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The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants



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START

The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants

*Final Report to Borders, Trade, and
Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of
Houston*

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National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
A Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Emeritus
Center of Excellence Led by the University of Maryland

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About This Report

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About START

Established in 2005 as U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence led by UMD, START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics, and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information, contact START at infostart@start.umd.edu or visit www.start.umd.edu.

Citations

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Executive Summary

This mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative research produced a comprehensive account of the push and pull factors driving southern migration from the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) and the absorptive capacity of the southern Central American states of Panama and Costa Rica to serve as a host and relocation destination for individuals and families. This project used extant open source evidence, and also collected novel data through interviews and a survey among Panamanian and Costa Rican businesses. Together, these data helped to identify not only key drivers of and trends in regional migration, but also multiple dimensions that shape the absorptive capacity of Costa Rica and Panama, including the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on absorptive capacity.

Findings on Push/Pull Factors for Northern Triangle Migration

The findings from this mixed methods analysis challenge traditional assumptions that classify migrants as *either* humanitarian *or* economic migrants. Instead, they conclude that a combination of economic and physical security-related push factors is responsible for outflows from Northern Triangle countries. Evidence from survey data, key informant interviews, and quantitative analysis also reveal that while the destination countries of these migrant populations frequently include better economic conditions, it is not the sole motivation for their movement.

Both Panama and Costa Rica have a positive reputation for their stronger economies and peaceful societies and a history of serving as both transit and destination countries, which are pull factors for migrants in the region and, indeed, worldwide. Entry and asylum policies are permissive (at least on paper) and migrants that were victims of gang, cartel, domestic, and LGBTQ+ related violence have been granted asylum in Costa Rica. Similarly, the Panamanian government provides protections for migrants fleeing out of fear of persecution for demographic, political, or social reasons.

However, these countries lack one essential “pull” factor for Northern Triangle populations: kinship networks. The vast majority (around 85%) of Honduran, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan migrants live in the United States, with only a very small number located in Panama and Costa Rica. As a result, significant segments considering emigration from the Northern Triangle are unlikely to choose to relocate to Panama and Costa Rica, where kinship networks and co-ethnic support communities are scarce.

Findings on Economic and Social Absorptive Capacity in Panama and Costa Rica

The economic and social absorptive capacities of both Panama and Costa Rica have been negatively impacted by COVID-19. Unemployment rates were 21.9 percent in Costa Rica and 18.5 percent in Panama in recent months.¹ Surveyed businesses indicated that the overall business climate in their country was

¹ “Encuesta Continua de Empleo trimestre móvil Agosto – Septiembre – Octubre (ASO 2020).” Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, December 2020. <https://www.inec.go.cr/noticia/tasa-de-desempleo-nacional-llego-al-21.9>. Evolución del Desempleo. Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, September 2020. <https://www.inec.gob.pa/archivos/P0705547520201222124619Gr%C3%A1fica%201.pdf>.

poor or very poor (77% in Panama and 67% in Costa Rica), that employers had fewer employees and fewer paid working hours as a result of the pandemic, and that there is limited interest in hiring migrants or immigrants from outside the country. Specifically, businesses said that they were less likely to hire migrant workers (50% in Panama and 45% in Costa Rica) as a result of COVID-19. Though both countries have historically had large informal sectors, these positions have become scarcer due to the pandemic.

In terms of social absorptive capacity, xenophobic attitudes are also present, if unevenly held and complex in nature, in the host societies of both Panama and Costa Rica. These fears and prejudices have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pernicious narratives have emerged about immigrants and migrants spreading the virus, stealing scarce jobs, and overwhelming the healthcare system. Importantly, the reduced economic and social absorptive capacity has impacted the appeal of Panama and Costa Rica for migrants, some of whom have returned home and others of whom are facing hunger and poverty, and even harsh conditions at border camps.

In this context, the best opportunities for immigrants and migrants from outside the country are in those places (industries, businesses, geographic locations) where employment of migrants is common and support networks already exist. For Northern Triangle migrants, these networks are not co-ethnic or kinship-based, but there are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations providing services, connection, and generally improving the ability of society to absorb these populations. Surveyed businesses that already employ migrants or operate in industries where hiring workers from outside the country is common tend to be more open to hiring from these communities in the future. In terms of geography, the capital regions of both countries provide more employment opportunities and have larger immigrant communities.

Findings on Policy Barriers to Increased Absorptive Capacity

The ability of the economies and societies of Panama and Costa Rica to absorb additional migrant populations from the Northern Triangle is also directly impacted by government regulations and policies. Potential Northern Triangle migrants face significant financial barriers to achieving legal residency and work authorization. Though visas are not required for Northern Triangle citizens to enter either country, immigrants who wish to settle and find employment in either state must endure a lengthy bureaucratic process, during which time they are not authorized to work in the country and must pay numerous fees to apply for official status. Though many would legally qualify for asylum, the processes are still time-consuming, backlogged and, in Panama, heavily regulated with strict requirements, making them inaccessible and impractical for many applicants.

Businesses in both Costa Rica and Panama risk fines for hiring migrant workers without these work authorizations in place. Yet they also face long waiting periods to verify whether a worker has the proper status in place. Findings indicate that, in Costa Rica, these regulations are relatively unknown and poorly enforced, though there is some greater awareness of them in Panama. Surveys indicate that they have a mild-to-moderate impact on the willingness of companies to hire workers from outside the country, at

least in the current climate. In both countries, those in industries or businesses with higher levels of migrant employment would be more likely than those not employing migrants to hire from these communities if regulations were relaxed. However, concerns about scarce jobs and anti-immigrant sentiments make changes to regulations on businesses difficult in the current climate.

Policy Recommendations

- Streamlining bureaucratic processes for immigrant residency and work authorization in both Panama and Costa Rica would greatly increase the absorptive capacity for migrants from all countries of origin.
- Efforts aimed at supporting industries and companies that have hired migrants and immigrants in the past are the most likely to increase employment of these groups in the future.
- While financial incentives to hire workers from outside the country are likely to increase companies' willingness to do so, other interventions like helping migrants identify and communicate skill set matches with potential employers or supporting workplace integration programs for non-Panamanian and non-Costa Rican employees may be even better suited to addressing employers' needs.
- Programs that highlight labor market opportunities for migrants in positions that native Panamanians and Costa Ricans are less likely to fill may boost economic security for Central American migrants while effectively limiting negative reactions and narratives within host societies.
- Local and outside actors can play an essential role in improving social absorptive capacities by supporting the work of community organizations and NGOs that serve as essential networks for migrant and immigration communities.
- Policies that rely on kinship networks or chain migration to encourage southern route migration from the Northern Triangle are likely to be ineffective; instead, policies and messaging that promote Panama and Costa Rica as desirable host countries should target potential migrants that do not have strong ties elsewhere.
- Local and outside actors can play an essential role in improving social absorptive capacities by supporting the work of community organizations and NGOs that provide services and essential networks for migrant and immigration communities.
- Official, fact-based campaigns to counter anti-immigrant narratives and foster community relations will make Panama and Costa Rica more appealing and boost short-term social absorptive capacity during the pandemic.
- COVID-19 policies regarding access to relief programs, food and housing aid, healthcare, and vaccinations should all include provisions for those with irregular status.

Introduction

This mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative research produced a comprehensive account of the push and pull factors driving southern migration from the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) and the absorptive capacity of the southern Central American states of Panama and Costa Rica to serve as a host and relocation destination for individuals and families involved in these regional migration flows. This project used extant open source evidence, including high-quality international surveys, government statistics bureaus, and international organizations. It also collected novel insights and data through interviews and a business survey conducted by the researchers. Together, these data helped to identify not only key drivers and trends in regional migration, but also multiple dimensions that shape the absorptive capacity of Costa Rica and Panama. In addition to providing insights into how Costa Rican and Panamanian absorptive capacity can be bolstered, the research also explored implications stemming from COVID-19, which has profoundly impacted these countries ability to absorb migrants. This report puts the multiple lines of research and data collection efforts into conversation with one another to provide the most accurate and timely picture of these issues available to date.



Image 1: Map of Central America

Data and Methodology

This multi-method approach to understanding the absorptive capacity of southern Central American countries to migrant populations relied on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The initial phase of quantitative analysis leveraged open source data from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the AmericasBarometer international survey project, and published government statistics. These data sources were used to provide an evidence-based profile of regional migration to Costa Rica and Panama, and to examine the patterns of push and pull factors most relevant for Northern Triangle migrants. The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) at Vanderbilt University provided incomparable insight into the realities of migration drivers and migrant profiles of those from the Northern Triangle. Because LAPOP relies on sound methodological standards and nested demographic sampling, these data provided a truly representative sample of the general population in the countries in question.²

Developing a better understanding of the patterns of migration in the region in general and target countries in particular guided two additional streams of data collection: qualitative interviews and an online survey of businesses in Panama and Costa Rica. Qualitative fieldwork involved twenty-seven semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs). Due to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and limitations on international travel and in-person fieldwork, the KIIs were conducted remotely. Researchers' informal networks as well as open-source research served to identify potential targets for online recruitment for participation in these remote interviews. Tailored interview scripts were then used to conduct interviews among subject matter experts and/or officials and representatives belonging to three main target groups: 1) businesses; 2) government; and 3) non-profits, civil society, non-governmental, and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs). Through semi-structured interviews, researchers collected novel qualitative data that captured the varied and complex picture of migrant realities in Costa Rica and Panama.³

An online survey of businesses fielded in Costa Rica and Panama constituted the final means of data collection. The COVID-19 global pandemic has led to rapidly changing economic pressures and challenges to businesses, making the retrospective and historical data reviewed in the initial phase of the research a poor indicator of either country's economic absorptive capacity for migrant populations of any origin,

² "Country Questionnaires and Sample Designs." AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, Vanderbilt University. Accessed June 1, 2020. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php>.

³ For additional information on the research methodology, please refer to the Quantitative and Qualitative Reports: Lindquist, Kathryn and Amira Giadala. "The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants." Quantitative Report to Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of Houston. College Park, MD: START, 2020, 6.

Giadala, Amira, Barnett S. Koven, and Samuel Henkin. "The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants." Qualitative Report to Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of Houston. College Park, MD: START, 2020, 3.

including the Northern Triangle. The business survey asked a range of questions about the impact of COVID-19 on the respondents' business, industry, and country, and also collected information about employment in general and migrant employment in particular, including identifying factors influencing willingness to hire migrants. An expansive contact list based on national business registries was the basis of the survey's distribution. While this data collection and contact methodology does not constitute a representative sample of Panamanian or Costa Rican businesses, this convenience sample nonetheless provides timely evidence that sheds light on key issues of interest in the current research.

While an expanded discussion of the methodology for both the open-source quantitative data analysis and the interview data collection and analysis can be found in the full-length reports for those portions of the study, the business survey data presented in this report is novel. The survey was fielded from November 19, 2020 to January 15, 2021 in Panama and from December 2, 2020 to January 15, 2021 in Costa Rica. Survey questions included multiple choice, multiple response, and one open-ended question. It was available in both Spanish and English, with instructions on how to toggle to a different language provided in the invitations and on the consent page. Invitations and reminder emails were in Spanish, and the default language that a respondent saw on the consent form landing page was Spanish (see Appendix B and C for the complete instrument, and Appendix D for the solicitation language). Participants were provided with information about the study and asked to provide digital consent before proceeding to the questionnaire. A total of 168 businesses in Costa Rica and 261 in Panama completed the survey. Additional materials related to the survey, including the overall results, cross-tabulations, the survey instrument, and communications are included as appendices or supplements to this report.

Plan of the Report

This report triangulates across the multiple phases and data streams to present overall findings about the absorptive capacity of Panama and Costa Rica to receive migrants and immigrants in the current climate, as well as the most relevant patterns, drivers, and other unique considerations for Northern Triangle immigrants and migrants. These findings clustered around several thematic areas. The first set included "push" and "pull" factors that are key considerations for those leaving Guatemala, Honduras, or El Salvador; why they are leaving, and what are the major factors in their relocation choices. The second set of findings covered the economic absorptive capacity of Panama and Costa Rica; similarly, a third set focused on social absorptive capacity for additional migrants and immigrants in these societies. Not surprisingly, both economic and social absorptive capacities have been powerfully, and primarily negatively, impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fourth, there were a set of policy barriers to expanding absorptive capacity in both potential host countries. These included barriers like getting work authorization or residency status that present challenges to immigrants and migrants directly as well as regulations and policies that impact the employment choices and trends among businesses. The final section concludes and identifies potential

policy interventions, primarily for the United States and outside actors, that would ultimately bolster the absorptive capacity in Panama and Costa Rica. In some cases, this would increase the capacity for Northern Triangle migrants, in particular, and in some cases, recommendations would lead to a better integration of or general support for migrants from other countries of origin, both inside and outside the region.

Findings on Key Push and Pull Factors in Central American Regional Migration

The researchers collected and analyzed evidence from a variety of sources about the push and pull factors influencing migration patterns in Central America. In migration studies, “push” factors are those that encourage individuals and families to leave their home, and “pull” factors are those that draw them to another area or place.⁴ Findings from this study indicate that there are multiple push factors involving fear of physical safety and economic insecurity that are driving emigration from the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. These populations are subsequently drawn to relocate elsewhere based on pull factors like economic opportunity, political stability and security, and kinship ties in destination countries. Additionally, there is evidence that Panama and Costa Rica do possess at least some of these relevant pull factors, with the major caveat that kinship ties are largely lacking anywhere outside the United States. This means that kinship-related factors are more likely to pull a meaningful segment of (potential) migrant populations along a northern, as opposed to a southern, route.

Push Factors

Complex Insecurity in the Northern Triangle

The Northern Triangle countries of Central America are a growing source of migration flows in the region. These countries have experienced varying levels of systemic violence since the 1960s. With a history of long-lasting civil wars, the governments of Guatemala and El Salvador struggle to appropriately govern and enforce the rule of law. As a result, many populations in the Northern Triangle countries face strong organized criminal elements that use extortion and threats of violence to secure capital. While Honduras is not beset by comparable levels of organized violence that plague Guatemala and El Salvador, it came second only to El Salvador in homicide rates in the region. In 2019, El Salvador and Honduras recorded 62.1 and 41.7 intentional homicides per 100,000 population, while Central America had an overall rate of 25.9, the highest of any region.⁵

These pressures constitute a series of push factors that have led many in these countries to consider emigrating. In 2019, the UN DESA estimated that a combined 3.6 million individuals from the three Northern Triangle nations were living outside their country relative to a total population of nearly 33.8 million.⁶ Moreover, surveys conducted in 2018 by the AmericasBarometer and analyzed as part of this

⁴ Oxford Reference defines push and pull factors as “In the study of migration, push factors are those that encourage a population to leave its home, pull factors are those that draw a population to another area or place.” Oxford Reference, 2021. Accessed February 8, 2021.

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100355608>.

⁵ “Global Study on Homicide 2019: Booklet 2,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Vienna: UNODC, 2019), 17. Accessed February 11, 2021.

<https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet2.pdf>.

⁶ The UN DESA defines an international migrant as “any person who changes his or her country of usual residence.” Note that this includes figures of refugees and persons in refugee-like situations, as identified and tracked by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees where appropriate.

“Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration.” *UN DESA* Revision 1, (1998): para. 33. Accessed July 20, 2020.

https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_58rev1e.

“Total Population – Both Sexes.” UN DESA World Population Prospects, 2019. Accessed February 11, 2021.

<https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>.

research revealed that almost a quarter of those in El Salvador and Guatemala and nearly four in ten in Honduras intended to live or work in another country in the next three years (see Figure 1).⁷ It is important to note that these data were gathered before the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has restricted migration and movement, as well as depressed economic activity in the region. It is difficult to assess the total magnitude or even the direction of the change that COVID-19 may have on the regional intent to migrate.

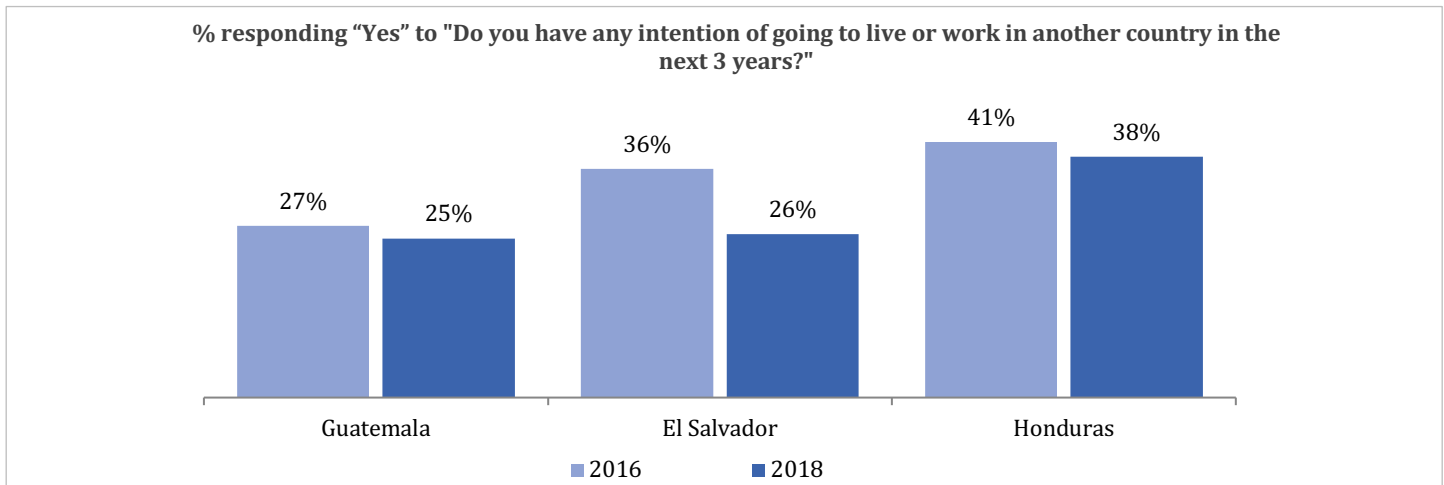


Figure 1: % responding “Yes” to “Do you have any intention of going to live or work in another country in the next 3 years?” by country.

Evidence from both interviews and the quantitative study suggest that it is a combination of economic and physical security-related push factors that are ultimately responsible for the outflows from these countries. Exposure to violence was relatively commonplace – one in five respondents to representative national surveys in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras had been a victim of a crime in the past twelve months.⁸ Concerns for the physical safety of one’s family were also commonly compounded with issues of financial and economic insecurity. Honduras (and, incidentally, Nicaragua) have some of the lowest per-capita GDPs in all of Latin America, with El Salvador and Honduras ranking only slightly higher.⁹ Only five to seven percent reported having sufficient income that they could save.¹⁰

⁷ “Country Questionnaires and Sample Designs.” AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, Vanderbilt University. Accessed June 1, 2020. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php>.

⁸ Lindquist, Kathryn and Amira Giadala. “The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants.” Quantitative Report to Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of Houston. College Park, MD: START, 2020, 12.

⁹ Rankings derived from pre-COVID-19 data for consistently. Specific ranking based on PPP in current international dollars. Figures retrieved from the International Comparison Program, World Bank / World Development Indicators Database. “GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$) – El Salvador, United States, Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras.” World Bank Data, 2018. Accessed July 27, 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD?end=2018&locations=SV-US-MX-CR-PA-GT-HN&start=2018&view=bar>.

¹⁰ In both Guatemala and El Salvador, seven percent had sufficient income to save for the future, and in Honduras, the figure was five percent. See Quant report, page 13.

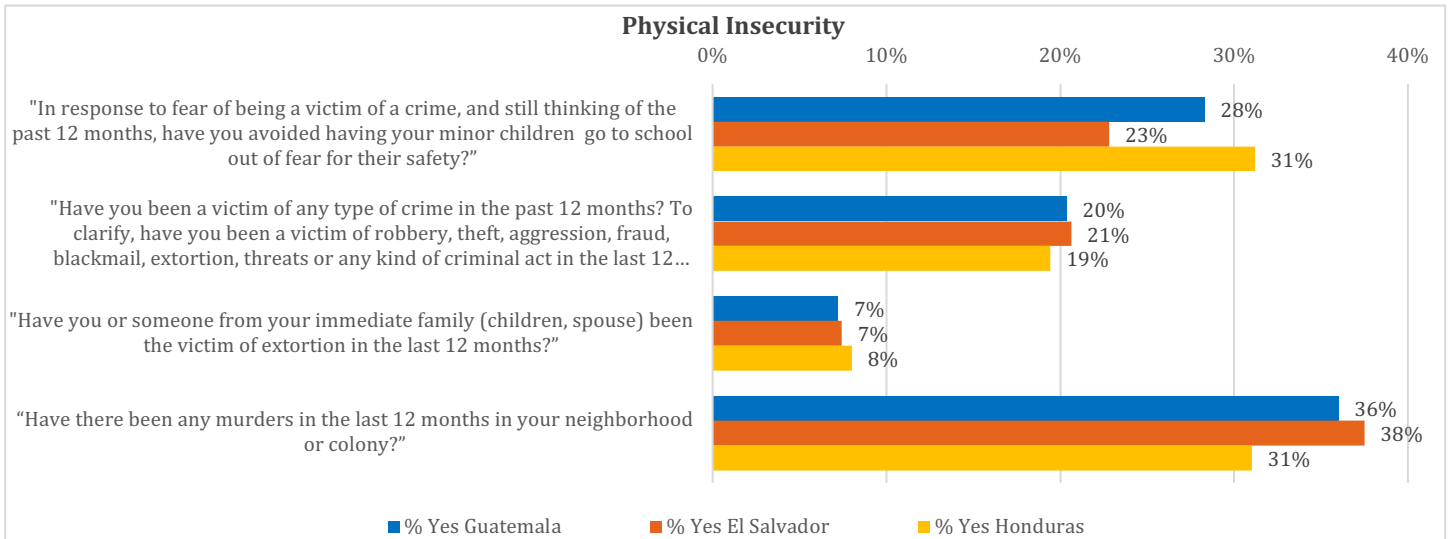


Figure 2: % responding “Yes” to questions regarding physical insecurity, by country

Interview subjects involved in the qualitative KIIs broadly agreed that the most important push factors driving Northern Triangle migration are physical and economic insecurity.¹¹ According to one interviewee, “in the case of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador...migration is caused due to inequality, lack of opportunities and [in]security.”¹² These considerations are paramount to understanding the role of economic and physical insecurity in prompting Northern Triangle migration flows from and within the region. Another interviewee recalled that “the reasons for which these [migrants] flee depends on their countries of origin, but in general terms, one could say that it is due to structural violence, political violence, or [out of necessity] from belonging to a certain [socioeconomic] group.”¹³ Interviewees emphasized the entrenchment of instability and violence in Northern Triangle countries, which have forced migrants to flee their countries of origin for safer destinations.

¹¹ Direct quotes cited in this report were translated from Spanish to English by Amira Giadala. Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 21, 2020, (AACAP 11).

¹² Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 21, 2020, (AACAP 11).

¹³ Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 23, 2020, (AACAP 10).

