



AN ATOMISED CRISIS

Reframing displacement caused by crime and violence in El Salvador

THEMATIC REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was researched and written by Vickie Knox of the Refugee Law Initiative, University of London, with valued support from David Cantor. This research was commissioned by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) for its project "A baseline for action: Understanding and estimating displacement in the Northern Triangle of Central America". The project was conceptually designed and managed by Elizabeth Rushing and its core team includes Adrián Calvo-Valderrama, Andrés Lizcano-Rodriguez and Leonardo Milano.

The author and IDMC would like to thank the organisations that provided feedback on this report, including the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs.

The author is grateful to all research participants who contributed to the work by sharing their knowledge and expertise in interviews conducted in the region during March and April 2018. These include the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Office of the Attorney General, the National Youth Institute (INJUVE), the Assistance Centre for Returned Girls, Boys and Adolescents/the Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Development of Children and Adolescents (CANAF/ISNA), the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONNA), the National Council for the Protection and Development of Migrants and Their Families (Conmigrantes), UNHCR El Salvador, UNHCR Mexico, The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) El Salvador, ICRC El Salvador, ICRC Mexico, Cristosal, the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), Save the Children El Salvador, Amnesty International Americas, the Quetzalcoatl Foundation, Caritas El Salvador, the Jesuit Refugee Service, Asociación Salvadoreña por los Derechos Humanos (ASDUHU), the Feminist Collective, the Organisation of Salvadoran Women for Peace (ORMUSA), the National Coordinating Council for Indigenous Salvadorans (CCNIS), the Heinrich Böll Foundation Central America, the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), the Human Rights Institute of the Central American University (IDHUCA), Walter Murcia, Mauricio Gaborit, Jeannette Aguilar and other academic researchers, journalists, frontline workers, church ministers and representatives of NGOs, international agencies, civil society organisations and associations who preferred to participate anonymously.

Editor: Jeremy Lennard

Design and layout: Rachel Natali

Cover photo: *Hector (46), his wife *Camila (39) and their 3 children (15, 10 and 3) are refugees living in Guatemala. They were forced to flee El Salvador when they started to receive death threats from gang members after Hector helped a friend of his who was shot by a gang member. The gangs also wanted to recruit Hector's 15 year old son, started watching their house and intimidated Camila every day. They made the decision to flee when one day gang members forced their way inside the family's home. Photo: UNHCR/Michael Muller, July 2018

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SEPTEMBER 2018

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SUMMARY

Displacement caused by crime and violence has, by any measure, risen to the level of a humanitarian crisis in El Salvador and the broader Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA). The cross-border dimension of the phenomenon and associated asylum claims are well acknowledged, but much less is known about the drivers, patterns and impacts of displacement within the country's borders.

What little data is available suggests that the number of people internally displaced by criminal violence in El Salvador is high, and has risen significantly in recent years. In a 2017 public survey, 5.1 per cent of respondents said they had been forced to move in the previous year because of threats. This percentage, extrapolated to reflect the population of El Salvador, produces a figure of 296,000 new displacements, with over a quarter of people having moved twice or more.¹ Using a different methodology, a government-led profiling study published in 2018 found that 1.1 per cent of the households questioned had been forced to change their residence within the last ten years because of violence.²

The number of asylum claims from Salvadorans has risen in parallel. There were roughly 60,000 new claims lodged globally in 2017, a nearly 40 per cent increase on the previous year. The number of current and imminent deportations and returns to El Salvador is also high, and includes people who are unable to return to their places of origin because of ongoing protection concerns and those who may be otherwise at risk once back in the country.

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION AS A FIRST STEP TO IMPROVED RESPONSE

Addressing displacement comprehensively and achieving durable solutions for people displaced will be challenging. Much internal displacement is not even documented and the government is still to officially recognise

the phenomenon let alone collect data on it systematically. Its aforementioned publication of a profiling study on "internal mobility" caused by violence in March 2018 was, however, a positive development. In July 2018, the Supreme Court also issued a landmark ruling ordering the government to officially recognise displacement in the country, develop appropriate legislation and policies to assist and protect displaced people, allocate a budget for the response and take action to prevent displacement.

Official acknowledgement is a vital first step toward the government fulfilling its duties, in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, to protect and assist the country's internally displaced people (IDPs) and uphold their right to ask for and receive such support. A deeper understanding of the dynamics that drive displacement, from the *modus operandi* of gangs to the effects of the state's failure to facilitate durable solutions and its repressive response to criminality, could help to encourage state recognition of the phenomenon and inform an effective response.

A BASELINE FOR ACTION: UNDERSTANDING AND ESTIMATING DISPLACEMENT

This study seeks to reframe internal displacement caused by criminal violence in an effort to establish a shared understanding of the phenomenon in El Salvador and the NTCA. Academic studies, civil society and ombudsman reports and the recent government-led profiling study have contributed to this end, but significant data and knowledge gaps remain.

The study draws on extensive desk research covering the academic literature and latest empirical reports, and qualitative data collected in 51 interviews with 80 experts in El Salvador and Mexico City during March and April 2018. The research findings were analysed using a systems dynamics approach to look beneath the surface of the



Clandestine commerce and sales form a large part of daily life in San Salvador. Photo: Shutterstock/ConceptMatch, August 2008

observable phenomenon and explain why it happens, identify its drivers and dynamics, and identify high-leverage entry points for an effective response.

This research includes seven key findings drawn from the analysis and presented against the backdrop of the principle of national sovereignty as responsibility. They offer new insight into the phenomenon as a basis for developing protection and assistance interventions, guiding government and civil society responses, and informing policy recommendations.

| KEY FINDING 1: DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS ARE OSTENSIBLY RANDOM

In the absence of state support, people displaced by criminal violence rely on social capital and family networks during their displacement. A safe haven is hard to find, and depends on the cause and circumstances of each displacement, particularly the reach of criminal gangs. Some IDPs are able to access support from civil society organisations, certain state agencies and municipal bodies, but there is

no centralised or coordinated mechanism for doing so. Much displacement also remains invisible because IDPs choose not to report their plight and seek support for fear of their persecutors finding them. This makes patterns difficult to discern, and movements appear to be random.

| KEY FINDING 2: TARGETED THREATS CREATE A CONTINUUM OF RISK

Although the term “generalised violence” describes the widespread and sustained situation of violence in El Salvador, it does not adequately convey the highly targeted and individualised nature of criminal gangs’ threats and persecution, nor the varied dynamics of displacement they provoke. This must be understood as a continuum of risk that affects the decision to flee, its immediacy, options in terms of a safe haven and the diverse nature of IDPs’ protection needs.

