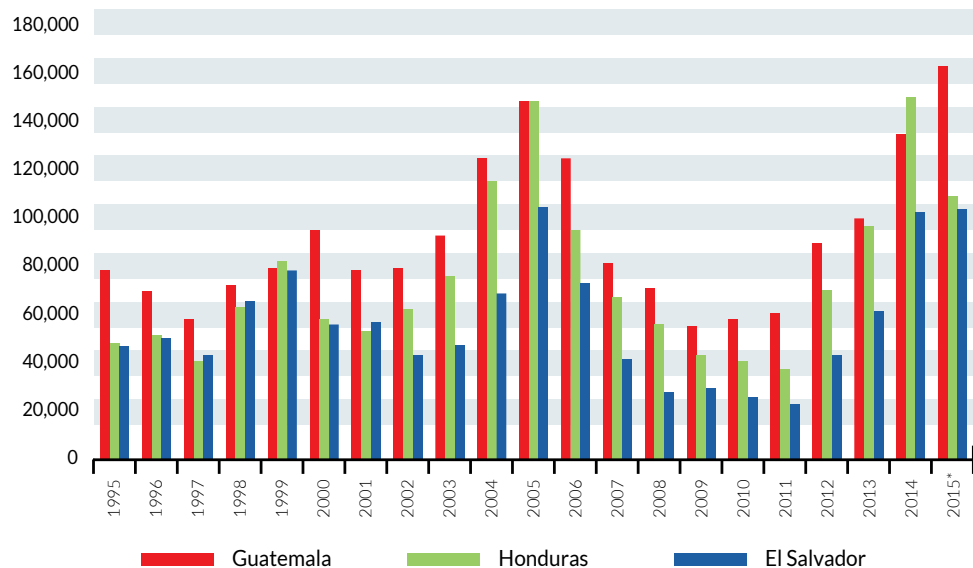
An analysis of the three stages identified above, based on the proportion of each of the indicators used to integrate the estimated volume of the annual flow of Central American migrants traveling irregularly through Mexico, reveals two trends.

The first is that the proportion of Central American migrants detained by the Mexican authorities has gradually declined in relation to those apprehended by U.S. authorities, meaning that their proportions have been inverted in the past decade. The proportion of migrants apprehended by Mexico's INM fell from 55% in the period 2006-2011 to 33% between 2012 and 2014, while those apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol in the southwestern zone rose from 28% to 56% during the same periods.

The second is that the number of migrants who managed to settle in the U.S., avoiding all immigration controls, fell in each of the stages analyzed from 24% between 1995 and 2005 to 17% between 2006-2011 and to 11% in recent years.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 7.** Estimated number of NTCA migrants in irregular transit through Mexico to the U.S. by country of origin, 1995-2015



Source: Prepared by the author based on data from Mexico's SEGOB, UPM, INM: *Boletín de estadísticas migratorias*. U.S. Border Patrol, Southwest Border: *Aliens apprehended by country of citizenship* (unpublished data). More residuals based on: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS and CPS: Foreigners recorded in the survey who were living abroad a year earlier and U.S. DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics: Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status (LPR). \*2015 preliminary data

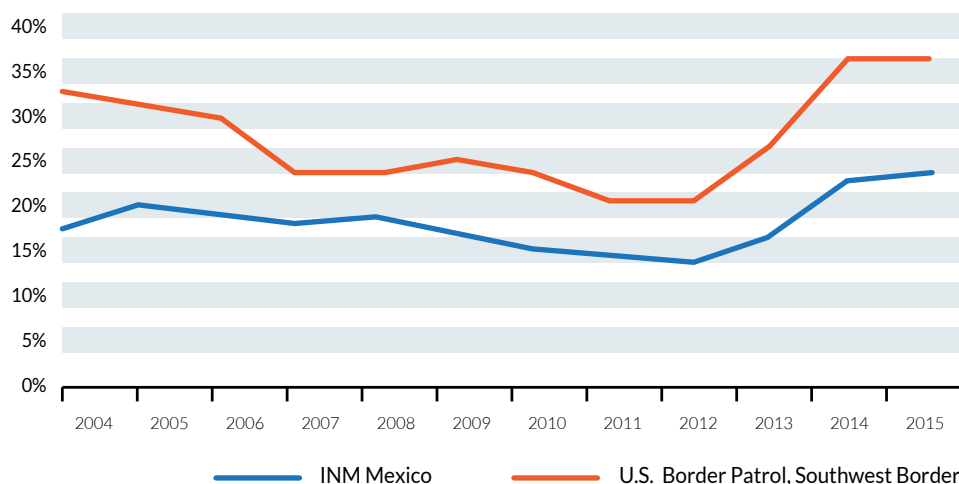
*The participation of women with children and unaccompanied child migrants has played a key role in the increase in the number of Central American migrants in transit through Mexico and arriving at the southern U.S. border in recent years*

