



EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANTS IN TRANSIT ACROSS HONDURAS WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON CHILDHOOD

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAH:	Action Against Hunger
CAMI:	Center for the Attention of Irregular Migrants
INM:	National Institute of Migration
FLACSO:	Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences
IOM:	International Organization for Migration

INTRODUCTION

The southern and eastern border of Honduras has become a transit territory for migrants from other continents, mainly from South America and the Caribbean, who decide to travel a migratory route that exposes them to a series of risks along their journey to the United States. **Irregular entries to Honduras during 2022 have registered a considerable increase in the migrant population in vulnerable conditions, especially men and women traveling with minors.**

The interest of this research is to have an approach to the problematic that pushes the migratory flows of people in transit through Honduras. It is of interest to systematize the experiences lived by migrants in transit in relation to the causes, characteristics and difficulties they have overcome along the route, as well as to awaken the interest of other national and international researchers in deepening the analysis of migrations in transit through Honduras.

This report is organized in several sections. The first part describes the methodological strategy, **data collection techniques and the selection of informants.**

The second section provides a contextual framework to **understand the migration situation** on the eastern border of Honduras, specifically the municipalities of Danlí and Trojes as transit areas.

The third part provides a **definition of irregular transit migration**, as well as the risks and conditions of vulnerability presented by this type of migration.

The results constitute the fourth section of this report. It includes a **characterization of the migrant population in transit** that participated in this study, their experiences, the risks of the migratory route and the difficulties involved in traveling with minors.

Finally, the case histories elaborated from the interviews conducted with the participants are presented.

1. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to characterize the population in transit across Honduras through the systematization of the lived experiences of migrants with a special focus on children, as well as the risks and difficulties involved in the migratory route. The scope of the study is developed in the southeastern border of Honduras, specifically in the municipalities of Trojes and Danlí located in the department of **El Paraíso**.

The research has an exploratory-descriptive scope with a qualitative approach and a non-experimental and longitudinal design. The case studies had the participation of **28 migrants traveling with minors**, by following the research objectives. The men and women who were selected for interview ranged in age from **21 to 53 years**.

An instrument was developed for data collection that includes socioeconomic and migratory characteristics. This instrument was applied to the 28 migrants, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to elaborate life histories, which are presented in this document as case studies. In Trojes, the instrument was applied and interviews were conducted near the migrant shelter and the Migration Office. In the city of Danlí, the population was interviewed at the Jesús Está Vivo shelter, located in the Las Colinas neighborhood, and in the vicinity of the Migration Office.

For the systematization and analysis of the 28 semi-structured interviews that were conducted, a matrix was prepared to integrate the units of analysis according to the objectives of this work.

Finally, of the 28 semi-structured interviews that were applied to migrants in transit, 10 were selected to construct the case studies. These 10 cases respond to the **greater openness and eloquence of the interviewees** when providing information, as well as the depth of the interview and its potential to develop the proposed objectives.



2. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Situation of the eastern border of Honduras

The Republic of Honduras has become one of the transit territories for migrants irregularly entering to the United States. From January 1st to October 31st, 2022, a total of **141,200 migrants** in irregular transit have been reported to have entered to the Honduran territory through the border zone between Honduras and Nicaragua. The trend shows a steady increase in irregular migration each month, in January a total of 1,766 irregular migrants were counted, while in October the monthly average reached 30,775 people (INM, 2022).

According to their nationality, migrants are mainly from South America and the Caribbean. The majority are from Cuba (**57,360**), the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (**49,404**), Ecuador (**12,838**) and Haití (**6,141**). In smaller proportions are migrants from Colombia (**1,878**), Dominican Republic (**1,368**), India (**1,307**), Senegal (**966**) and Angola (**852**). The distribution by gender shows irregular migration composed of:



55% OF MEN
27% OF WOMEN
18% OF GIRLS AND BOYS

Migrants have mostly entered through the Danlí (**63,851**) and Trojes (**40,697**), delegations, in the department of El Paraíso, while the Center for Attention to Irregular Migrants (CAMI) in Choluteca has reported the entry of **33,347** migrants (INM, 2022).

According to the situation report No.1 of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), from January to April 5th, 2022, **13,684** migrants were registered in the offices of the municipality of Danlí, while an average of 600 to 800 people entered daily through blind spots in the municipality of Trojes, who could not be immediately attended in the migration offices, due to the existing demand and because many entered at night.

The Trojes border zone is noted for the limited presence of state institutions, poor access to basic services, and the smuggling of migrants, drugs, trade and livestock. Many migrants have also been victims of extortion and fraud.

On the other hand, the municipalities of Danlí and Trojes, as transit areas, have experienced new dynamics in informal commerce, promoting a market for goods and services based on the migrants needs . The circulation of the dollar and the time migrants stay in Trojes and Danlí have also promoted the alteration of prices in services and some local businesses.

The IOM situation report of June 6 informs that irregular charges have been made by networks of people who operate by mobilizing migrants who enter through blind spots in the municipality of Trojes and have been transferred under deception by motorcycle cabs or public transport buses, **charging \$35 per person** to reach the Guayambre River located in the village of Santa Maria, and then charging **another \$15** to cross the river. This route is more extensive and unnecessary, as there is direct and inexpensive transportation to Danlí. Thus, the department of El Paraíso has become a transit route for migrants seeking to reach the border of Guatemala bound for the United States.

On the other hand, for March 2022, the presence of migrants in the communities of the department of El Paraíso increased due to the administrative penalty of **4,782.66 lempiras equivalent to 200 dollars** that must be paid by persons who enter to the Honduran territory in an irregular manner. This situation caused many migrants who did not have enough money to remain stranded until they obtained the money or requested an economic vulnerability assessment from the INM to exempt themselves from paying the fine (IOM, 2022).