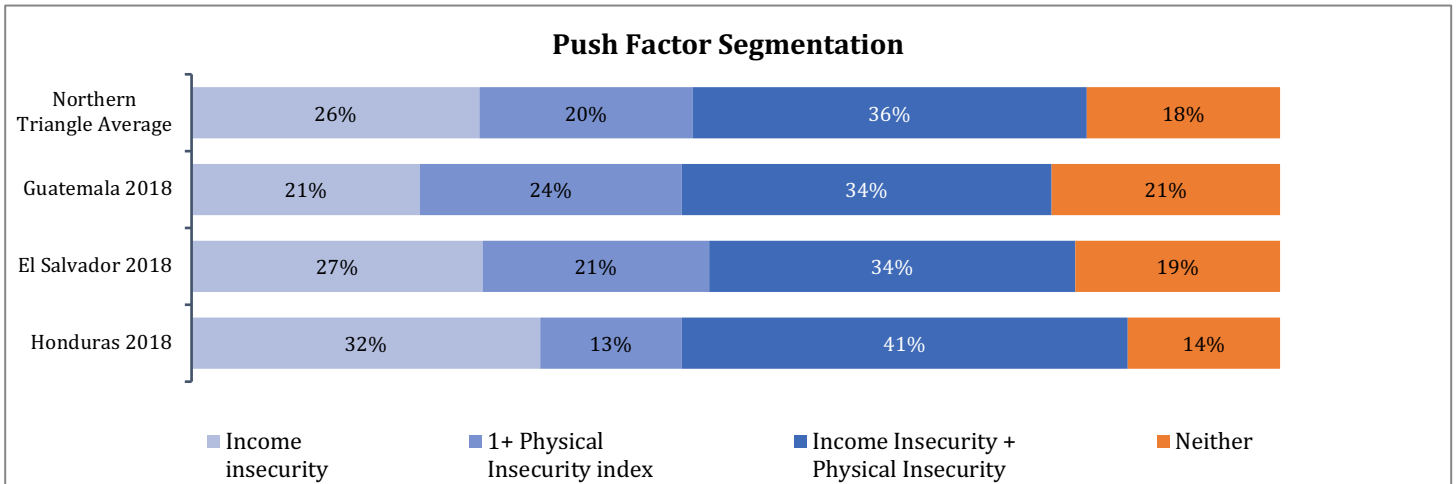


Figure 3: Push Factor Segmentation

Indeed, the plurality of those living in the Northern Triangle were facing both physical and income insecurity, what this research has called “complex insecurity.”¹⁴ Furthermore, according to the AmericasBarometer data, it was this complex insecurity that was the most consistent predictor of respondents’ intent to migrate in the next three years. Logistic regressions that controlled for important correlates to migration, like age and gender, (see Table 1) found this to be true in all three Northern Triangle countries (models G2, S2, and H2). Not surprisingly, facing neither economic nor physical insecurity was negatively correlated with an intent to migrate, meaning that such individuals were less likely to leave their home countries. Further, facing *only* income or *only* physical insecurity (the “single insecurity” indicator variable) was uncorrelated with an intent to migrate in both Guatemala and El Salvador (models G1 and S1), and was negatively correlated in Honduras (model H1).¹⁵

¹⁴ These were defined based on a series of questions in the AmericasBarometer about income sufficiency and exposure to or experience of threats of violence. See Lindquist, Kathryn and Amira Giadala. “The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants.” Quantitative Report to Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of Houston. College Park, MD: START, 2020, 13-14.

¹⁵ This negative correlation was statistically significant at the 95% level.

| | Guatemala | | | El Salvador | | | Honduras | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| VARIABLES | Model G1 | Model G2 | Model G3 | Model S1 | Model S2 | Model S3 | Model H1 | Model H2 | Model H3 |
| Single Insecurity | -0.036 (0.021) | | | -0.014 (0.022) | | | -0.081* (0.024) | | |
| Complex Insecurity | | 0.137* (0.022) | | | 0.072* (0.023) | | | 0.177* (0.024) | |
| Neither insecurity type | | | (0.131* (0.026) | | | -0.085* (0.028) | | | -0.188* (0.034) |
| Gender (male=1) | 0.111* (0.021) | 0.114* (0.021) | 0.113* (0.021) | 0.087* (0.022) | 0.09* (0.022) | 0.094* (0.022) | 0.134* (0.023) | 0.138* (0.023) | 0.145* (0.023) |
| Respondent age (categories) | -0.035* (0.003) | 0.037* (0.003) | -0.036* (0.003) | -0.035* (0.003) | -0.036* (0.003) | -0.036* (0.003) | -0.045* (0.004) | -0.046* (0.004) | -0.045* (0.004) |
| Constant | 0.396* (0.025) | 0.341* (0.024) | 0.411* (-0.024) | 0.416* (0.027) | 0.39* (0.025) | 0.426* (0.025) | 0.583* (0.028) | 0.481* (0.026) | 0.567* (0.025) |

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05

Table 1: Migration intention and push factors logistic regression models by country

These findings challenge the traditional assumption that migrants are easily classified as *either* humanitarian *or* economic migrants, and suggest that where general societal instability is high, as in the Northern Triangle countries, it is difficult to disentangle these insecurities.¹⁶ They do support a growing literature surrounding the notion that not all migration can be categorized as labor migration.¹⁷ Northern Triangle outflows are perhaps better understood as forced migration, including “refugee flows, asylum seekers, internal displacement, and development-induced displacement.”¹⁸ While the destination of these migrants may include better economic conditions, it is not the primary, and certainly not the sole, motivation for their movement. This finding about the complex concerns that serve as push factors for potential Northern Triangle emigrants and migrants is one of the most consistent and pronounced themes of both the qualitative and quantitative evidence from this study.

¹⁶ The idea that migrants’ lived experiences violate categories of “refugee” and “labor migrants” is gaining traction among empirical researchers; e.g. Heaven Crawley & Dimitris Skleparis (2018) Refugees, migrants, neither, both: categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe’s ‘migration crisis’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:1, 48-64, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1348224. Relatedly, in an early example of empirical studies of migration/immigration causes, William Deane Stanley examined time-series data of violent events in El Salvador and Salvadoran migration. He found that fear of violence was a significant motivating factor, but his model *also* included measurements of economic motivations, suggesting, though not explicitly theorizing, the interaction and co-existence of these push factors. See Stanley, “Economic Migrants or Refugees from Violence? A Time-Series Analysis of Salvadoran Migration to the United States.” *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 1 (1987): 132-54. Accessed July 27, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/2503545.

¹⁷ C. Nolin, *Transnational Ruptures: Gender and Forced Migration* (New York Routledge: 2017); also M. Eastmond, “Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20 no. 2 (2007): 248-264.

¹⁸ S. Castles, “The Forces Driving Global Migration,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34 no. 2 (2013), 130.

Pull Factors

Economic Opportunity and Political Stability

As complex insecurity, with both physical and economic security dimensions, is a crucial feature serving as a push factor in the Northern Triangle, countries that afford both economic opportunities and political stability are attractive relocation destinations. Both Panama and Costa Rica have stronger economies and peaceful societies, which are pull factors for migrants in the region and, indeed, worldwide. According to data from 2019, Costa Rica hosted nearly 420,000 migrants and Panama supported over 185,000 migrants from around the world, representing 8.3 percent and 4.4 percent respectively, of those countries’ populations.¹⁹ Put into context, 15.1% of the U.S. population is migrant stock and migrants make up 12.5% of the German population.²⁰

Remittances

Remittances to Northern Triangle countries, from all international sources, have grown over the last decade. In 2019, remittances were estimated to constitute 22 percent of GDP in Honduras, 21 percent of GDP in El Salvador, and 13.1 percent in Guatemala; equating to over US\$21 billion remitted to the Northern Triangle.²¹

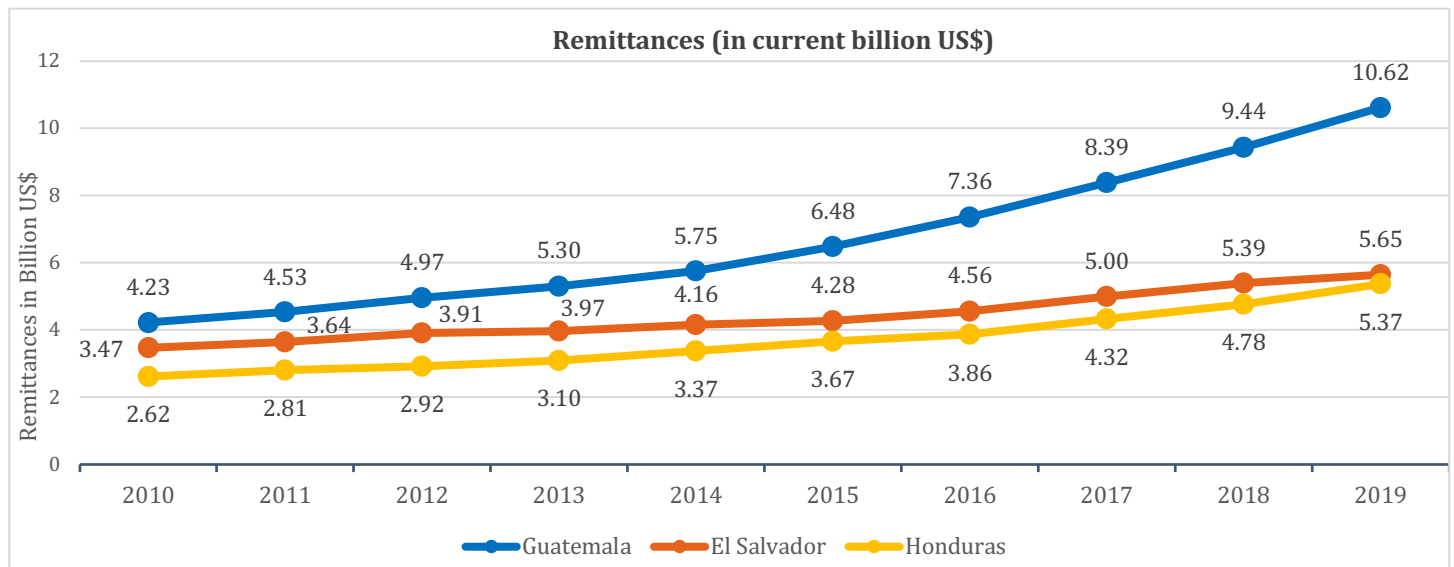


Figure 4: Remittances (in current billion US\$)

¹⁹Data from UN Database. “Migrant Stock by Origin and Destination” United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019. Accessed July 20, 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>; total population; also “International Migrant Stock 2019: Country Profile, Costa Rica.” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2019. Accessed May 4, 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/countryprofiles.asp>.

²⁰ Giles Pison, “The Number and Proportion of Immigrants in the Population: International Comparisons,” *Population & Society*, no. 563 (February 1919). Monthly Bulletin of the French Institute for Demographic Studies.

https://www.ined.fr/fichier/s_rubrique/28889/563.international.comparison.immigrants.2019.en.pdf.

²¹ “Annual Remittances Data.” World Bank, April 2020. Accessed June 15, 2020. <https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Remittance%20inflows%20April%202020.xlsx>.

Among those surveyed in the AmericasBarometer in 2018, 13 percent of Guatemalans, 23 percent of Salvadorans, and 21 percent of Hondurans reported receiving remittances from abroad. There is also evidence that these remittances have a positive impact on families; survey data from all three Northern Triangle countries also show that, overall, those who indicated they were receiving remittances were *less* likely to report that their household income was insufficient and more likely to report that they had enough household income that they could save. The trend was particularly pronounced in Guatemala, where 30 percent of those who had enough income to save received remittances, though only 13 percent of all Guatemalan respondents reported receiving money from abroad.²²

| | Guatemala | El Salvador | Honduras |
|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| VARIABLES | Model G4 | Model S4 | Model H4 |
| Receives remittances (yes=1) | 0.089* (0.031) | 0.093* (0.026) | 0.111* (0.028) |
| Gender (male=1) | 0.108* (0.021) | 0.083* (0.022) | 0.131* (0.023) |
| Respondent age (categories) | -0.034* (0.003) | -0.034* (0.003) | -0.043* (0.004) |
| Constant | 0.365* (0.023) | 0.388* (0.025) | 0.518* (0.026) |

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05

Table 2: Migration intention and remittances logistic regression models by country

This correlation between adequate household income and remittance income also suggests that the ability to consistently send remittances to help families in countries of origin is an important pull factor when choosing a relocation destination. Interestingly, statistical modeling based on survey evidence found that those who receive remittances are also more likely to consider emigrating in the next three years. This is further support for the importance of this pull factor in regional migration flows and individual-level decisions about relocation. Even if economic insecurity is not the most powerful push factor on its own, when it comes to individuals' intent to live or work abroad, remittances are an essential part of the economic dynamics in the migration push/pull calculus.

²² This result for Guatemala is statistically significant at the 99% level.

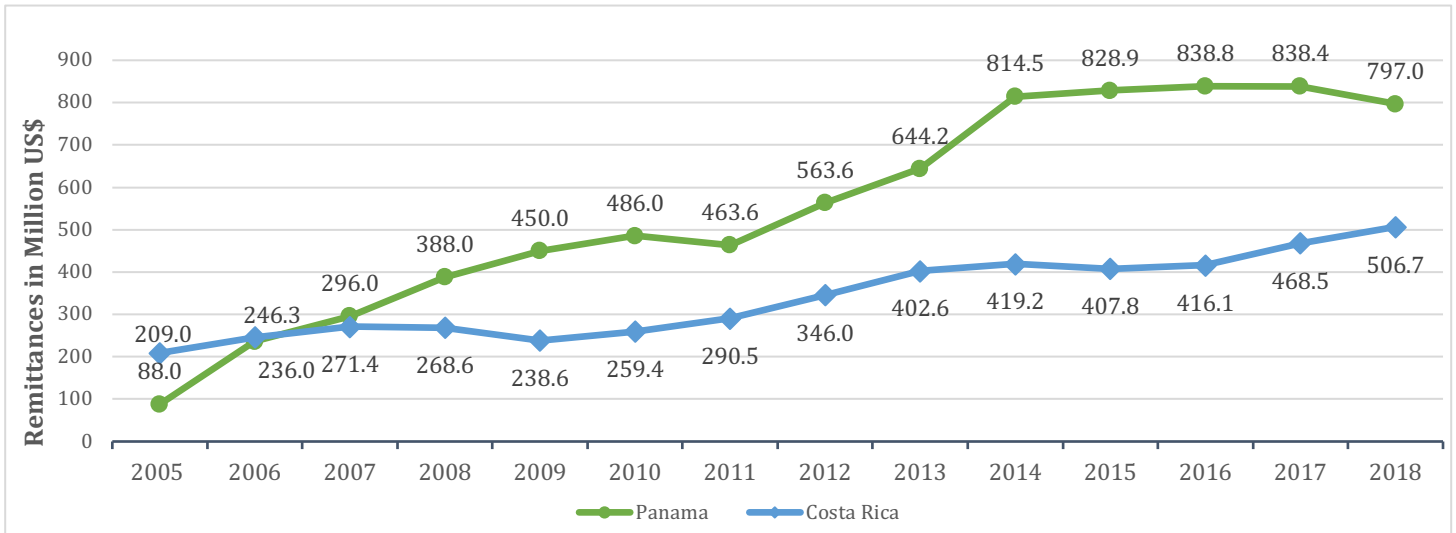


Figure 5: Remittance outflows from Panama and Costa Rica (in current million US\$)

Both the Costa Rican and Panamanian economies have proven strong and vibrant enough to support large migrant populations in the past few decades. Data on remittance outflows demonstrate this (see Figure 5).²³ The ability of Costa Rican and Panamanian economies to absorb migrant workers and afford them the opportunity to remit money back to their countries of origin further fuels the perception that these economies are, as one interviewee asserted, “stronger than [those] of neighboring countries...meaning that there are more favorable economic opportunities than in Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras.”²⁴ Furthermore, when asked to elaborate on the role of remittances in prompting migration by selecting whether remittances were: 1) enabling (overcoming economic barriers to migration); 2) inspiring (prompting migrants to want what another relative has); or 3) a true pull factor (alleviating grievances by offering economic opportunities) for migration, the majority of interviewees agreed that all three explanations were at play. Their comments were consistent with the analysis conducted with the AmericasBarometer survey and reinforced the correlation between receiving remittances and intending to migrate; this important pull factor for Northern Triangle populations is present in southern Central America.

Safety and Stability

Regional experts have also noted that, just as fears of violence and a desire to live safely and peacefully are push factors, political stability and reliable physical security make relocation destinations more appealing. In particular, many interviewees touched on the role of violence and insecurity in prompting migration flows and praised Costa Rica and Panama as the safest alternatives in the region. Several interviewees commended Costa Rica as an option “for migrant populations that are in vulnerable

²³ All numbers are in current (nominal) US \$.
 GDP data from IMF World Economic Outlook. “Annual Remittances Data: Outflows.” The World Bank, April 2020. Accessed May 20, 2020.
<https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Outward%20remittance%20flows%20April%202020.xlsx>

²⁴ Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 23, 2020 (AACAP 10).

situations [and seeking to] find safety...[and a] country where they can shelter [themselves] and find the protection that they have not been able to find in their countries.”²⁵ On a national level, Costa Rica has taken steps to protect humanitarian migrants and/or refugees via frameworks to facilitate asylum requests and by expanding the conditions to qualify for asylum.²⁶ Furthermore, in an effort that reflects an awareness of the realities of incoming migrants, Costa Rica has also granted asylum to migrants that were victims of gang, cartel, domestic and LGBTQ+ related violence.²⁷ Similarly, “compared to the rest of the countries in the Central American region, [Panama] proves to be one of the safest,” and can also be considered to be an alternative for migrants fleeing violence in their countries of origin.²⁸ Many interviewees noted the physical security and stability in these countries, and existing laws to protect asylum seekers and refugees—though others criticized the role of strict bureaucratic requirements in hindering the provision of protected status.²⁹ Nevertheless, many migrants have crossed the northern border with Costa Rica or the inhabitable and lawless Darien gap to the south to settle in Panama. In fact, Panama has experienced an exponential increase in asylum requests from asylum seekers fleeing Nicaragua and Venezuela specifically, which would further reinforce the importance of perceived safety and stability as pull factors for migration.³⁰

Kinship Ties

A final, key pull factor is existing kinship ties and co-ethnic communities in a (potential) host country destination. Given that the United States is the historical destination of choice for many in this region, migration along a northern route is likely to continue. This research suggests that attempts to influence potential migrations in the Central American context are most likely to be effective when they target those for whom existing kinship ties to the United States do not already provide a strong pull for that relocation destination.

Existing kinship networks can be particularly important in determining where migrants ultimately choose to resettle, in addition to influencing whether they decide to migrate.³¹ Interviewees stressed the importance of these networks in supporting migrants throughout their migration and resettlement journeys, emphasizing that wherever kinship networks were lacking, the “economic opportunities [for migrants] to support themselves and help their families is [much] more limited.”³² These existing networks provide concrete opportunities for work, which is particularly important as newly arriving

²⁵ Costa Rican government official, interview with author, November 18, 2020, (AACAP 23).

²⁶ “El Informe Anual del Marco Integral Regional para la Protección y Soluciones (MIRPS),” OAS, 2019, 21-22. Accessed December 2, 2020. http://www.oas.org/es/sadye/inclusion-social/docs/II_Informe_Anuar_MIRPS.pdf.

²⁷ Costa Rican human rights lawyer, interview with research team, October 20, 2020, (AACAP 2).

²⁸ Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, October 22, 2020, (AACAP 4).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Panama – Fact Sheet.” UNHCR, 2020. Accessed December 2, 2020. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/78885>.

³¹ Simone A. Wegge, “Chain Migration and Information Networks: Evidence from Nineteenth-Century Hesse-Cassel.” *The Journal of Economic History* 58, no. 4 (1998): 957-86. Accessed July 21, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/2566846; also Alejandro Protes and Leif Jensen. “The Enclave and the Entrants: Patterns of Ethnic Enterprise in Miami before and after Mariel.” *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 6 (1989): 929-49. Accessed July 21, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/2095716.

³² Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 21, 2020, (AACAP 11).

immigrant or migrants may find themselves wanting or needing to work before receiving formal authorizations to do so.³³ Furthermore, as cases of “successful” relocation are made known to sending communities, chain migration trends can begin to take hold, with other members of the sending community making the choice to emigrate to similar locations and even into similar industries.³⁴ Closely related to these kinship networks is the fact that family reunification is another major motivation for individuals to cross borders.³⁵

The current study found evidence that this pull factor is operational in the Central American and Northern Triangle migration context. It is important to note that migration from the Northern Triangle is fairly common; in 2019, an estimated 7.3 percent of Guatemalans, 8.2 percent of Hondurans, and a staggering 24.8 percent of Salvadorans were living outside their countries of origin.³⁶ Equally important to note is that the vast majority of Northern Triangle migrants live in the United States (see Figure 6). Importantly, only a very small number of Northern Triangle migrants are currently located in Panama (0.19%) and Costa Rica (0.58%).³⁷

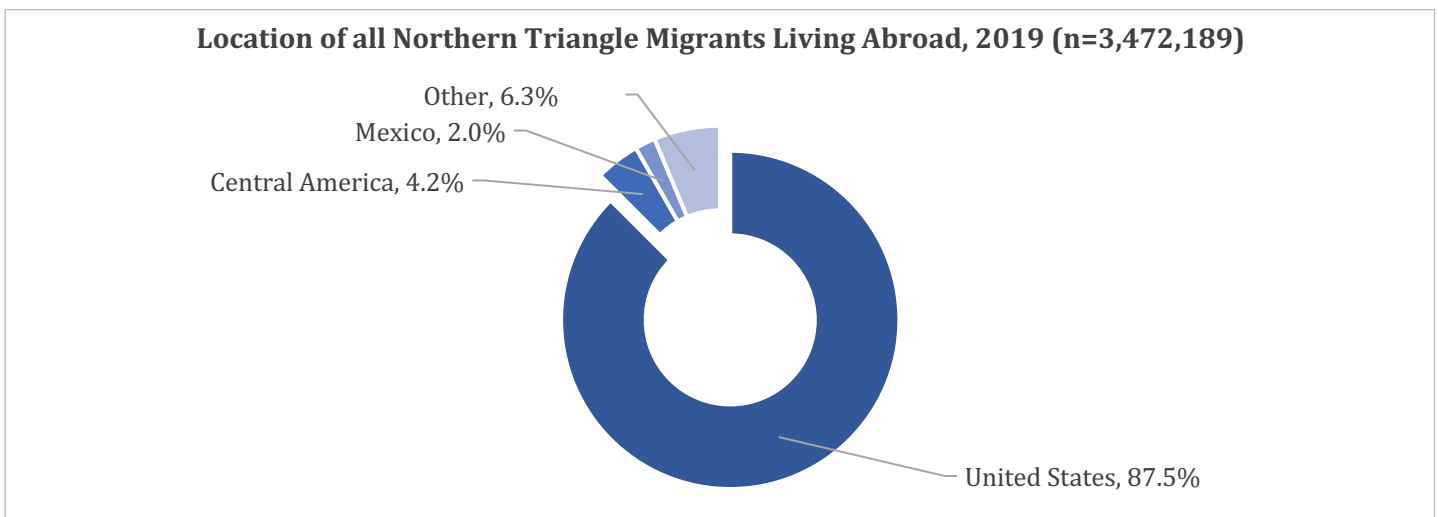


Figure 6: Location of all Northern Triangle migrants living abroad in 2019

³³ Jon Horgen Friberg and Midtbøen, Arnfinn H. “The Making of Immigrant Niches in an Affluent Welfare State.” 2018. *International Migration Review*. Sage Journals. Accessed June 20, 2020. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0197918318765168#bibr5-0197918318765168>; also Alejandro Portes, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, University of California Press, 1985.

³⁴ Wegge, “Chain Migration and Information Networks: Evidence from Nineteenth-Century Hesse-Cassel,” 961. Christopher S. Carter and Timothy F. Leslie. “Assessing Immigrant Niches Across Large American Metropolitan Areas.” *Population, Space and Place*, 21: 171 – 192. doi 10.1002/psp.1841. Wiley Online Library, 2015. Accessed April 10, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1002%2Fpsp.1841>.

³⁵ Bryan Roberts et al, “Northern Triangle Migrant Flow Study: Final Report.”

³⁶ Note: For El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras the percentage for this measurement was calculated using the “Total International Migrant Stock in Host Country” and the “Total Population” to accurately record the number of migrant stock outside each NT country. “International Migrant Stock 2019: Country Profiles.” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020. Accessed July 27, 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/countryprofiles.asp>.

³⁷ “International Migrant Stock 2019.” United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2019. Accessed January 28, 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>.

In terms of the decision to emigrate at all, and the decision to relocate to a particular destination, this kinship phenomenon was evidenced in the analysis of the AmericasBarometer survey, where the majority of Northern Triangle respondents who intended to go abroad were systematically more likely to have a close friend or relative in the United States. This was true across Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, and was statistically significant in quantitative models that controlled for other factors, like gender and age.

| | Guatemala | El Salvador | Honduras |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| VARIABLES | Model G5 | Model S5 | Model H5 |
| Close U.S. friend/relative | 0.13* (0.021) | 0.100* (0.025) | 0.136* (0.026) |
| Gender (male=1) | 0.099* (0.021) | 0.08* (0.022) | 0.12* (0.024) |
| Respondent age (categories) | -0.033* (0.003) | -0.035* (0.003) | -0.043* (0.004) |
| Constant | 0.302* (0.026) | 0.342* (0.029) | 0.449* (0.031) |

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<0.05

Table 3: Migration intention and U.S. ties logistic regression models by country

Given that kinship networks play an important role in migration and emigration patterns, an important consideration for understanding and influencing these patterns is whether or not potential migrants have existing ties to any particular destination country. Using the AmericasBarometer survey responses, this research designed a segmentation based on “Likely U.S. migrants”, “Potential U.S. migrants”, and “Potential non-U.S./Southern path migrants.”³⁸ While the majority of potential Northern Triangle migrants, as surveyed in 2018, had close ties to someone in the United States, many of them did not (27% of Guatemalans, 19% of Salvadorans and 20% of Hondurans). These portions of the potential migrant population may be more open to alternative destinations. Conversely, there are segments of the population that are particularly unlikely to choose a southern route, given the strength and importance of existing kinship networks.