An analysis of the annual flow of migrants in transit for each of the NTCA countries in Figure 7 shows that each country has very similar trends in most of the years described, regardless of the difference in the volume of each flow. This behavior may be associated with the strong links between the countries and their situation compared with their migrant communities in the U.S., and the role of the labor market and social networks. Overall, Guatemala has maintained the largest share of migrant flows, particularly since 2008, whereas El Salvador, which formerly accounted for the largest number of migrants to settle in the U.S., experienced a decline in 2002 although it has recently seen an upsurge. Honduras has usually placed second, gaining strength in recent years.

## Women and minors in the migration flows

The participation of women with children and unaccompanied child migrants has played a key role in the increase in the number of Central American migrants in transit through Mexico and arriving at the southern U.S. border in recent years. Using migrants apprehended by immigration authorities in Mexico and the U.S. as a reference, since 2013 there has been a reversal of the previous trend of women's lower participation in the Central American migratory flow, which reached a peak in 2015, with women accounting for 37% of those apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol on the southwest border, and 23% of migrants detained by Mexico's INM.

**Figure 8.** Participation of women among Central Americans apprehended by immigration authorities in Mexico and the U.S., calendar years 2004-2015



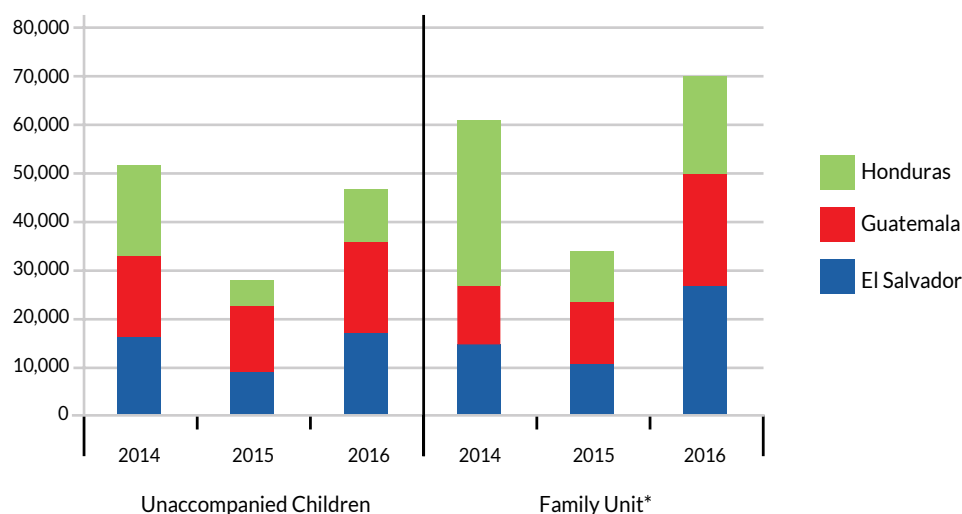
Source: Prepared by the author based on statistics on migrants apprehended by Mexico's INM by country and sex (2004-2006 has been estimated using partial information) and unpublished data from the U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border on alien apprehensions by sex and country of citizenship.

Of all the NTCA migrant women apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol between 2012 and 2015, Salvadorans are the most numerous (37.9%), closely followed by Hondurans (36.3%) with Guatemalans placing a distant third (24.2%).

Many of these women travel with their children and are recorded in what is called a "household unit" in the statistics on migrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol, a subgroup that has grown significantly since 2014, like that of un-

accompanied minors under the age of 18. At the end of fiscal year 2016, the family unit subgroup was the largest category, with 70,407 cases, above the already high levels recorded in 2014 (61,334).<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 9.** Minors and accompanying relative from NTCA countries apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol Southwest, by country and fiscal year 2014-2016



Source: U.S. Border Patrol Southwest. *Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions*, October 2016.<sup>1</sup>

Note: "Family unit" is the number of children under 18 apprehended in the company of a parent or legal representative. The figure includes minors and adults in this category (mainly children arriving with their mothers).

