



# *Saliendo Adelante*

## Why migrants risk it all

Brief on Creative Associates International's research study into the differentiating factors of migration from the Northern Triangle

## At the root of migration

The pervasive challenges of the Northern Triangle, its fragile economies and epidemic levels of gang violence, lead thousands to cross borders in search of a better future. If the global development community is to respond to the ongoing but constantly shifting migration crisis, it requires nuanced and in-depth data that go beyond common knowledge of the region's economics and security situation.

Creative Associates International believes that development can significantly mitigate irregular migration through a *first mile approach* – one that addresses the specific factors that trigger someone to leave their home. With an intentional and targeted first mile approach, development programs can address the root causes that drive migration and ultimately reduce the number of people embarking on an often dangerous journey, whose absence reverberates through their communities.

It is important to note that this first mile approach must be tailored for each location, based on the specific factors that push people to emigrate from one high-migration area as opposed to another. In fact, the success of this approach in mitigating migration hinges on a localized strategy.

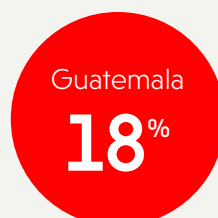
In February 2019, Creative commissioned an ambitious research study that first zeroed in on those municipalities that have the highest rates of outward migration from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Analyzing data from nearly 900 municipalities, Creative identified the 60 that

combined account for more than half of all the region's emigration. In those 60 municipalities, Creative then conducted 2,400 individual in-person surveys to gather data on intentions to migrate, family, the economic situation of the household and exposure to crime, among other points. Based on these surveys and extensive data analysis, Creative was able to distinguish the different triggers of migration in each municipality, as well as paint a general portrait of potential migrants. These conclusions shed light on the region's textured migration landscape and can be used to inform highly focused programming that can mitigate irregular migration and improve the conditions of Central Americans.

The study took on the name “Saliendo Adelante,” borrowing from a Spanish phrase that was heard frequently across the region as people described what drives them to migrate – their resilience and desire to move forward in life.

The factors at play in each of these 60 mostly urban municipalities, while varied, can be broken down into three principal categories: economics, victimization and transnational ties.