However, the payment of the administrative fine caused the migration delegations in Trojes and Danlí to exceed their administrative and humanitarian attention capacities. Following the situation report No.4 of Action Against Hunger(AAH) and given the accumulation of people in a legal insecurity situation and inability of many migrants to pay, on August 3rd, **the legislative decree that exempts the payment of the administrative penalty went into effect, benefiting migrants in economic precariousness and those who the charge put them in a situation of greater vulnerability.**

The border zone has also become a waiting territory for many migrants as they seek to be attended at the migration delegations. Religious, civil and non-governmental organizations have coordinated efforts to ensure that human rights are respected and that temporary shelters are set up. **The shelters in the city of Danlí have exceeded their capacity due to the high number of migrants entering (IOM, 2022).**

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to the IOM (2006), irregular migration refers to the movement of people outside the regulations of the sending, transit or receiving states. Within destination countries, it means that the entry, stay and work of a migrant who does not have the required authorization or documentation from the migration authorities is illegal. A migrant who violates the rules of admission and stay in a receiving country is referred to as an undocumented, clandestine or irregular migrant.

On the other hand, the concept of **“transit country”** has been defined as the **“country through which the individual or migratory group passes to its destination”** (IOM, 2006, p. 50). Undocumented or irregular migration in transit countries is associated with social, economic, political and cultural transformations resulting from the current geography of inequality and conflicts between the disparity in income, social conditions and social security between some countries and others (Álvarez Velasco, 2011, pp.7-8).

In general, irregular migrants are **exposed to abuses and violations of their human rights along the routes they must travel in transit countries**. In addition, certain migrant subpopulations occupy unequal positions that make them more vulnerable, so they live differentiated experiences, as the case of women and minors is (Nájera Aguirre, 2016). Violence in different expressions is another social fact present in irregular migration in transit. Criminal groups, extortion and kidnapping are some of the realities faced by migrants and are related to the characteristics of the space through which they transit (Nájera Aguirre, 2016, p.260).

From the perspective of transnationalism, irregular migrants have also been approached as social actors that interconnect distant regions, **set up networks through which they exchange migratory knowledge, strategies, experiences, money** and even manage to set up transnational communities that interconnect places of origin and destination (Álvarez Velasco, 2011, p.13).

For this research, reference is made to the work **“Migración de tránsito por la ruta de occidente de México: actores, riesgos y perfiles de vulnerabilidad”** by Adriana González Arias and Olga Aikin Araluce (2015), who conduct an analysis of Mexican and Central American migrants in transit starting from the category of vulnerability and recognizing the lack of protection of migrants, but also the conditions of agency when designing ways to face risk situations during the migratory route. Vulnerability is understood as **the level of exposure to risks** associated with insecurity, uncertainty and lack of protection against potential or real threats, while the difficulty in facing these risks derives from a series of factors such as lack of resources, individual characteristics and other structural conditions (Gonzales Arias and Aikin Araluce, 2015, p. 87).

Among the results of the aforementioned study is that vulnerability is permeated by factors such as age, nationality, gender, socioeconomic conditions, support networks and travel experiences. It is evident that most of them travel with **scarce resources and high risks in transit** such as extortion by migration authorities, sexual violence and aggressions by citizens and organized crime, among others.

Women traveling alone with minors show greater vulnerability due to their gender status, for fleeing a situation of domestic violence or lack of social capital during their journey. Migrants also show capacities to generate survival strategies to the extent that they have greater resources such as the use of support networks, electronic media and telephony (Gonzales Arias and Aikin Araluce, 2015, p. 112).

Therefore, this document adopts the vulnerability approach in order to describe the conditions in which migrants travel in transit through Honduras, by identifying the risks involved in the migratory route and the resources they have to **face these difficulties**.



4. RESULTS

4.1. Characterization of migrants in transit through Honduras

This section describes the sociodemographic characteristics of the migrant population in transit through Honduras that participated in this study, in order to identify the factors that have influenced their decision to migrate irregularly with their children. It also addresses their level of schooling, the ways in which they have financed their journey and the means of transportation used.

In the 28 interviews conducted, there are female and male migrants within a range of 21-53 years of age. Most of them are **migrating with their partner or other family members** and all are traveling with one or more children between the ages of 7 months and 16 years. Nationalities include Haitians, Colombians, Ecuadorians and Venezuelans, the latter is the largest group interviewed.



Regarding the level of schooling, it is noteworthy that most of the migrants interviewed have **completed secondary school**. We also interviewed 3 people with university degrees who were left unemployed in their country and only had the possibility of opting for a poorly paid underemployment. Thus, the only option they have is to emigrate to look for other alternatives.

The majority of the migrant profile responds to economic reasons. The interviewees mentioned that they decided to emigrate with their families and children because of the economic situation in their countries of origin. Some had their own home and others rented an apartment instead. A smaller number said they decided to undertake the migratory journey for reasons such as violence, extortion and kidnapping threats, while two of the interviewees mentioned being victims of political persecution.

Migrants agree that the situation in their countries of origin is precarious, with no possibility of a better life for them and especially for minors, for whom they see no personal or professional opportunities. In general, the main reason for migration with minors has to

do with unfavorable expectations for the future in their countries and with the search for better economic, health and educational conditions for their children:

“We want to reach our destination, so that our children can have a better life quality , so that at least they can study, obtain what we could not obtain in our country. If they get sick, they have a medical center to go and be treated. That they have a decent education, they have their materials to be able to study, all their things. Their good food, their three meals a day, that is what we want for our children to be well, because we are already grown up, but we want our children to have a better upbringing than ours” (Case No.3)

All of the migrants interviewed are traveling to the United States for the first time and the majority said that they do not have economic support in their countries of origin or do not have an acquaintance or family member at their destination. Regarding the mode of travel, most have used buses and have had to walk through the Darien jungle. A minority have also traveled in trucks, pickup trucks and canoes in order to cross the rivers. However, they mention that in the transit countries, bus fares are overpriced, reaching up to **US\$50 per person**.