³⁸ Likely U.S. migrants had close friends or relatives in the United States and reported that they were *very likely* to live or work abroad in the next three years. Potential U.S. migrants also had close friends in the U.S., but only stated an intent to live or work abroad in the next three years. The last category included migrants that intended to relocate, but did not have close ties in the U.S. Also, see Lindquist, Kathryn and Amira Giadala. “The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants.” Quantitative Report to Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of Houston. College Park, MD: START, 2020, 16.

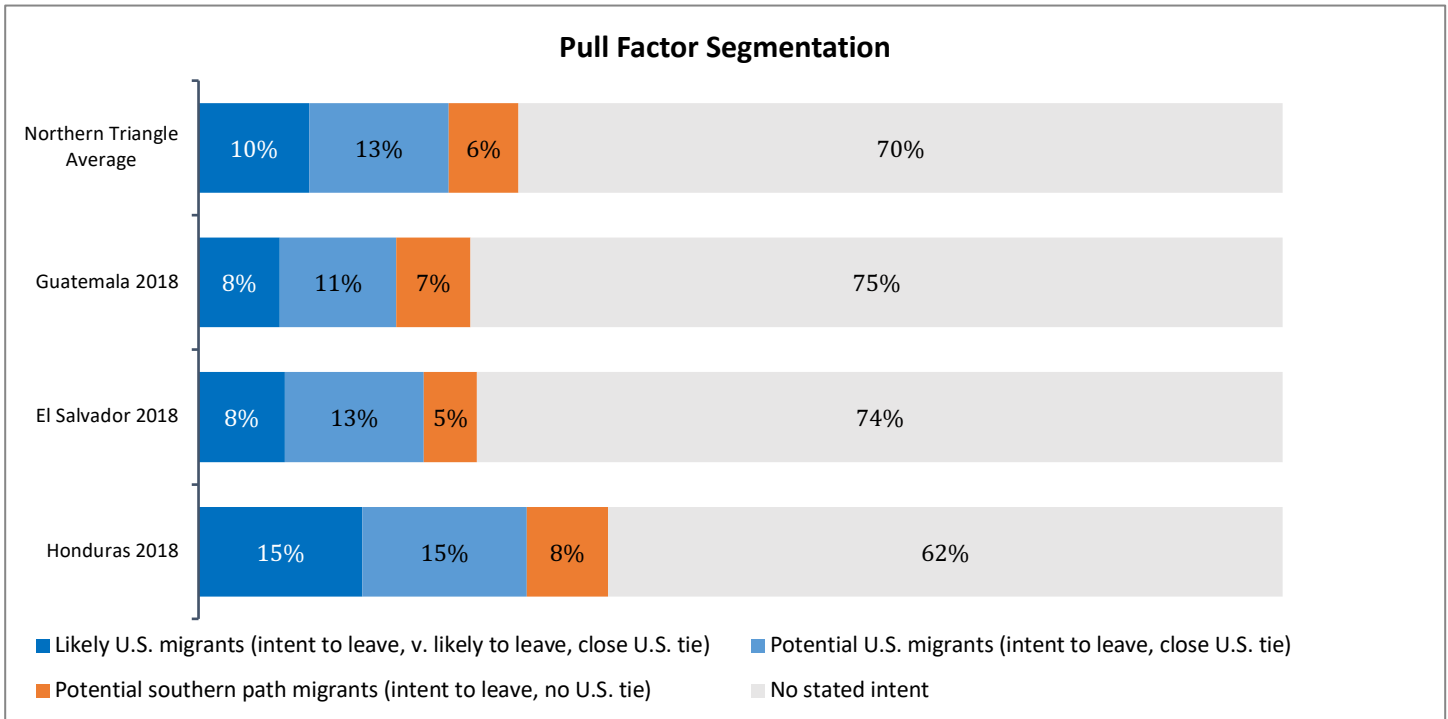


Figure 7: Pull factor segmentation by country

As discussed throughout this section, kinship networks can act as important pull factors for migrant populations as they support newly arrived migrants with settlement and integration into their host communities. The AmericasBarometer survey provided a lens into the “Potential non-U.S./Southern path” migrants that may be more inclined to consider alternative destinations to relocation aside from the United States.

To that end, perceptions of safety and economic opportunities in Costa Rica and Panama could play an instrumental role in directing at least a portion of Northern Triangle migrant flows to southern Central America. Given this evidence-based assessment of the relevant push and pull factors, Costa Rica and Panama are well-regarded in the region for possessing strong economies and peaceful societies, making them suitable destinations for those in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras facing complex insecurity-related push factors. The next section of this report delves into three relevant dimensions (economic, social, and policy barriers) of Costa Rica and Panama’s absorptive capacity for additional migrant populations.

Findings on the Economic Absorptive Capacity of Panama and Costa Rica

Though an examination of migrant and immigrant employment patterns reveals some useful insights into the industries and geographic areas that are most promising for non-native workers, the Panamanian and Costa Rican economies have both suffered tremendously from the negative repercussions of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, this has severely limited the absorptive capacity of these economies to additional migrants from the Northern Triangle, at least in the near-term. The businesses that participated in the business survey administered as part of this project indicated that they had fewer employees and fewer paid working hours as a result of the pandemic, and that there was limited interest in hiring migrants or immigrants from outside the country. However, there is some evidence that policy interventions that target businesses which are already employers of migrants and immigrants may boost this capacity, even in the current climate.

Economic Impact of COVID-19

Though both Panama and Costa Rica have long been recognized as more secure and prosperous than many of their Central American neighbors, COVID-19 has deeply harmed the economies of both countries. Unemployment rates have increased sharply as a result of the pandemic, reaching as high as 21.9 percent in Costa Rica and 18.5 percent in Panama in recent months.³⁹ This shift for Panama is particularly pronounced, as it had touted a pre-pandemic unemployment rate of just 4.7 percent, within the range that economists often consider to be full employment.⁴⁰ Additionally, GDP growth, which had been positive in the pre-pandemic years, turned sharply negative, with the most recent 2020 quarterly estimates at negative 7.2 percent in Costa Rica and negative 38.4 percent in Panama.⁴¹

Businesses in these countries are feeling these macroeconomic trends. According to those businesses that participated in the survey study for this research, the overall business climate in their country was seen as “Poor” by the majority of respondents (54% in Panama and 51% in Costa Rica), with an additional 23 percent in Panama and 16 percent in Costa Rica indicating that it was “Very Poor”. Businesses in Panama were more likely to indicate that their business had been “Hurt a lot” by COVID-19 (72%) compared to Costa Rica (52%). However, respondents in both countries believed that their industries overall were “Hurt a lot” at fairly similar rates (71% in Costa Rica and 79% in Panama).

³⁹ “Encuesta Continua de Empleo trimestre móvil Agosto – Septiembre – Octubre (ASO 2020).” Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, December 2020. <https://www.inec.go.cr/noticia/tasa-de-desempleo-nacional-llego-al-219>. Evolución del Desempleo. Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, September 2020. <https://www.inec.gob.pa/archivos/P0705547520201222124619Gr%C3%A1fica%201.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Data measures unemployment from 15+ years of age. “SDG indicator 8.5.2 – Unemployment Rate (%) - Annual.” ILO STAT, 2020. Accessed July 27, 2020. <https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer14/>. For a discussion of full employment, see Hall, Robert E., R. A. Gordon, and Charles Holt. “Why Is the Unemployment Rate So High at Full Employment?” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* 1970, no. 3 (1970): 369-410. Accessed February 2, 2021. doi:10.2307/2534138.

⁴¹ Panama figures is from Q2 2020 and comes from the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Panama, and Costa Rica figure is from Q3 and comes from the Central Bank of Costa Rica. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Costa-Rica/gdp_growth/ https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Panama/gdp_growth/

| | Panama (n=261) | | Costa Rica (n=168) | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | How do you perceive the current climate for your industry ? | How do you perceive the current overall business climate in Panama today? | How do you perceive the current climate for your industry ? | How do you perceive the current overall business climate in Costa Rica today? |
| Very good | 3% | 0% | 5% | 1% |
| Good | 11% | 4% | 26% | 10% |
| Neutral | 32% | 17% | 24% | 22% |
| Poor | 32% | 54% | 32% | 51% |
| Very poor | 20% | 23% | 13% | 16% |
| Prefer not to respond | 2% | 2% | 0% | 1% |

Table 4: Distribution of survey responses assessing outlook on business and industry in Panama and Costa Rica

| | Panama (n=261) | | Costa Rica (n=168) | |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|--|
| | Overall, how has this business been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic? | In Panama as a whole, how has this industry been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? | Overall, how has this business been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic? | In Costa Rica as a whole, how has this industry been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? |
| Hurt a lot | 72% | 79% | 52% | 71% |
| Hurt a little | 18% | 13% | 30% | 21% |
| Little or no effect | 5% | 3% | 9% | 2% |
| Helped a little | 3% | 3% | 2% | 1% |
| Helped a lot | 2% | 1% | 5% | 4% |
| Prefer not to respond | 0% | 1% | 2% | 1% |

Table 5: Distribution of survey responses assessing the effect of COVID-19 on business and industry in Panama and Costa Rica

There is evidence that these negative impacts on the macroeconomic, industry, and individual-business levels have a direct bearing on the willingness and ability of businesses in both southern Central American countries to employ migrants and immigrants. In Panama, firms in which it was somewhat common to hire immigrants or migrants were more likely by 12 points to say they had been hurt a lot.⁴² Businesses in Costa Rica that indicated at least some of their labor force worked in informal positions were also more likely to say their business had been hurt a lot by COVID-19 (61%), compared to surveyed businesses overall (again, 52%). This is consistent with findings from the interviews that there are fewer opportunities for migrant and immigrant workers in southern Central America than there had been pre-COVID. The majority of businesses that participated in the survey indicated that they cut the number of paid hours and the number of employees on payroll as a result in the pandemic, with the impact being more severe in Panama than Costa Rica.⁴³

Further, a plurality of business respondents in Costa Rica (45%) and in Panama (50%)⁴⁴ said that they would be less likely to hire migrants or immigrants from outside their countries as a result of COVID-19.⁴⁵ In Panama and Costa Rica, there was little variation in response to this question, regardless of whether the company already employed immigrants, or whether employing migrants or immigrants was common in the industry. It was also similar across all industry categories and business sizes. Only 10 percent of businesses surveyed in Costa Rica and seven percent in Panama indicated that they would be more likely to hire immigrants or migrants because of COVID-19.

These figures may well reflect a general slowdown in hiring and high unemployment rather than a more pervasive bias (though they are consistent with either scenario), but they do seem to indicate that companies will not generally increase positions available to migrant or immigrant workers in the short-term. Additionally, there are concerns that struggling businesses may take unfair advantage of migrants, especially those without formal work authorizations. As one Costa Rican interviewee put it: “Now with the pandemic there is a specific and unique pretext to deny [migrants of] employment opportunities,” and some companies are even “taking advantage of the legislations and decrees” to demand more from workers while providing fewer benefits.⁴⁶ Coupled with high unemployment and negative growth, COVID-19’s impact on the economy in both Costa Rica and Panama has been severe and negative, particularly as it relates to employment opportunities for (potential) Northern Triangle migrants.

⁴² The smaller subpopulation sample sizes mean that these results are not statistically significant at conventional levels, but they are comparatively large in magnitude.

⁴³ For Panama, 77% reduced hours and 65% reduced the number of employees (47% “decreased a lot”); for Costa Rica, 52% said they had reduced hours and 55% had reduced the total number of employees, with 26% saying they had “decreased a lot.”

⁴⁴ In Panama, there were 130 businesses out of 261 surveyed who gave this response.

⁴⁵ Question 20 text in English and Spanish: *How would you describe to impact of COVID-19 on your business’s employment of migrants or immigrants from outside [COUNTRY]?* ¿Cómo caracterizaría el impacto del COVID-19 en el empleo de migrantes/inmigrantes de otros países en su establecimiento?

⁴⁶ Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 22, 2020 (AACAP 14).

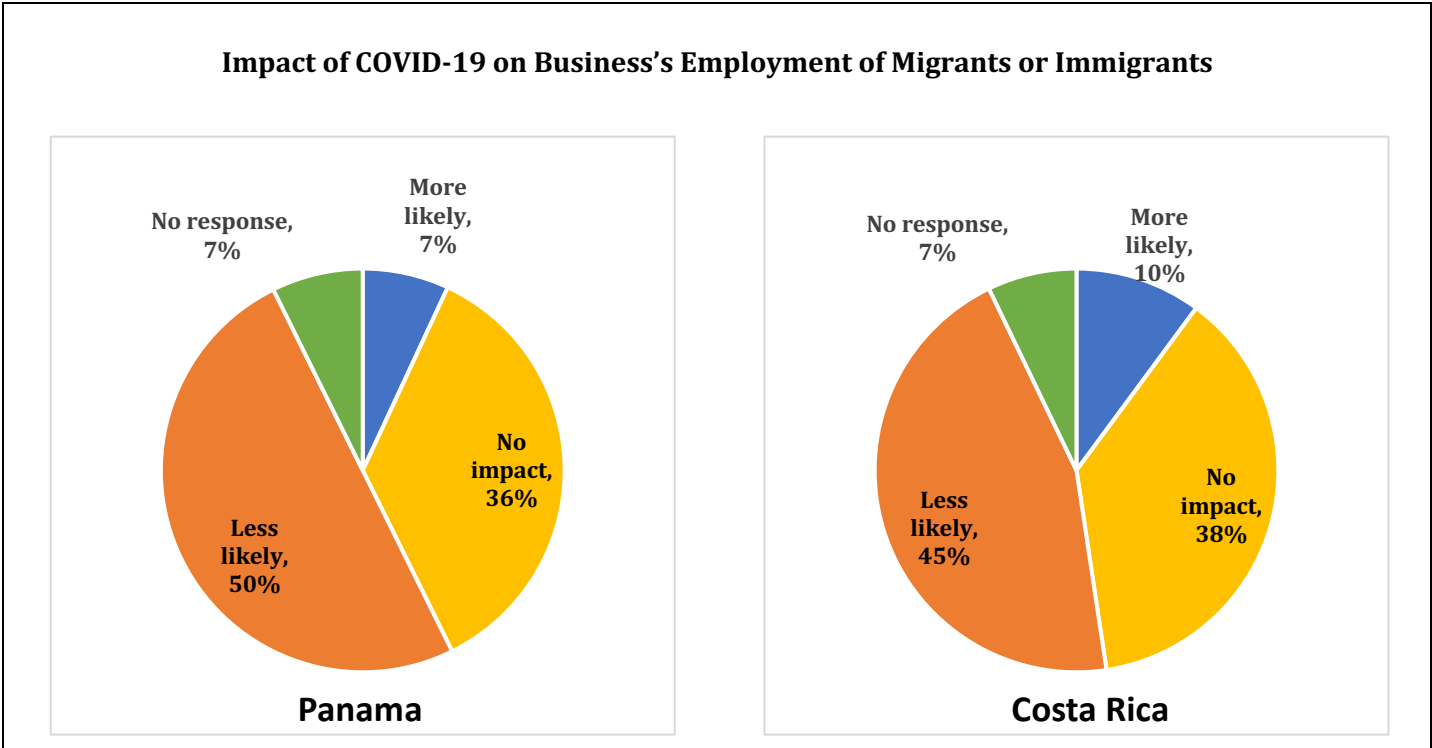


Figure 8: Impact of COVID-19 on business's employment of migrants or immigrants in Panama and Costa Rica

With a vaccine on the horizon, it is worth noting that most businesses believed that the economic downturn in their industries was temporary. Among those who said their industry had been hurt “a little” or “a lot” by COVID-19, 79 percent in Costa Rica and 72 percent in Panama predicted that their industries would return to pre-COVID-19 levels within two years. This indicates that reluctance to hire those from immigrant and migrant communities could prove to be temporary, and economic absorptive capacity in the form of employment opportunities for Northern Triangle migrants could strengthen in the near- to medium-term.

Employment Opportunities for Northern Triangle Migrants

One key finding of this research is that Northern Triangle immigrants and migrants represent a small minority of those who are currently living and working in southern Central America. Figure 9 and Figure 10 illustrate this using 2019 data from the UN DESA; Northern Triangle migrants represent no more than four percent of the total migrant population in either Panama or Costa Rica. In Panama, just fewer than one in three migrants are from South America (Colombia or Venezuela) and in Costa Rica, the overwhelming majority are from bordering Nicaragua.

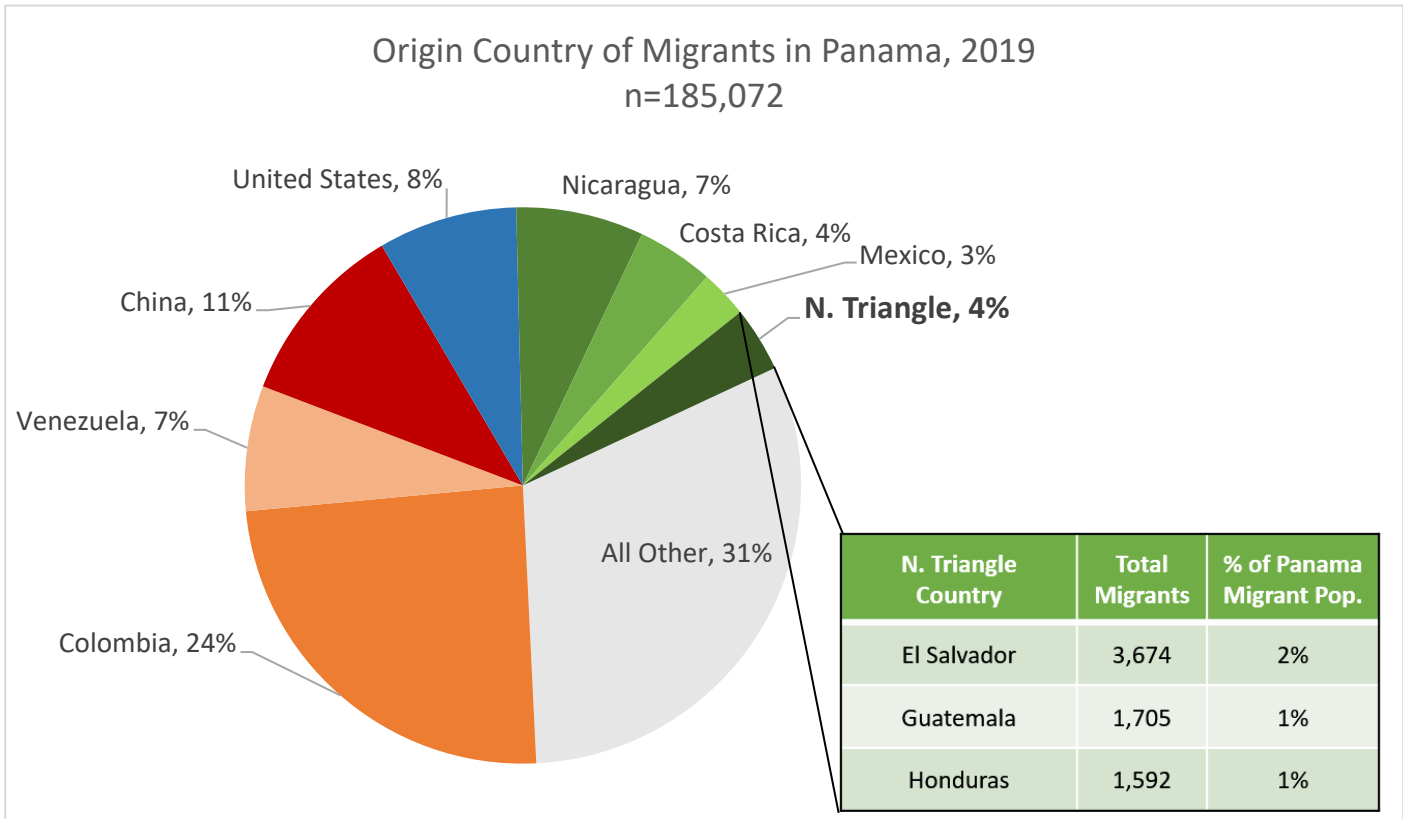


Figure 9: Origin country of migrants in Panama, 2019

These trends were also reflected in the survey of Panamanian and Costa Rican businesses. It is worth reiterating that this survey was not representative of the businesses in these countries, but they do show useful relative trends and figures that corroborate the findings in other portions of the research. Respondents to that survey were asked to tell us, to the best of their knowledge, whether their company had ever employed anyone from Northern Triangle countries.⁴⁷ Just nine percent of businesses surveyed in Costa Rica and seven percent in Panama were able to respond confidently in the affirmative (“Definitely yes”).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ To the best of your knowledge, has your company ever employed migrants/immigrants from Honduras, El Salvador, or Guatemala in particular? (Spanish: *Según su conocimiento, ¿su establecimiento ha contratado migrantes/inmigrantes de Honduras, El Salvador o Guatemala específicamente?*)

⁴⁸ When combined with “Probably yes,” the totals came to 10 percent of businesses in Panama and 15 percent that had probably ever employed Northern Triangle migrants. Because the survey may or may not have reached someone with thorough-going knowledge of the company’s hiring history, this question included these four “definitely yes, probably yes, probably no, and definitely no” answer choices, in addition to the “Prefer not to respond” option. Given that the number of businesses that employ Northern Triangle migrants was likely to be fairly small, this four-point scale helped to ensure that respondents provided us with as accurate a “best guess” as possible but also alleviated the satisficing tendency towards choose a neutral option that respondents may have when being asked questions that are cognitively demanding. (See Jon A. Krosnick, 1991. “Response Strategies for Coping with the Demands of Attitude Measures in Surveys.” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 5:214-36).

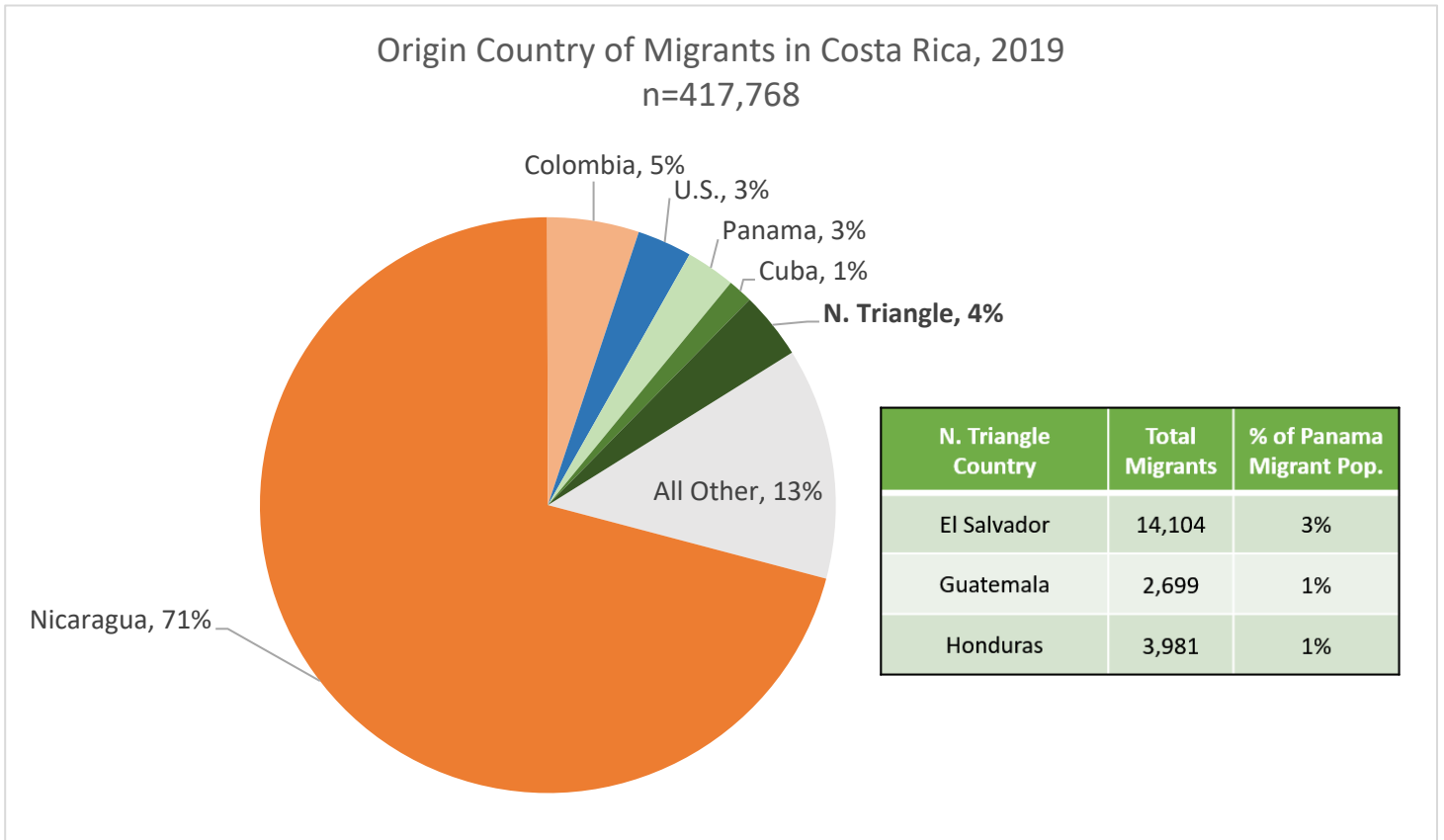


Figure 10: Origin country of migrants in Costa Rica, 2019

Overall, 53 percent of Panamanian and 55 percent of Costa Rican businesses surveyed indicated that their company currently employed workers from outside their respective countries. Those who said yes were asked which countries those workers were from, which meant that 139 individuals in Panama and 92 in Costa Rica were asked this question. Figure 11 reflects the responses of those who indicated that their business currently employed workers from outside the country. Note that this question entails a narrower timeframe than the question about whether the company had ever employed workers from the Northern Triangle. Nicaragua was the most-frequently cited worker country of origin among Costa Rican businesses surveyed, while Venezuela was the most common response in Panama.