### Percentage of survey respondents who intend to migrate



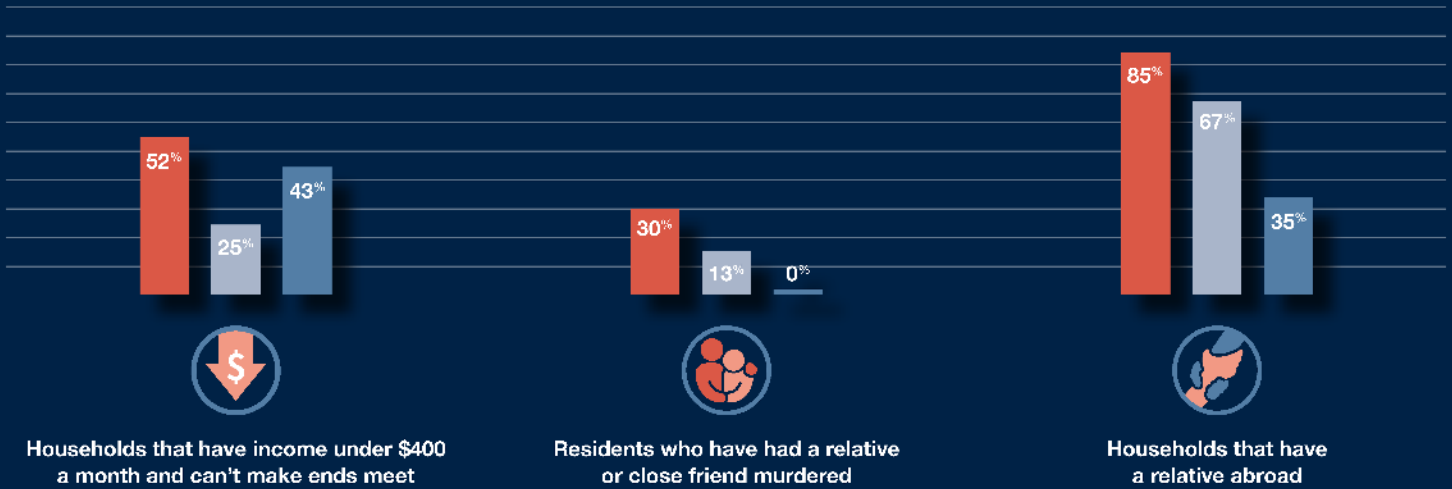
## Local data for targeted solutions

The factors that influence migration vary widely across the Northern Triangle's diverse communities. The three municipalities below seem similar at first glance: They all have populations under 300,000, and in each, 35% of residents plan to migrate. However, a closer look at the data shows significant differences among them.