| KEY FINDING 3: THE NATURE OF A SAFE PLACE IS HIGHLY INDIVIDUALIZED

Criminal violence is both pervasive and highly targeted, which provokes atomised patterns of displacement and make options for a safe place highly individualised. What may constitute a safe place for one person may not be safe for someone fleeing an ostensibly very similar situation. The individualised nature of a safe place is linked to the trigger of displacement, and people fleeing individual persecution and targeted threats or violence will be further limited in their options, particularly those perceived to have committed an act of betrayal and who are likely to be pursued after flight.

| KEY FINDING 4: THE PRECARIOUS NATURE OF DISPLACEMENT LEADS TO REPEATED TRANSITORY MOVES, “SELF-CONTAINMENT” AND SIGNIFICANT CROSS-BORDER FLIGHT

The absence of a state response and the individualised nature of a safe place mean that people fleeing criminal violence have few safe or sustainable options inside the country. Internal displacement is often ineffective and precarious, which leads to repeated transitory movements, severe restrictions on freedom of movement such as the phenomenon of “self-containment” and significant cross-border flight.

| KEY FINDING 5: REPRESSIVE STATE RESPONSES ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO DISPLACEMENT

In combatting the extremely high levels of violence in El Salvador, state security responses to gang activity have been counterproductive, and have triggered new displacement patterns. Repressive measures have increased enmity, which has led gangs to target police and military officers and their families, often leading to their displacement. The security forces themselves have also provoked the displacement of young people from gang-affected areas who flee arbitrary harassment and violence. This suggests an emerging state role in displacement, one of commission as well as omission.

| KEY FINDING 6: DISPLACEMENT HAS MAJOR IMPACTS AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY THAT ARE AGGRAVATED BY THE LACK OF A STATE RESPONSE

Displacement has significant socioeconomic and psychosocial impacts, which get worse if people are unable to find security and stability. These impacts also perpetuate and aggravate some of the underlying causes and drivers of criminal violence and displacement at the individual, community and national level. This highlights the failure of the state to fulfil its responsibility to intervene to address these causes and facilitate durable solutions.

| KEY FINDING 7: DATA AND REPORTING ISSUES IMPEDE UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION ON DISPLACEMENT

The lack of robust data and reporting impairs understanding of the scale of displacement caused by criminal violence in El Salvador and the needs of the people affected. In the absence of timely and reliable data, the state is unable – even if it were willing – to develop a comprehensive response to IDPs’ plight or effective measure to prevent future displacement. Instead, a protection void is left in which further human rights violations take place and the precarious nature of internal displacement leads to transitory movements, self-containment, and cross-border flight abroad.

INTRODUCTION

Internal displacement caused by criminal violence in El Salvador has been increasing over the past decade. Significant gaps in understanding remain, however, and there is no coherent or effective state response to the phenomenon. Academic researchers have taken initial steps to explain the emerging situation in the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA) and Mexico, and empirical reports have catalogued displacement situations and the people affected. More attention needs to be given, however, to the dynamics that drive displacement, how triggers and “generalised violence” affect its patterns, the effects of the state’s failure to facilitate durable solutions and its repressive responses to criminality, and the role of displacement in driving further crime and violence. This new understanding could help to encourage state recognition of the phenomenon and to inform an effective response.

Insecurity and criminal violence in El Salvador and NTCA is a factor in many people’s decisions to leave their homes. For some, particularly those who have been victims of crime or targeted persecution, it is the only or primary reason to flee within or beyond their country’s borders.⁵ For others, it is one of a combination of factors that may include economic concerns and family reunification. Other factors are also emerging, such as violence perpetrated by the security forces, drought and food shortages.⁶

There is relatively little data on internal displacement in El Salvador, and among that which does exist different sources present different figures. In the absence of systematic data collection by the government, the main sources of information are academic studies and empirical reports. There are few academic studies on criminal violence and displacement, but some have begun to analyse the phenomenon in NTCA and Mexico and to explain some of its dynamics.⁷

Recent reports have focused more squarely on internal displacement in El Salvador, and include those produced by civil society, the government and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the Salvadoran human rights ombudsman (*Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos*, PDDH) and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced people (IDPs), who noted “extremely high levels of internal displacement” following her visit to the country in August 2017.⁸

The data and figures in these reports vary according to their methodologies. Those published by civil society organisations and government agencies tend only to include people who have sought out their services and assistance. There is no mechanism to systematically register such cases or determine whether they are unique, but civil society organisations are developing a common registration system.

IDMC has extrapolated data from a survey carried out by University Institute of Public Opinion (*Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública*, IUDOP) at the Central America University, calculating that there were around 296,000 new displacements in 2017, affecting 5.1 per cent of the population older than 18.⁹ The Ministry of Justice and Public Security also published a nationally-representative profiling exercise on “internal mobility” caused by violence in March 2018. Supported by UNHCR, the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS), the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLASCO) and the government’s Department for Statistics and Censuses (DIGESTYC), it found that 1.1 per cent of the households questioned had been forced to change their residence between 2006 and 2016 because of, or in order to avoid, the effects of violence. This equates to around 71,500 people based on end-of-2016 population data.¹⁰

Such empirical reports provide useful tools to advocate for the government to officially acknowledge internal

displacement, and to shape the responses of its agencies, international donors, NGOs and civil society, but they are limited by methodological challenges, particularly arising from restricted access to affected populations, sampling limitations and data extrapolations.

This results in weak data that may not fully represent the scale of the phenomenon or the profile and needs of those affected. They do, however, provide an excellent base for this study to build on, and to address questions about the triggers and underlying drivers of displacement, the patterns of movement that result and the protection concerns of those affected.

To date, the state response to internal displacement has been lacking and it has failed to provide durable solutions for displaced people. However, recent developments appear to hold promise. In 2014, the government formed the National Council for Citizen Security and Coexistence (CNSCC, *Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadana y Convivencia*), which published the Plan El Salvador Seguro (PESS) in 2015.¹¹

A comprehensive and ambitious policy, it contains 124 action points on violence prevention, criminal prosecution, rehabilitation and social reinsertion, victims' protection and assistance, and institutional strengthening. Action point 111 covers the assistance assisting victims of displacement, and 106 the design and implementation of a permanent register for IDPs. This led to the establishment of Local Victim Assistance Offices (*Oficinas Locales de Atención a Víctimas*, OLAVs) in some of the areas worst affected by criminal violence.