Results from the business survey did reveal a few patterns about the types of companies that were more likely to employ migrants and immigrants from outside the host country. Not surprisingly, firms employing twenty or more workers were much more likely than the smallest firms (those with fewer than five employees) to indicate that they were currently employing migrants; there was a 70-point gap in Costa Rica and a 46-point gap in Panama.⁴⁹ Companies that said hiring immigrants and migrants was “Very common” in their industry also employed migrants at a higher rate.

⁴⁹ This was one of the few statistically significant results in these surveys.

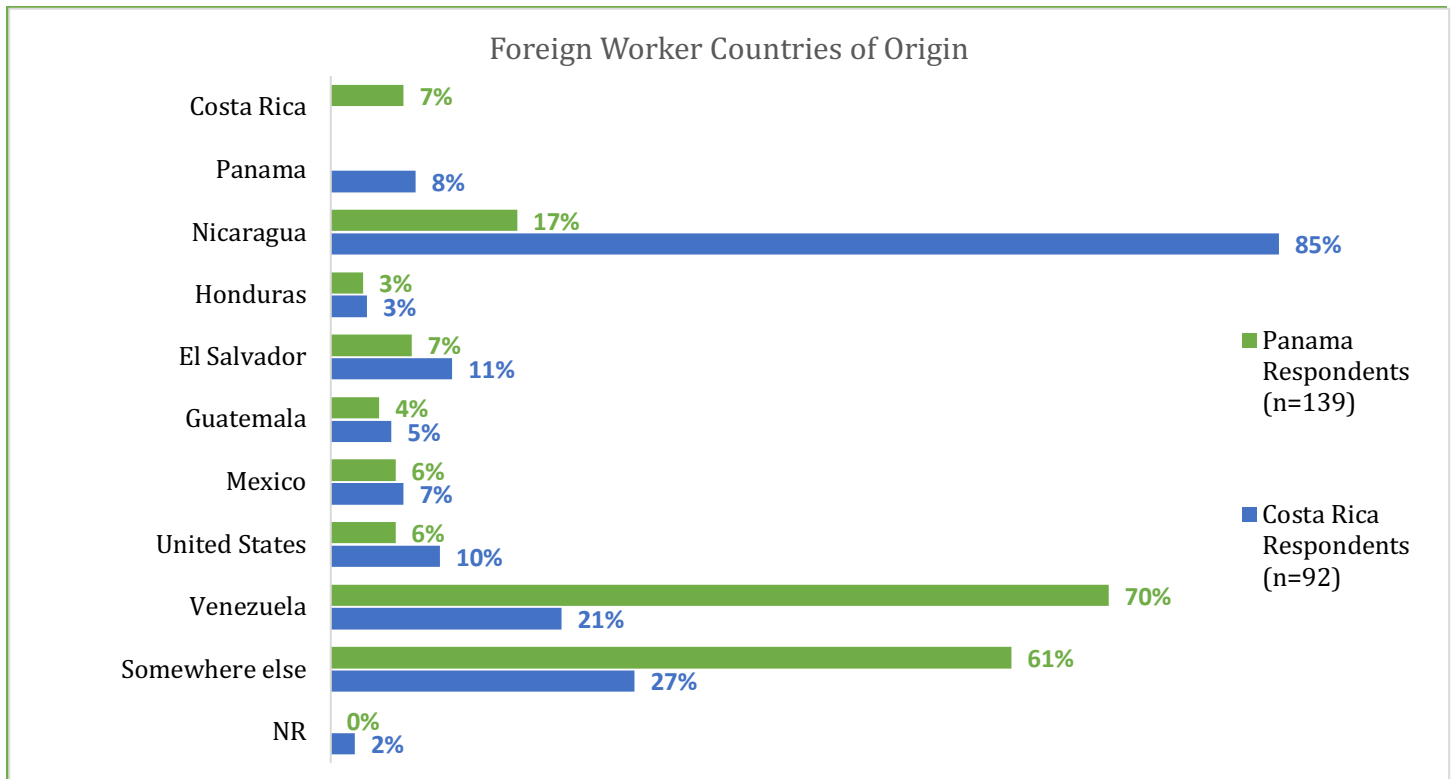


Figure 11: Foreign worker countries of origin

Moreover, companies and industries that were more likely to hire immigrants in general also reported having ever employed workers from the Northern Triangle at higher rates. Though the populations were small, this provides support for the notion that efforts to bolster companies and industries that already tend to provide employment for migrants would increase the capacity of those companies or industries to absorb Northern Triangle migrants in particular. In Panama, respondents who said they worked in the construction, or the hotels and restaurants industry were more likely to say that employment of migrants was “Very common” in their industry; in Costa Rica, this was true of the construction industry. The survey generated too few responses from those in agriculture in either country to provide additional insight; also, there were no Costa Rican respondents who indicated that hiring migrants was “Very common” in the manufacturing industry.

Using both metadata from survey respondents’ locations and answers to the survey question about their business’s location provided insight into the spatial distribution of employment opportunities and patterns for migrant and immigrant populations. The results of these spatial analyses appear below (Image 2 for Costa Rica). In Costa Rica, businesses in Limón tended to indicate that they employed those from outside the country with relatively higher frequency, with the majority (over 50%) of respondents in San José and Puntarenas indicating the same. In Panama, relatively few respondents were from outside the capital region; results are not shown.

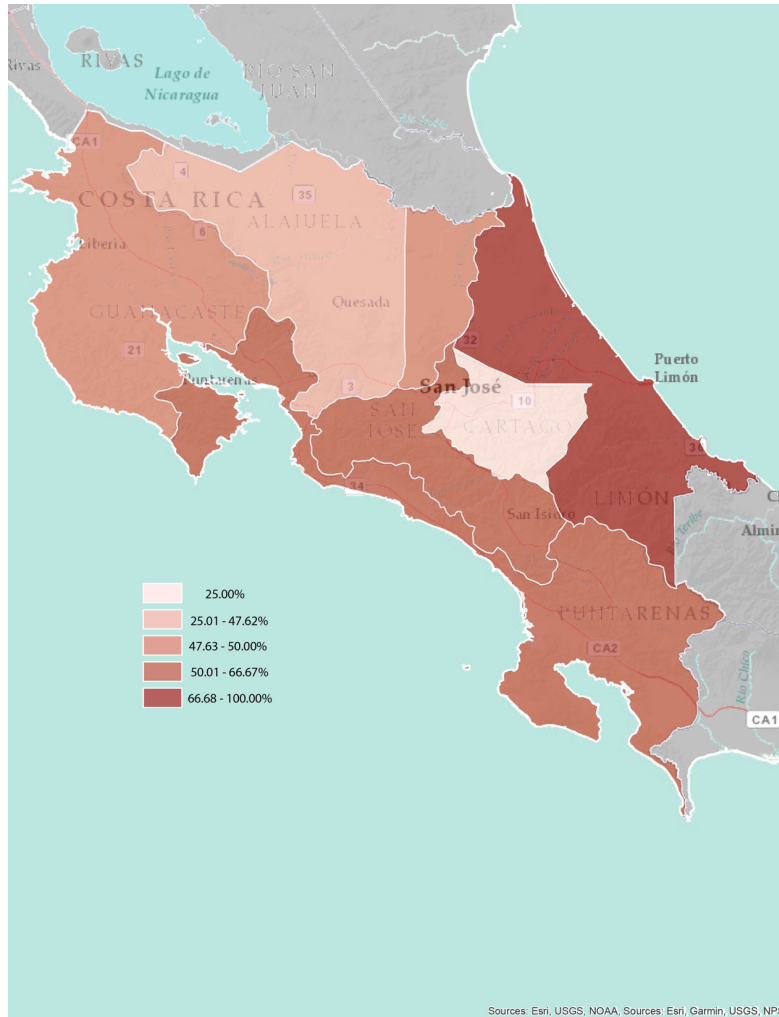


Image 2: Spatial Concentration of Costa Rican Businesses that Employ Immigrant/Migrant Workers

The survey of businesses in Panama and Costa Rica also provided insight into companies that hired seasonal workers. While 55 percent of those surveyed in Costa Rica and 61 percent of businesses surveyed in Panama indicated that they hired, at most, four seasonal employees each year, 20 or more seasonal workers were employed by 13 percent of surveyed businesses in Panama and 20 percent in Costa Rica. Many of these companies, especially those hiring only a few temporary workers each year, were clustered around the capital regions. However, in Costa Rica there was a wider geographic distribution of companies employing twenty or more seasonal workers. This is consistent with the

analysis of natality and mortality data in the quantitative report, which indicated that larger concentrations of immigrants and migrants could be found in large urban centers.⁵⁰



Image 3: Spatial Distribution of Seasonal Workers in Costa Rica

⁵⁰ Lindquist, Kathryn and Amira Giadala. “The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants.” Quantitative Report to Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of Houston. College Park, MD: START, 2020, 27-28.

These seasonal positions are not necessarily held by those from outside the country, but the geographic distribution of employers that already employ migrants and that regularly employ workers on a temporary or seasonal basis indicates where employment opportunities for Northern Triangle migrants might be found, even in the current economic climate. These results further indicate that Panama City and the broader capital region provide the best opportunities for migrant or immigrant workers in Panama, though employment opportunities in Costa Rica, while including the capital region, are also available in the border regions, particularly the northern provinces.

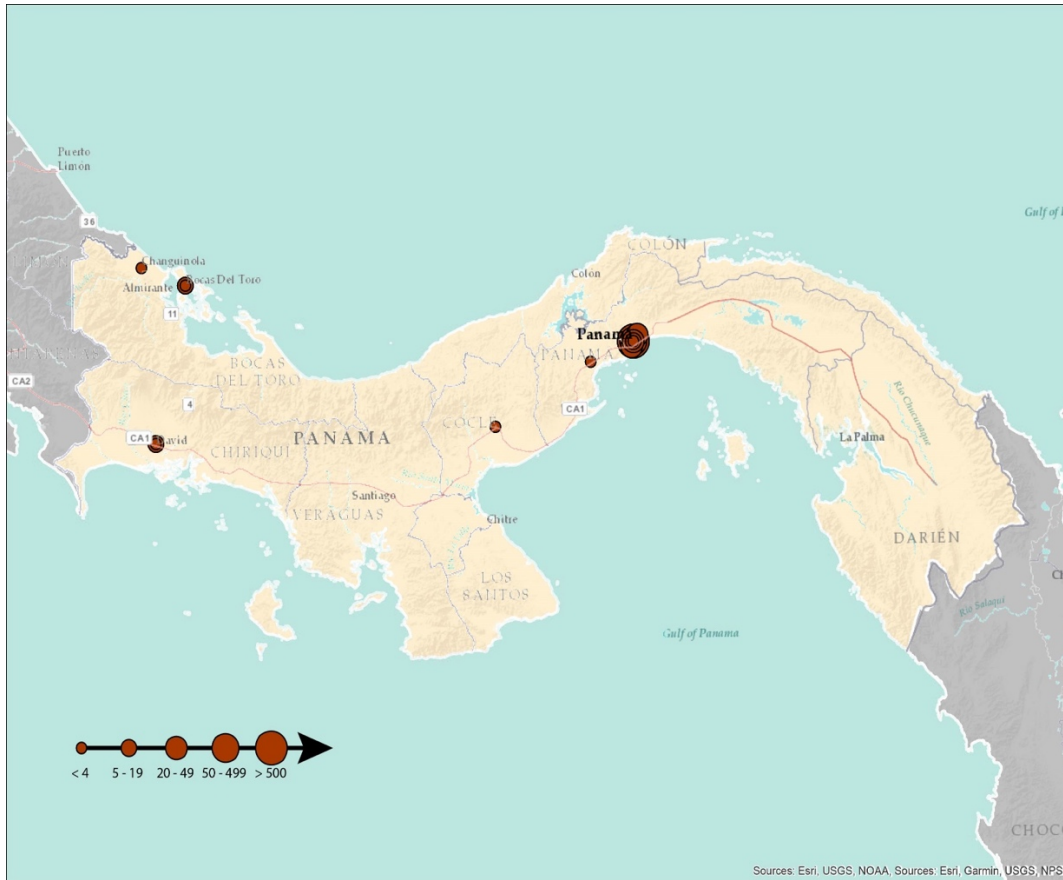


Image 4: Spatial Distribution of Seasonal Workers in Panama

The business survey also asked companies directly about factors that might make them more willing to hire workers from outside the country, including suggesting several specific policy mechanisms or interventions to increase willingness. The results were lukewarm overall; respondents were given a four-point scale ranging from “A lot more likely” to “No more likely.” Very few policies garnered strong “A lot more likely” responses and the plurality of respondents selected “No more likely” in each case. There was, however, a systematic difference between companies that were currently employing migrants or immigrants and those that were not. For instance, in Panama, 56 percent of surveyed firms that were already employing migrants noted that they would be at least somewhat more likely to hire from outside

their country if the skillsets were a better fit for their companies. In contrast, only 26 percent of those not currently employing migrants or immigrants felt the same way.

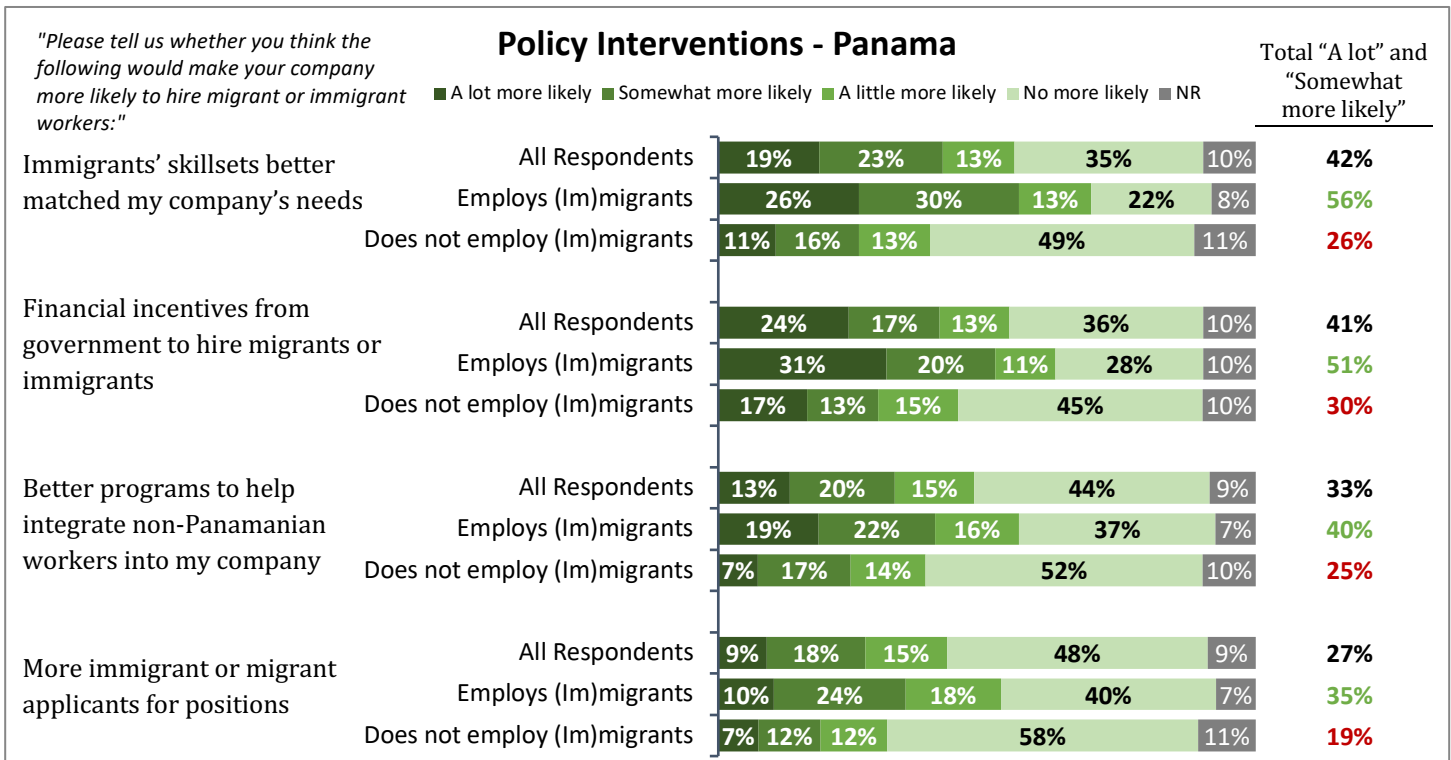


Figure 12: Panama: Distribution of responses to the following prompt, "Please tell us whether you think the following would make your company more likely to hire migrant or immigrant workers."

These discrepancies were larger in Panama than in Costa Rica. It is also worth noting that businesses in general did not think that additional migrant or immigrant applicants for positions would increase the chance of their being hired. This is consistent with evaluations of the current business climate in both countries, and with the findings in the qualitative report, which show that there are now fewer opportunities for migrants and immigrants (as well as Panamanian and Costa Rican nationals) in these countries.

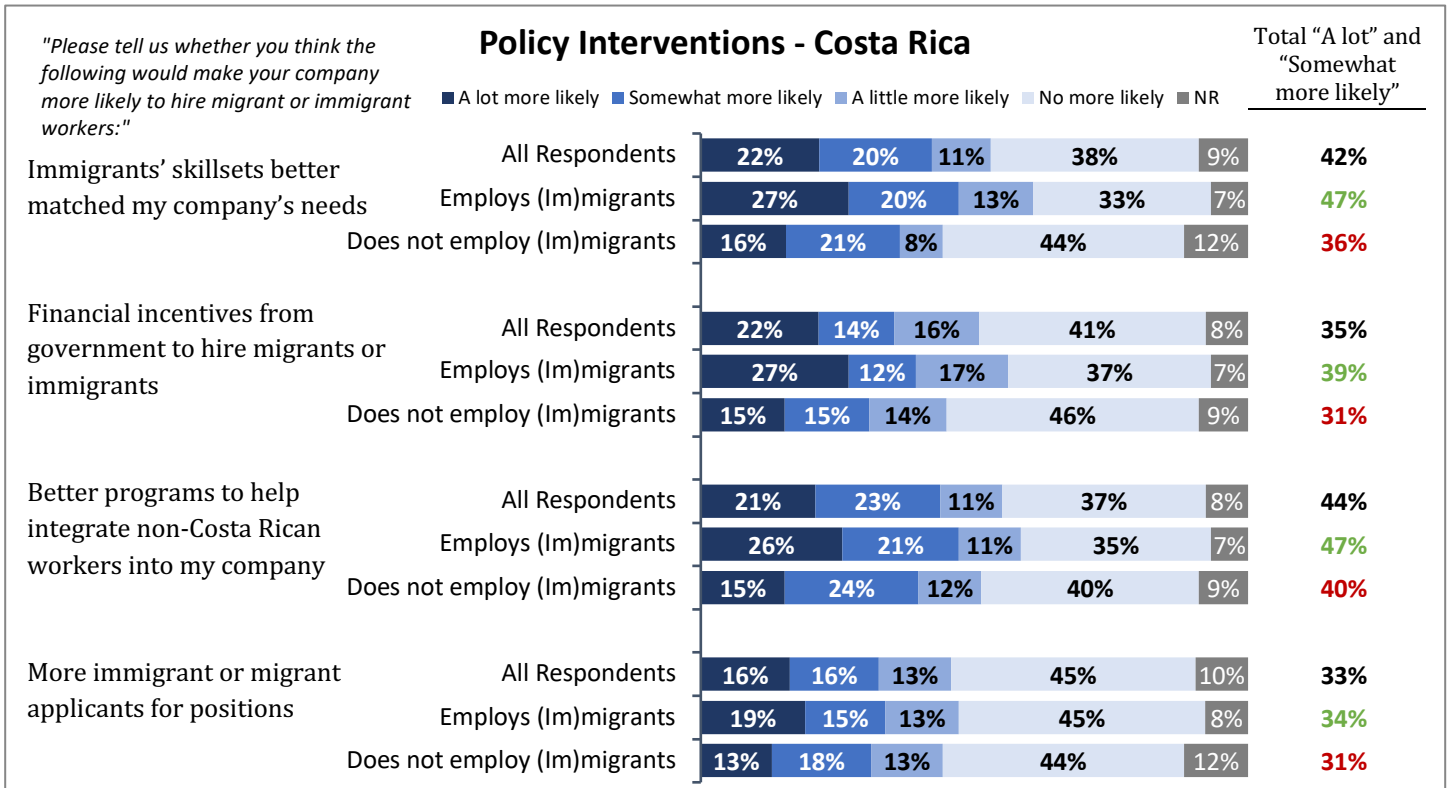


Figure 13: Costa Rica: Distribution of responses to the following prompt, "Please tell us whether you think the following would make your company more likely to hire migrant or immigrant workers."

These findings suggest that there is some appetite for programs that include financial incentives to companies or that help migrants and immigrants identify and develop the skills employers need. However, these programs are best targeted to industries and companies that are already employing migrants from other countries, as firms surveyed in this research that did not already do so were far less receptive to hiring migrants or immigrants in the future. Fortunately, these firms are also the ones more likely to have indicated employing workers from the Northern Triangle, so there is some evidence that promoting migrant and immigrant hiring in key industries will ultimately improve their absorptive capacity for additional workers from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras.

Findings on the Social Absorptive Capacity of Panama and Costa Rica

In addition to economic absorptive capacity, this research identified two important dimensions of Panamanian and Costa Rican social absorptive capacity for additional migrants from the Northern Triangle. Though both Panama, and especially Costa Rica, have sizeable migrant populations and have approached immigration policies with an eye towards respect and understanding of these communities, there are still issues of both general xenophobia and a lack of existing kinship networks that limit the ability to accept and integrate Northern Triangle migrants. However, there are some avenues to increase social absorptive capacity, especially through strengthening non-kinship-based support structures that rely on IGOs and NGOs such as the *Colectivo Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos Nunca +* (Nicaraguan Human Rights Collective Never Again), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Xenophobia

Xenophobic attitudes are also present, if unevenly held and complex in nature, in the host societies of both southern Central American countries in this study. At the level of national government policy, Panama and Costa Rica have long been destination and/or transit countries for diverse migrant populations. Costa Rica continues to demonstrate its dedication and commitment to migrants through myriad bilateral and multilateral agreements with regional and international actors. Panamanians, whose country has served as a transit point for about five centuries, are similarly generally perceived as more accustomed to and receptive towards different languages, practices, and skin tones.⁵¹

At the societal level, however, attitudes towards immigrants and migrants from outside the country are more complex and somewhat more negative. This has implications for how well the societies in Panama and Costa Rica may absorb larger numbers of Northern Triangle migrants. For instance, Panama has seen the enactment of policies that limit migrant access to high-skilled positions like those in medicine and many professional services, irrespective of the qualifications or work experience that incoming migrants may bring. An interview subject well-versed on these issues described the policies as “unfavorable for [migrant] integration and settlement.”⁵² The interviews also revealed pre-existing quotas that favor Panamanians over immigrants and migrants in hiring processes, and unions that normalize migrant underrepresentation and marginalization.⁵³

Social absorption may also be more challenging for Northern Triangle migrants who bear physical markers of difference, compared to host societies. Specifically, the findings from the KIIs with experts on

⁵¹ Schlemmer, Jimmi Joe. “International Migration in the geographical middle of the Americas – A perspective analysis of international migration in Panama.” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, November 2016, 1. Accessed February 3, 2021. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fesamcentral/13023.pdf>.