■ La Ceiba, Honduras

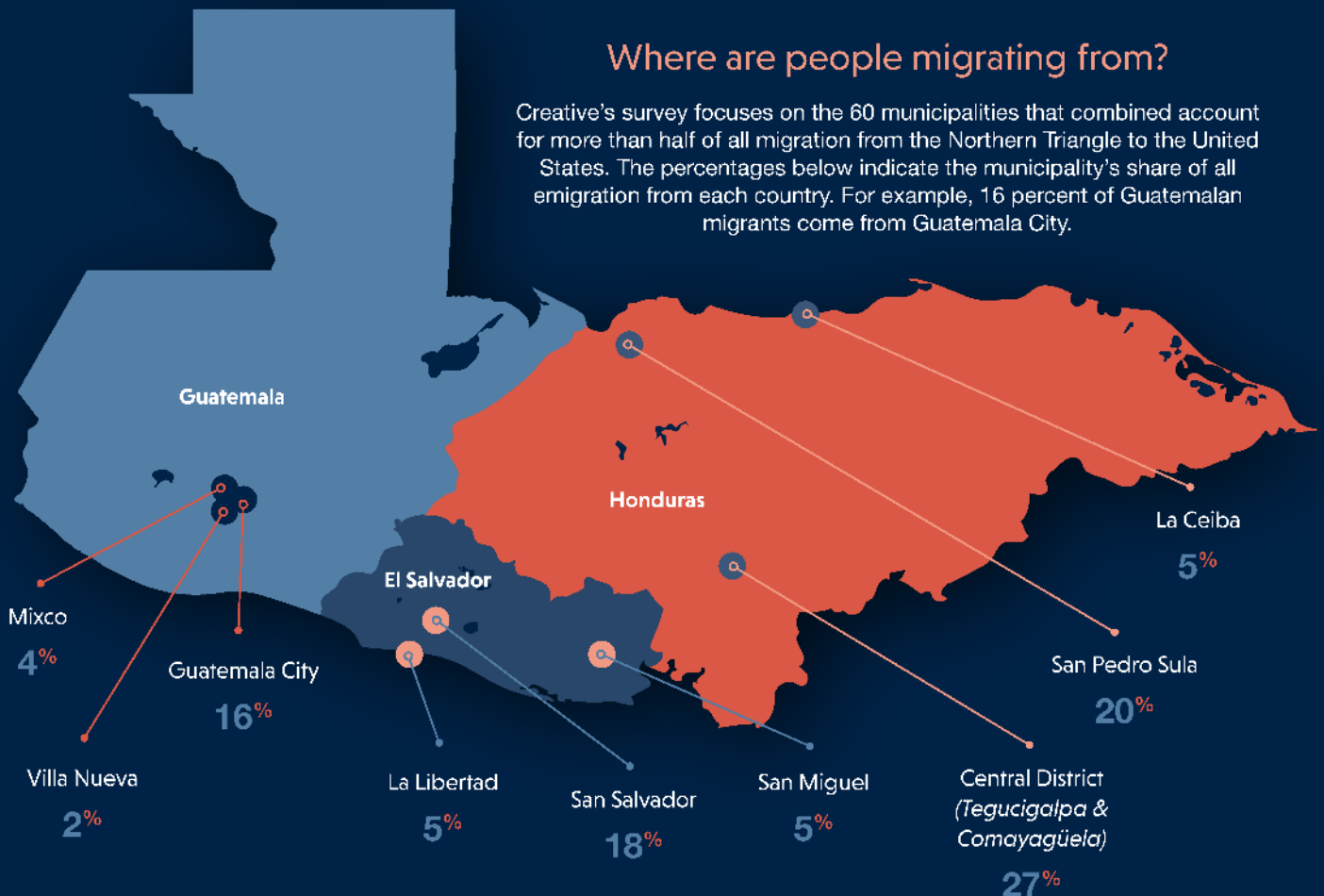
■ Soyapango, El Salvador

■ Totonicapán, Guatemala



## Where are people migrating from?

Creative's survey focuses on the 60 municipalities that combined account for more than half of all migration from the Northern Triangle to the United States. The percentages below indicate the municipality's share of all emigration from each country. For example, 16 percent of Guatemalan migrants come from Guatemala City.







# ECONOMICS

The principal factors that differentiate those who do intend to migrate from those who do not in the 60 high-migration municipalities surveyed fall under the category of economics. When asked what their primary reason for migrating would be, more than 60 percent of respondents cited economic-related concerns. Migration from the Northern Triangle occurs against the backdrop of a vulnerable regional economy, where many of those who are working do so in an informal capacity with few protections or opportunities for advancement.

Within the broader context of economics, three main factors were found to be differentiators:

*Figure 1:*

Percentage of those who intend to migrate who cite economic concerns as their primary reason for migration.

EL SALVADOR - 50%  
 GUATEMALA - 71%  
 HONDURAS - 67%

## Unemployment

On average across the region's high-migration municipalities, being unemployed makes someone nearly twice as likely to consider migrating. According to Creative's analysis, the issue of unemployment is particularly influential in Guatemala and El Salvador, and slightly less so in Honduras.

By looking closely at the local data, the study can also identify the municipalities in which unemployment is a stronger push factor for migration. In Guatemala City, for example, 16 percent of those who have considered migrating are unemployed, compared to just 5 percent who have not considered migrating but are unemployed. Holding a low-skill and unstable job is also a differentiator in Guatemala City, and 20 percent of those who have considered migrating are low-skill workers.

## Household Earnings

Those whose households earn less than \$400 a month and who cannot make ends meet are 1.25 times more likely to consider migrating. More than one-third of survey respondents reported household earnings under the \$400 line and said they could not make ends meet.

However, in breaking this information down further, Creative found that individuals in that group whose households earn under \$200 monthly and who cannot make ends meet are actually less likely to migrate. One explanation could be that those with the most limited resources cannot afford the journey; depending on the country, hiring a coyote, or smuggler, to lead the trip to the U.S. border can cost up to \$8,000 per person.

## Pessimistic Outlook

Believing that their household's economic situation is on the decline is an interestingly strong indicator of migration. This is particularly true in high-migration municipalities in Honduras, where believing that the household is worse off than it was the previous year makes individuals 1.5 times more likely to consider migrating.

Looking closely at the coastal municipality of La Ceiba, Honduras, pessimistic economic outlook is a clear differentiator: 71 percent of those who have considered migrating think their economic situation will be worse next year, compared to 39 percent who have not considered migrating but feel the same.

*Figure 2:*

**Migration and unemployment among youth ages 18 to 29**

	EL SALVADOR		GUATEMALA		HONDURAS	
	Plans to migrate & unemployed	No plans to migrate & unemployed	Plans to migrate & unemployed	No plans to migrate & unemployed	Plans to migrate & unemployed	No plans to migrate & unemployed
Young men	20%	10.4%	18.4%	2.2%	23.6%	18.4%
Young women	18.5%	1.9%	11.5%	8.6%	8.3%	4.2%



# Saliendo Adelante: Isabel



Isabel	Age 20
Location	Salcajá, Guatemala
Migration experience	Has not migrated but intends to
Primary reason for migrating	Unemployment; wants to provide more economic stability for her family
Hopes for her future	Dreams of becoming a doctor to help those with limited resources

“Here, there aren’t many jobs, and the jobs that exist don’t pay well. So I want to run the risk to be able to get to the U.S.”