Most do not have passports, only identity cards, and some do not have any documentation at all, many having lost them while crossing through the Darien jungle, which delays the intervention tasks at immigration offices and delays any banking procedures for those who receive external monetary aid.

Following the vulnerability categorization elaborated by González Arias and Aikin Araluce (2015), the profile of the migrants interviewed is close to the high vulnerability degree in which women with very few resources, people traveling with minors, very young or middle-aged male migrants without a consolidated profession and traveling for the first time, lacking previous travel experience, are recurrent. **In addition, support networks in the countries of origin, transit or destination are scarce or non-existent.**

4.2. Experiences of migrants in transit through Honduras

Regarding the experiences lived by migrants, it is important to mention that their information sources for deciding to undertake the journey were through friends and acquaintances who were preparing to emigrate or people who had already arrived in the United States. There are migrants who comment having used the internet, cell phones and digital communication through social networks such as Facebook and WhatsApp to get information and organize themselves before starting their journey. It has also been observed that they have other information sources such as migrants who already know the migratory route and shelters.

The existence of social capital through family, friends and community ties facilitates the migration process and provides information, opportunities and strategies when emigrating. However, as mentioned above, most of the interviewees do not have support networks in their countries of origin, transit or destination; and only 3 of the cases have family members who provide them with money to continue traveling and inform them through their migratory experiences to guide them during the journey:

“We used social networks to get into groups, we researched, found out and got advice from many people who had already traveled, we asked them, we had the audacity to ask them. We have friends who have already arrived, family members who have already arrived or are in the United States. I am in constant communication with my parents and my siblings and my children’s grandmother, who are in Venezuela. I have some aunts,uncles and friends in the United States.”
(Case No. 3.)

“Yes, it is expensive. We should have money in all the countries we go,if not, we can not stay there. We sold the things we had in our household, almost everything was sold. My parents are in Ecuador, and they request credits to keep sending me money to be able to get there.” **(Case No.4)**

Due to the precarious conditions in which they travel, most migrants said that they have had to beg for alms or food to be able to continue moving and to feed their children, which places them in a greater vulnerability degree. In the case of men who have a trade as day laborers, bricklayers or welders, they mention that they have managed to get a temporary job and earn money in a transit country. The work in which they are hired is usually precarious; two of the interviewed men expressed that they were hired for two or three days in some transit city, and with this, they were able to buy food for their partner and children. One of the interviewed men said that he built two ladders in Panama, and in Costa Rica, he worked for two days, earning between US\$15-20 per day (Case No. 2).

In their innocence, children do not understand the human drama of crossing the migratory route; however, those over 13 years of age have an intuition of the scenario they are going through and are the most emotionally affected. The testimonies found coincide with the recurrence of playful fantasies used by the youngest children between 7 and 10 years of age to cope with the emotional pain experienced during the crossing:

“At the beginning, my daughter saw it as a game, as an adventure; but as the days went by, she cried to me ‘let’s go back’, I told her ‘no, let’s go ahead’, what are we going to do if we sold everything?” (Case No. 7)

Most migrants traveling with children have encountered humanitarian aid along the way as they pass through transit countries. Several organizations provide them with guidance, food, medicine and shelter.

They have also found solidarity on the part of individuals who have helped them with tickets, and in some cases, by hosting them in their own homes. However, some of the interviewed migrants also narrate the painful situation of having encountered discrimination and xenophobia in some transit countries:

“In Ecuador... we arrived at dawn, the police arrived and treated us badly, they treated us really rude, they told us that we had to leave; that’s what they have to tell us, but at least, politely; instead they arrived with that arrogance, arbitrariness, they just said... go home, don’t stay here... go back to your country.” (Case No.7)

According to interviewees' narratives, there are underage migrants who have experienced high-risk situations and need psychotherapeutic support. In the case of mothers, the fear of losing one of their children and constantly looking out for their well-being during the journey causes post-traumatic stress disorder and it is considered a clinical emergency.

“A psycho-affective and social condition of this nature can delay the journey and increases the vulnerability degree of minors by having a parent who is more exposed or who does not have sufficient protection strategies for the young children. In some acute cases of anguish and depression, mothers turn to the faith and emotional support of family members with whom they are traveling or those left behind in the countries of origin..”

As this is the first time they have made the trip, they say they do not know in detail what awaits them on the rest of the journey, but the general perception is that the transit through Mexico is the most dangerous part of traveling with minors, especially based on the stories and experiences that other migrants have told them. Thus, there is fear and concern about being deported by immigration authorities or becoming victims of organized crime.

4.3. Risks and difficulties involved in the migratory route of the population in transit through Honduras.

Among the risks involved in the migratory route are those related to migratory controls, criminal acts and obstacles inherent to geographical conditions. Irregular migrants from South America and the Caribbean bound for the United States must not only transit Central America and Mexico, but also cross the Darien Gap, an area located on the border between Colombia and Panama.