⁵² “Transit of Irregular Foreigners through the Border with Colombia.” Servicio Nacional de Migración, 2020. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://www.migracion.gob.pa/transparencia/datos-abiertos>.

⁵³ Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 18, 2020 (AACAP 24).

⁵³ Ibid.

migration indicated the presence of discriminatory attitudes towards individuals with darker complexions. In Costa Rica, migrants with darker skin were frequently associated with Nicaraguan migrants, who also did not typically possess the same level of education as Costa Rican nationals.⁵⁴ Similarly, Panamanian subjects highlighted special treatment towards migrants of lighter skin tones.

Interestingly, though, these skin tone categories appear to intersect with (perceived) levels of education. Several interviewees proudly referenced Costa Rica's highly educated population, which often contrasts to that of the incoming Central American migrants. Another interviewee highlighted the possibility of Salvadoran and Honduran migrants experiencing instances of xenophobia as well, but noted that this would largely depend on whether they take advantage of the education programs made available to them. Guatemalan migrants reportedly "possess [higher] education levels so they do not face rejection like [their Nicaraguan counterparts]."⁵⁵ Similarly, a Panamanian subject highlighted that the "level of xenophobia ...is reduced when the foreigner is educated," which would presumably imply opportunities to bolster social absorptive capacity.⁵⁶ This suggests that more educated Northern Triangle migrants may face less xenophobia from host societies in these countries, even if there are other apparent markers of social difference.

To further understand perceptions of migrants in local communities in Panama, the research team conducted a geospatial analysis of two AmericasBarometer survey questions tackling crime and culture, both of which are useful to illustrate the subnational attitudes of Panamanian nationals towards migrant communities.⁵⁷ The two questions were examined by using global and local spatial autocorrelation and comparing each municipality to three of its nearest neighbors. The results suggested that the responses are regionally clustered and show positive and significant spatial autocorrelation.

Interestingly, the results showed a clear delineation between municipalities bordering Nicaragua and Colombia, suggesting that the more urbanized municipalities bordering Central American countries (Costa Rica and Nicaragua) harbor more negative feelings about *immigrants and crime* (Image 6) and *immigrants and Panamanian culture* (Image 7) than central municipalities or municipalities bordering Colombia. These findings could suggest a reduced absorptive capacity for migrants that resettle in the northernmost municipalities, but a potential opportunity for resettlement in sparsely populated locations throughout central or southern Panama.

⁵⁴ Costa Rican government official, interview with author, October 30, 2020 (AACAP 16).

⁵⁵ Costa Rican government official, interview with author, October 30, 2020 (AACAP 16).

⁵⁶ Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 6, 2020 (AACAP 18).

⁵⁷ The questions examined in the quantitative report included: 1) *Do migrants make crime worse?* And 2) *Do migrants harm Panamanian culture?*

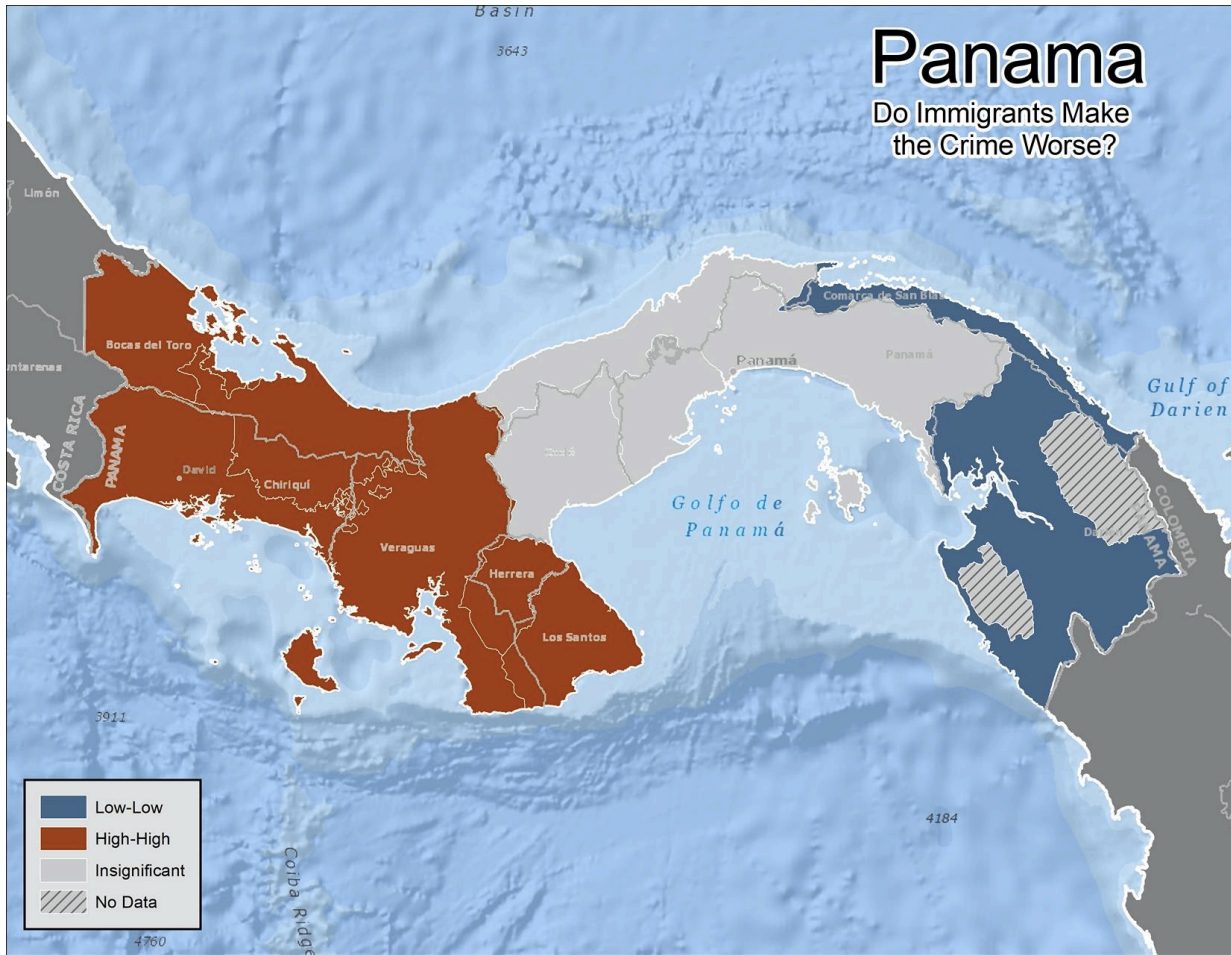


Image 5: Spatial Correlation on Crime and Immigration Views

Further complicating the social absorptive capacity issue are the global, regional, and national effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which seem to have exacerbated the pre-existing tendencies towards xenophobia in both Panama and Costa Rica. A June 2020 study in Costa Rica conducted by COES Análisis de Medios revealed a 62 percent increase in xenophobic and discriminatory social media content, whereby 65 percent of these messages blame foreigners for transmitting and increasing cases of COVID-19.⁵⁸ While this study has not yet been replicated in Panama, an interviewee from the KIIs in this research referenced the effects of the Ebola outbreak in 2014 in Panama and the need to implement programs to compensate for the increased rejection of migrant communities as a result.⁵⁹ Another interviewee further reinforced this conclusion by associating the rise in xenophobia to the re-adoption pre-existing migration stereotypes that blame migrants for spreading the disease and saturating healthcare systems.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ This research is not associated with the authors' own project. "Análisis de Información Xenofobia en Redes Sociales." COES Análisis de medios, July 2020. <https://www.coescomunicacion.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Xenofobia-y-Discriminaci%C3%B3n-en-Redes-Sociales.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 6, 2020 (AACAP 18).

⁶⁰ Costa Rican human rights lawyer, interview with research team, October 20, 2020 (AACAP 2).

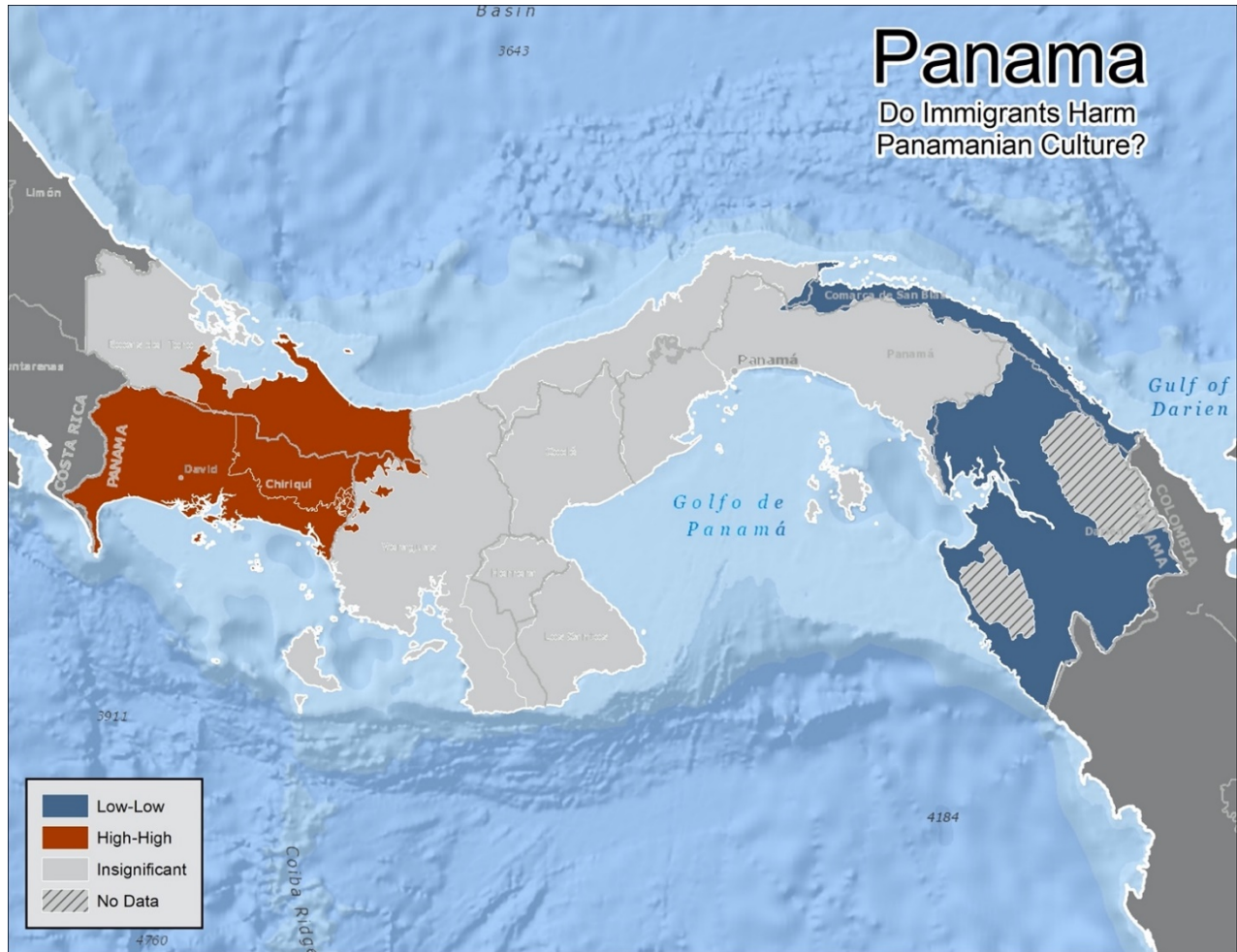


Image 6: Spatial Correlation on Culture and Immigration Views

Other stereotypes were also re-adopted by host communities, including beliefs that migrants take advantage of government subsidies or “steal their jobs.”⁶¹ These attitudes were directed primarily at Latin American migrants, in part identifiable by their darker skin and eye color; there is a perception that those from European countries for instance are not a strain on national and societal resources.⁶² The high unemployment rates and overall impact of COVID-19 noted above suggest that economic programs that benefit local Costa Ricans or Panamanians may also play a role in ameliorating concerns around immigrants tackling scarce employment opportunities and could reduce xenophobia. However, these programs would have to involve a variety of opportunities if they are to include host society employment. In the case of Costa Rica, one interviewee noted that “there are campaigns to encourage [Costa Ricans] to collect coffee, but there is no way [to convince them to do so].”⁶³ By diversifying the types of available

⁶¹ Costa Rican human rights lawyer, interview with research team, October 20, 2020 (AACAP 2).

⁶² Costa Rican government official, interview with author, October 30, 2020 (AACAP 16); Costa Rican human rights lawyer, interview with research team, October 20, 2020 (AACAP 2); Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 21, 2020 (AACAP 5); Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, November 19, 2020 (AACAP 21).

⁶³ Costa Rican government official, interview with author, October 30, 2020 (AACAP 16).

opportunities, the governments of Costa Rica and Panama could reduce unemployment figures and help their host and migrant communities support themselves and their families. Moreover, the governments could take advantage of the reluctance of many to perform low-skill jobs and utilize the opportunity for migrant-oriented campaigns to fill such gaps.

The business community is not immune to these social trends. The business survey conducted as part of this research found that 45 percent of Costa Rican businesses and 50 percent of Panamanian businesses surveyed indicated that they are less likely to hire immigrants and migrants as a result of COVID-19 (see Figure 8, above). This is compared to just 10 and seven percent in Costa Rica and Panama respectively that said they were more likely to hire workers from outside the country. Furthermore, the survey also explored other motivators to promote migrant inclusion into Panamanian and Costa Rican societies, including examining whether financial incentives from the government would encourage businesses to hire migrants or immigrants. Surprisingly, 57 percent of Costa Rican and 49 percent of Panamanian businesses surveyed said these financial incentives would make them little or no more likely to hire migrants or immigrants. This was a surprising finding, because, as described in the previous section of this report, businesses in both countries have been hurt financially by the pandemic. A potential alternative explanation is simply that businesses are not hiring at all; however, as noted in the previous section, firms already employing migrants or immigrants were more likely to show an interest in financial incentives to hire from these communities. Thus, while the survey results do not clearly indicate a motive for turning down (hypothetical) financial support for hiring, taken together, these findings could imply there are social pressures on the private sector that financial incentives alone may struggle to overcome in encouraging businesses to hire from migrant communities in the current climate.

Implementing programs to de-link fears of migrants spreading COVID-19 among host communities in both Costa Rica and Panama may be needed to boost near-term absorptive capacity. Community-led initiatives could increase positive interactions between migrant and host communities and humanize their experiences by discussing the factors that drive regional migration. Further, programs to educate host populations of the potentially positive effects migrants have on society could cause Costa Ricans and Panamanians to be more welcoming of migrant populations. Finally, efforts to counteract xenophobic narratives and provide verifiable information about the main drivers of COVID-19 transmission could change perceptions of migrants playing a central role in spreading the disease. This could be achieved through developing brochures, social media posts, and even televised coverage regarding the localized surges in cases of coronavirus and the main recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO).

In terms of bolstering companies' social absorptive capacity, 44 percent of Costa Rican and 33 percent of Panamanian businesses surveyed said better programs to help integrate non-native workers would make them much or somewhat more likely to hire migrants or immigrants. In Panama, interest in such

programs increased to 40 percent when only examining businesses that already employed workers from outside the country.⁶⁴ However, the aforementioned COES Análisis de Medios study conducted in Costa Rica suggested that of 123 businesses surveyed, only 1 percent has focused on inclusion and tolerance programs for immigrant communities, compared to other minority groups.⁶⁵ This suggests that while integration programs for migrant groups may not currently be the norm for local businesses, there is interest in their implementation and ample room for local or outside actors to work with these businesses to improve migrant inclusion and thereby increase absorptive capacity.

Migrant Support Networks

Migrant support networks can also provide a significant boost to social absorptive capacity, even in societies where xenophobia, discrimination, and other factors may make it more difficult for individuals to sustain themselves in a host country. Indeed, the presence of these existing kinship and support networks for Northern Triangle migrants in the United States is a key factor that makes a northern route appealing. Thus, the present research sought to understand the existing presence and role of kinship or other support networks for migrants in Costa Rica and Panama, and to explore how these may impact the capacity of these societies to absorb additional Northern Triangle migrants and immigrants in the future.

There were meaningful distinctions between Panamanian and Costa Rican contexts on this issue. The KIIs in Costa Rica reiterated the importance of kinship networks in facilitating migration flows. An interviewee from a local NGO described the prevalence of individuals that “had migrated once they were in contact with friends or family members that were [economically] stable and [able to] facilitate [their] arrival, through some kind of accommodations or other type of aid.”⁶⁶ This pattern in migration and immigration choices is common and not surprising.

However, most interviewees in Costa Rica recognized kinship networks almost exclusively in the context of *Nicaraguan* migrants, which make up the majority of migrants in Costa Rica, given the shared border and long history of migration flows.⁶⁷ The 1978 Sandinista Revolution sparked mass migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica and Nicaraguans have since created numerous civil society organizations and NGOs to support each other and advocate for their community’s evolving needs.⁶⁸ When asked, interviewees dismissed the possibility of these ties within Nicaraguan communities presently extending to Central American communities in general. The main limitation is presumably the small number of

⁶⁴ Question 26 text English and Spanish: *Better programs to help integrate non-[Panamanian/Costa Rican] workers into my company. Mejores programas para ayudar a integrar a los trabajadores no panameños/as en nuestro establecimiento.* Under Question 21INT. *Please tell us whether you think the following would make your company more likely to hire migrant or immigrant workers from outside [COUNTRY]. Por favor díganos si cree que estas posibilidades alentarían a su establecimiento a contratar trabajadores migrantes o inmigrantes de otros países.* See Appendix A.

⁶⁵ “Análisis de Información Xenofobia en Redes Sociales.” COES Análisis de medios, July 2020. <https://www.coescomunicacion.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Xenofobia-y-Discriminaci%C3%B3n-en-Redes-Sociales.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 28, 2020 (AACAP 3).

⁶⁷ Giadala, Amira, Barnett S. Koven, and Samuel Henkin. “The Road Less Traveled: Bolstering the Absorptive Capacity of Southern Central American States to Facilitate the Southern Flow of Northern Triangle Immigrants.” Qualitative Report to Borders, Trade, and Immigration (BTI) Institute at the University of Houston. College Park, MD: START, 2020, 8.

⁶⁸ Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 28, 2020 (AACAP 3).

Northern Triangle migrants, as compared to Nicaraguans, currently in Costa Rica. Nevertheless, the development of these widespread and successful kinship networks would suggest that there is an opportunity for other migrant groups, including those from Northern Triangle countries, to replicate the Nicaraguan experience.

The idea of kinship networks was largely absent in discussions among Panamanian interview subjects. Many doubted the possibility of migrant community kinship networks being sufficiently strong to support these populations in Panama while others highlighted the role of organizations in providing aid and support for migrant communities.⁶⁹ An interviewee working in the Panamanian government cited several international NGOs, public organizations and “many [other] institutions that work in migrant-related matters” and “provide considerable support for regular and irregular migrants.”⁷⁰ The establishment of these types of support networks indicate a strong preference for and reliance on organizations to support migrant groups and communities. The failure of kinship ties to materialize beyond organization-led networks suggests a distinctive reliance on these organizations to act as alternate support systems.

Both Costa Rica and Panama, then, face limitations when it comes to kinship-based support networks for Northern Triangle migrants. However, the prevalence of other active local and national organizations that provide support to these communities may present an opportunity to bridge the gap between Northern Triangle communities and establish relationships for them to access support through non-kinship-based networks. Indeed, given the geographic and societal scope of these organizations throughout the region, they may be able to provide more reliable support to migrant communities. Furthermore, their reliance on external funders such as governments, IGOs, and private donors, presents a unique opportunity to enhance absorptive capacity for additional Northern Triangle migrants by investing in and simultaneously strengthening local and international organizations. Over time, these systems could meaningfully help build relationships and networks within the local migrant communities in Panama and Costa Rica, which in turn would be more predisposed to encourage further migration.

Additionally, a portion of businesses in Panama and Costa Rica would be more inclined to hire migrant workers if they had better integration programs to support them. These integration programs could also serve as a social support network, while simultaneously bolstering absorptive capacity for additional migrants. The programs could also prove to be especially useful in mimicking the Nicaraguan kinship ties (and reinforcing existing community relationships) in Costa Rica and leveraging alternative support networks in Panama where kinship networks are not as well established.

⁶⁹ One interviewee suggested that past experiences with violence or violent groups might make migrants more hesitant to connect with others from their country of origin. Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, October 22, 2020 (AACAP 4).

⁷⁰ Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 18, 2020 (AACAP 24).

However, the lack of kinship networks in the present moment is a serious limitation to the absorptive capacity of southern Central American states. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected migrant job security and driven migrants into vulnerable situations, including poverty and hunger, prompting many of them to, as one interviewee put it, “return [to their countries of origin] in buses during the pandemic...[because] they have no opportunities.”⁷¹ In Costa Rica, other interviewees cited unreliable housing conditions contributing to these return migration flows, as “many Nicaraguans struggle to secure rental” housing agreements due to discriminatory attitudes.⁷² These circumstances will undoubtedly impact the possibility of kinship or other kinds of support networks enabling or sustaining future migration flows, as the existing migrants may themselves be in need of ongoing organization-led support. Paramount to the resilience of these support networks, therefore, is the performance of the economy and potential employment opportunities for migrants. At present, these findings would suggest a marginal opportunity to bolster social absorptive capacity. However, additional research will be required at different stages throughout the pandemic to determine viable opportunities to revitalize migrant support networks and incentivize chain migration trends.

⁷¹ Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with research team, October 14, 2020 (AACAP 1).

“COVID-19 driving Nicaraguan refugees to hunger and desperation.” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, August 28, 2020. Accessed January 28, 2021 <https://reliefweb.int/report/costa-rica/covid-19-driving-nicaraguan-refugees-hunger-and-desperation>.

“What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children?” Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, October 2020. Accessed January 28th, 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/>.

⁷² Costa Rican human rights lawyer, interview with research team, October 20, 2020 (AACAP 2).

Policy Barriers to Increased Absorptive Capacity

The ability of the economies and societies of Panama and Costa Rica to absorb additional migrant populations from the Northern Triangle is also directly impacted by government regulations and policies. These fall into two broad categories—those requirements facing migrants hoping to work and live in southern Central America more permanently, and those regulations on businesses' hiring and employment practices. Currently, potential Northern Triangle migrants face significant financial and practical barriers to achieving legal residency and work authorization, limiting the ability of these countries to truly “absorb” immigrant populations without a minimum level of wealth or advanced education. Businesses in both Costa Rica and Panama risk fines and harm to their businesses for hiring irregular workers, while also facing potentially long waiting periods to verify whether a worker has proper employment authorization; evidence from the business survey suggests that these policies have a mild-to-moderate impact on the willingness of companies to hire workers from outside the country.

Bureaucratic and Government Hurdles Facing Migrants

Though Northern Triangle migrants are able to enter both Costa Rica and Panama without a visa, for those that aim to resettle and work in either country, there is a lengthy and expensive process to obtaining legalized status and work authorization. Migrants in Costa Rica, for instance, are required to pay a US\$50 deposit to apply for temporary residency, and an additional US\$200 if they entered the country as a tourist.⁷³ Moreover, applicants must also pay for every piece of paper stamped by the *Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería* (DGME; General Directorate of Migration and Foreign Affairs).⁷⁴ The overall cost of applying for temporary residency therefore limits accessibility to lower income households, especially when the average monthly household income was under US\$1,900 in 2018, and the economic effects of COVID-19 have echoed throughout society.⁷⁵ The process of obtaining a residency permit can take a minimum of three months, during which time migrants cannot apply for work authorization.⁷⁶ This prolonged and open-ended waiting period strains low-income families even further and often forces them to work without authorization, usually in Costa Rica's large informal sector.