- Isabel

Figure 3:

### Pessimistic Economic Outlook in Tegucigalpa and La Ceiba, Honduras

These two municipalities show how the same differentiating factor can uniquely affect people from different areas. While having a pessimistic economic outlook is a strong motivation in both, the factor’s effect on the likelihood of migration in La Ceiba is far stronger. Both cities exhibit similar rates of irregular migration.

Municipality	Intends to migrate and thinks economic situation will worsen	Does not intend to migrate but thinks economic situation will worsen
Tegucigalpa, Honduras	48%	34%
La Ceiba, Honduras	71%	39%



# VICTIMIZATION

Across the Northern Triangle, and particularly in high-migration, urban municipalities, residents are coping with levels of violence that are among the highest in the world. Creative's study sought to look beyond the alarming homicide rates and focus instead on personal experiences of victimization and how they relate to migration. The study focused not just on homicides, but also on exposure to other crimes that breed feelings of insecurity, including extortion, robbery, bribery and violence against women.

Regionally, having been a victim of a crime or having a family member or someone close to you who has been makes an individual 1.5 times more likely to consider migrating. The analysis suggests that how people react to these crimes varies significantly by country and by municipality; Hondurans and Salvadorans appear to be more greatly impacted by victimization than Guatemalans.

## Homicides

Having personal exposure to homicide is a clear differentiating factor in the high-migration municipalities of both Honduras and El Salvador.

Nearly one-third of survey respondents who have considered migrating from Honduras have had a family member or close friend murdered, while 15 percent of those who do not intend to migrate have lost a relative or friend to homicide.

## Robbery

Even more so than homicides, robberies are a powerful influencer of migration decisions. Again, this is truer in Honduras and El Salvador than in Guatemala.

In Honduras, 61 percent of those who have considered migrating have been robbed on the street, compared to 39 percent who haven't considered migrating but have been robbed.

## Extortion

Extortions are particularly concentrated in the high-migration municipalities surveyed. Eighty-six percent of the total registered extortions in Honduras in 2017 occurred in these municipalities, which are home to less than 60 percent of the total population. In El Salvador, 70 percent of registered extortions occurred in high-migration municipalities, and in Guatemala, 43 percent. Extortions seem to have the biggest impact in El Salvador: Nearly a quarter of those who have considered migrating have been extorted, compared to 11 percent of people who have not considered migrating but have been extorted.

Figure 4:

**Percentage of those who intend to migrate who cite victimization factors as their primary reason for migration**

EL SALVADOR	GUATEMALA	HONDURAS
38%	14%	18%

Figure 5:

**In Guatemala, victimization affects municipalities differently, as seen in Guatemala City and Totonicapán.**

Municipality	Intends to migrate and has been exposed to at least two acts of crime or violence	Does not intend to migrate but has been exposed to at least two acts of crime or violence
Guatemala City, Guatemala	57%	39%
Totonicapán, Guatemala	50%	27%

**52%** of those who say they have thought about migrating say they would do so alone; **26%** say they would migrate with their children



# Saliendo Adelante

## Luisa & Alejandro



Luisa & Alejandro		Ages 31	
Location	San Pedro Sula, Honduras		
Migration experience	Joined a caravan heading north from San Pedro Sula with their 5-year-old son. Turned back in Mexico after facing violence and illness.		
Primary reason for migrating	Violence and extortion; low-wage, informal work		
Hopes for their future	Want their children to grow up in a safe community with better opportunities.		

"We want to see a change in combating crime. We don't feel safe when we go to work."

- Luisa





# TRANSNATIONAL TIES

Transnational ties – defined here as existence of family in the U.S., receipt of remittances, and prior migration to the U.S. – is an important pull factor in the migration equation, although far less impactful than economics and victimization.

In the larger regional context, a culture of migration has been and continues to be solidified through the generations. Nearly two-thirds of all survey respondents have a relative living abroad, 75 percent of those relatives have lived in the U.S. for 10 years or more, and about 25 percent for over 20 years. However, an expectation that family reunification would be a significant driver of migration was disproven by the data collected, with only 3 percent of survey respondents citing reuniting with relatives as their primary reason for migration.

In addition, statistical analysis shows that simply having a family member in the U.S. is not a differentiating factor between those who intend to migrate and those who don't, despite the large number of people who reported family ties.