This dense virgin jungle has fast-flowing rivers and swampy areas that provide habitat for wild cats, caimans and poisonous snakes. Illegal armed groups also operate in the jungle, exposing migrants to robbery and sexual violence. In recounting their experiences during the jungle journey, migrants reveal heartbreaking episodes:

“In the Darien jungle children are crying, mothers are worried, pregnant women are falling, many dead people. I saw a pregnant girl who hit her belly, her child was left outside and both died. The poor girl died there, in the jungle.” (Case No.9)

“In the Darien jungle, my grandson almost lost his life, he went into a swamp, the mud was getting up to his neck. My daughter desperately tried to pull him out. Thank God she managed to save his life, but my daughter got tangled in a vine and hurt her leg, spraining it, which has caused her leg to become inflamed.” (Case No.7)

Due to the geographical and climatic conditions of the route, minors have suffered from illnesses at some point of the trip, whether diarrhea from drinking contaminated water, fever from exposure to the outdoors (under the sun or rain), malnutrition due to lack of basic food, insect bites when passing through the Darien jungle and blind spots (unauthorized crossings) in transit through the different countries.

When making the trip for the first time, they lack previous experience and most of them did not know how dangerous this migratory route is. The interviewees perception differ once they have experienced the reality of traveling with children, women or elderly. Women and men traveling with children experience greater physical and psychological difficulties. One of the interviewees related the following:

“I suffer from my left knee and it has been a real difficulty to travel with children, above all, to walk in the mud in the jungle and in difficult terrain, you can slip on a stone, in a river, in a swamp and lose your life as has happened to many people.” (Ceso No. 9)

The presence of criminal groups and swindlers is another risk along the migratory route. Some interviewees were assaulted in the Darién jungle by illegal armed groups that charge a tax to allow them to transit. In transit towns and highways, they reported having been assaulted by criminals or swindled by coyotes or transport networks that charge exorbitant prices:

“It is real hard to pass through Pájaro Negro in Costa Rica, we passed at 12 o’clock at night. Men came out with machetes, it was very traumatic for the children, and finally when we arrived in Nicaragua they charged us again to take us to the other towns. They force us to do it because the safe-conduct costs 150 dollars even for the children. That’s why we come at night running danger, avoiding migration, because we don’t have to pay, imagine us, 4 would be 600 dollars and how can we afford it without money?” (Case. No. 9)

One of the interviewed migrants mentioned an episode in which he was assaulted by armed groups in the Darién jungle:

“The hooded men with guns ask you for 100 dollars each, and if you don’t have it, they tell you: “then, the children and women stay”. If you pay, you go out and those who didn’t pay, they should be stayed. Sometimes, people are followed to take them all their money, if they realize that they have enough dollars.

That is already coordinated, because they ask you for information about those who come after you to steal from them as well. They already have information, but they are verifying it.” (Case. No. 7)

Another of the difficulties involved in the journey has to do with the ability to cope with risks. In order to finance their journey, most migrants traveling with children have self-managed the trip, having to sell all their property and belongings in their country of origin. When running out of money or having scarce resources, some of them look for blind spots to avoid migration controls at the borders and beg in the streets to raise money to buy airfare, get food and keep moving forward:

“We don’t know anyone, and without money in my pocket, I really had to beg to be able to continue with my children. I was hunger, so I preferred to ask for food, because I am not a beggar, but I do ask for a plate of food for my children, and most of all because my child suffers from anemia and he needs iron.” (Case No.5)

Most of the interviewed migrants have had to sleep on the streets on many occasions, since the little money they brought with them from the sale of their properties in their country has been lost along the way, as they have been victims of assault and fraud due to excessive charges for fares and food. To protect themselves when they sleep in the streets or on the roadsides, they decide to form groups of people or family members and protect the children in the tents, if they have one.

4.4. Case studies



CASE NO. 1

Moraima

She is a **53-year-old woman whose schooling went up to elementary school**, She is the mother of a 30-year-old son, a 27-year-old daughter and a 13-year-old son. Originally from Ecuador, she worked as a kitchen helper before starting with her husband of 52 years and their 13-year-old son on their migratory journey to the United States. She says that they decided to leave their country because of poverty, the cost of the basic food basket and the scarce job opportunities for people of their age.

Throughout her trip **she has maintained regular communication** via WhatsApp with her older children who reside in Ecuador and receives financial support from them who send her the little money obtained from the sale of mattresses, the television and household appliances that she left in the apartment she rented with her husband.

Regarding the risks and difficulties involved in the migratory route, Moraima mentions that she **has had several difficulties during the entire journey.** She relates that she regrets having migrated and putting her son's life at risk by remembering the moment when they were in danger of drowning in the river during the journey through the Darien jungle, the uncertainty that the journey conveys, the wild animals, the fatigue, the days that they have not consumed any food and the fear of criminal groups that operate in the jungle. **These experiences have also affected her youngest son who suffers from nightmares and wakes up crying at night.**

As a migrant, she has been deceived by fraudsters who have overpriced food, hotels, drinking water and personal items in the countries she has traveled through. For this reason, she **distrusts the people around her** and feels vulnerable in the face of her experiences. She avoids thinking about what lies ahead for the rest of the journey through Guatemala and Mexico, focusing on her present rather than the uncertainty of the immediate future.

She reflects that, in spite of the difficulties, hunger and physical wear and tear due to her age, **it is the strength and encouragement from her husband and youngest son who accompany her that has allowed her to continue the journey.** She maintains her trust in God and the hope of reaching the United States to find a good job that will allow her to provide for her son's basic needs



CASE NO. 2

Fernando

He is a **23-year-old man from Venezuela. He completed his high school degree in science with an university degree in electrical engineering unfinished.** He is traveling with a group of twelve people, including his wife and two daughters, one 4 years old and the other 2 years old. He also travels with a brother, who is accompanied by his 4-year-old daughter, who is autistic. Fernando emigrated to Peru with his family 5 years ago, but 5 months ago he started his journey to the United States in **search of better opportunities for his daughters,** because he perceives that in his country of origin it is not possible to live due to economic difficulties.

Regarding his migration experience, he decided to migrate after his brother started the migration route earlier - at the time of this interview Fernando's

brother is at the border of Mexico and the United States - and has guided him throughout the journey through Facebook, as Fernando does not have a cell phone and internet and **must go to Internet centers** when he has the opportunity to communicate with his brother and he can show him the way forward.