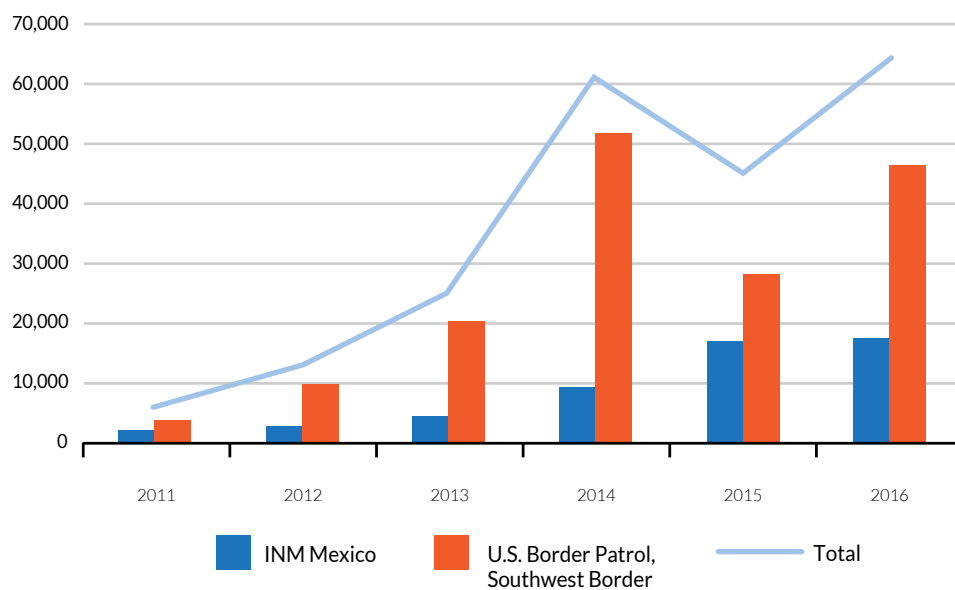
Regarding the country of origin of minors apprehended by the Border Patrol in the area adjoining Mexico, including unaccompanied minors and families with children, in 2014, Hondurans constituted the largest group, followed by Guatemalans in 2015, and Salvadorans in 2016. Combining the three years (2014, 2015 and 2016) for both categories for each country yielded very similar figures for all three countries: Honduras, 99,513; Guatemala, 97,452 and El Salvador, 96,124.

A comparison of the number of migrants under 18 apprehended or brought before the U.S. Border Patrol or Mexico's INM between 2010 and 2015 shows that there has been a sharp increase in the U.S. since 2012, and in Mexico since 2013. The number of minors reaching the U.S. border during the whole period is up to five times higher than the number detained by the Mexican authorities, according to 2014 figures.





**Figure 10.**  
Unaccompanied  
child minors from the  
NTCA apprehended  
by Mexico's INM and  
the U.S. Border Patrol  
Southwest, fiscal years  
2011-2016



Source: Prepared by the author using data from Mexico's SEGOB, UPM, INM (unpublished monthly data converted to fiscal years - October to September - to bring them into line with U.S. data) and U.S. Border Patrol Southwest, *Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions*.<sup>12</sup>



Photography: Ernesto Rodríguez Chávez  
Suchiate river, Ciudad Hidalgo -Tecún Uman (Mexico-Guatemala)

The share of unaccompanied minors rose from 3% to 4% of the total number of NTCA migrants detained by Mexican immigration authorities between 2010 and 2012 to 11% in 2015. The proportion apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol, Southwest Border rose from 10% in 2010-2012 to 21% in 2015.<sup>13</sup> The increased presence of children under 18 and women among migrants apprehended by U.S. border authorities in relation to those detained throughout Mexican territory by Mexico's INM (Figures 7 and 9) supports the hypothesis that as part of a family strategy, more resources are invested in transporting women and children that will enable them to reach the U.S. border.