Comparably, in Panama residency laws frequently stipulate that applicants must possess income and education levels that may be out of reach for migrants from lower-income groups.⁷⁷ (One alternative for these groups to receive documentation is through marriage to a Panamanian, which would presumably

⁷³ “Residencia Temporal para Cónyuge de Costarricense.” Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería, 2019, 2. Accessed July 1, 2020. [https://www.migracion.go.cr/Documentos%20compartidos/Categor%C3%ADa%20Migratorias%20\(Extranjer%C3%ADa\)/Categor%C3%ADas%20Especiales/Residencias%20Temporales/V%C3%ADnculo%20con%20C%C3%B3nyuge%20Costarricense.pdf](https://www.migracion.go.cr/Documentos%20compartidos/Categor%C3%ADa%20Migratorias%20(Extranjer%C3%ADa)/Categor%C3%ADas%20Especiales/Residencias%20Temporales/V%C3%ADnculo%20con%20C%C3%B3nyuge%20Costarricense.pdf).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de los Hogares 2018” Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo - Costa Rica (INEC), 2018. Accessed February 11, 2021. <https://www.inec.cr/sites/default/files/documentos-biblioteca-virtual/reenigh2018-ingreso.xlsx>.

⁷⁶ “Preguntas Frecuentes,” Servicios Migratorios Costa Rica. Accessed December 7, 2020.

http://www.immigrationsservicescr.com/Servicios_de_immigracion_en_Costa_Rica_preguntas_frecuentes.html

⁷⁷ “How to Obtain Residency in Panama.” POLS – Abogados, 2020. Accessed June 15, 2020. http://www.panama-offshore-services.com/espanol/how_to_obtain_permanent_residency_in_panama.htm.

make applicants immediately eligible for temporary residency and work authorization.⁷⁸) Nevertheless, these requirements also involve expensive fees, including a deposit of US\$250 to the National Treasury.⁷⁹ In regards to the Panamanian bureaucracy, an interviewee noted that “it all depends on the amount of money [a] person has. If they have money, they won’t have any problems to establish themselves. This is the main criteria that will determine how difficult and lengthy the process will be.”⁸⁰ Therefore, lower-income migrants in Panama would also be forced to choose between undergoing the lengthy and expensive naturalization process, or, as in Costa Rica, bypassing it entirely by seeking employment in informal settings.

Migrants that continue on the legalization track and have obtained residency permits can apply for work authorization in Costa Rica and Panama from the *Ministerio de Trabajo* (Ministry of Labor) in Costa Rica or through a lawyer at the *Servicio Nacional de Migración* (National Migration Service) in Panama. Individuals hoping to open businesses face additional hurdles, which would further delay their ability to secure a source of income to provide for themselves or their families. A human rights lawyer noted that Costa Rica has a “bureaucracy for everything, including for health permits ...[and] it is really difficult to obtain the certificates endorsed by the health system.” These permits would be crucial for any businesses handling or preparing food, which is a common type of business among migrants in Costa Rica. Several NGOs assist migrants with navigating these bureaucratic obstacles, including the *Colectivo de Derechos Humanos Nicaragua Nunca +* and the *Centro de Derechos Sociales del Inmigrante* (CENDEROS; Center of Immigrant Social Rights), which could potentially play a role in streamlining bureaucratic processes and subsequently bolstering absorptive capacity for additional applications.

This support from outside organizations for immigrants seeking to establish themselves could also prove useful in Panama, where interviewees cited the need for specific and sometimes costly pre-requisites to opening up businesses which frequently dissuade aspiring migrant entrepreneurs.⁸¹ These lengthy bureaucratic processes can also drive migrants to consider informal opportunities, where they are not necessarily required to present documentation. This is especially true in Panama due to its booming informal sector and protectionist policies that limit the types of professions migrants can choose from. Positions in professions such as dentistry, medicine, architecture, and economics, among others are restricted to those who are Panamanian by birth.⁸² This means that despite undergoing the long process of obtaining regularized status, highly skilled migrants would nonetheless have limited professional opportunities. These lengthy timelines and protectionist employment policies make it more difficult for

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ “Permiso de Residente Permanente por Razones Demográficas, Reagrupación Familiar, Casado con Panameño, Casado con Panameña.” Servicio Nacional de Migración, 2020. Accessed June 17, 2020. migracion.gob.pa/images/PAGINA%20WEB%20EFRAIN/ResidentePermanente/3%201%20Reagrupaci%20n%20calidad%20de%20Casado%20con%20Nacional.pdf.

⁸⁰ Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with research team, October 14, 2020 (AACAP 1).

⁸¹ Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 6, 2020 (AACAP 18).

⁸² “Migration Governance Indicators, Panama.” International Organization for Migration, 2019, 13. Accessed June 15, 2020. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mgi-panama-2019.pdf>.

Panama to absorb additional migrant populations, especially for those that cannot afford to wait years to obtain employment authorization.

In the case of asylum seekers and refugees, Costa Rican and Panamanian laws have a more streamlined process to granting regularized status, which may suggest an opportunity for Northern Triangle migrants fleeing persecution and violence. Costa Rica specifically has implemented a framework to facilitate access to asylum processes and other government-sponsored guarantees like healthcare and education.⁸³ Moreover, Costa Rica also provides “psychosocial, medical and integral [attention] without exception to foreigners, refugees and others without coverage,” among other efforts to protect and provide for at-risk communities.⁸⁴ However, many interviewees revealed that approval processes can be extremely lengthy for refugees and asylum seekers, leaving them without the ability to secure employment or obtain legalized status for extended periods of time.⁸⁵ In Panama, interviewees referenced difficult regulatory systems where only one percent of all asylum applications are approved, despite recent increases in such requests.⁸⁶ Moreover, a 2019 Human Rights Report published by the U.S. State Department revealed that there is a backlog of over 15,000 asylum cases in the *Oficina Nacional para la Atención de Refugiados* (ONPAR; National Office for the Attention of Refugees), that is causing insurmountable delays in processing asylum requests, which are reportedly supposed to take about one year.⁸⁷ An interviewee revealed that it can “sometimes [take] two or three years for the process to be approved,” during which time asylum seekers “are not granted work authorization.”⁸⁸ These considerations adversely affect both countries’ ability to absorb additional Northern Triangle populations that are looking to secure asylum or refugee status, for which many could potentially qualify given the physical insecurity and violence in their home countries.

A common theme in the KIIs was that changes to national policy related to COVID-19 were impacting migrants negatively, making it less attractive to immigrants and migrants from all locations. In the case of Costa Rica, three quarters of Nicaraguan migrants awaiting refugee status in Costa Rica are facing hunger, and many have abandoned their asylum requests and returned to their country of origin, as a direct

⁸³ *Marco de Protección y Soluciones de Respuesta a la Situación de Personas Refugiadas en Costa Rica (MINARE: Protection Framework and Policy Responses to the Situation of Refugees in Costa Rica)*. “Costa Rica Factsheet.” UNHCR, 2016, 1. Accessed December 2nd, 2020.

https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/RefugiadosAmericas/Costa_Rica/Costa_Rica_factsheet_July_2016_ENG.pdf?view=1.

⁸⁴ Costa Rican human rights lawyer, interview with research team, October 20, 2020 (AACAP 2).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

“Costa Rica expects asylum claims to quadruple as refugees head south.” *The Guardian*, August 4, 2016. Accessed February 2, 2021.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/04/costa-rica-refugees-asylum-requests>.

⁸⁶ “Panama 2019 Human Rights Report,” U.S. State Department, 2019, 8. Accessed December 2, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PANAMA-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>.

⁸⁷ “Guía Informativa para las Personas Refugiadas y Solicitantes de la Condición de Refugiado en Panamá.” *La Oficina Nacional para la Atención de Refugiados (ONPAR)*. ACNUR, September 2015, 11. Accessed December 2, 2020.

<https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/Publicaciones/2016/10692.pdf?file=t3/fileadmin/Documentos/Publicaciones/2016/10692>.

“Panama 2019 Human Rights Report,” U.S. State Department, 2019, 8. Accessed December 2, 2020. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PANAMA-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, November 19, 2020 (AACAP 21).

result of the pandemic.⁸⁹ Similarly, recently implemented movement restrictions and border closures have disproportionately affected migrant communities. These barriers to entry and limited access to healthcare – including, potentially, COVID-19 vaccines – mean that neither Panama nor Costa Rica is able to truly ‘absorb’ segments of their migrant populations today, and would generally be unable to support, or appeal to, additional influxes from the Northern Triangle in the short-term. Many of these restrictions have since subsided, but countries in the region, including Panama, still require a COVID-19 test within days before arrival, which could be challenging for migrants to obtain if they have been travelling for weeks or months before reaching the border.⁹⁰ At various points during and as a result of the pandemic, border closures have stranded thousands of migrants in the uninhabitable Darien jungle bordering Colombia and forced these migrants into overcrowded camps where living conditions are deteriorating.⁹¹ An interviewee from the Panamanian government argued that these camps are “providing services [such as] food, accommodations, [and] medical attention.”⁹² Nevertheless, on June 11, 2020 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered Panama to release hundreds of detained migrants in the overcrowded camps and implement policies that did not infringe on their freedoms, thereby suggesting that more efforts are required to properly provide for arriving migrants.⁹³ Questions about how Panama is treating migrants in these camps, whether current living conditions in the camps adhere to international sanitary standards, and how long migrants are expected to reside in these camps remain unanswered, but would be crucial to determining absorptive capacity.

Though the situation remains fluid, the uncertainties surrounding movement restrictions due to COVID-19 will undoubtedly impact the opportunities for migrants to enter or obtain legalized status in Costa Rica and Panama. Bureaucratic limitations and delays leave migrants at a disadvantage, often depending on unreliable employment opportunities to feed their families. This further aggravates the economic impact of the coronavirus on migrant communities and weakens absorptive capacity for additional migrant populations. At the time of writing this report, Costa Rica and Panama are among the only Central American countries with a plan for COVID-19 vaccine distribution, though it is unclear whether bureaucratic hurdles will hamper the vaccination process or if this process will become a pull factor for regional migration.⁹⁴ Furthermore, proposals governing vaccination plans for migrant communities would be paramount to determining absorptive capacity in both Costa Rica and Panama. These lingering uncertainties suggest that more research will be required during the future stages of the pandemic to

⁸⁹ Dupraz-Dobias, Paula, “Nicaraguan asylum seekers face hunger in Costa Rica or dangerous returns,” *The New Humanitarian*. Accessed December 8, 2020. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/09/28/Nicaragua-Costa-Rica-migration-economy-poverty>.

“COVID-19 driving Nicaraguan refugees to hunger and desperation,” UNHCR, 2020. Accessed December 8, 2020.

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/8/5f44c56d4/covid-19-driving-nicaraguan-refugees-hunger-desperation.html>.

⁹⁰ “COVID-19 Panama Information.” U.S. Embassy in Panama. Accessed December 10, 2020. <https://pa.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/>.

⁹¹ Juan José Rodríguez, “Pandemic triggers tension in crowded migrant camps in Panama.” *The Tico Times*, August 5, 2020. Accessed February 2, 2021. <https://ticotimes.net/2020/08/05/pandemic-triggers-tension-in-crowded-migrant-camps-in-panama>.

⁹² Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 6, 2020 (AACAP 18).

⁹³ José Miguel Vivanco. “High Risk of Covid-19 for Migrants and Inmates in Panama.” *Human Rights Watch*, June 11, 2020. Accessed June 17, 2020.

<https://www.hrw.org/es/news/2020/06/11/alto-riesgo-de-covid-19-para-migrantes-y-presos-en-panama>.

⁹⁴ “Centroamérica no tiene plan de vacuna contra la covid, salvo Panamá y Costa Rica.” *Yahoo Noticias*, January 8, 2021. Accessed February 2, 2021. <https://es-us.noticias.yahoo.com/centroam%C3%A9rica-plan-vacuna-covid-salvo-162236659.html>.

evaluate the progress of government-led responses and identify opportunities to bolster migrant absorptive capacity.

Bureaucratic and Government Hurdles Facing Businesses

The ability of Costa Rica and Panama to absorb additional persons from Northern Triangle countries is also impacted by government policies that make it more difficult or costly for businesses to hire those without citizenship. One of the key flow-down effects of slow bureaucratic processes facing migrants themselves is that businesses face hurdles and/or take financial risks in hiring immigrants from outside the country. Panamanian law sanctions employers of undocumented workers US\$500 per employee with an invalid work permit, and US\$1,000 per employee without a work permit.⁹⁵ Repeated violations may be met with a fine of US\$10,000, a suspension of the company's commercial license, or even the license's cancellation.⁹⁶ In Costa Rica, these fines can range from US\$1,300 to nearly US\$8,000 depending on the severity of the offense and the number of irregular migrants employed.⁹⁷

Fines and other repercussions to businesses may only be playing a small role in limiting the willingness and ability of businesses to hire Northern Triangle migrants, however. In interviews, experts noted that the above laws are applied unevenly at best.⁹⁸ To more fully explore the role that fines, or the fear thereof, may play in individual companies' decisions to hire workers from outside the country, the business survey asked a series of questions about regulations on businesses regarding the hiring of migrants. In this case, "irregular workers" are those who do not have permission to work in the country, though, as described in the previous section, they may well be authorized to be in the country and may even be in the process of obtaining a regularized status or work authorization. Businesses that hire irregular migrant or immigrant workers thus face costs to verifying the status of their workers, and they may also face risks of fines or business suspensions if they cannot or do not do so.

In Costa Rica, more than four in five businesses surveyed (83%) had never heard of a business being fined for employing workers who were not authorized to work in the country. Indeed, only two percent of respondents indicated that they knew of a business that had been fined. In Panama, on the other hand, one in ten surveyed said that they knew of a business that had been fined, and a further 44 percent had heard of businesses being fined for employing irregular workers. This suggests that either enforcement or information (or both) is more widespread, or at least more visible to businesses in general, in Panama than in Costa Rica.

⁹⁵ "Ley 59 de 12 de Septiembre de 2017." Gaceta Oficial Digital. 1. Accessed June 15, 2020.
https://www.organojudicial.gob.pa/uploads/wp_repo/blogs.dir/cendoj/63626c%C3%B3digolaboral.pdf.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ "Múltiples Patronos que Emplean Extranjeros Indocumentados." Punto Jurídico, June 26, 2014. Accessed February 5, 2021.
<https://www.puntojuridico.com/multas-por-emplear-extranjeros-indocumentados-regiran-a-partir-del-proximo-1-de-agosto/>.

⁹⁸ Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 6, 2020 (AACAP 18).

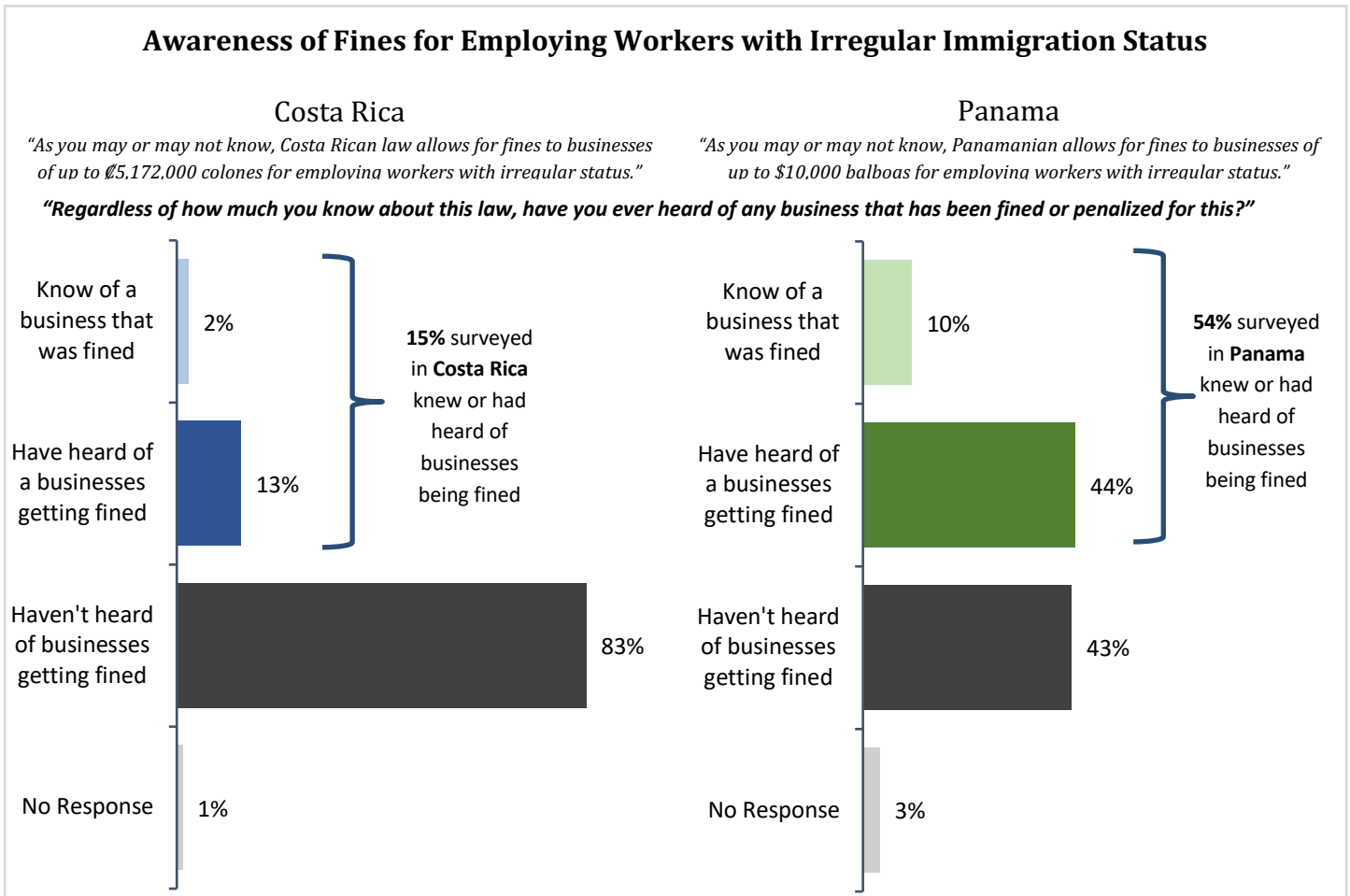


Figure 14: Awareness for Employing Workers with Irregular Immigration Status

This research also surveyed businesses directly about the impact that these regulations may have on their willingness to hire migrants or immigrants. Specifically, respondents were asked about fines, business suspensions, and wait times to verify worker status; and whether limiting or eliminating these would increase their willingness to hire migrants. The results appear in Figure 15 for Panama and Figure 16 for Costa Rica.

In Panama, surveyed businesses indicated that changes to government regulations may well make them more likely to hire migrants and immigrants. There was a pronounced gap between businesses that already employed migrants and those that did not. Nearly one in three companies that already employed migrants (32%) said that they would be "A lot more likely" to hire migrants and immigrants if they did not have to worry about fines or businesses suspensions for doing so. On the other hand, about half of businesses that did not already employ workers from outside Panama said that these changes would make them "No more likely" to hire from these communities.

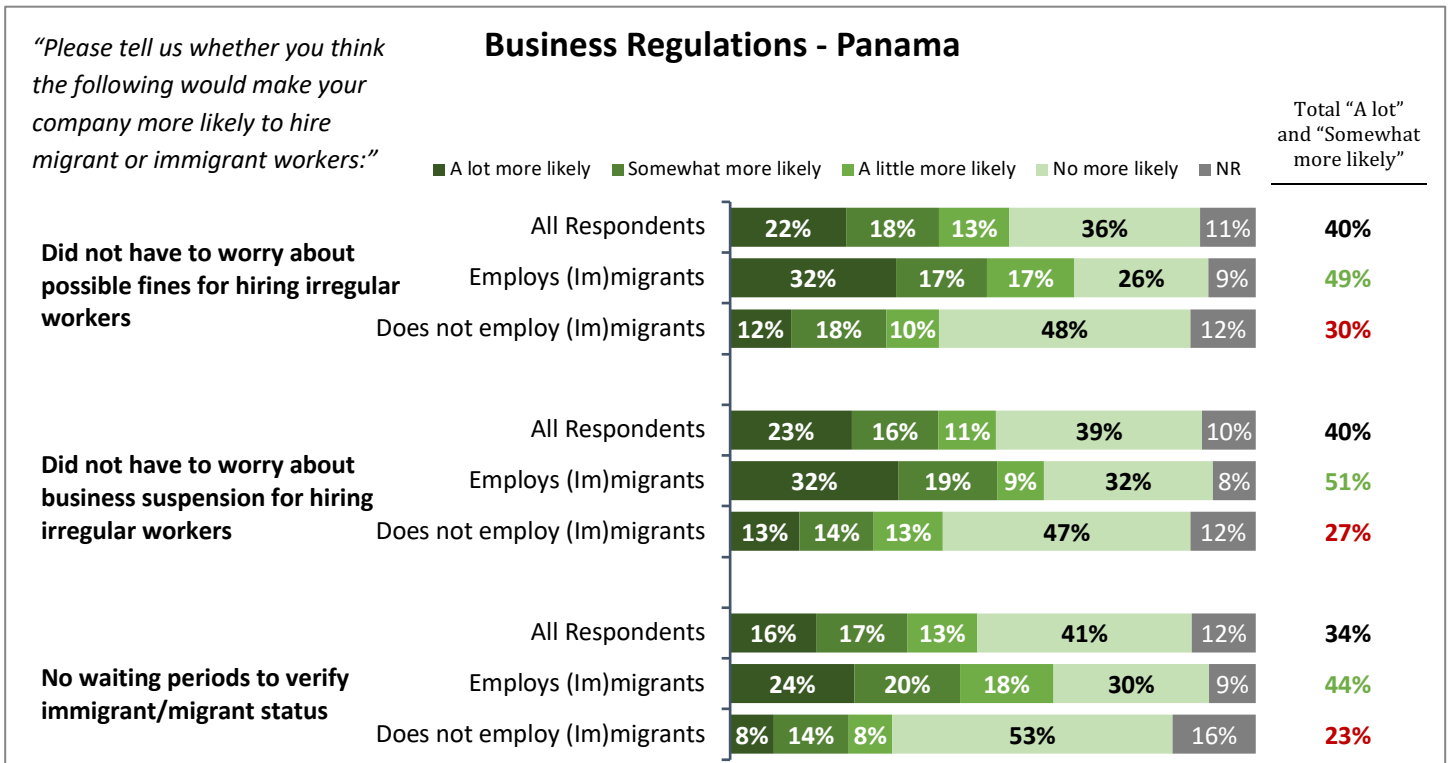


Figure 15: Distribution of responses to the following prompt, “Please tell us whether you think the following would make your company more likely to hire migrant or immigrant workers.”

Results in Costa Rica were somewhat different, with the Costa Rican businesses surveyed being relatively less likely to indicate that changes to policy would drive up migrant and immigrant hiring. Indeed, comparisons between companies that already employ migrants and those that do not were negligible. This is consistent with the findings from the question about awareness of fines for hiring irregular workers and the generally uneven application of regulation on this issue; the regulatory impact appears to be inconsistent and somewhat muted. Thus, changes to regulations might be expected to have a less clear impact on hiring practices.

Comparing responses between those that do not employ migrants and those who work in industries where migrant employment is “Very common” suggests that more limited regulation – in particular, reducing the burden of fines – would indeed make businesses a lot more likely to hire immigrants or migrants. Fully 37 percent of businesses that indicated hiring workers from outside Costa Rica was very common in their industry also said that not having to worry about fines would make it a lot more likely for them to take on migrant and immigrant workers. Reduced waiting periods and changing business suspension regulations may also have an impact.