This is the first time he has made the trip to the United States and he maintains that the economic cost of the trip has been indefinite. He worked as a welder in Venezuela and Peru, and began his migratory journey with his paycheck and \$350 he can save. He says that **in order to continue moving forward, he has had to sell candies and work** as a welder in Panama and Costa Rica.

He knew that the migratory route was difficult and dangerous, but he perceives that in his personal case, **he has had more risks and the trip has been longer because he travels with minors**. He relates that his two girls got sick with diarrhea and fever in the Darien jungle, while his wife had a lot of vomit from drinking river water. He also says that his daughters cry regularly on the road, especially when they have to walk long distances.

Hunger has been another of the difficulties, he says that on several occasions he has spent two or three days without food, because **when he gets something to eat, he tries to make sure that his daughters can eat before him**, even if it is only bread and cookies. He has been able to eat something "salty" like a little chicken, rice or tuna in the shelters.

He constantly feels insecure about sleeping on the street or on the side of a highway. In the group in which he travels, they only have two tents to spend the nights and the minors rest in them, so the rest of the migrants sleep around the tents. For this reason, he considers that he is exposed to the danger of assailants or drunken people.

Mentally, he still wishes to continue with the migratory route, but he feels that physically he cannot continue moving forward and wishes to settle down for a month in a transit country. After **the experiences lived during the trip, he maintains that he would not have dared to emigrate** and would have stayed in Peru, Colombia or Chile, because he considers that in these countries there are opportunities to work as a welder, making metal structures and repairing construction machinery.

Many migrants have warned him of what awaits him on the rest of his journey. He has heard about **cases of rape of migrant women and theft of minors**. He is worried, especially about the transit of Mexico and the risk of exposing his wife and daughters to human trafficking networks, but he avoids showing his fears because he wants to convey strength to his family.



CASE NO. 3

Danimileth

She is a 23-year-old woman from the city of Caracas, Venezuela. Her education is high school level. She travels with her husband and three children, a 6-year-old boy, a 3-year-old girl and an 8-month-old baby. She is a housewife and her husband works in construction and home remodeling. She decided to immigrate with her family to the United States because she mentioned that in her country of origin the salary is not enough to support her large family and she **wants her children to have better opportunities, access to health and education.**

She began to learn about the migration route through social networks, friends and other people who had already made the journey. In addition, she says that she has uncles who are already in the United States and have constantly advised her on the path to follow and the shelters to look for. She also **maintains constant communication** with her parents, siblings and her children's grandmother that are in Venezuela.

She started her journey with USD 1,200 that her husband had saved and that made it as far as Costa Rica, later her husband's aunt sent them 500 dollars as a loan to be able to continue. Back in Costa Rica, she says that they were victims of a robbery and lost the money they had received, which is why she had to **beg in the streets with her children** while her husband worked for three days remodeling two rooms in a hotel.

In Nicaragua, in addition to experiencing discrimination because of their migrant status, **transportation fares are overpriced**, as a US\$5 fare is worth US\$50 for migrants.

She feels depressed because she thinks that she lost everything on the trip and feels anguish when she thinks about the trip through Mexico, since she has heard from her migrant friends that during the journey they are exposed to **violence, discrimination, human trafficking and kidnapping of minors.** In addition, she is worried that she will not be able to enter the United States and that all the effort would be in vain.

Since embarking on her journey, three months ago, Danimileth says it has been difficult, crossing the Darien jungle took 9 days and she was in danger of drowning while crossing a river. She witnessed an episode where a 6 month pregnant woman was swept away by the current and they were unable to help her.

She tells that these experiences have affected her children physically and emotionally. The older ones were sick with diarrhea and vomiting for several days while her baby was sick, has suffered from fever and cold. After leaving the jungle and upon entering Honduras through the Trojes border, the minors started crying saying “it's the jungle, I don't want to go to the jungle, I don't want to, I don't want to”. She said that if she had known that the whole journey was so difficult she would not have exposed her children.

Since their sleeping tent deteriorated in the Darien, they had to discard it. The overflowing shelters have forced them to sleep on the streets and on occasion they have received help from people who have given them lodging at home, providing them with a mat to rest on. Faith in God and being able to cross the northern border of Mexico to enter the United States are her hopes; and once there, she hopes to be able to rent an apartment so that **her children have a place to sleep, that they can study and play sports**, and to be able to get a job to support her husband.



CASE NO. 4

Jessica

She is an Ecuadorian woman traveling with her husband and two children of 10 and 3 years old. **She decided to emigrate because of the precarious economic and social situation in her country of origin.** She mentions that she had no job and that the high rates of violence put her children at risk, that is why she was forced to divest herself of her belongings and embark on her journey. She learned about the migration route from friends who have already arrived in the United States, and this is the first time she has made the trip. To protect herself from the risks involved in the journey, she organized a group of 31 migrants.

She is aware of the danger and comments that in the Darien jungle she regretted having emigrated because of the risk of drowning in a fast-flowing river and the adversities involved in carrying her youngest son on her back, the dehydration she suffered and the mosquito bites., She had to sell her household possessions in her home country. She mentions that, fortunately, **traveling in a large group has given them more security during the jungle crossing** and when crossing the rivers they passed their children carried on the shoulders of adults. Their youngest son had diarrhea and was treated with their first aid kit, when they arrived in Panama they were attended by the Red Cross.