Article 152(B) of the criminal code was reformed in 2016 to introduce the crime of "illegal restriction of freedom of movement", which penalises "any person who, by violence, intimidation or threat to persons or property, prevents another from freely moving, entering, remaining or leaving any place in the territory of the republic". It also applies to the illegal occupation of property, but it does not adequately encompass the crimes that trigger displacement, its impact on those affected or their adequate protection. The 2006 Victims and Witnesses Law provides protection for witnesses and victims of crime but "does not adequately include internally displaced persons as a unique category of victims requiring support, assistance and protection".¹²

After the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted precautionary measures in favour of a family that had been internally displaced, the constitutional chamber of the Supreme Court ordered protective measures for them in October 2017. By the start of 2018, the court had accepted six *amparo* or protection petitions for 60 IDPs in six family groups. On 13 July 2018, the constitutional chamber issued a landmark ruling in one of the six *amparo* cases presented by a group of IDPs with support from civil society organisations and law clinics. The court ordered the government to officially recognise forced displacement in the country, develop appropriate legislation and policies to assist and protect displaced people, allocate a budget for the response and take action to prevent displacement.

The court considered it well proven that internal displacement existed in the country and had a cross-border aspect, and that the government's response has been inadequate. Compliance with the ruling is required within six months and will greatly advance the protection of IDPs and those who filed the *amparo* cases. The justice minister said on 23 July that he would comply with the ruling "faithfully and absolutely".¹³

The government's March 2018 profiling exercise is to be followed up with a multi-agency plan for assisting victims.¹⁴ The Roadmap for Inter-Institutional Coordination for the Comprehensive Care and Protection of Victims of Violence was still under development as of July 2018, and the authorities have requested international cooperation and support from civil society organisations for at least two years to assist with implementation.¹⁵ The justice minister has also unofficially acknowledged cases of forced internal displacement and the security forces' role in some of them. He has said he intends to develop a protocol for prevention and a comprehensive response to the phenomenon in 2018.

These developments undoubtedly constitute progress, but the government still needs to do more to identify and assist IDPs and support them in achieving durable solutions so they "no longer have specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and such persons can enjoy their human rights without discrimination resulting from their displacement".¹⁶ It must assume primary responsibility for collecting data systematically and for preventing displacement by addressing its causes. Full official recognition of the phenomenon would be a vital first step.

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this research was to gather evidence for a conceptual framework of the drivers, triggers, impacts and patterns of internal displacement caused by criminal violence in El Salvador, with the aim of establishing a shared understanding of the phenomenon in the country and NTCA more widely. It sought to answer the following questions in four areas:

- | What are the main drivers and underlying structural factors that combine to cause generalised criminal violence and displacement in the region?
- | What are the main triggers or shocks that compel people to leave their homes?
- | What are the individual and structural impacts of displacement, and who is the most at risk of displacement, and abuse and harm once displaced? How do mixed migration flows affect the assistance and protection that displaced people receive?

| What are the patterns of displacement? What are the main challenges to address and opportunities to explore in terms of durable solutions, and how does the failure to address protection concerns and achieve durable solutions lead to protracted or repeated displacement? What are the tipping points for onward movement across borders? What happens to asylum seekers and migrants deported or returning to their countries of origin who are unable to go back to their place of origin because of protection concerns?

The study is based on a comprehensive review of academic literature, empirical reports and available data on criminal violence and displacement in NTCA, including cross-border movement, on new data generated from 51 semi-structured interviews with 80 key informants in the region. Experts and informants were selected to produce data from a range of perspectives, and to provide insight into people's vulnerabilities before, during and after displacement. Interviewees included academics, government officials, frontline workers, church ministers, and representatives of international agencies, international NGOs, law clinics, civil society



A city bus burned by gang members in Apopa, El Salvador. Photo: shutterstock/ES James

and human rights organisations, and LGBT, women's and indigenous groups.

The interviews were tailored according to informants' areas of expertise, and orientated around the project's four research areas to generate data on the impacts of displacement on different demographic groups, the causal dynamics, scope and scale of the phenomenon, and government and civil society responses. The majority of interviews were conducted in San Salvador in March 2018. Others took place in Usulután, Sonsonate and Santa Ana. Regional-level interviews were conducted in Mexico City. The research also identified sources of quantitative data from agencies and organisations in El Salvador that might help to paint comprehensive picture of displacement and its impacts.

The research adhered to ethical standards for guaranteeing confidentiality and managing data correctly in a highly insecure situation. Given the nature of this study and the inevitability of sampling bias in conducting interviews with IDPs in El Salvador, it is based on key informant interviews and secondary sources. A number of Salvadoran interviewees did indicate, however, that they had been the victim of crime and/or displacement, and other people spontaneously related their direct or experiences of the phenomenon. The majority of interviewees requested anonymity, so sources are referred to only by their job title or by the type of organisation they represented, unless permission was otherwise given.

I CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

Evidence about the triggers, drivers, patterns and impacts of displacement was analysed using a systems dynamics approach, so as to build a conceptual framework of internal displacement caused by criminal violence in the region. The analysis looks beneath the surface of the observable phenomenon to explain why it happens.

It is not necessarily possible to determine how or where people displaced by criminal violence in El Salvador will move, but the analysis did help to explain the causal relationships and mechanisms behind seemingly random displacement patterns, and to highlight protection concerns during displacement. The approach also helped to identify points where its causes might be addressed

and where intervention would be most effective, and to provide deeper understanding about the actual and potential adverse consequences of policy or actions.

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report is made up of six sections. Section one introduces the report and the phenomenon of crime, violence and displacement in El Salvador. Section two examines the social, political and economic drivers and structural factors that combine to cause criminal violence and displacement. Section three examines the main triggers that compel people to leave their homes, and shows how understanding them in relation to gang code sheds light on protection concerns before and during displacement. It also explains how the state's security-led response to criminality provokes further displacement.

Section four examines the displacement patterns that result. It looks beneath what ostensibly appear to be random movements and explains how the failure to address protection needs and achieve durable solutions results in repeated displacement. It also examines links with cross-border flight, and the situation of people who are returned to El Salvador but unable to go back to their place of origin. Section five discusses the impacts of displacement at the individual, community and national level, and identifies how they help to perpetuate the situation by aggravating the underlying factors and conditions and factors that drive violence and displacement.

Section six presents key findings drawn from the analysis and themes from the previous four sections. The findings are orientated around the principle of national sovereignty as responsibility and the state as duty bearer. They offer new insight into the phenomenon as a basis for developing protection interventions, guiding government and civil society responses, and informing policy recommendations.