Remittances, however, are indicative of a strong family connection to the U.S. while also pointing to viable job opportunities, an existing support system in the U.S. and the potential for economic prosperity.



**Over 20%**  
of income for  
households across  
the region comes  
from remittances

## Remittances

Nearly a quarter of those who say they have thought of migrating receive remittances across the Northern Triangle's high-migration municipalities, in comparison to 15 percent of those who haven't thought of migrating but receive remittances. The statistical significance of remittances is greatest in Guatemala, where receiving remittances makes an individual nearly twice as likely to have thought about migrating.

But remittances also have a positive effect in reducing poverty and help families below the \$400 monthly income threshold make ends meet.

**Only 3%** of those  
who intend to  
migrate cite family  
reunification as their  
primary reason for  
migration

# Saliendo Adelante

Alberto



Alberto	Age 22
Location	Apopa, El Salvador
Migration experience	Migrated to the U.S. in 2016, was apprehended by immigration authorities and deported
Primary reason for migrating	Family living in the U.S.; crime and violence in his neighborhood; underemployment
Hopes for his future	A steady job and better future for his family

“My greatest inspiration was my daughter and sister because what I want most is for them both to have a better life.”

- Alberto





# YOUTH MIGRATION

Respondents ages 18 to 29 years old are more than twice as likely to consider migrating than adults ages 30 and older. The data from Honduras is particularly stark: 46 percent of youth from the municipalities surveyed intend to migrate, compared to 28 percent of older adults.

Youth exposure to the factors that influence migration differs from that of adults, and these factors may influence youth differently. According to the survey, due to a combination of factors among which victimization is significant, Honduran young women intend to migrate more than young men. This is not the case in the other countries where young men were found to have higher intentions to migrate.

*Figure 6:*  
**Youth who intend to migrate**

Country	Percent of youth who plan to migrate	
	Young men	Young women
El Salvador	44.6%	30.0%
Guatemala	31.7%	22.6%
Honduras	40.7%	51.3%

*Figure 7:*  
**What drives youth to migrate**

	EL SALVADOR		GUATEMALA		HONDURAS	
	Youth 18-29 who intend to migrate	Adults 30+ who intend to migrate	Youth 18-29 who intend to migrate	Adults 30+ who intend to migrate	Youth 18-29 who intend to migrate	Adults 30+ who intend to migrate
Unemployed	19%	7%	16%	5%	16%	12%
Has been robbed on the street	58%	45%	47%	48%	63%	59%
Receives remittances	28%	23%	14%	12%	26%	31%



# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the Creative Associates International migration study underscore the need for a first-mile approach to reducing migration that addresses specific drivers, strengthens communities and creates opportunity locally. The following findings and recommendations are intended to help shape effective migration-focused programming in the Northern Triangle.

## Key conclusions

## Recommendations for development

### Migration is highly localized

A small number of municipalities, largely urban, account for the bulk of all irregular out-migration from the Northern Triangle. While trends emerge at the national level, the factors that influence one's decision to migrate vary dramatically by municipality.

### Focus on high-migration areas

For the most effective and efficient results in mitigating migration, programs should focus on high-migration municipalities. Interventions should be designed to address the specific factors influencing migration in each.

### Economics are driving migration

Economic factors are the most salient in influencing migration and are cited far more often as the primary motivator for migration than victimization factors.

### Expand economic programs

Programming should seek to stabilize vulnerable local economies and then expand on traditional economic development interventions to address the specific economic realities of high-migration municipalities, including the informal economy.

### Youth are most likely to migrate

People from the ages of 18 to 29 report distinct levels of exposure to economic and victimization factors and react to these factors differently than adults in their decisions to migrate.

### Meet youths' urgent needs

Youth, and positive youth development, should be at the center of migration-specific programs. Implementers should also be cognizant of differences in young women's and young men's motivations for migration.

### Victimization is varied

Extortion, robbery and other crimes are, in most cases, an even stronger motivator for migration than exposure to homicide.

### Address the victimization spectrum

Programs should seek to reduce the high levels of victimization in target areas, taking into account not only homicides but all types of crime and violence that create highly victimized communities.

