

“My son has decided to migrate to the United States because he is not safe in El Salvador anymore. He cannot even leave our home without being hassled by gang members who want him “to jump in” (gang’s initiation rite). He is just a boy who is a fisherman. He even stopped going to school because he was afraid,”

says Carolina, while she is waiting for her sixteen-year old son at the Migrant Protection Directorate Office in San Salvador. This teenager has been repatriated twice in a period of 20 days, in this occasion from Acayuca, Mexico.



A young woman is sitting on a bed at the Returning Migrants and Children’s Aid Center of the Honduran Institute for Children and Family. On the wall, a MS13 graffiti is engraved. This facility usually receives 500 children in an average day. The kids are given a health check-up and psychologist interviews them —most of the children have gone through traumatic experiences both of violence en sexual abuse, and there are alarming figures of abductions by criminal gangs in Mexico, extortions or being sold for prostitution.



MIGRATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
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As region, Central America has its own characteristics: a particular historical context, a political system marked by corruption coupled with low economic growth and high rates of poverty and social exclusion. This makes up a highly vulnerable area exposed to several social, economic, cultural and environmental factors directly affecting the most unprotected populations. As a result, this has led to a growing internal and external mobilization of people from their territories to the United States mainly.

Despite migration is multicausal in the region, official studies suggest that much of the impact of this phenomenon is interrelated with a context of violence in Central America. Deterioration of public security in the so-called Northern Triangle can be observed from the growing trend of criminalization, homicides, and systematic violation of human rights. According to the United Nations, by 2014 five countries in America rank as the top five most violent in the world, with Honduras high on the list with a homicide rate of 90,4%¹; El Salvador, with 41.2%, ranks fourth, and Guatemala, with 31.9%, ranks fifth.

This phenomenon provokes migration and displacement of people inside and outside of these countries, at the mercy of serious danger en route to their destination. According to data, returnees from Mexico and the United States of America increased 50% for the Northern Triangle. Regarding internal displacement, studies show that the main cause is organized crime and gang violence. It is estimated that at least 566,800 people were internally displaced in 2014 in this region (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2015).

A “returnee population” is people who has been forced, by threats or insecurity, to internal or external displacement and/or migration from their origin places, and has returned (ACNUR, 2015).

On the other hand, data show that most of children returning by air or land express their reasons for migration to the United States: family reunification. In many cases, this reunification was forced by violence or insecurity in their places of origin.

Migration and displacement by violence must be seen from a holistic human rights-based approach, starting from addressing the root causes that make these people migrate from their territories.

¹ % Percentage of homicides per 100,000 habitants.