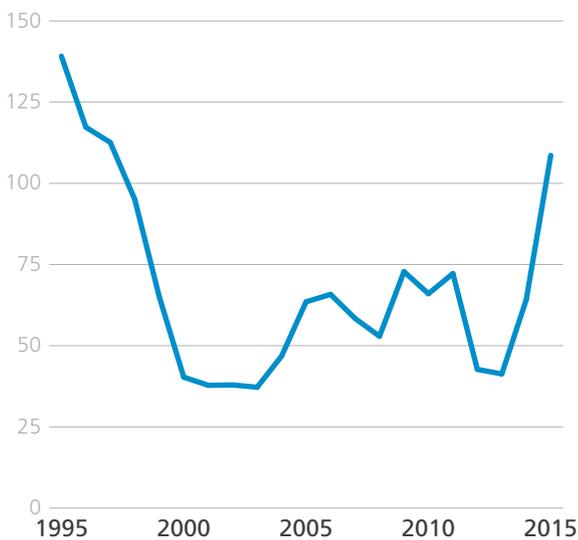
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DRIVERS OF CRIME, VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT IN EL SALVADOR

There are a number of social, economic and political drivers that make people more vulnerable to crime and drive high levels of violence and displacement in El Salvador, and which feed into each other to perpetuate the pervasive criminality and violence in the country. They also perpetuate the disadvantage, poverty and inequality that increase the likelihood of people being victims of crime or becoming involved in gangs, and the ineffective state responses that means people have no choice but to flee.

weather and climate change impacts. These have already caused some sporadic and acute movement and have the potential to cause more chronic displacement in the future.¹⁷ It is also affected by changes in other countries' migration policies, such as the revocation of temporary protection status (TPS) in the US and the hardening of enforcement in Mexico, which have led to increasing numbers of deportations and returns. All these issues need to be monitored as they emerge, and the impact of criminal violence on people's resilience to future threats considered.

FIGURE 1: Homicide statistics in El Salvador, 1995-2015
Intentional homicides (per 100,000 people)



Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime's International Homicide Statistics database

Criminal violence has provoked and continues to provoke the majority of displacement in El Salvador, but the country is also vulnerable to natural disasters, extreme

BACKGROUND

The history of human mobility in El Salvador has played a role in perpetuating some of the socioeconomic factors that reduce people's resilience to criminal violence and displacement. It is linked to the growth of criminal gangs in the region and also continues to frame the way forced displacement is seen. It also help to explain attitudes toward, and understanding of this new form of internal displacement, including some of the government's reluctance to acknowledge the phenomenon and its relationship to cross-border movement.

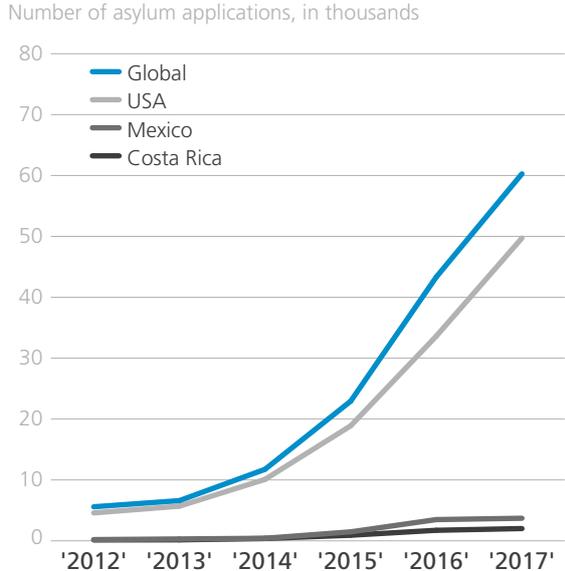
During the 1979 to 1992 civil war, about a quarter of El Salvador's population were forcibly displaced, particularly in rural areas. Around 550,000 people were internally displaced and 500,000 sought refuge in other countries as entire communities were driven from their homes by death squads or fled fighting, massacres and scorched earth activities.¹⁸

For those who fled abroad the main destination was the US, although significant numbers also relocated to Mexico and elsewhere in Central America. Large cross-border flows continued throughout the 1980s, declining in the early 1990s when the conflict ended. A series of disasters triggered further migration from Central America in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and in 2001 the US granted Salvadorans TPS following earthquakes that devastated parts of the country.

The social networks that immigrants established in the US influenced migration for economic and family reunification reasons during the 2000s, and the number of women migrating rose significantly.¹⁹ Over the past decade, however, people’s reasons for mobility have been increasingly linked to criminal violence and gang activity.²⁰

During this time and particularly since 2013, there has been a marked shift in the demographic composition of cross-border flows, characterised by a steep rise in the number of children, unaccompanied minors and families leaving the country and accompanied by an unprecedented rise in the number in asylum claims, particularly in Mexico, the US and Costa Rica.²¹ Some people’s decisions to flee are multi-causal, but for others criminal violence is the primary or standalone reason.

FIGURE 2: Number of asylum claims filed by Salvadorans by year, 2012-2017



Source: UNHCR

About a third of Salvadorans, some 3.2 million people, live outside the country,²² mostly in the US, where around 200,000 have been granted TPS.²³ Remittances in 2016 grew to more than \$4.5 billion, representing around 17 per cent of El Salvador’s GDP and a key factor in the country’s economic growth.²⁴ One in five of households receive remittances, most of which is spent on basic needs. Many of these households would be vulnerable to extreme poverty without this source of income.²⁵ Many households benefitting from remittances demonstrate better development outcomes in terms of indicators such as school attendance, but they also have negative impacts, particularly in rural areas where lifestyles increasing revolve around consumption rather than production.

Emigration has also broken up families. Many children whose parents have emigrated are brought up by grandparents, relatives or friends, which can lead to protection concerns, a reduced sense of belonging and heightened vulnerability to involvement in criminal activities and gangs.²⁶ It has also had a direct impact on the growth of criminal gangs in El Salvador. Young refugees from the civil war joined gangs in inner-city Los Angeles, and when many were deported in the early and mid-1990s, they came back to a country marked by poverty and social exclusion, weak state institutions, and where weapons had not been decommissioned. Further deportations of gang members and former prisoners in the early 2000s also appear to have contributed to increased gang membership.²⁷

This background influences current patterns of displacement caused by criminal violence, because many people in El Salvador have strong social capital outside the country. This helps to determine migration decisions and destinations and to facilitate journeys by contributing to the cost of people smuggling services. It does not provoke cross-border flight in and of itself, but it does help to fuel the phenomenon.²⁸

Experiences and memories of violent forced displacement caused by the security forces and their proxies during the civil war also mean that many people and government officials tend to understand the current movements as voluntary migration, rather than forced internal displacement and refugee flows. The government’s reluctance to officially recognise internal displacement is closely linked to its historical view of the phenomenon, in which entire communities were forced

to flee during the armed conflict. There is also a lack of political will to recognise a problem that the government does not have a response to, and which exposes its ineffective control in some parts of the country.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, however, give a broader definition of displacement as “persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters”. This definition is also used in regional instruments such as the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees.