## Study Methodology

### About Creative

Creative Associates International works with underserved communities by sharing expertise and experience in education, elections, economic growth, citizen security, governance and transitions from conflict to peace.

Based in Washington, D.C., Creative has active projects in nearly 30 countries. Since 1977, it has worked in nearly 90 countries and on almost every continent. Recognized for its ability to work rapidly, flexibly and effectively in conflict-affected environments, Creative is committed to generating long-term sustainable solutions to complex development problems.

Creative has grown to become a leader among U.S. private sector implementers of global development projects. Creative is minority owned and operated.

### Creative in Latin America and the Caribbean

Creative has been leading innovative, sustainable development programs in Latin America and the Caribbean for four decades.

Creative's programming in the hemisphere is built on evidence, proven tools and a deep understanding of local contexts. Projects are designed to be inclusive of marginalized groups, operate with local organizations and engage the private sector to ensure that the positive change put in motion lasts long after Creative's interventions.

Creative began its work in the Northern Triangle in 1983 with a training of Peace Corps volunteers in Guatemala. Since then, Creative has implemented dozens of programs in the region's most challenging communities and contexts, supporting gang violence prevention, peace and reconciliation, education and civic engagement, positive youth development, rule of law and governance strengthening and more. Creative currently implements four programs in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, reaching many of the region's highest-migration municipalities. ■

Creative's study began in early 2019 with an extensive review of available data at the regional, national and municipal levels that relate to migration.

To narrow down the study to those municipalities that have the highest rates of emigration, Creative relied on a methodology that uses remittance payment points in the recipient country to identify the place of origin of migrants who are in the United States. This methodology was designed by Manuel Orozco and has been adopted and used by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the Inter-American Dialogue since 2009. In the Northern Triangle, there are more than 100,000 payment points where families collect remittances.

Drawing data from 893 municipalities in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, Creative

identified the 60 municipalities that 1) each account for more than 1 percent of irregular migration from their respective countries and 2) combined, make up a majority of outward irregular migration from the Northern Triangle.

Creative then commissioned a randomized survey of residents in those 60 municipalities, first testing the detailed survey instrument in two municipalities in Honduras. Trained enumerators were then dispatched to conduct 2,400 in-person surveys, which ultimately generated about 100,000 individual data points.

With municipal-level data on 48 distinct social, economic and crime variables that relate to migration, Creative analyzed migratory trends and their relationship to the survey indicators. Statistical regression models were used to identify any statistical significance of these indicators on the likelihood of migration.

#### The 60 municipalities surveyed were (by country, in order of emigration from highest to lowest):

##### El Salvador

San Salvador (18% of Salvadoran emigration), San Miguel, La Libertad, Soyapango, Santa Ana, Sonsonate, La Unión, Apopa, Zacatecoluca, Usulután, Cojutepeque, Metapán, Ahuachapán, Ilopango, Santa Rosa de Lima, Juayúa, San Francisco Gotera, Antiguo Cuscatlán, Chalatenango, San Vicente

##### Guatemala

Guatemala City (16% of Guatemalan emigration), Mixco, Villa Nueva, Totonicapán, Chiquimula, Huehuetenango, Jutiapa, Chimaltenango, Retalhuleu, Sololá, San Pedro Sacatepéquez, Cobán, Villa Canales, Escuintla, Flores, La Libertad, Coatepeque, Morales, San Marcos, Antigua Guatemala, Salamá, San Juan Sacatepéquez, Jalapa, Zacapa, Sayaxché, Esquipulas, Puerto Barrios

##### Honduras

Central District (Tegucigalpa and Comayagüela, 27% of Honduran emigration), San Pedro Sula (20% of Honduran emigration), La Ceiba, Comayagua, El Progreso, Choluteca, Santa Rita, Puerto Cortés, Choloma, Siguatepeque, Danlí, Juticalpa

*\*Municipalities listed above without a number account for between 1 percent and 5 percent of their respective country's emigration.*

To see more study results and hear migrant stories, visit:

[Saliendo-Adelante.com](http://Saliendo-Adelante.com)



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