On the other hand, she says that her parents and siblings who live in Ecuador have had to resort to borrowing money to finance her trip. She maintains communication with her parents, and when she no longer has money during the trip she asks to them and they send her remittances, which has allowed her to buy food, especially meals based on chicken meat and carbohydrates for her children. Within the group with which she travels, they also **maintain ties of solidarity, lending each other money to be able to continue moving forward.**

Jessica shares the experience with her **youngest son who does not assimilate it, and he thinks it is just a trip; but when night falls, he asks when they will return to home.** On the other hand, the older son does not take the situation in the best way, but he understands that the trip is made to improve the living conditions of the whole family. Since she has a financing source in her country of origin, she has a better chance of continuing her migratory route.



CASE NO. 5

Lía

She is a 33-year-old Colombian woman with a **technical degree in business administration.** Together with her husband, their 11-year-old daughter, 9-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter, she set out on her journey with limited resources. The reason why she decided to start her journey by an unknown route was the prevailing violence in her country and the presence of armed groups operating in the mountains and small towns, dedicated to kidnapping and extortion. In this case, they were threatening to kidnap Lía's eldest daughter.

Despite her and her children's fatigue, they prefer to continue with the journey. She comments that she has experienced moments of great difficulty throughout the journey and when multiple obstacles or anguish or despair moments appear, she and her partner argue with each other very startled. These episodes are very recurrent and she is aware that this situation affects the children emotionally. She also says that she **travels with her children because she could not leave them alone in her country for fear of harming them.**

It is worth mentioning that she and her children are in a very vulnerable situation, she **has no friends or family to constantly monitor her journey** due to the loss of cell phones and telephone numbers. Upon her arrival in Honduras,

she is surrounded by all kinds of episodes of begging, illness, emotional instability and hunger that has lasted for more than 48 hours. She hinted that she is being mistreated in some way by her partner, who refused to give an interview.

In Nicaragua, she felt discriminated against. Because she is migrating with scarce resources, **she has had to beg for food for her children and has slept with her family on the streets**. At the time of the interview, she was waiting for a space to be allowed access to the shelter located near the Migration Office in the municipality of Trojes, El Paraíso.

She feels depressed and has had episodes of anxiety and crying, but comments that her young children give her support and encouragement words. She does not know the route she is missing, although she mentions having heard that in Mexico they are deporting, and that the transit through the country is dangerous, as migrants are shot at and other migrants have advised her that she should take good care of her children and not separate from them.



CASE NO. 6

Gabriel

He is a 30-year-old man, Venezuelan, accompanied by his wife of 26 years and their children of 10 and 8 years, respectively. He was a policeman in his country, **but his monthly salary was not enough to support his family**. For this reason, he immigrated to Peru where he stayed for a year, but because of his migrant status, he was unable to find a stable job. He says that he has friends and co-workers who are already in the United States and they motivated him to take the migratory route for the first time.

The trip has turned out to be very expensive. He says that in order to begin emigrating he sold his household appliances, motorcycle and furniture. Since he left Peru, he has had to spend approximately US\$3,500. Since he no longer has any money to buy food, Gabriel **has had to sell his cell phone, lollipops or ask for money**.

He is constantly considering whether to return to his country or to continue, but in both cases, he needs money and has no financial support. His parents live in rural Venezuela, and they only hear his voice over the phone when someone rents them a cell phone. When recounting the journey through the

Darien, he recognizes that he **will never be able to get the** horrifying episodes he experienced during nine days **of hunger, fatigue and experiences out of his mind**, such as noticing the corpses that appeared in the mud as he advanced through the jungle. When traveling with children he had to move at a slower pace, although he mentions that the little ones took the journey as a game, running and getting ahead on the road.

Gabriel's story is still marked by uncertainty, he no longer has any money and believes he will have to resume small commercial activities such as selling candies and popsicles in towns and cities along the route. In addition, he hopes that the Hondurans will allow him to work as a day laborer in order to continue and support the group that accompanies him. **He trusts in God's favor to reach the United States.**



CASO NO. 7

José

He is a 50-year-old man who suffers from diabetes. He is from Venezuela, and he decided to emigrate with 23 members of his family, including his 13-year-old daughter and 70-year-old mother. The reason they decided to undertake this risky journey was **due to the insecurity faced by the family**, which they attribute to political reasons.

Because of this, they decided to sell the few things they had in order to leave the country for Peru and remained there during four years. A month and a half ago, they set out on the migratory route with the goal of reaching the United States to find a better life for the members of their family, which consists of **14 adults and 10 children between the ages of 4 and 14.**

Being a large family traveling with 10 children, José mentions that they have had to go through many difficulties, especially with his daughter who asks him crying to go back., They stayed 16 days during the journey through the Darien jungle, in that time **they were hungry, cold, dehydration, diarrhea, vomiting and fever with the children, and one of them almost lost his life when he fell into a swamp.**

José comments in the interview that even knowing how dangerous the route was before crossing it, they took the risk, as they had no other alternative.

Then, , they lost a bag at the camp in Armilla with part of the money they had brought with them; since then, the situation has been harder for the family. The only hope he has is to reach the United States. He reiterates that, if he had known how dangerous the crossing was, he would not have come, although he also recognizes that there are people who have helped and supported them in the different countries of transit.

Because they are a large family with multiple needs, they have had to sell candies to make up the fare and be able to eat. When they arrived in Nicaragua, they had to beg for alms. Illnesses in the family group have been the order of the day. He says that his daughter and mother have been suffering from fever, vomiting and diarrhea. However, **all the Red Cross shelters that they have been visited, have helped them with medicines**, but in his case, he has not been able to buy the medicine for diabetes, because he has given priority to the children and his mother.

He comments that they were victims of discrimination by the police in Ecuador. When they arrived in that country at dawn, the police treated them very badly, with arrogance and arbitrariness, shouting at them to go back to their country. José assures that this has been the only country where they have felt discriminated against.