UNDERLYING FACTORS THAT INCUBATE VIOLENCE

The causes of today’s crime and violence are the same as those that drove the civil war - poverty, economic inequality, lack of opportunities, social exclusion and unequal access to services. These seeds of violence, inequality and discrimination were sown during colonial times, and blossomed as a result of military dictatorships and war. Peace accords were signed after the conflict ended, but despite their vision for reconstruction the underlying social and economic issues have not been addressed. A postwar amnesty law, which the Supreme Court overturned in 2016, also licensed impunity for the massacres, disappearances and human rights violations carried out by the army with US support.

| ECONOMIC DRIVERS

El Salvador continues to be affected by poverty and deep economic inequality, with a Gini index of 41.8 and 38.2 per cent of the population estimated to be living below the poverty line in 2016.²⁹ The situation has been aggravated by neoliberal economic policy that has concentrated wealth in the hands of a few, leaving the majority poor, marginalised and socially excluded. Dollarisation in 2001 failed to attract investments that might have opened up economic opportunities, and “left the poorest Salvadorians worse off because while prices rose, wages did not, leaving everyone with a lower real income”.³⁰

The lack of social development and economic opportunities has fuelled criminal violence, while the latter in turn impedes the former, leading to a downward spiral.³¹ A quarter of 15 to 29 year olds are not in school or employment.³² This creates ample recruiting ground for gangs, and many young people have joined and become involved in crime as a survival strategy.³³ In doing so, their economic potential is lost, while increasing gang activity also hampers broader economic activity in affected areas.

Living in safety often has an economic cost, and this creates an inequality of security. Some are able to afford a private vehicle, pay for private security and/or move to a gated community in a safe area. Prices in such areas have recently increased significantly, however, and many families who invest in moving to them are likely to suffer a reduction in their living standards as a result. For the majority, this option is simply out of reach. Instead they live in more insecure areas and rely on public transport, making them more vulnerable to violence and displacement.³⁴

| SOCIAL DRIVERS

People’s lack of access to essential services is also both a driver and result of crime and violence. Gang activity and governmental neglect mean education, health and social services in affected areas and rural parts of the country are limited or absent, and inequality in education makes children more vulnerable to crime. Gangs target the poorest children with lower education levels, and those not in school are particularly vulnerable to recruitment.³⁵ Dropout rates are also high, in part the result of violence and displacement but also disaffection with education because of the lack of economic opportunities available for young people. This feeds a vicious circle of deprivation and violence.³⁶

Given young people’s political, economic and social marginalisation and exclusion, joining a gang can offer identity, income and a sense of belonging. At the same time, however, gang activity has led the government and private sector to criminalise young people more broadly and to treat them with suspicion. Those from affected areas are stigmatised and refused employment whether they are involved in gangs or not, causing further economic loss and marginalisation. They are also subjected to arbitrary state harassment and violence when the security forces carry out raids in their neighbourhoods.

According to one representative from a law clinic, it is not just the gangs that cause forced displacement: “Police treat children very badly, and this has increased with the army’s involvement in operations. They don’t see people, and especially children, as rights-holders.”³⁷ Negative portrayals of young people in the media reinforce their stigmatisation and sense of marginalisation.³⁸ Coverage also tends to be supportive of repressive responses to criminal gangs, sensationalising their violence while normalising that of the security forces against them.³⁹

Gender discrimination is fuelled by patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes. Women face discrimination in employment and wage disparity, and the majority who work do so in the informal sector, where they are vulnerable to exploitation. El Salvador has a gender inequality index of 85 and a global gender gap index of 64.⁴⁰ These benchmarks do not, however, fully reflect women’s and girls’ experiences of violence or their lack of bodily autonomy. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is common, sexual violence is endemic and El Salvador has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world.⁴¹ Girls and adolescents are particularly affected by sexual violence. Eighty per cent of sexual offences reported in 2017 were against women under the age of 18. Sex with a minor is classed as statutory rape, but one third of pregnancies occur among children aged between ten and 19.

Abortion is banned in all circumstances, meaning that children and rape victims are obliged to carry their pregnancies to term. Numerous poor women who have suffered obstetric complications, miscarriage or stillbirth have been given prison sentences of 30 years or more. The ban on abortion, which is linked to gender stereotypes of women, can be understood as state violence and a violation of bodily autonomy.⁴² It should also be noted that gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes contribute to gangs’ extreme machismo and men’s vulnerability to being a victim or perpetrator of violence.

The rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people are not respected, and the community is deeply affected by stigma and violence. Discrimination and exclusion limits their access to education, work and career opportunities. There is no comprehensive legislation to protect the LGBT community, nor any legal obligation for state actors not to discriminate against it. Anyone who does not appear to fit patriarchal gender

norms is targeted, but most criminal attacks on LGBT people are against trans women, who live “a life of abuse that is a continuum of violence”.⁴³

The civil society organisation COMCAVIS TRANS has documented more than 600 murders of LGBT people over the last 20 years, and the killing of two trans rights activists between 2014 and 2017. Given a climate of impunity and state complicity, however, crimes are not prosecuted.

The government has failed to record a single hate crime against LGBT people, despite changes to the penal code that include sexual orientation and gender identity as aggravating factors in hate crimes and murders. The police are supposed to record data on sexual orientation and gender identity when people report crimes, but this is not done properly, so hate crimes cannot be identified. LGBT people also face particular challenges in reporting crimes. They may be re-victimised when they do so, it can be impossible to report a crime for people who appear different in gender from their identity document, and domestic violence cannot be reported because of the lack of recognition of same-sex partnerships and family relationships.⁴⁴

| POLITICAL DRIVERS

Weak rule of law and political polarisation are key factors in driving violence and displacement, and in preventing effective solutions. There is a deep lack of trust in the authorities and a reticence to approach them for protection and assistance based on the state’s failure to deliver justice for atrocities committed during the civil war, the current infiltration of institutions by gangs, corruption and collusion.

Collusion ranges from tolerance to active involvement, from the practical assistance of some mayors to gangs’ cash donations for presidential election campaign and a political party giving money to gang members in return for their families’ votes. The relationship between gangs and the police, however, may have changed since 2014 as enmity has increased, with the increased enmity between them since 2014, and the country’s attorney general, Douglas Meléndez, has led attempts to crack-down on corruption.