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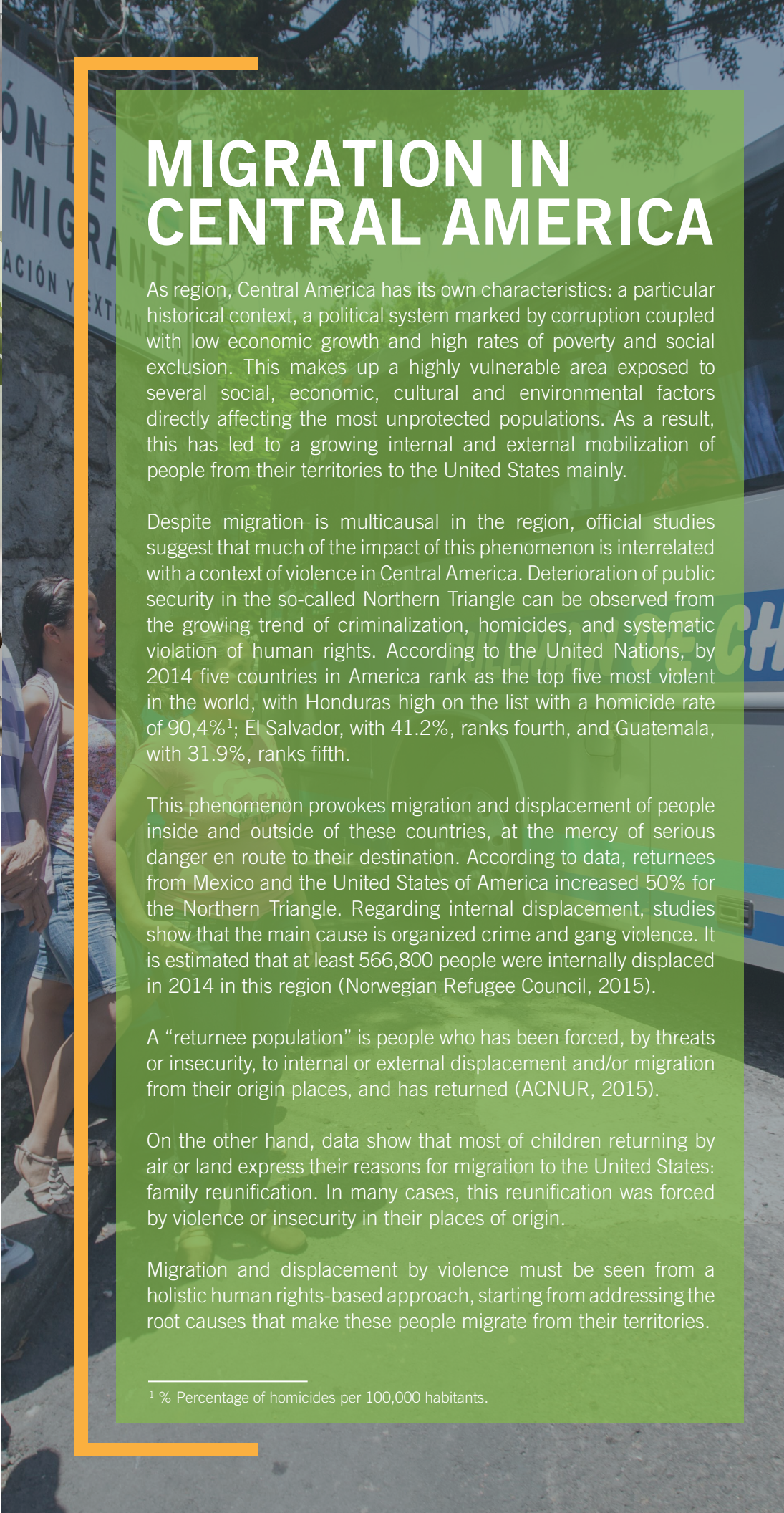
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A VIEW FROM THE CHURCHES IN CENTRAL AMERICA



Migration is an important topic for Christian churches in general. From a theological perspective, God's people have been migrants. In this world, everybody is a migrant. No one is illegal. The Church assists and accompanies migrant families who have migrated or are migrating due to social insecurity in El Salvador. It also supports cases of internal displacement. All communities assisted by the Church through its Pastors have created a security system for allowing them both carrying out their pastoral work and provide advisory and guidance for very frightened families.

Bishop Medardo Gómez, The Lutheran Church of El Salvador.



The Augustinian Lutheran Church from Guatemala (ILAG, Spanish acronyms) strongly believes that the only way of making changes in the migration scenario in Guatemala and Latin America is through radical changes in governments, enforcing existing laws to provide more education opportunities, skilled labor force, land and support for farmers, ensuring fair prices for their products.

Rev. President Karen Castillo Echeverria. Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala.



As Church, we cannot encourage migration. However, we understand the reasons why people migrate. In our countries, living conditions are unworthy. We raise our voices for our Governments together with the US Government develop policies to prevent this problem, generating decent living conditions for our people.

