

Good call! Reaching migrant returnees by phone

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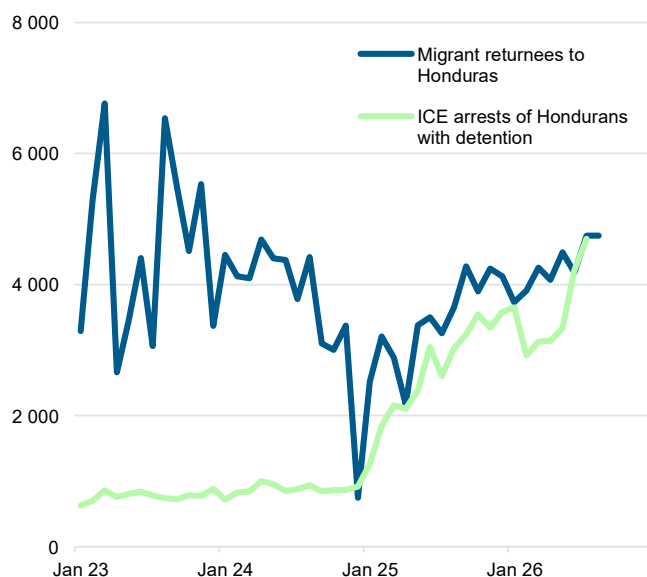
Lessons from PERSPECTIVAS in Honduras

Return migration in Honduras is on the rise

As hundreds of thousands of Hondurans moved abroad over the years in search of better lives, there has always been a flow of migrants returning home. Between January and August of this year, more than 34 000 Hondurans have returned home – 40% more than over the same period last year. As immigration detention and removal operations in the United States, a major destination for Honduran migrants in the past, have intensified, many more are expected to arrive over the coming months.

Figure 1: Return migrants to Honduras and arrests of Honduran citizens in the United States

January 2023 – August 2026



ICE is the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a federal law enforcement agency under the Department of Homeland Security. Data on migrant returnees to Honduras come from SEDESOL's [Observatorio de Desarrollo Social](#). Data on ICE arrests in the United States come from the [Deportation Data Project](#) at Universities of California Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Upon returning, migrants and the communities they arrive to face significant challenges. Many returnees are traumatised by violence they experienced during the journey. Others were forced to leave behind lives that they had spent years building – complete with jobs, friends, and families. Lack of job opportunities was often the reason they left in the first place. Many lack skills applicable to local labour markets or documentation validating their qualifications. Yet finding a good job is typically the first step for returnees to building a life back home.

PERSPECTIVAS, a project funded by Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development via KfW, aims to improve return migrants' prospects for re-integration. A regional project – PERSPECTIVAS is active in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – it is carried out by the Secretariat for Central American Social Integration (SISCA) and implemented in municipalities by Swisscontact, an international foundation.

At the local level, PERSPECTIVAS strengthens structures that support migrant returnees. This includes public infrastructure, awareness-raising among employers, and the support of a network of local organisations that offer trainings and job matching and which includes municipalities, trade associations, vocational schools, and many more. The services they provide are free of charge and include the development of soft skills, psychosocial support, the certification of qualifications, re- and upskilling, as well as training in financial literacy and business development.

Snowballs vs. MICC

Initially, a major challenge of the partners providing services was finding their target group. Return migrants are often highly mobile. And after years abroad, many lack established networks. Outreach relied on word of mouth: current participants and other key informants were asked to relate information about offers to other return migrants within their networks. While this "snowball" approach was easy to implement, it was difficult to scale up and to know whether it reached the most vulnerable returnees.



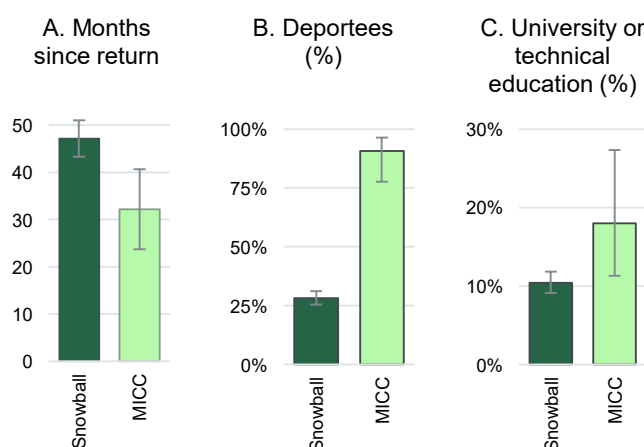
Photo credit: Swisscontact.