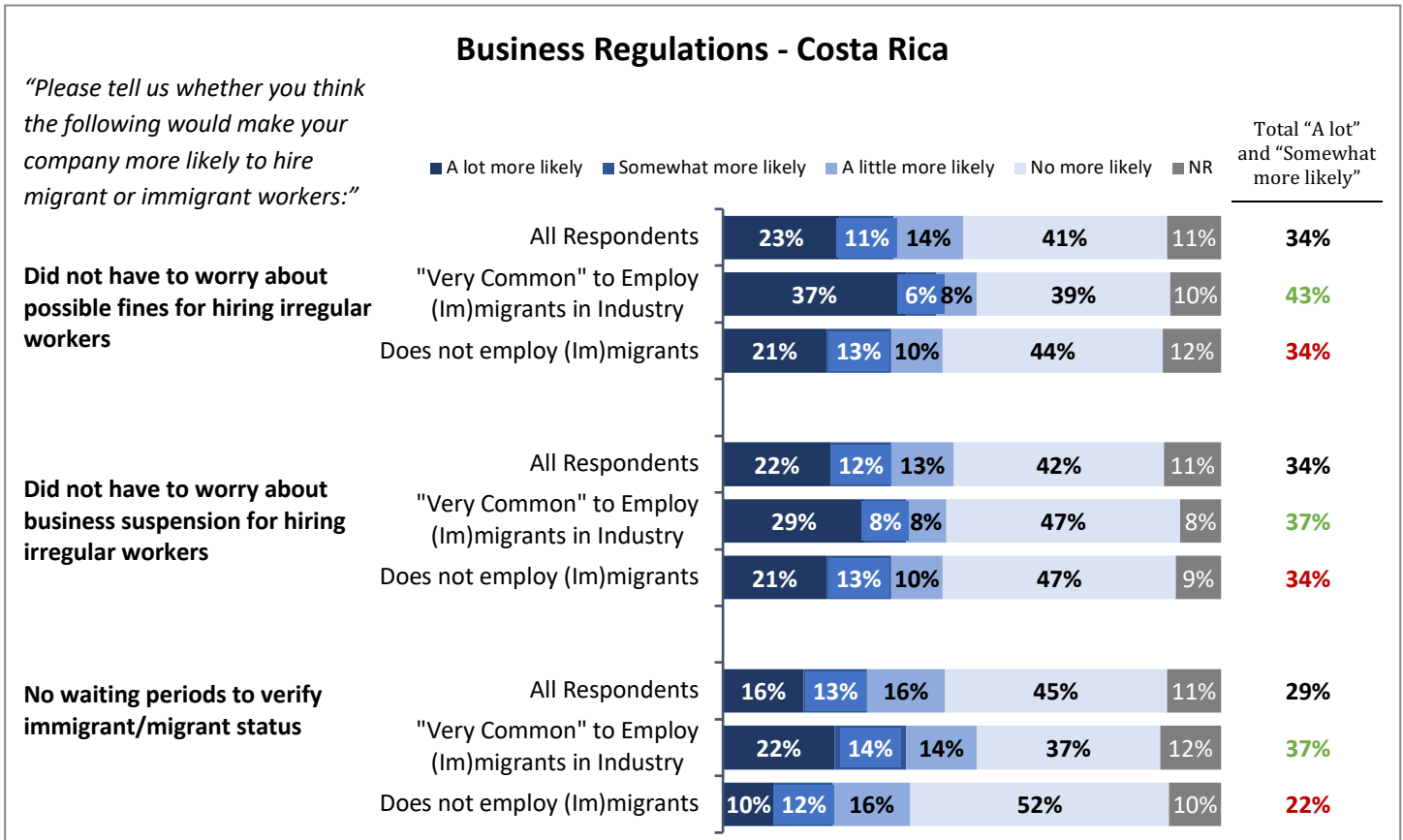


Figure 16: Distribution of responses to the following prompt, “Please tell us whether you think the following would make your company more likely to hire migrant or immigrant workers.”

Moreover, results from both countries indicate that existing fines and regulations are having a depressive effect on hiring workers from outside the country, like those from the Northern Triangle. Further, the companies that are more likely to hire migrants as a result of policy changes are companies, or those operating in the industries, which already tend to hire workers from outside the country. Though the smaller sample sizes in this business survey do not provide unique insight into which industries or companies those may be, existing studies indicate that key areas to target include low-skill industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction.⁹⁹ It has already been noted that there is overlap between companies that tend to hire immigrants and migrants, and those firms which employ individuals from the Northern Triangle in particular. This underscores, then, the theme that increasing the absorptive capacity for these communities in general will bolster the ability of both Costa Rica and Panama to host additional populations from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

⁹⁹ “Labour Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean: Diagnosis, Strategy, and ILO’s Work in the Region,” Lima: ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2017: 26. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_548185.pdf.

Importantly, however, changes to these regulations may have undesirable consequences as well, and, given the political and economic climate, removing hiring regulations on businesses could be difficult to achieve. Interview evidence suggested that politicians play a role in perpetuating “xenophobic rhetoric [and] generating social rejection.”¹⁰⁰ Fortunately, the work authorization status of individual workers is the crux of the regulatory framework examined in this research. This means that if bureaucratic hurdles for migrant and immigrant work permits are reduced, a reform agenda for which there is already appetite in both Costa Rica and Panama, there would be less of a cost to businesses to determine a worker’s status and less risk to businesses that any individual is working without a permit.

¹⁰⁰ Panamanian member of an NGO, October 23, 2020 (AACAP 8).

Conclusion

The southern Central American states of Panama and Costa Rica are a vital part of regional, and indeed global, migratory dynamics. This research identified key social, political/bureaucratic, and economic dimensions of their absorptive capacity, as well as the challenges and limitations that COVID-19 presents to their societies, governments, and economies. Xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments have risen alongside unemployment rates, business closures, ever-shifting travel restrictions, and government relief efforts. Nonetheless, powerful push factors will continue to encourage emigration from Northern Triangle countries, and, while the United States hosts the largest number of Honduran, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan immigrants, Costa Rica and Panama could ultimately provide settlement opportunities for larger numbers of migrants from these countries. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the aforementioned limitations to absorptive capacity, all of which may have lasting effects on the ability of Costa Rica and Panama to successfully integrate additional migrant populations in the short-, medium-, and long-term. While these challenges and barriers may prove temporary, the long-term effects of the pandemic are difficult to fully ascertain at this time. Additional research will be required to fully comprehend the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing social, political, and economic consequences.

At the time of writing this report, and taking into account the need for additional research as the pandemic progresses, the research team has identified a series of policy recommendations that could boost the absorptive capacity of Panama and Costa Rica for additional migrants. Notably, many recommendations will improve absorptive potential for migrants and immigrants from a variety of points of origin, and some will be most impactful for Northern Triangle migrants in particular.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Streamlining bureaucratic processes for immigrant residency and work authorization in both Panama and Costa Rica would greatly increase the absorptive capacity for migrants from all countries of origin.** The expensive and lengthy bureaucratic hurdles involved in obtaining regular status in Panama and Costa Rica frequently leave migrants unable to secure (formal) employment or provide for themselves and their families for extended periods of time.
 - o The digitization of documents and improving communication between different government agencies, so that migrants could apply for their residency and work authorization cards simultaneously rather than separately would make it easier for both employers to hire without fear of fines and for immigrants themselves to become stable and established.
 - o Migrants and asylum seekers should receive employment authorization cards while they await a decision on their residency permits or asylum cases, in order to ensure that they can afford to pay for the bureaucratic process itself and provide for themselves and their

families. This authorization could be circumscribed (valid for shorter duration or permitting work in only certain locations or types of businesses).

- **Efforts aimed at supporting industries and companies that have hired migrants and immigrants in the past are the most likely to increase employment of these groups in the future.** In both Panama and Costa Rica, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a powerful negative impact on businesses, especially potential employers of migrants and immigrants. Given the extent to which COVID-19 has increased unemployment rates and exacerbated existing xenophobic and anti-immigrant narratives, it should not be assumed that policy interventions will be well-received by, much less effective for, Panamanian or Costa Rican companies in general. However, companies with a history of employing workers from outside their country and those in industries where employment of migrants and immigrants is common were both more likely to employ Northern Triangle migrants and more receptive of policy interventions to encourage them to hire from migrant communities in the future.
- **While financial incentives to hire workers from outside the country are likely to increase companies' willingness to do so, other interventions may be even better suited to addressing employers' needs.**
 - In Panama, surveyed businesses indicated that they wanted to be sure that potential employees met their company's needs. Programs that helped to match immigrant or migrant workers, or that helped workers better communicate their skills and backgrounds to potential employers, could boost absorptive capacity.
 - Costa Rican companies surveyed expressed interest in programs to better integrate those from outside the country into their workforce. Such programs could also address issues of social absorptive capacity for Northern Triangle migrants and immigrants in particular.
- **Programs that highlight labor market opportunities for migrants in positions that native Panamanians and Costa Ricans are less likely to fill may boost economic security for Central American migrants while effectively limiting negative reactions and narratives within host societies.** In particular, agricultural sectors in Costa Rica could provide employment, as it is a labor-intensive sector that offers work but does not contribute to the sense in the host society that workers from outside the country are limiting opportunities for native populations. Such policies would have the advantage of primarily benefitting migrants and immigrants without contributing to xenophobic narratives or generating backlash.
- **Policies that rely on kinship networks or chain migration to encourage southern route migration from the Northern Triangle are likely to be ineffective.** Kinship networks for Northern Triangle migrants are, at best, relatively small and inactive in Costa Rica and may not exist at all in Panama. Conversely, kinship networks encourage northern migration, given the presence of more sizeable Guatemalan, Honduran, and Salvadoran communities in the United States.

- **Instead, policies and messaging that promote Panama and Costa Rica as desirable host countries should target potential migrants that do not have strong ties elsewhere.** For a segment of potential Northern Triangle migrants, the “push factors” to emigrate appear to be stronger than the “pull factors” of a particular destination country. Providing more information about the economic opportunities and stability of these southern Central American countries can make an impact, especially among those who do not have close relatives or friends in the United States or another destination country. Concretely supporting migration south through funding and programs in sending countries would further facilitate flows along this route.
- **Local and outside actors can play an essential role in improving social absorptive capacities by supporting the work of community organizations and NGOs that provide services and essential networks for migrant and immigration communities.** Though kinship networks for Northern Triangle migrants are limited in southern Central America, organizations like the *Colectivo Nicaragüense de Derechos Humanos Nunca +*, HIAS, and UNHCR provide essential support services and foster community ties in ways that can emulate kinship networks. Because many of these organizations are funded by external donors, they provide a direct intervention point for interested parties to bolster support networks for immigrants in these countries.
- **Official, fact-based campaigns to counter anti-immigrant narratives and foster community relations will make Panama and Costa Rica more appealing and boost short-term social absorptive capacity during the pandemic.** Both countries have large migrant populations and a history of tolerance. While their reputation as host countries is still broadly positive, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated xenophobic tendencies towards migrant communities and reduced overall social absorptive capacity for additional Northern Triangle populations. Directly refusing narratives about disease and scarce jobs and healthcare resources, while supporting community-led initiatives to create a space for migrant and host communities to learn from one another will help shift existing negative attitudes.

These policy recommendations will serve to improve the ability of Costa Rican and Panamanian societies, economies, and governments to absorb larger numbers of migrants, as well as highlight and/or maintain their appeal as a destination country, both for general migrant populations as well as, those from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras in particular. Specific policy interventions should follow these guidelines for target audiences (or industries), as well as substantive program design to maximize absorptive capacity and bolster the appeal and feasibility of a ‘southern route’ for migrants from the Northern Triangle region.

Appendix A. Survey Topline Results

Business Survey – Panama and Costa Rica

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Field Dates | 19 Nov 2020-15 January 2021 | 2 Dec 2020-15 January 2021 |
| Responses | n=261 | n=168 |

First, we would like to ask you a few questions about the business you work for.

1. How would you categorize your business?

| Costa Rica | | Panama | |
|---|-----|--|-----|
| Agriculture | 3% | Agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing | 3% |
| Livestock, forestry and fishing | 0% | Livestock, forestry and fishing | 1% |
| Mines and quarries exploitations | 1% | Mines and quarries exploitations | 0% |
| Manufacturing Industries | 12% | Manufacturing Industries | 2% |
| Supply of electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning | 0% | Supply of electricity, gas and water | 1% |
| Water supply; sewage disposal, waste management and decontamination | 0% | | |
| Construction | 18% | Construction | 8% |
| Wholesale and Retail; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles | 12% | Retail trade | 8% |
| Transportation and storage | 2% | Transportation, Storage, Communication | 5% |
| Accommodation and catering activities | 5% | Hotels and Restaurants | 7% |
| Information and communication | 2% | | |
| Financial and insurance activities | 3% | Financial services | 2% |
| Real estate activities | 4% | Real estate, business and rental activities | 5% |
| Professional, scientific and technical activities | 12% | | |
| Administrative and support service activities | 2% | | |
| Teaching | 2% | Teaching | 5% |
| Human health care and social assistance activities | 2% | Social assistance and health activities | 8% |
| Artistic, entertainment and recreational activities | 2% | Artistic, entertainment and recreational activities | 2% |
| Other government/public sector | 1% | Other government/public sector | 2% |
| Other service activities | 9% | Other service activities | 30% |
| Something else | 7% | Something else | 9% |
| | | Wholesale and Retail in commission and free trade zone | 3% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% | Prefer not to respond | 0% |

2. How many total employees, full or part time, work for this company? If you're not sure, please make your best guess.

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|-------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1-4 employees | 31% | 24% |
| 5-19 employees | 38% | 30% |
| 20-49 employees | 14% | 21% |
| 50-99 employees | 9% | 8% |
| 100-249 employees | 3% | 9% |
| 250-499 employees | 2% | 2% |
| 500-999 employees | 1% | 4% |
| 1,000 or more employees | 1% | 1% |
| Prefer not to respond | 0% | 24% |

3. About how many *seasonal* workers does this company employ in a typical year?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|--------------------------------|--------|------------|
| 0-4 seasonal workers | 61% | 55% |
| 5-19 seasonal workers | 24% | 23% |
| 20-49 seasonal workers | 8% | 9% |
| 50-99 seasonal workers | 3% | 4% |
| 100-499 seasonal workers | 2% | 5% |
| 500-999 seasonal workers | 1% | 1% |
| 1,000 or more seasonal workers | 0% | 1% |
| Prefer not to respond | 2% | 3% |

4. About what portion of workers in this company have informal employment? If you're not sure, please make your best guess.

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|---|--------|------------|
| Entirely or almost entirely formal employment | 60% | 58% |
| Mostly formal employees, with some informal employment | 18% | 18% |
| An even mix of formal employees and those in informal positions | 8% | 10% |
| Mostly informal employment | 3% | 6% |
| Entirely or almost entirely informal employment | 4% | 2% |
| Prefer not to respond | 7% | 6% |

5. How long as this company been in business?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| 0-2 years | 2% | 7% |
| 3-5 years | 6% | 11% |
| 6-10 years | 18% | 15% |
| More than 10 years | 74% | 66% |
| Prefer not to respond | 0% | 1% |

COVID-19 BLOCK

6. Overall, how has **this business** been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| Hurt a lot | 72% | 52% |
| Hurt a little | 18% | 30% |
| Little or no effect | 5% | 9% |
| Helped a little | 3% | 2% |
| Helped a lot | 2% | 5% |
| Prefer not to respond | 0% | 2% |

7. Did this business have a change in the total number of hours worked by paid employees as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| Yes, increased | 7% | 7% |
| Yes, decreased | 77% | 52% |
| No | 15% | 40% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% | 1% |

8. Did this business have a change in the total number of paid employees working for the company as a result of the pandemic?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|---|--------|------------|
| Yes, increased a lot | 3% | 2% |
| Yes, increased a little | 4% | 11% |
| Yes, decreased a little | 18% | 29% |
| Yes, decreased a lot | 47% | 26% |
| No change in total number of paid employees | 27% | 32% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% | 1% |

| | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------|------------------------|
| 9. | In [country] as a whole, how has this industry been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? | | |
| | | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | Hurt a lot | 79% | 71% |
| | Hurt a little | 13% | 21% |
| | Little or no effect | 3% | 2% |
| | Helped a little | 3% | 1% |
| | Helped a lot | 1% | 4% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 1% | 1% |
| 10. | [ASK IF Q10=1 or 2 “Hurt”] How long do you think it will take for your industry to return to pre-COVID-19 levels? | | |
| | | Panama (n=240) | Costa Rica (n=156) |
| | <6 months | 3% | 6% |
| | 6-12 months | 25% | 33% |
| | 1-2 years | 44% | 40% |
| | 2-5 years | 25% | 17% |
| | More than 5 years | 1% | 2% |
| | Will never return to pre-COVID-19 levels | 3% | 1% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 0% | 1% |
| 11. | How do you perceive the current climate in [COUNTRY] for your industry today? | | |
| | | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | Very good | 3% | 5% |
| | Good | 11% | 26% |
| | Neutral | 32% | 24% |
| | Poor | 32% | 32% |
| | Very poor | 20% | 13% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 2% | 0% |
| 12. | How do you perceive the current overall business climate in [COUNTRY] today? | | |
| | | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | Very good | 0% | 1% |
| | Good | 4% | 10% |
| | Neutral | 17% | 22% |
| | Poor | 54% | 51% |
| | Very poor | 23% | 16% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 2% | 1% |

MIGRANTS/IMMIGRANTS BLOCK

13. In some businesses and industries, it is common to hire immigrants and/or migrants from outside [country], and in some businesses or industries, this is less common. Would you say businesses in your industry tend to employ people from outside [country?]

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|--|--------|------------|
| This is very common in my industry | 23% | 30% |
| This is somewhat common in my industry | 34% | 24% |
| This is somewhat uncommon in my industry | 21% | 24% |
| This is very uncommon in my industry | 21% | 20% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% | 2% |

14. How would you describe the impact of COVID-19 on **your industry's** employment of migrants or immigrants from outside [COUNTRY]?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|--|--------|------------|
| This industry is now <i>more</i> likely to employ or hire migrants or immigrants | 17% | 17% |
| This industry is now <i>less</i> likely to employ or hire migrants or immigrants | 51% | 46% |
| COVID-19 has had no impact on the industry's hiring/employment of migrants or immigrants | 25% | 33% |
| Prefer not to respond | 7% | 4% |

15. Does your business currently employ anyone from outside [COUNTRY]?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| Yes | 53% | 55% |
| No | 45% | 45% |
| Prefer not to respond | 2% | 1% |

(IF Q15 = 1, ASK Q16-18)

16. How many employees in your business are from outside [COUNTRY]? **[OPEN-ENDED]**

| | Panama (n=136) | Costa Rica (n=92) |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| None | 0% | 2% |
| 1-5 | 82% | 52% |
| 6-10 | 10% | 12% |
| 11-20 | 5% | 10% |
| 21-50 | 1% | 11% |
| 50+ | 1% | 5% |
| Other response | 1% | 8% |

17. To the best of your knowledge, what country are they from? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]*

| | Panama (n=139) | Costa Rica (n=92) |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Costa Rica (<i>asked in Panama only</i>) | 7% | |
| Panama (<i>asked in Costa Rica only</i>) | | 8% |
| Nicaragua | 17% | 85% |
| Honduras | 3% | 3% |
| El Salvador | 7% | 11% |
| Guatemala | 4% | 5% |
| Mexico | 6% | 7% |
| United States | 6% | 10% |
| Venezuela | 70% | 21% |
| Somewhere else | 61% | 27% |

* Note: Respondents were able to select multiple countries, so percentages will not sum to 100

(RESUME ASKING ALL)

18. To the best of your knowledge, has your company ever employed migrants/immigrants from Honduras, El Salvador, or Guatemala in particular?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|-----------------------|--------|---------------|
| Definitely yes | 7% | 9% |
| Probably yes | 3% | 6% |
| Probably no | 7% | 13% |
| Definitely no | 82% | 70% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% | 3% |

19. How would you describe to impact of COVID-19 on **your business's** employment of migrants or immigrants from outside [COUNTRY]?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|---|--------|---------------|
| This business is <i>more</i> likely to hire immigrants or migrants | 7% | 10% |
| This business is <i>less</i> likely to hire immigrants or migrants | 50% | 45% |
| COVID-19 has had no impact on this business's hiring/employment of migrants or immigrants | 36% | 38% |
| Prefer not to respond | 7% | 7% |

POLICY BLOCK

20INT. Please tell us whether you think the following would make your company more likely to hire migrant or immigrant workers from outside [COUNTRY].

(RANDOMIZE)

| | | | |
|-----|--|--------|------------|
| 20. | Immigrants' skillsets better matched my company's needs | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | A lot more likely | 19% | 22% |
| | Somewhat more likely | 23% | 20% |
| | A little more likely | 13% | 11% |
| | No more likely | 35% | 38% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 10% | 9% |
| 21. | Did not have to worry about possible fines for hiring irregular workers | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | A lot more likely | 22% | 23% |
| | Somewhat more likely | 18% | 11% |
| | A little more likely | 13% | 14% |
| | No more likely | 36% | 41% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 11% | 11% |
| 22. | Did not have to worry about business suspension for hiring irregular workers | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | A lot more likely | 23% | 22% |
| | Somewhat more likely | 16% | 12% |
| | A little more likely | 11% | 13% |
| | No more likely | 39% | 42% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 10% | 11% |
| 23. | No waiting period to verify immigrant/migrant status | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | A lot more likely | 16% | 16% |
| | Somewhat more likely | 17% | 13% |
| | A little more likely | 13% | 16% |
| | No more likely | 41% | 45% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 12% | 11% |

| | | | |
|-----|--|--------|------------|
| 24. | Financial incentives from government to hire migrants/immigrants | | |
| | | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | A lot more likely | 24% | 22% |
| | Somewhat more likely | 17% | 14% |
| | A little more likely | 13% | 16% |
| | No more likely | 36% | 41% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 10% | 8% |
| 25. | Better programs to help integrate non-[Panamanian/Costa Rican] workers into my company | | |
| | | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | A lot more likely | 13% | 21% |
| | Somewhat more likely | 20% | 23% |
| | A little more likely | 15% | 11% |
| | No more likely | 44% | 37% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 9% | 8% |
| 26. | More immigrant or migrant applicants for positions | | |
| | | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | A lot more likely | 9% | 16% |
| | Somewhat more likely | 18% | 16% |
| | A little more likely | 15% | 13% |
| | No more likely | 48% | 45% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 9% | 10% |

(END RANDOMIZE)

27. [PANAMA VERSION] As you may or may not know, Panamanian allows for fines to businesses of up to \$10,000 balboas for employing workers with irregular status.

[COSTA RICA VERSION] As you may or may not know, Costa Rican law allows for fines to businesses of up to ₡5,172,000 colones for employing workers with irregular status.

Regardless of how much you know about this law, have you ever heard of any business that has been fined or penalized for this?

| | | | |
|--|--|--------|------------|
| | | Panama | Costa Rica |
| | Yes, know of a business that was fined | 10% | 2% |
| | Yes, have heard of businesses getting fined | 44% | 13% |
| | No, have not heard of businesses being fined | 43% | 83% |
| | Prefer not to respond | 3% | 1% |

28. In what geographic area is your business located? [DROP-DOWN MENU]

Costa Rica

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Alajuela | 13% |
| Cartago | 4% |
| Guanacaste | 4% |
| Heredia | 11% |
| Limón | 2% |
| Puntarenas | 4% |
| San José – San José canton | 27% |
| San José – other cantons | 33% |
| Outside Costa Rica | 1% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% |

Panama

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Bocas del Toro | 2% |
| Chiriquí | 2% |
| Coclé | 1% |
| Colón | 1% |
| Darién | 0% |
| Emberá | 0% |
| Herrera | 1% |
| Kuna Yala | 0% |
| Los Santos | 0% |
| Ngäbe Buglé | 0% |
| Panamá | 14% |
| Panamá - Panama City | 72% |
| Panamá - San Miguelito | 1% |
| Panamá Oeste | 4% |
| Veraguas | 1% |
| Outside Panama | 0% |
| Prefer not to respond | 0% |

29. Does your business operate in Panama's free trade zone? (*Asked in Panama only*)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Yes | 5% |
| No | 94% |
| Prefer not to respond | 1% |

30. How would you describe your level of influence in hiring decisions made by your company?

| | Panama | Costa Rica |
|-----------------------|--------|------------|
| High | 51% | 38% |
| Medium | 20% | 25% |
| Low | 17% | 23% |
| None | 10% | 11% |
| Prefer not to respond | 2% | 3% |

Appendix B: Panama Survey Instrument (Spanish)

Español (América Latina) ▾

Consent Block with Scroll HTML

Formulario de Consentimiento para la Investigación

Sobre el Estudio

Al realizar esta encuesta, estará participando de un estudio elaborado por los investigadores de la Universidad de Maryland, College Park en los Estados Unidos. El propósito de esta investigación es obtener un mejor entendimiento sobre los patrones de empleo en Panamá y las formas en las que el COVID-19 ha afectado el empleo en el país.

Descripción de la Encuesta:

En este estudio de investigación, se le preguntará sobre el empleo en su establecimiento e industria, como también como su establecimiento, industria y empleo han sido afectados por el COVID-19. La encuesta está diseñada para durar entre 6 y 8 minutos, y se puede realizar a través de su computadora, teléfono inteligente, o tablet. Puede comenzar la encuesta y terminarla después reutilizando el enlace en el email de invitación. La encuesta esta disponible en Inglés y Español, y podrá elegir el idioma de su preferencia al utilizar el menú desplegable ubicado en la parte superior de la pantalla a mano derecha.