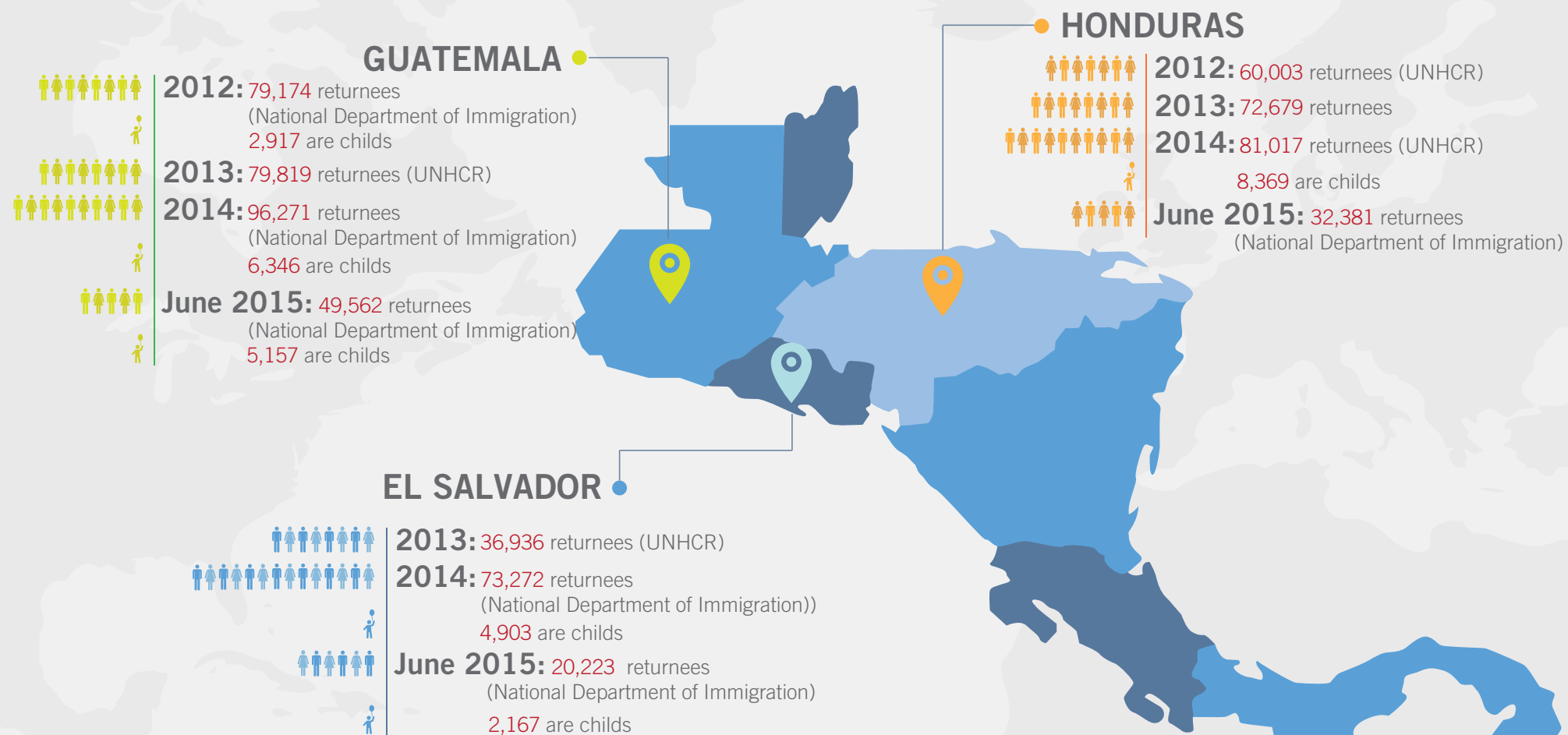
Pastor President Martin Giron, The Lutheran Church of Honduras.



In Nicaragua, migration rates are lower than the rest of Central American countries. Migration is the result of existing socioeconomic systems in the region where unemployment pushes people to migrate. More than a million Nicaraguans have migrated to Costa Rica. Others also migrate to the USA and El Salvador.

Bishop Victoria Cortes, The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Joy.

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More information: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAEIUwutEw0>
* data of migration to the United States.

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH ON MIGRATION

The Lutheran World Federation/Department for World Service-Central America Program, believes development actions should always be conceived from a holistic human rights-based approach, in which the dignity of the human person is at the core of all actions.

A holistic attention of the problem includes dialogue and coordination with different actors —from affected population, civil society organizations, government bodies to international organizations and agencies, and engagement of the governments concerned.

We believe that Churches and faith-based organizations have an important role to play in accompanying people affected by migration, since they are aware of the reality of communities and suffer together with them the problems in the region. Because there is no mechanism at this time for protecting people displaced by violence, Churches and faith-based organizations are working from their possibilities to meet protection needs of this population, in addition to addressing the root causes of the problem.