José **feels physically and emotionally exhausted**, and with tearful eyes, he expressed that he has been emotionally broken, because with the loss of money, he has spent days with hunger, and other days, they have only eaten once to be able to save a little and complete money to buy the fares. On many occasions, they have had to sleep on the streets, because when they arrive at the shelters at night, they are closed or overcrowded.

He thanks God because they have found people who have helped them with food, clothes and even with their airfare, and that is why they have been able to reach Honduras.



CASE NO. 8

Romy

He is a 32-year-old father of a family, originally from Haiti, with a high school education. Romy travels with his wife and two-year-old daughter. He mentions that six years ago he left Haiti for Brazil, where he settled for a long time

with his wife. From Brazil, he decided to take the migratory route about a month ago. They maintain communication via WhatsApp with other people of his group and family members in the United States who are financing the trip, which has not been cheap, since they have been able to pass through the migration borders, paid for lodging and bought food.

He says that apart from the economic cost, the route has not been easy, **because his baby has been sick on several occasions**, mainly arriving in Panama where the child arrived dehydrated with a lot of diarrhea and vomiting. He feels that he is more physically than emotionally prepared to continue with the route, but he maintains the hope of being able to reach his objective that is the United States to be able to work. He did not know that the migratory route was so difficult and even less so dangerous, because if they had known, they would never have risked so much.

The experience in the Darien jungle was extremely complicated, as **they faced many risks, went through floods and almost lost their lives**. He also comments that they were three days without food, they only drank water and the baby was only kept with milk. They endured hunger, cold, sickness and extreme danger, as they crossed the rivers with nooses tied around their waists.

He expresses with astonishment that Nicaragua has been the most expensive migratory border, as they were charged \$150 each, including the baby, paying a total of \$450. He is aware of what awaits them later and knows that the remaining migratory route will not be easy, but he **has no other option, because they cannot return**. With the girl's illness, people have helped them with medicines, because, although they receive money from their relatives, it is not enough. He says that fortunately they have not been victims of assault, discrimination or violence.



CASE NO. 9

Lorenys

She is a 30-year-old woman from Venezuela with a Bachelor of Science degree. She travels with her two children of ages 7 and 9, and her 16-year-old niece. She decided to emigrate with her two children **because of the lack of work and opportunities**. She left Venezuela to Ecuador 5 years ago, but in this country, she says that the situation is also very difficult, as she lived in a very

dangerous area with high rates of violence and crime, so she began to emigrate to the United States a month ago.

She learned about the migratory route through friends and acquaintances who left, but she comments that it is never the same, that each experience is different. Lorenys **has lost communication with other people in the group and even with some family members**, since her cell phone got wet on the way; so they are finding out through the news if the border between Mexico and the United States has been opened.

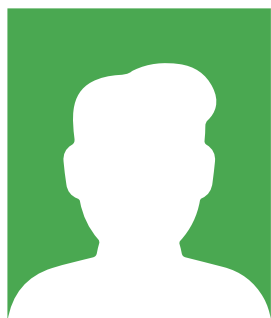
She says that the trip is very difficult for people who bring little or no money. At each border, they want to charge high prices even for children. In Costa Rica the cost of the ticket was \$120, not counting food. In Darien, she was **robbed by hooded people** carrying up to two guns each and they charged her and the children that were accompanying her 100 dollars. After this robbery, she was still able to continue with some money, but in Naranjal and Pájaro Negro, Costa Rica she was robbed again by people carrying machetes, robbing her the little money she had left.

When she arrived in Nicaragua, she had to beg for money on the street with her children and niece to complete the fare. However, they had to risk crossing the border with Honduras at night through blind spots (unauthorized points) to avoid the \$150 charge per person, including the children, because they had no money to pay.

She never imagined that they were going to close the border to the United States, since she found out on the way, and she **considers it impossible to return, since she sold everything she had and the money was also lost.** She has had to sleep together with the children in the street on many occasions and eat once a day. To solve the lack of food for her children, she asks for money on the street, something she has never done before in her life. With tears in her eyes, Lorenys narrates in the interview that this whole journey has been extremely difficult. She points out that the children have been real warriors, because **apart from the psychological trauma, they have also had diarrhea, dehydration, flu and pneumonia symptoms.** The cause was the constant rains they were exposed to in the Darien jungle, as they spent 15 days there, where it rains every day. She also witnessed episodes of several migrants losing their lives in the jungle, including a pregnant woman.

She says that she and the children have been victims of discrimination. In one of the transit countries, they were told they had to get off the bus because they were not nationals. **She had no idea that the migratory route was so difficult and dangerous** so she believes she would never have risked traveling with the children. She feels physically and emotionally exhausted, in every place she

arrives she feels the uncertainty of not knowing if her children will eat or if they will have a place to rest. She says that resting is a luxury that they have not been able to afford, even though they have been housed in some shelters. Their migratory experience is exhausting and a struggle to survive in each place they arrive with their children, because when they get to a place, they have nowhere to bathe, change a sanitary pad and do their physiological needs.



CASE NO. 10

Ámbar

He is a 42-year-old Venezuelan man with a completed high school education in his country. He travels with his wife, an adult daughter, another 2-year-old daughter, a 14-year-old son with epilepsy problems and 9 other members, including uncles, brothers and nephews. His migratory history begins in 2019, year in which he left to Peru due to the economic situation in Venezuela. She lived in Peru for two years, and when his work permit expired he had to return to his country.

He received threats and extortion attempts in Venezuela, because criminals thought that he was bringing a lot of money since he came from another country. Although he tried to obtain support from community and municipal authorities, he did not receive it.

He decided not to pay the extortionists who were charging him to live in his own house. To get out of this situation, he was forced to sell his house, car and everything he had built during his life at prices below the real cost. He managed to raise \$8,000 and set out on his journey with his family, including siblings, cousins and nephews.