However, the research team supporting the project (KfW's Evaluation Department and researchers from the University of Groningen) soon learned that Honduras' Secretariat of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*, SEDESOL) had for years registered returnees at the time of re-entry. The exercise, known as the Returnee Service System (*Sistema de Atención al Migrante Retornado*, SIAMIR), captured data on migrants' gender, age, education and work experience. Returnees were also routinely asked where they wanted to go next and to leave contact details, including a phone number.

This last detail, the availability of phone numbers, led to the idea of an outreach exercise by phone, an approach that would subsequently be called the "MICC" (*Mecanismo Centralizado de Identificación y Contacto*). The project team and SEDESOL started by designing a pilot phase: a call centre within SEDESOL was provided with additional staff, specialised software, and training. Scripts and protocols for calls were developed. Calls were then made to validate contact information, assess returnees' interest, and invite them to enrol into the programme.

A first pilot, which was implemented between November 2024 and July 2025, served to answer three questions: 1) could migrant returnees be reliably contacted over the phone? 2) Would they be interested in the programme? 3) Would outreach based on the SIAMIR data allow us to reach returnees that the traditional snowball approach did not reach?

Figure 2: Differences between PERSPECTIVAS participants



Based on data from Swisscontact that are collected from participants at the time they enter into the programme.

Pilot results

The first pilot targeted all adult migrant returnees in the programme areas that returned between 2017 and 2024. So how did we do?¹ Out of the roughly 6 000 migrant returnees that SEDESOL tried to contact, about 600 could be reached – not bad given that some returnees will have switched phone numbers in the meantime or left the country again while others might simply not answer calls from unknown numbers as a matter of principle. Encouragingly, response rates more than doubled among recent arrivals. Out of the 600 migrant returnees that could be reached, 303 expressed interest and 40 ultimately

became participants. (From a second pilot, 51 returnees turned into participants.)

We found that participants that joined the programme through the MICC differed from the rest, albeit not in terms of age or gender.² (The typical participant is a woman in her early-to-mid thirties that has dependent children at home and spent about two years abroad.) Rather, MICC returnees were more likely to be more recent arrivals, having spent about 15 months less in-country at the time they registered.³ The centralised mechanism, it seems, can reach the target group in a timelier manner.

Another important difference is that the large majority of MICC recruits were forced to return to Honduras by deportation (as opposed to voluntarily). Deportees should arguably be an important target group of the programme as they had less time to prepare financially, arrange housing, reconnect with their social network, or secure work. Targeting them can therefore address acute needs immediately after return.

At the same time, MICC recruits are on average somewhat better educated and more likely to either look for a new job or to start a new enterprise. This suggests that they might stand better chances to take advantage of the opportunities they are presented with through the programme.

No MICC drop soon

Overall, the pilot suggests that outreach based on administrative records holds promise for better targeting. While only a fraction of return migrants can be reached by phone, the absolute numbers are still substantial, especially among recent returnees. Also, those that enrol via the MICC are different from those that enrol through word of mouth. Importantly, there is some evidence that the MICC succeeded in reaching more recent arrivals.

Piloting the MICC came with a learning curve. The coordination of phone calls with specific offers to returnees was challenging at first but has since improved markedly. Outreach by phone has also proved valuable for collecting information on returnees' needs and requirements. At this point, SEDESOL and other development partners are using a much-expanded call centre to reach returnees in Honduras. The lessons learned and capacity created have also triggered discussions to implement this phone-based outreach for other vulnerable populations. Similar approaches are under consideration in both El Salvador and Guatemala.

The MICC is also underpinning a study on the impact that the interventions have on participants. Baseline data collection starts this month, with follow-up surveys planned for next year. The study, which KfW's Evaluation Department conducts jointly with academic partners from the University of Groningen, will help us understand whether and how interventions are helping migrant returnees to re-integrate.

¹ See also PERSPECTIVAS (2025): *Conoce el Mecanismo Centralizado de Identificación y Contacto en Honduras* (in Spanish only).

² The analysis that follows is based on monitoring data from Swisscontact.

³ This is partly a result of who we decided to reach out to and the fact that the contact information left by recent returnees is more likely to be up to date. However, it also plausible that more recent arrivals lack networks that would allow them to receive information by way of word to mouth.