Many people choose not to report crimes, whether committed by gangs or state entities, for fear of



A middle-aged man from rural El Salvador stands in the garden of a migrant assistance center in Guatemala's capital city. "The Maras shot me once already. They will finish the job if I go back." He fled his home in 2009, after witnessing a murder, and again in 2015, after reporting his daughter's rape to the local police. Photo © UNHCR/Rodrigo Cruz, April 2016

reprisals.⁴⁵ This feeds into a culture of impunity that creates an environment in which gangs and crime can flourish, which in turn further undermines people's trust in the authorities, increases their vulnerability to gangs' abuses and undermines access to justice. That said, impunity is a complex issue. There are also significant practical challenges in delivering justice, such as a lack of resources and capacity and the sheer volume of cases, both new and old.⁴⁶

Salvadoran politics is deeply polarised between the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) on the right and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) on the left, and "political party polarisation is the principal obstacle to dealing seriously with the issue of violence".⁴⁷ With the loss of popular support for the left party, the opportunity for dialogue and a reasoned response lessens the right's recourse to security measures.⁴⁸ Such responses do not address the causes of poverty and inequality that drive crime and violence. Nor do they foster an atmosphere conducive to rehabilitation, reinsertion and peacebuilding.

| REPRESSIVE RESPONSES TO CRIMINALITY

Far from alleviating El Salvador's gang problems, the state's security-led responses have made them worse. They have led to changes in gangs' *modus operandi*, their territorial expansion and their activities becoming more extreme. Such responses began in the mid-2000s with *mano dura*, or strong hand, and *súper mano dura*. These responses and subsequent security-focussed measures led to gangs no longer using visible signs of allegiance such as tattoos, recruiting ever younger people and moving into rural areas.⁴⁹

The current repressive response followed the failure of the 2012-2013 gang truce.⁵⁰ It contributed to the ruralisation of gangs and violence and increased territoriality, and an increased drive to recruit young people and children. The political discourse since 2014 and extraordinary measures introduced in 2016 have caused growing enmity between gangs and the police, and increasing gang violence, some of it targeting officers and their families. There have also been growing concerns about the state's abuse of power, its arbitrary harassment of young people, disappearances and extrajudicial executions in what has been described as "a blurring of state and criminal violence".⁵¹

These issues have combined, along with the failure to address the causes of violence and displacement, to perpetuate and fuel both phenomena. They also undermine what little trust existed in the authorities. One public opinion survey shows that trust in the police, justice ministry, attorney general's office and Supreme Court fell in 2017, along with political engagement. This appears to coincide with the latest security-driven crackdown, and to have particularly alienated young people.⁵²

| RECENT LEGAL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

There are some well-developed and promising policies on paper, but implementation tends to be problematic. The Safe El Salvador Plan (*Plan El Salvador Seguro*, PESS) developed by the National Council for Citizens' Security and Coexistence (*Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadana y Convivencia*, CNSCC) and published in January 2015 contains 124 action points in five streams: violence prevention; criminal prosecution; rehabilitation and social reinsertion; the protection and assistance of victims; and institutional strengthening.⁵³

It is a comprehensive and ambitious policy that has the potential to achieve positive change in the municipalities most affected by violence. Action point 111 covers the assistance of victims of displacement, and 106 the design and implementation of a permanent register for IDPs. Neither has been achieved, though some progress has been made toward the former with the establishment of Local Victim Assistance Offices (*Oficinas Locales de Atención a Víctimas*, OLAVs) in some of the areas worst affected by criminal violence.

OLAVs are a promising step forward, but they are still in their initial stages and there are significant gaps. They provide legal advice and psychosocial support, but do not offer emergency assistance or temporary protection, and civil society organisations have expressed concern about their practicalities. Their opening hours do not match gangs' night-time operating hours when people have nowhere to turn, and so far they are only located in PESS target municipalities. As such, they are only able to assist people who remain in the area and may not be present in areas of refuge.

Nor is there a comprehensive state programme to refer people to, so it is left to civil society organisations and NGOs to provide what assistance they can, often for

only a limited time. The government's Roadmap for Inter-Institutional Coordination for Comprehensive Care and Protection of Victims of Violence, currently under development by the justice ministry, is an encouraging next step in this sense.⁵⁴ The authorities have requested international cooperation and support from civil society organisations for at least two years to assist with implementation.

The prevention measures that underpin PESS have been underfunded, which has undermined their effectiveness.⁵⁵ Security elements have been rolled out, but some have been implemented in ways that have led to the abuse of power and human rights violations. Joint military and police operations in affected communities have been marked by the excessive use of force, and young people are assumed to be gang members and suffer arbitrary harassment and abuse.⁵⁶

Some recent legislative and judicial developments have the potential to perpetuate violence and displacement. A Supreme Court ruling in 2015 designated street gangs as terrorist groups, effectively endorsing a militarised response. It also means that working with gang members on violence prevention or rehabilitation can be considered collaboration with terrorists. Opportunities for dialogue and negotiation are extremely limited, which leaves little space for solutions that are not security-focussed, and "further lends itself to the possibility of human rights abuses by authorities".⁵⁷ That said, proposed legislation on the rehabilitation of gang members could necessitate the ruling being overturned.⁵⁸

A related area of concern is legislative change that has led to near-complete police impunity, giving them "carte blanche to do whatever they want."⁵⁹ Changes to part of the penal code in 2014 make cases of state abuse easy to dismiss if, for example, the accused's commanding officer submits a report saying the use of lethal force was required.⁶⁰ This has resulted in almost all cases against the police and military being thrown out before they reach a judge, a particular concern given the growing number of complaints, the repressive elements of PESS and the lack of options for anything other than a militarised response.⁶¹

CURRENT CRIMINAL VIOLENCE AND GANGS' MODUS OPERANDI

Knowledge of gangs' *modus operandi* is vital in understanding how they perceive people's actions to be infractions of their rules, and how this affects displacement and protection needs. Their criminal activities are not as pertinent in this sense as the social control they exert in their territories and the allegiance they demand. "The MS13 is a social organisation first, and a criminal organisation second".⁶² Gangs are present in around 247 of El Salvador's 262 municipalities, meaning that most of the country is affected by pervasive violence and potential risk to individuals.⁶³

| TERRITORIAL CONTROL AND GANG CODE

Territorial control is central to gangs' powerbase and revenue streams such as extortion, and they create unofficial "borders" that limit residents' access to employment, education and healthcare. Local people are forbidden to work or access services in an opposing gang's territory or even to cross rival territory on their way. Such restrictions are reinforced by a strong communications network, with lookouts posted throughout the country who communicate by telephone and check people's identity.⁶⁴

Código or gang code dictates how anyone associated with the gang must behave. "They want control, obedience, silence. If that doesn't happen they will kill you."⁶⁵ Strict compliance is also required from people living in the territory a gang controls. The absolute requirements are to be loyal, to *ver, oír y callar* or "see, hear and shut up" and to comply with demands.

The lives of gang members and residents are affected by anything from curfews to rules determining clothing and haircuts, and any infraction - real or suspected - is punished with a severity the gang deems commensurate with the "offence". Betrayal is punishable by death, while resistance may incur violence to force compliance or a credible death threat.