They were assaulted twice in the Darien jungle. The first time they asked for \$100 for the right of passage from each of their relatives. They were heavily armed and hooded. They spent many days in the jungle, **as they had to move at a slower pace when carrying children.** The second time they were assaulted, it was 10 days after being in the jungle, where another armed group of about 15 people came out and searched their pants, pockets, socks, the tongues of their shoes and even their deodorants, since some people had hidden money there. Women had their hair and bras searched to see if they had money. They took their bags and began to search in them. Even though the money was hidden in a sewn backpack, they found it and **took everything from them.**

Ámbar narrates that after that experience, it was difficult to go through the jungle. Although they had a lot of faith, they **felt that their lives were in danger from armed groups as well as from rising rivers, swamps and encounters with dangerous animals** such as snakes. To cross a 5 meter river they were asked 10 dollars for each person, and since they did not have any money, Ámbar asked the people in charge if they could help with anything to pay for the passage through the Darien jungle.

When they arrived in Panama, they were able to leave with humanitarian aid and they were transported in buses. Relatives and friends in Colombia sold the few things they had to help them to continue the migration route. When they left the jungle, they learned that the U.S. border was closed, **but he affirms that their only option is to continue moving towards their destination country which is Canada.**

Their children have become sick on the way, the 2 year old baby had a lot of diarrhea to the point of dehydration; likewise, the other children in the family group have also become sick. When they arrived in Costa Rica, they had to beg for alms, since the little that the family had sent them had run out. He was not used to begging because he mentions that in the times of prosperity in his country he had a good job and comforts. He **never thought that he would have to emigrate** with his whole family and take such a risk. When they started their trip they were in good physical condition, he says that he was chubbier and that his 14-year-old son was an athlete in Venezuela. However, the physical condition of the family group is deplorable. He argues that they **have lost weight and her daughter is just recovering from dehydration due to diarrhea.** They have all fallen ill with flu, diarrhea and cough, but have been given help with medicines, mainly in Honduras.

Ámbar says that he **has had to deal with her son's epilepsy problems,** since he has had repeated seizures and he has not been able to get the medicines he needs to lead a normal life. He has asked for help at several Red Cross points, but they have not provided them, because **they only have basic medicines.** In his country of origin, the boy was taking Oxycodal and in the absence of this, a stronger dose of Carbamazepine. His son cannot drink coffee, sun, sodas and he needs to sleep and eat well, so he has been barely able to maintain his health.

They feel they **have been victims of fraud because they want to charge them high costs for fares and food** and they have had to sleep on the sidewalks of the streets. They stayed working for a few days in Panama by selling Venezuelan food, and that is how they were able to pay for the ticket and a little for food. They only eat once a day, giving priority to the children. **It is faith and hope that keep him on his feet** to continue struggling and he hopes to find a better life in the country of his destination.

5. RESULTS

The interviewed migrants commented that they decided to emigrate due to a series of social, economic and political factors. Poverty, lack of opportunities, human rights violations and unemployment are some of the reasons why they leave their countries of origin. In this sense, the profile of the migrant presents a high vulnerability level because they are men and women who cross the migratory route with minors. Their education level is secondary school and they have few resources to face the difficulties that arise along the way. In terms of their migratory experiences, economic precariousness appears as a constant and few strategies or capacities to face such a dangerous migratory route were also identified. Since the lack of resources, they beg for money, sell candies and in some cases work in the cities of transit. They also sleep on the streets and when they can, they find refuge in a shelter. To protect themselves from criminal acts, they seek the company of large groups of people or family members.



Social networks and the Internet have been important tools for their organization at the time of embarking on their journey.

However, in exceptional cases, they do not have support networks in their home countries or in the United States, and this is the first time they are making the journey, so they lack previous experience and knowledge of the road ahead.

The risks of the migratory route include a series of factors related to geographic conditions and insecurity from criminal groups. Transit through the Darién jungle is the most dangerous experience, and all interviewees agreed that they had fallen ill, had not eaten, and the high risks involved in traveling with minors.

In addition to the dangers of the Darién jungle, there is insecurity due to the presence of illegal armed groups, assaults and extortion. In transit cities, migrants are vulnerable to frauds in transportation, lodging and dining facilities. They have also reported cases of high charges to minors at migration borders.

On the other hand, it has been observed that child migration in the company of one or more family members is in a highly vulnerable situation. The crossing in the Darien involves the exposure of minors to armed groups, wild animals, diseases and lack of drinking water. In addition, according to some interviewees, several minors experienced episodes of danger and others lost their lives.

According to testimonials of parents, the climatic conditions of the migratory route have affected all the minors who have been suffering from different illnesses such as flu, cough, pneumonia symptoms, fever, diarrhea, dehydration and malnutrition due to nutritional deficiency. Most of those interviewees commented that they have had to sleep on the streets with the children, which exposes them to cold, disease and theft by criminal groups. In some cases, parents minimize the emotional impact that migration has had on their children.



All interviewees traveling with minors reported that they received medical, financial, shelter, clothing and food assistance from humanitarian, civil and religious institutions in the transit countries.

However, despite the fact that efforts to protect migrant children are expanding, an urgent issue that must be highlighted is the inadequate medical care in the absence of medicines and specialists for migrant children suffering from complex pathologies such as epilepsy, third degree burns, asthma, different types of allergies, autism, Down syndrome, among others.

Given the risks, vulnerability and difficulties described above, it is necessary to expand the mechanisms that guarantee the human rights of adult and minor migrants in transit. In addition, it has been possible to observe the post-traumatic stress symptoms faced by many mothers and minors interviewed during the experience of the migratory journey, which requires urgent intervention by all state and non-governmental actors to strengthen psychological care and support for children and adolescents.



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