Al dar su consentimiento para participar, certifica que tiene al menos 18 años y que ha recibido suficiente información sobre los procedimientos y que acepta participar voluntariamente en este estudio. También puede imprimir esta información para sus registros.

- He leído la información anterior y acepto participar de este estudio.
- No acepto participar en este estudio.

Industry Select

Primero queremos hacerle algunas preguntas acerca del establecimiento para el cual usted trabaja.

¿Cómo clasificaría su establecimiento?

BUSINESS DEMOS BLOCK

¿Cuántos empleados, incluyendo los que trabajan a tiempo parcial y tiempo completo, trabajan para este establecimiento? Si no está seguro/a, por favor denos su mejor respuesta.

- 1-4 empleados
- 5-19 empleados
- 20-49 empleados
- 50-99 empleados
- 100-249 empleados
- 250-499 empleados
- 500-999 empleados
- 1,000 o más empleados
- Prefiero no responder

Aproximadamente, ¿cuántos trabajadores temporales emplea esta empresa en un año típico?

- 0-4 trabajadores temporales
- 5-19 trabajadores temporales
- 20-49 trabajadores temporales
- 50-99 trabajadores temporales
- 100-499 trabajadores temporales
- 500-999 trabajadores temporales
- 1,000 o más trabajadores temporales
- Prefiero no responder

En el transcurso de un año típico, ¿aproximadamente qué parte de los trabajadores de esta empresa tiene un empleo informal? Si no está seguro/a, por favor denos su mejor respuesta.

- Empleo total o casi totalmente formal
- Empleados principalmente formales, con algún empleo informal
- Una combinación uniforme de empleados formales y aquellos en puestos informales
- Empleo mayoritariamente informal
- Empleo total o casi totalmente informal
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cuánto tiempo lleva en funcionamiento este establecimiento?

- 0-2 años
- 3-5 años
- 6-10 años
- Más de 10 años
- Prefiero no responder

COVID-19 BLOCK

En general, ¿cómo se ha visto afectado este establecimiento por la pandemia del COVID-19?

- Daño Importante
- Daño Leve
- Poco o ningún efecto
- Poco Beneficioso
- Muy Beneficioso
- Prefiero no responder

En este establecimiento, ¿hubo un cambio en cuanto al número total de horas trabajadas por empleados pagados a raíz de la pandemia del COVID-19?

- Sí, ha aumentado
- Sí, ha disminuido
- No
- Prefiero no responder

En este establecimiento, ¿hubo un cambio en cuanto al número total de empleados pagados a raíz de la pandemia?

- Sí, ha aumentado mucho
- Sí, ha aumentado un poco
- Sí, ha disminuido un poco
- Sí, ha disminuido mucho
- No hubo cambio en el total de empleados pagados
- Prefiero no responder

En Panamá como país, ¿cómo se ha visto afectada esta industria por la pandemia del COVID-19?

- Daño Importante
- Daño Leve
- Poco o ningún efecto
- Poco Beneficioso
- Muy Beneficioso
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cuánto tiempo cree que necesite su industria para volver a los niveles previos al COVID-19?

- <6 meses
- 6-12 meses
- 1-2 años
- 2-5 años
- Más de 5 años
- Nunca volverá a los niveles previos al COVID-19
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo ve el clima actual en Panamá para su industria?

- Muy bien
- Bien
- Neutral
- Mal
- Muy mal
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo ve el clima empresarial general en Panamá actualmente?

- Muy bien
- Bien
- Neutral
- Mal
- Muy mal
- Prefiero no responder

MIGRANTS/IMMIGRANTS BLOCK

En algunos establecimientos e industrias, es común contratar a inmigrantes y/o migrantes de otros países, y en otros establecimientos e industrias es menos común. ¿Diría usted que los establecimientos en su industria tienden a contratar a personas de otros países?

- Esto es muy común en mi industria
- Esto es algo común en mi industria
- Esto es poco común en mi industria
- Esto es muy poco común en mi industria
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo caracterizaría el impacto del COVID-19 en el empleo de migrantes/inmigrantes de otros países en su industria?

- Ahora es más probable que esta industria emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- Ahora es menos probable que esta industria emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- El COVID-19 no ha tenido ningún impacto sobre el empleo/ la contratación de migrantes o inmigrantes
- Prefiero no responder

¿Su establecimiento emplea alguna persona de otro país?

- Sí
- No
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cuántos empleados de su establecimiento son de otro país?

Según su conocimiento, ¿de qué país son? (Seleccione todas las que correspondan)

- Costa Rica
- Nicaragua
- Honduras
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- México
- Estados Unidos
- Venezuela
- Otro país
- Prefiero no responder

Según su conocimiento, ¿su establecimiento ha contratado migrantes/inmigrantes de Honduras, El Salvador o Guatemala específicamente?

- Definitivamente sí
- Probablemente sí
- Probablemente no
- Definitivamente no
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo caracterizaría el impacto del COVID-19 en el empleo de migrantes/inmigrantes de otros países en su establecimiento?

- Ahora es más probable que este establecimiento emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- Ahora es menos probable que este establecimiento emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- El COVID-19 no ha tenido ningún impacto sobre el empleo/la contratación de migrantes o inmigrantes
- Prefiero no responder

POLICY BLOCK

Por favor díganos si cree que estas posibilidades alentarían a su establecimiento a contratar trabajadores migrantes o inmigrantes de otros países.

| | Mucho más probable | Algo más probable | Un poco más probable | Ni más probable ni menos probable | Prefiero no responder |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Las calificaciones de los inmigrantes coinciden con las necesidades de mi establecimiento | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| No tener que preocuparse por una suspensión al establecimiento por contratar a trabajadores en situación irregular | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Incentivos financieros del gobierno para contratar a migrantes / inmigrantes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Más postulaciones por parte de migrantes o inmigrantes para puestos vacantes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| | Mucho más probable | Algo más probable | Un poco más probable | Ni más probable ni menos probable | Prefiero no responder |
| No tener que preocuparse por posibles sanciones por contratar a trabajadores en situación irregular | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mejores programas para ayudar a integrar a los trabajadores no panameños/as en nuestro establecimiento | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| No tener que esperar para verificar el estatus migratorio de migrantes/ inmigrantes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

La ley panameña permite multar a los establecimientos hasta 10.000 balboas por contratar trabajadores en situación irregular.

Independiente de cuánto conozca de esta ley, ¿ha sabido de algún establecimiento que haya sido multado, sancionado o penalizado por esto?

- Sí, conozco un establecimiento que fue multado
- Sí, he sabido de establecimientos que fueron multados
- No, nunca he escuchado de ningún establecimiento que fuera multado
- Prefiero no responder

¿En qué área geográfica se encuentra su establecimiento?

¿Su empresa opera en la zona franca de Panamá?

- Sí
- No
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo caracterizaría su nivel de influencia en el área de contrataciones de su establecimiento?

- Alto
- Medio
- Bajo
- Ninguno
- Prefiero no responder

Con tecnología de Qualtrics

Appendix C: Costa Rica Survey Instrument (Spanish)

Español (América Latina) ▾

Consent Block with Scroll HTML

Formulario de Consentimiento para la Investigación

Sobre el Estudio

Al realizar esta encuesta, estará participando de un estudio elaborado por los investigadores de la Universidad de Maryland, College Park en los Estados Unidos. El propósito de esta investigación es obtener un mejor entendimiento sobre los patrones de empleo en Costa Rica y las formas en las que el COVID-19 ha afectado el empleo en el país.

Descripción de la Encuesta:

En este estudio de investigación, se le preguntará sobre el empleo en su establecimiento e industria, como también como su establecimiento, industria y empleo han sido afectados por el COVID-19. La encuesta está diseñada para durar entre 6 y 8 minutos, y se puede realizar a través de su computadora, teléfono inteligente, o tablet. Puede comenzar la encuesta y terminarla después reutilizando el enlace en el email de invitación. La encuesta esta disponible en Inglés y Español, y podrá elegir el idioma de su preferencia al utilizar el menú desplegable ubicado en la parte superior de la pantalla a mano derecha.

Al dar su consentimiento para participar, certifica que tiene al menos 18 años y que ha recibido suficiente información sobre los procedimientos y que acepta participar voluntariamente en este estudio. También puede imprimir esta información para sus registros.

- He leído la información anterior y acepto participar de este estudio.
- No acepto participar en este estudio.

Industry Select

Primero queremos hacerle algunas preguntas acerca del establecimiento para el cual usted trabaja.

¿Cómo clasificaría su establecimiento?

BUSINESS DEMOS BLOCK

¿Cuántos empleados, incluyendo los que trabajan a tiempo parcial y tiempo completo, trabajan para este establecimiento? Si no está seguro/a, por favor denos su mejor respuesta.

- 1-4 empleados
- 5-19 empleados
- 20-49 empleados
- 50-99 empleados
- 100-499 empleados
- 500-999 empleados
- 1,000 o más empleados
- Prefiero no responder

Aproximadamente, ¿cuántos trabajadores temporales emplea esta empresa en un año típico?

- 0-4 trabajadores temporales
- 5-19 trabajadores temporales
- 20-49 trabajadores temporales
- 50-99 trabajadores temporales
- 100-499 trabajadores temporales
- 500-999 trabajadores temporales
- 1,000 o más trabajadores temporales
- Prefiero no responder

En el transcurso de un año típico, ¿aproximadamente qué parte de los trabajadores de esta empresa tiene un empleo informal? Si no está seguro/a, por favor denos su mejor respuesta.

- Empleo total o casi totalmente formal
- Empleados principalmente formales, con algún empleo informal
- Una combinación uniforme de empleados formales y aquellos en puestos informales
- Empleo mayoritariamente informal
- Empleo total o casi totalmente informal
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cuánto tiempo lleva en funcionamiento este establecimiento?

- 0-2 años
- 3-5 años
- 6-10 años
- Más de 10 años
- Prefiero no responder

COVID-19 BLOCK

En general, ¿cómo se ha visto afectado este establecimiento por la pandemia del COVID-19?

- Daño Importante
- Daño Leve
- Poco o ningún efecto
- Poco Beneficioso
- Muy Beneficioso
- Prefiero no responder

En este establecimiento, ¿hubo un cambio en cuanto al número total de horas trabajadas por empleados pagados a raíz de la pandemia del COVID-19?

- Sí, ha aumentado
- Sí, ha disminuido
- No
- Prefiero no responder

En este establecimiento, ¿hubo un cambio en cuanto al número total de empleados pagados a raíz de la pandemia?

- Sí, ha aumentado mucho
- Sí, ha aumentado un poco
- Sí, ha disminuido un poco
- Sí, ha disminuido mucho
- No hubo cambio en el total de empleados pagados
- Prefiero no responder

En Costa Rica como país, ¿cómo se ha visto afectada esta industria por la pandemia del COVID-19?

- Daño Importante
- Daño Leve
- Poco o ningún efecto
- Poco Beneficioso
- Muy Beneficioso
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cuánto tiempo cree que necesite su industria para volver a los niveles previos al COVID-19?

- <6 meses
- 6-12 meses
- 1-2 años
- 2-5 años
- Más de 5 años
- Nunca volverá a los niveles previos al COVID-19
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo ve el clima actual en Costa Rica para su industria?

- Muy bien
- Bien
- Neutral
- Mal
- Muy mal
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo ve el clima empresarial general en Costa Rica actualmente?

- Muy bien
- Bien
- Neutral
- Mal
- Muy mal
- Prefiero no responder

MIGRANTS/IMMIGRANTS BLOCK

En algunos establecimientos e industrias, es común contratar a inmigrantes y/o migrantes de otros países, y en otros establecimientos e industrias es menos común. ¿Diría usted que los establecimientos en su industria tienden a contratar a personas de otros países?

- Esto es muy común en mi industria
- Esto es algo común en mi industria
- Esto es poco común en mi industria
- Esto es muy poco común en mi industria
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo caracterizaría el impacto del COVID-19 en el empleo de migrantes o inmigrantes de otros países en su industria?

- Ahora es más probable que esta industria emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- Ahora es menos probable que esta industria emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- El COVID-19 no ha tenido ningún impacto sobre el empleo/ la contratación de migrantes o inmigrantes
- Prefiero no responder

¿Su establecimiento emplea alguna persona de otro país?

- Sí
- No
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cuántos empleados de su establecimiento son de otro país?

Según su conocimiento, ¿de qué país son? (Seleccione todas las que correspondan)

- Panamá
- Nicaragua
- Honduras
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- México
- Estados Unidos
- Venezuela
- Otro país
- Prefiero no responder

Según su conocimiento, ¿su establecimiento ha contratado migrantes o inmigrantes de Honduras, El Salvador o Guatemala específicamente?

- Definitivamente sí
- Probablemente sí
- Probablemente no
- Definitivamente no
- Prefiero no responder

¿Cómo caracterizaría el impacto del COVID-19 en el empleo de migrantes o inmigrantes de otros países en su establecimiento?

- Ahora es más probable que este establecimiento emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- Ahora es menos probable que este establecimiento emplee o contrate a migrantes o inmigrantes
- El COVID-19 no ha tenido ningún impacto sobre el empleo/ la contratación de migrantes o inmigrantes
- Prefiero no responder

POLICY BLOCK

Por favor díganos si cree que estas posibilidades alentarían a su establecimiento a contratar trabajadores migrantes o inmigrantes de otros países.

| | Mucho más probable | Algo más probable | Un poco más probable | Ni más probable ni menos probable | Prefiero no responder |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| No tener que preocuparse por posibles sanciones por contratar a trabajadores en situación irregular | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Incentivos financieros del gobierno para contratar a migrantes o inmigrantes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Las calificaciones de los inmigrantes coinciden con las necesidades de mi establecimiento | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| No tener que esperar para verificar el estatus migratorio de migrantes/ inmigrantes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| | Mucho más probable | Algo más probable | Un poco más probable | Ni más probable ni menos probable | Prefiero no responder |
| Más postulaciones por parte de migrantes or inmigrantes para puestos vacantes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mejores programas para ayudar a integrar a los trabajadores no costarricenses en nuestro establecimiento | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| No tener que preocuparse por una suspensión al establecimiento por contratar a trabajadores en situación irregular | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

La ley costarricense permite multar a los establecimientos hasta ₡5.172.000 colones por contratar a trabajadores en situación irregular.

Independiente de cuánto conozca de esta ley, ¿ha sabido de algún establecimiento que haya sido multado, sancionado o penalizado por esto?

- Sí, conozco un establecimiento que fue multado
- Sí, he sabido de establecimientos que fueron multados
- No, nunca he escuchado de ningún establecimiento que fuera multado
- Prefiero no responder

¿En qué área geográfica se encuentra su establecimiento?

¿Cómo caracterizaría su nivel de influencia en el área de contrataciones de su establecimiento?

- Alto
- Medio
- Bajo
- Ninguno
- Prefiero no responder

Con tecnología de Qualtrics

Appendix D. Survey Communications

English:

Subj: Survey of Panama/ Costa Rica Businesses on COVID-19 and Employment



Good morning/ Good afternoon/ Dear:

We are a group of researchers from the University of Maryland, and we are conducting a study to better understand economic and employment opportunities in Panama/Costa Rica, and how COVID-19 has impacted businesses like yours. We are reaching out to member of the business community in Panama/Costa Rica to invite you to participate in our online survey.

Our short, 6-8-minute survey asks some simple questions about your business, and how COVID-19 has impacted your company and employment opportunities for different populations in Panama/Costa Rica.

If you are interested in taking this survey, please click here.

If you have questions about this study, please get in touch with our researchers Dr. Katy Lindquist and Amira Giadala, M.A. by emailing us at CA_Encuesta@umd.edu.

Thank you for considering participating in this important research.

Sincerely,

Marcus Boyd, PhD (Principal Investigator)
University of Maryland

Katy Lindquist, PhD
University of Maryland



To unsubscribe, click [here](#).

Spanish:

Subj: Encuesta de Establecimientos en Panamá/Costa Rica sobre el COVID-19 y el Empleo



Buenos días/Buenas tardes/ Estimado/a:

Somos un grupo de investigadores de la Universidad de Maryland, y estamos realizando un estudio para adquirir un mejor entendimiento de las oportunidades económicas y de empleo en Panamá/Costa Rica, y como el COVID-19 ha afectado a los establecimientos como el suyo. Estamos escribiéndole a miembros de la comunidad empresarial en Panamá/Costa Rica para invitarlos a participar de una encuesta en línea.

Nuestra corta encuesta, que durará entre 6 a 8 minutos, le preguntará unas preguntas básicas sobre su establecimiento, y como el COVID-19 ha afectado su establecimiento y las oportunidades de empleo para diferentes poblaciones en Panamá/Costa Rica.

Si está interesado/a en participar de esta encuesta, por favor haga clic aquí.

Si tiene preguntas, por favor comuníquese con nuestras investigadoras Dra. Katy Lindquist y la Sra. Amira Giadala en la Universidad de Maryland respondiendo a este email.

Gracias por considerar su participación en este importante estudio.

Atentamente,

Marcus Boyd, PhD (Investigador Principal)
Universidad de Maryland

Katy Lindquist, PhD
Universidad de Maryland



Para eliminar su suscripción, haga clic aquí.

English:

Subj: Reminder: Survey of Panama/Costa Rica Businesses



Good morning/ Good afternoon/ Dear:

As a member of the business community in Panama/Costa Rica, you recently received an invitation from our research team at the University of Maryland to participate in an academic study of COVID-19 and its impact on your business and employment opportunities in the country.

Your response is important to us, and the survey takes only 6-8 minutes to complete.

If you are interested in taking this survey, please click here.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Dr. Katy Lindquist and Amira Giadala at CA_Encuesta@umd.edu.

Thank you again for considering participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Marcus Boyd, PhD (Principal Investigator)
University of Maryland

Katy Lindquist, PhD
University of Maryland



To unsubscribe, click [here](#).

Spanish:

Subj: Reminder: Encuesta de Establecimientos en Panamá/ Costa Rica



Buenos días/ Buenas tardes/ Estimado/a:

Como un miembro de la comunidad empresarial de Panamá/Costa Rica, recibió una invitación por parte de nuestro equipo de investigación de la Universidad de Maryland para participar en un estudio académico sobre el COVID-19 y sus efectos en su establecimiento y las oportunidades de empleo en su país.

Su respuesta es importante para nosotros y la encuesta solamente durará entre 6 a 8 minutos.

Si está interesado/a en participar de esta encuesta, por favor haga clic aquí.

Si tiene preguntas, por favor comuníquese con la Dra. Katy Lindquist y Sra. Amira Giadala al CA_Encuesta@umd.edu.

Gracias nuevamente por considerar su participación en este importante estudio.

Atentamente,

Marcus Boyd, PhD (Principal Investigator)
Universidad de Maryland

Katy Lindquist, PhD
Universidad de Maryland



Para eliminar su suscripción, haga clic aquí.

English:

Subj: Final Reminder: Survey of Panama/Costa Rica Businesses



Good morning/ Good afternoon/Dear :

We would like to make sure that businesses like yours are represented in our study. As a member of the business community in Panama/Costa Rica, you recently received an invitation from our research team at the University of Maryland to participate in an academic study of COVID-19 and its impact on your business and employment opportunities in the country.

Our short survey, which takes between 6-8-minute will ask you some simple questions about your business, and how COVID-19 has impacted your company and employment opportunities for different populations in Panama/Costa Rica. We would very much appreciate your participation in our survey that will close on **January 15th**.

If you are interested in taking this survey, please click here.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Dr. Katy Lindquist and Amira Giadala at CA_Encuesta@umd.edu.

Thank you again for considering participating in this important study.

Sincerely,
Marcus Boyd, PhD (Principal Investigator)
University of Maryland

Katy Lindquist, PhD
University of Maryland



To unsubscribe, click here.

Spanish:

Subj: Recordatorio Final: Encuesta de Establecimientos en Panamá/Costa Rica



Buenos días/ Buenas tardes/ Estimado/a:

Nos encantaría que establecimientos como el suyo sean representados en nuestro estudio. Como ya sabe, somos un grupo de investigadores de la Universidad de Maryland, y estamos realizando un estudio para adquirir un mejor entendimiento de las oportunidades económicas y de empleo en Panamá/Costa Rica, y como el COVID-19 ha afectado a los establecimientos como el suyo.

Nuestra corta encuesta, que durará entre 6 a 8 minutos, le preguntará unas preguntas básicas sobre su establecimiento, y como el COVID-19 ha afectado su establecimiento y las oportunidades de empleo para diferentes poblaciones en Panamá/Costa Rica. Mucho le agradeceremos responder voluntariamente a nuestra encuesta que cerrará el **15 de enero**.

Si está interesado/a en participar de esta encuesta, por favor haga clic aquí.

Si tiene preguntas, por favor comuníquese con nuestras investigadoras Dra. Katy Lindquist y la Sra. Amira Giadala en la Universidad de Maryland respondiendo a este email.

Gracias por considerar su participación en este importante estudio.

Atentamente,

Marcus Boyd, PhD (Principal Investigator)
Universidad de Maryland

Katy Lindquist, PhD
Universidad de Maryland



Para eliminar su suscripción, haga clic aquí.

Appendix E. Key Informant Interview List

Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with research team, October 14, 2020 (AACAP 1).

Costa Rican human rights lawyer, interview with research team, October 20, 2020 (AACAP 2).

Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 28, 2020 (AACAP 3).

Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, October 22, 2020 (AACAP 4).

Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 21, 2020 (AACAP 5).

Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with research team, October 20, 2020 (AACAP 6).

Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 28, 2020 (AACAP 7).

Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, October 23, 2020 (AACAP 8).

Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 23, 2020 (AACAP 10).

Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 23, 2020 (AACAP 11).

Regional member of an IGO, interview with author, October 21, 2020 (AACAP 12).

Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 19, 2020 (AACAP 13).

Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, October 22, 2020
(AACAP 14).

Regional member of an NGO, interview with author, October 30, 2020 (AACAP
15).

Costa Rican government official, interview with author, October 30, 2020
(AACAP 16).

Costa Rican member of an NGO, interview with author, November 6, 2020
(AACAP 17).

Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 6, 2020
(AACAP 18).

Costa Rican business sector representative, interview with author, November
17, 2020 (AACAP 19).

Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, November 19, 2020
(AACAP 21).

Panamanian member of an NGO, interview with author, November 17, 2020
(AACAP 22).

Costa Rican government official, interview with author, November 18, 2020
(AACAP 23).

Panamanian government official, interview with author, November 18, 2020
(AACAP 24).

Costa Rican government official, interview with author, November 18, 2020
(AACAP 25).

Costa Rican member of an NPO, interview with author, November 18, 2020
(AACAP 26).

Costa Rican government official, interview with author, November 18, 2020
(AACAP 27).

Costa Rican government official, interview with author, December 2, 2020
(AACAP 28).

Costa Rican member of an IGO, interview with author, December 3, 2020
(AACAP 29).

Appendix F. Interview Communications

English:

Dear ____:

I am part of a research team led by Dr. Marcus A. Boyd from the University of Maryland conducting research about migration and immigration in Costa Rica and Panama. Given your work, we might like to schedule a phone or web interview with you to learn more about your work and experiences.

Our research seeks to better understand regional trends in migration and immigration. Specifically, we'd like to understand how and why immigrants and migrants from Guatemala, El Salvador, and/or Honduras come to Panama or Costa Rica, and what might be done to better serve and support these communities in these two countries.

If you are interested in learning more and potentially sitting for an interview with our research team, please respond to this email or contact:

Email: (TBD)

Phone: (TBD)

Spanish:

Estimado/a _____:

Soy parte de un equipo de investigación dirigido por el Dr. Marcus A. Boyd de la Universidad de Maryland que está realizando investigaciones sobre migración e inmigración en Costa Rica y Panamá. Debido a su trabajo, nos gustaría agendar una llamada o entrevista virtual para aprender más sobre su trabajo y experiencias.

Nuestra investigación busca adquirir un mejor entendimiento sobre las tendencias regionales de migración e inmigración. Específicamente nos gustaría entender cómo y por qué los inmigrantes y migrantes de Guatemala, El Salvador y/o Honduras vienen a Panamá o Costa Rica y qué se podría hacer para servir y apoyar mejor a estas comunidades en estos dos países.

Si le interesa aprender más y, posiblemente participar de una entrevista con nuestro equipo de investigación, por favor responda a este email o comuníquese con:

Email: (TBD)

Teléfono: (TBD)

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