IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return Program aims to achieve the voluntary, orderly and humane return of migrants who can not or do not want to stay in their countries of transit or destination and wish to return voluntarily to their country of origin.

Since November 4th, 2018, IOM has provided voluntary return assistance to 1406 people, 66 of which are unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents.

In Mexico, most cases were registered in Mexico City (58%) and Tijuana (24%). The remaining cases were registered in Tapachula (13%), Monterrey (3%), Guanajuato (1%), and Piedras Negras (1%). All unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents registered in Mexico have benefited from assisted voluntary returns through air transportation, considering their serious situation of vulnerability.

As for the case of Guatemala, the Voluntary Return Programme has operated from the border with Mexico, in Tecun Uman, and by land only. The 80 per cent of migrants registered in Guatemala returned to Honduras and 20 per cent to El Salvador.

Regarding means of transportation, 80 per cent of migrants have been returned by ground transportation, 5 per cent by air transportation (unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents) and 15 per cent have alternately used air and ground transportation during their assisted return.
At the time of their voluntary return, most migrants had an irregular migration status (87%) of which 70 per cent were located in Mexico and 30 per cent in Guatemala. The predominant educational level is primary level (54%), comprised by a 16 per cent of women and 84 per cent of men. At the secondary level (30%), 19 per cent are women and 81 per cent are men. The 12 per cent has no education, 25 per cent of them are children under 5 years of age, while 75 per cent are adults who did not have access to basic education (15% are women, 85% are men).

Additionally, in their countries of origin, most people worked in the agricultural sector (24%), followed by the construction (19%) and commerce sectors (12%). In the agricultural sector, people have mostly a primary education level (48%), which is followed by secondary level (17%). In the construction sector, the level of education remains also at the primary level with 59 per cent, followed by the secondary level at 24 per cent. Similarly, in the commerce sector the level of education among migrants is primary (49%) and secondary education (38%).
In the following graph, three categories are used to summarize the main reasons for migration.
The need for improving their living conditions has been highlighted as the main reason for the mobilization of these migrants, as many of them referred to conditions of unemployment and inequality in their countries of origin.

Secondly, violence and insecurity is another important cause which explains the mobilization of people thought the caravans, many of them mentioned being threatened by gang members.

Finally, some people specified that their reason for joining the caravans is their desire to find relatives in the destination county.

Migrants reported that, during their journey, they experienced violence (28%), abuse (21%), extortion (17%), threat (14%), fraud (9%), exploitation (2%) and kidnapping (2%).

Seven per cent of migrants had already requested or started an application for the regularization of their migratory status in Mexico. However, all of them decided to return to their country of origin, reporting the following reasons for leaving Mexico: (12%) reported that their identity document had been stolen, (19%) reported scarcity of financial resources, (25%) problems with third parties, (12%) abandonment of the application, (7%) homelessness, and (25%) unspecified reasons*.

With regard to the intentions after returning to their country of origin, migrants wished to start looking for a job (31%) and reunite with their families (69%).

Considering that data collection activities started in March 2019, the representativeness of the following information is equal to 2% of the total amount of registered returns.

In regard to the health conditions of migrants, the majority self-perceived as healthy, however, at the time of the screening process it was revealed that approximately one third suffered from respiratory diseases, as well as from infections and affectations in muscles and extremities.

Moreover, the survey allowed IOM staff to assess that migrants had suffered from specific health conditions during the journey, such as anxiety, nervousness, dehydration and burns.

The following chart shows the kinship among the people who are part of the migrant caravan. In the first category, the data shows that most migrants are travelling alone (49%), followed by migrants travelling with first-degree relatives, meaning parents, siblings and children (45%), and a smaller percentage of migrants (6%) who reported to be traveling with friends or acquaintances.

Regarding migrants who are traveling with family members, 25 per cent are minors between 0 and 17 years of age, and 10 per cent are under 13 years of age.

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