Gangs' extreme machismo of gangs dictates strict gender divisions. Some women are gang members and undertake regular activities, and others have

administrative roles while male members are in jail. In general, however, women are viewed as subservient or "property", and gang members demand complete control over their bodies and lives. LGBT people are not permitted to join gangs or to live in some gang areas, although they may be forced to collaborate. This leads to high levels of violence based on gender and sexual orientation, and femicide for perceived acts of betrayal. Sexual violence and rape are used as punishment, including against female relatives of men who have offended gang members.⁶⁶

| EXTORTION

Renta or extortion is gangs' main source of income, and bearing its economic burden is part of life in territories they control. It has reached endemic proportions over the last decade, with 93 per cent of small business people reporting having had to pay up.⁶⁷

Extortion is mainly demanded from businesses, but local residents may also have to pay "taxes" or *renta* to access their homes. No business sector is spared, and goods and professional services may be demanded instead of, or in addition to money. Large businesses and transport operators have dedicated employees to negotiate extortion fees, which are built into their financial models.

Implicit risk starts as soon as someone is targeted to pay, and it rises if they are unable to pay or the *renta* charged increases. Those who refuse to pay are killed. Those forced to pay will be constantly harassed, and many have shut their businesses down because they find themselves working solely for the gangs' benefit. Drivers of public transport and commercial goods vehicles are systematically targeted, and many have been killed for refusing to pay or to enter certain areas.⁶⁸

| TARGETING OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN

Young people and children are forcibly recruited into gangs, with boys targeted from the age of ten.⁶⁹ Children fall under the age of criminal responsibility, they are easy to target because they do not have a developed sense of right and wrong, and they are often happy with small rewards such as sweets and toys. Some have attributed the phenomenon to postwar family breakdown, but vulnerability is linked more to socioeconomic factors and the susceptibility of young people who are

not in education or employment.

Gang membership is a means of survival for many, but for others drawn by gaining status or rewards an element of choice is involved. Either way, the decision to join a gang can be understood as a manifestation of structural violence caused by the state's failure to address the lack of opportunities for young people, which perpetuates poverty, inequality and exclusion.⁷⁰

Reductions in the age for gang recruitment appear to be triggered by repressive state responses that have targeted young people. After *mano dura* and *súper mano dura*, gangs started to recruit ever younger members who were less likely to be targeted in raids and would serve shorter prison sentences than adults.⁷¹ Intense efforts to recruit children from the age of ten began after a failed truce 2014 and 2015 and the start of the current cycle of repression.⁷² This coincided with a sudden increase in the number of unaccompanied minors fleeing the country.

Agencies in El Salvador report that they now see cases of children as young as seven being recruited. The dynamic is similar to the recruitment of child soldiers, in which recruits are brutalised, traumatised and forced to kill.⁷³

| SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Women and girls are also recruited into or join gangs, but they are more commonly subjected to sexual abuse, which is widespread. Gang members and others may call these women *novias* or girlfriends, and some women willingly engage in sexual relationships, but it tends to be a forced or coerced involvement, particularly when underage girls are involved.⁷⁴ Girls are subjected to rape and sexual abuse, effectively becoming gang members' sexual slaves, and they may be forced into sexual activity with the entire *clika* or gang cell.

Girls aged 12 to 15 are the most vulnerable, but some are groomed from as young as ten.⁷⁵ Girls with no sexual experience are kidnapped and given to gang members as "birthday presents", and may be held for several days while being raped. Women have also been made to visit gang members in prison, their visits including drug smuggling and forced sexual acts.⁷⁶ They are threatened with death if they refuse.⁷⁷

There is near impunity for sexual crimes, and many girls

grow up "in a cycle of violence that they are unable to escape".⁷⁸ Those subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse are unlikely to report their ordeals for fear of reprisals if they speak up and stigma surrounding the issue, but they may present if they become pregnant or contract a sexual transmitted infection. The suicide rate among young girls has also been linked to avoiding their initiation into gangs and forced sexual acts, as well as to the unwanted pregnancies that result, given El Salvador's absolute ban on abortion.

The causes that lie behind the systematic targeting and exploitation of young women and girls below the age of consent cannot be comprehensively addressed without confronting patriarchal attitudes, endemic sexual violence and the legal restrictions women face in making decisions about their bodies.⁷⁹

| COPING STRATEGIES

People adopt coping strategies to deal with criminal violence. At one end of the spectrum lies absolute compliance with gangs' demands, and at the other forced displacement. Strategies depend in part on the level of risk people face and their ability to tolerate it. Some may be able to remain in their homes and comply with a gang's demands to the extent necessary to maintain a bearable level of risk. Some have no option but to endure extreme abuse, aware that any transgression will increase the risks they face. Others may move to safer areas, but in the absence of effective state protection the viability of such strategies also depends on people's economic resources and social capital. In this sense, the first two options can be understood as a manifestation of structural violence.

3

DISPLACEMENT TRIGGERS

Displacement triggers are the visible events that mark the moment in which people feel compelled to flee their homes, but they come about as a result of the complex interaction of underlying drivers described in the previous section. The triggers for displacement and forced migration caused by criminal violence recorded in empirical reports and academic studies include threats of violence or death, rape or sexual violence, extortion, forced recruitment, attempted murder, murder of a relative and assault.

People may flee a targeted threat to their personal security, and they may also flee because of a general fear of violence, the socioeconomic effects of crime and insecurity, increased violence in their neighbourhood or territorial battles. Sudden increases in violence and murders appear to follow government crackdowns and disputes and rifts within the gangs and cells.⁸⁰

DISPLACEMENT BY GANGS

Three types of criminal groups operate in the NTCA – street gangs, smuggling groups or *transportistas* and Mexican cartels. In contrast to the situation in Guatemala and Honduras, only gangs appear to provoke forced displacement in El Salvador.⁸¹ Responses by the security forces to gang activity also increasingly trigger displacement connected to criminal violence.⁸²

El Salvador's street gangs each have their distinct modus operandi, which affect people's security before and after they flee from them. The MS gang is highly organised and hierarchical. Orders come from above, even if they may be applied inconsistently, and it may be able to pursue people effectively after they flee. The 18 gang on the other hand is more disorganised, its members can indulge in extortion and threats without authorisation, and its overall conduct is chaotic.