## ◉ Conclusion

- Trends in the number of migrants apprehended by Mexican and U.S. immigration authorities, added to the estimated calculation of those who successfully entered the U.S. without status confirm the increasing regionalization of migration processes in the Central America-Mexico-U.S. corridor, in a context of a lack of openness in general and greater restrictions on undocumented migrants in particular.
- Regarding the flow of Central American migrants over the past two decades, during periods showing an increase (1995-2005 and 2012-2015) or decrease (2006-2011), the trends highlight the link between living conditions in the places of origin and destination as push and pull factors.
- The dramatic increase in the number of Central American undocumented migrants arriving at the border between Mexico and the U.S. since 2014, in contrast to the reduction in the arrivals of irregular Mexican migrants, has forced the U.S. government to pay more attention to the arrival of Central Americans. Concerted actions have been promoted with NTCA governments to discourage irregular migration, provide options for international protection within the territories of origin and promote economic and social investment. However, evidence suggests that factors such as poverty, job insecurity, lack of law and order and social welfare, natural disasters (see CANAMID PB#01 and PB#08) and urban violence remain crucial triggers for emigrating from the NTCA.
- The strong upsurge in the total flow in recent years, supported by the increased participation of children and women, distinguishes it from previous flows during high-volume periods. The current composition, coupled with stiffer immigration controls in both Mexico and the southern U.S. border, exacerbates migrants' vulnerability, due to the increased use of smugglers, the shift to more dangerous routes, increased exposure to the actions of criminal organizations, and other factors such as theft, extortion and kidnapping.

## Policy recommendations

The consistently high volume of flows of undocumented Central American migrants in transit through Mexico arriving in the U.S. over the past three years, particularly of minors, women and persons in need of international humanitarian protection, poses enormous challenges for the various actors concerned with the care of these migrants. A list of recommendations for specific areas is given below:

### ➤ 1) Cooperation and shared responsibility between Central America-Mexico- U.S.

- a) Strengthen multilateral mechanisms addressing Central American migration from various perspectives and levels, in favor of migrants' rights, human development and migration governance by involving government and civil society actors.
- b) Incorporate the regional dimension into the policies of each country and make cooperation and shared responsibility effective as regards:
  - Portability of rights for border and/or temporary workers.
  - Guaranteeing access to social security, health and education services in areas of destination or transit, regardless of people's immigration status.

### ➤ 2) Immigration documents and access to rights

- a) Evaluate alternatives to Mexico's current policy toward undocumented Central American migrants in transit in the country with a perspective of openness and integrity that will genuinely help to improve migrants' safety and guarantee their access to the rights already stipulated in the legislation and international treaties signed by the countries involved.
- b) Promote consideration of Mexico as a country of destination for migrants in the various government departments and levels in Mexico, as well as among the population.
- c) Gradually advance an expansion of options for Central American migrants in Mexico and the U.S., either as temporary workers or residents for humanitarian reasons, via family reunification or another means in order to facilitate safer, more orderly flows.
- d) Central American consulates should provide greater accessibility and easiness for their citizens so that they can obtain the necessary identification documents for migratory, legal or civilian procedures in Mexico or the U.S.
- e) Promote national policies in NTCA countries to facilitate the reintegration of the returned migrant population, particularly deportees.
- f) Expand the capacity and resources for migrant shelters in border areas with the greatest flow of undocumented and at-risk migrants in Mexico and Central America, with national and international support.

### ➤ 3) Availability and access to information

- a) Improve the production and publication of systematized, disaggregated statistics in keeping with the various concurrent migration processes in each country and set up institutions to collect information to facilitate the comparability and complementarity of the information registered.
- b) Create a database of missing Central American migrants with information from countries of Mesoamerica and the U.S. to track them.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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5. Total average 2012-2014 of migrants returned to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador by Mexican immigration authorities with less than one year in the country (98.7%) and by U.S. immigration authorities of migrants with less than a year in the country (88.2%). Encuesta sobre migración en la Frontera Sur de México (Emif Sur). México: COLEF, UPM, CONAPO, SEGOB, SRE, STyPS and CONAPRED. <http://www.colef.mx/emif/>
6. Since the U.S. is not the final destination of all Central Americans apprehended by Mexico, there may be an overestimation of this indicator. Data from the Emif Sur Survey on migrants returned by Mexican authorities to Guatemala (2004-2011), Honduras and El Salvador (2009 and 2011) who declared that their final destination was Mexico rather than the U.S. suggest that although the volume has decreased, the trend has not changed. See Berumen et al. 2012, "La migración centroamericana de tránsito irregular por México. Una aproximación a partir de registros administrativos migratorios y otras fuentes de información", in Ernesto Rodríguez et al. (coords.), *Construyendo estadísticas. Movilidad y migración internacional en México*. México: Centro de Estudios Migratorios, Unidad de Política Migratoria, SEGOB, INM, Tilde Editores, pp. 89-134.
7. Encuesta sobre migración en la Frontera Sur de México 2015 (Emif Sur) (2016). Mexico: COLEF, UPM, CONAPO, SEGOB, SRE, STyPS and CONAPRED. <http://www.colef.mx/emif/>
8. The estimate is the residual value obtained by subtracting from the total number Central Americans recorded in the American Community Survey (ACS) (2005-2014) and the Current Population Survey (2000-2004), who resided outside the U.S. a year ago, those of the same nationality who arrived that year with the proper documents according to data from the Department of Homeland Security on new arrivals of persons who have already been granted permanent residence (Legal Permanent Residence -LPR, New Arrival). An additional adjustment was made, taking into consideration unaccompanied minors registered by the Border Patrol as deportable apprehended a year earlier, most of whom are allowed to stay until an immigration judge determines whether they are subject to international protection or another benefit that allows them to remain legally in the country. This residual may also contain an overestimate, by excluding those who arrived that same year with a temporary-stay visa and remained irregularly in the U.S. without having entered through Mexico, known as Overstays.
9. Central American migrants detained or apprehended by immigration authorities in Mexico and the U.S., as well as those estimated to have entered the U.S.
10. These proportions could change if the events of migrants apprehended by the authorities in Mexico and the U.S. were reduced to persons. However, preliminary exercises in this regard suggest that migrants who pass the immigration control and retention systems in both countries accounted for the lowest proportion of migrants in the past decade.
11. Consider that many of the women traveling in the company of their children or other minors for whom they are responsible, as well as unaccompanied minors, reported in the U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border as apprehended usually submit an application for international protection or a special visa for immigrants under 21 who have been abandoned, abused or neglected by their parents (Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa) in the hope of not being deported expeditiously and having their case examined by an immigration judge. This process grants them an initial stay and then possibly a permanent stay in the U.S., according to the regulations in that country for migrants from non-neighboring countries and vulnerable populations. See details of the procedure in CIDH (2015). *Situación de derechos humanos de familias, niños, niñas y adolescentes no acompañados refugiados y migrantes en los Estados Unidos de América*. OEA OAS/Ser.L/V/II.155. Doc. 16
12. Data on migrant events involving those under 18 brought before the immigration authorities, by country of citizenship and travel status (unpublished monthly data converted to fiscal years -October to September- to bring them into line with U.S. data) and U.S. Border Patrol Southwest. *Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions by Fiscal Year for Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador*. Available at: <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016>, retrieved October 20 2016.
13. On the causes and impacts of this situation see: Carlson, Elizabeth and Anna Marie Gallagher (2015). "Humanitarian Protection for Children Fleeing Gang-Based Violence in the Americas" *Journal of Migration and Human Security*, v.3, n. 2, pp.129-158; Rosenblum, Marc (2015). *Unaccompanied Child Migration to the U.S.: the Tension Between Protection and Prevention*. Washington, D.C.: MPI. Servan-Mori, Edson et al. (2014). "Migrants Suffering Violence While in Transit through Mexico: Factors Associated with the Decision to Continue or Turn Back". *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, v.16, n.1, Feb-Mar, pp. 53-59.



## Central American migrants in irregular transit through Mexico: New figures and trends

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Author: Ernesto Rodríguez Chávez

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- Instituto de Investigación y Proyección sobre Dinámicas Globales y Territoriales (IDGT), Rafael Landívar University (Guatemala)
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## SUMMARY

The number of irregular Central American migrants in transit through Mexico to the United States, mainly from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador - the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) - has risen considerably over the past three years, totaling approximately 392,000 in 2014, just under the record set in 2005. The current flow almost tripled its annual average between 2008 and 2011, fluctuating around 135,000 migrants a year.

Two major changes can be observed in the flow of Central American migrants passing through Mexico between 2013 and 2015: the unprecedented participation of minors, both accompanied and unaccompanied, mostly adolescents; and the increasing numbers of women. The past five years have shown that although Guatemalans constitute the largest group of Central Americans apprehended while trying to cross the U.S. border from Mexico, their proportions have declined due to the growing share of Salvadorans and Hondurans.

The variety of routes and the short time it takes Central American migrants to cross Mexico make it difficult to measure the volume and characteristics of the flows, essential for decision-making in migration policy and management, as well as for the assistance and humanitarian aid that government and social organizations can provide to these people.

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