Men aged 18 to 35 are the most vulnerable to gang-related killings, and the intentional homicide rate for this group exceeds 300 per 100,000 in some parts of the country. Women and men are affected differently by gang activity, and children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to recruitment and to sexual exploitation. People who refuse to join a gang, try to leave one or refuse to comply with its demands are highly vulnerable to extreme reprisals. Those suspected of belonging to or associating with a rival gang, or having friends or family who do so, face persecution and extrajudicial execution by gang members and death squads supported by state acquiescence or complicity.⁸³

Victims of gangs' criminal activities or threats comprise people actively persecuted and individually targeted and those affected more generally by criminal violence, including those forced to move when the gang that controls their local area changes.⁸⁴ People from both groups may have to relocate, but the former have heightened security concerns before and after displacement, and this will result in different patterns of movement and outcomes.

The term "generalised violence" is somewhat problematic in this respect.⁸⁵ It describes the situation of widespread and sustained criminal violence in El Salvador, but it does not adequately convey the highly targeted and individualised nature of much of the violence, threats and persecution, or the implications for individual protection needs or displacement dynamics it may provoke.

| THREATS

Threats of death, sexual violence or disappearance are a significant trigger of displacement. They may be made directly to an individual or indirectly to a relative, neighbour or friend, and they may be implicit or explicit. Those threatened both directly and indirectly tend to flee within hours, leaving little or no time to plan or prepare for their displacement.



Gabriela, María and Lule (names have been changed) cannot show their faces. They are refugees from El Salvador, having fled violence and persecution and sought safety in Guatemala. Photo © UNHCR/Michael Muller, July 2018

Direct threats may be linked to forced recruitment, failure to pay extortion money or submit to other demands, or a perceived act of *traición* or betrayal. The murder or attempted murder of a relative or act of aggression against them constitutes an indirect threat rather than a growing risk in the community more broadly. The act itself constitutes an implicit threat, but an explicit threat or order to leave may also follow.⁸⁶

Threats may arise because of what someone has or hasn't done, but also because of who someone is. People who are particularly vulnerable in this sense include members of the security forces and others targeted because of their work, members of the LGBT community, and people with past or current links to gangs, including former prisoners, those who have left gangs and the partners and relatives of gang members. These should be understood as people whose presence is an affront to gangs or is perceived to violate gang code, and people whose identity is constructed by having committed or having the potential to commit acts perceived as resistance or betrayal.

Framing threats within gangs' modus operandi and social control can help to differentiate between the

sudden onset of actual risk and the slower onset of latent risk. It can also help to explain to whom the risk is extended, the urgency of flight and the likelihood of persecution after displacement. It is useful to understand these threats as a continuum of risk that does not diminish, but increases in intensity, immediacy and the number of people to whom the risk extends.

The 2014 conceptualisation by David Cantor, the director of the Refugee Law Initiative at the University of London, of acts that gangs perceive as grounds for displacement - betrayal, enmity, resistance, land appropriation and insecurity - is adopted below, with the acknowledgment that the distinction between them is not necessarily absolute.⁸⁷

| BETRAYAL

Street gangs demand absolute loyalty from all gang members, their partners and their families. This can also extend to the people who live in the areas gangs control. Acts perceived to be betrayal or *traición* are usually punished with murder, and this risk can extend to family members. The lines between the ways different *clikas* perceive refusals to comply with their demands, such as

not acquiescing to recruitment or sexual involvement, may be blurred. They may be perceived either as resistance or betrayal, depending largely on the dynamics of the local *clika* and its territorial control, and the seniority of the gang members who issued the demand.

| FORCED RECRUITMENT

Young men and boys are particularly vulnerable to threats associated with forced recruitment, but young women and girls may also be targeted. Young people who refuse to join a gang are threatened, and may be terrorised into collaborating out of fear. Children may be sent away to relatives to avoid their forced recruitment, or entire families may leave because the initial threat is extended to them all. Disappearances associated with forced recruitment may also trigger the displacement of the whole family.⁸⁸

The forced recruitment of children must be addressed distinctly from that of adults, not only because children's exposure to violence has greater psychological and mental health impacts that continue as they grow, but also because the refusal of recruitment provokes different displacement patterns depending on the age of the person in question.

Where children are concerned these may include the splitting up of families when a child is sent to relatives, unaccompanied minors fleeing or whole families being displaced. It may be unclear at the moment of displacement whether the family is fleeing to accompany the targeted minor, the threat has been made to the whole family unit or the act of the minor's displacement would extend the risk to all.

| SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Women and girls enter into sexual involvement with gang members with varying degrees of voluntariness, from willing sexual partners to coerced or forced involvement. Young women and girls are systematically targeted for sexual abuse and exploitation and forced to be sexual slaves.⁸⁹ They and their families may flee to escape the abuse, but families also move girls pre-emptively when they reach a certain age and gang members start to show interest in them. If a girl refuses a gang member's demands, she puts her life in danger. The level of immediate risk depends on the seniority of the gang member who wants her. If he is a leader, she must

agree or she will be killed, usually within hours, and her family must leave.

If a family finds out that their daughter has been sexual abused by a gang member, the risk extends to all of them which may also lead to their forced displacement. Families with few resources or no place to go may have no option but to remain and tolerate the abuse.⁹⁰

| GANG MEMBERS' PARTNERS

Women and girls who have been sexually involved with a gang member are particularly vulnerable to risk and displacement if there is any change in their relationship, regardless of the extent to which their involvement was voluntary. Meantime they must follow the code of fidelity and obedience dictated by extreme machismo or be killed.

Acts considered betrayal include wanting to leave the relationship, being unfaithful, arousing the suspicion of infidelity, talking to another man, refusing to visit the gang member in prison and having an unauthorised relationship after the death of their partner or the end of their association. Deaths in such cases tend to involve torture, and women's bodies are often found mutilated or dismembered.

Because gangs perceive these acts or suspected acts as betrayal, the risk of threatened women who flee being sought out and persecuted is high, and options for safe relocation within the country are extremely limited. The risks before and after displacement are even more acute if a gang leader is involved. They may also be heightened if the gang member belongs to MS, given that it is more organised and responsible for the torture and murder of more women than other gangs, particularly in the *zona occidental*, the western region of the country.⁹¹

| WITNESSING AND REPORTING CRIMES

Witnessing and reporting a crime, and achieving a successful prosecution present a continuum of risk with rising levels at each stage of the process. Reporting breaks the code of *ver, oír y callar* - see, hear and shut up - and often leads to death threats or even murder. Witnesses are also at risk because they may go on to report to, or cooperate with the authorities. They may also automatically be assumed to be informants. This means that even the initial level of risk is very high.

Many victims and witnesses who have cooperated with the police or courts have been killed, and many more are too frightened to come forward. The state provides victim and witness protection schemes, but they tend not to include appropriate accommodation, particularly for family units to whom the individual's threat may extend.⁹² Nor is it necessarily secure from perpetrators. People who have witnessed a murder, are related to a witness or have found out about a serious crime such as the sexual exploitation of their daughter may choose to flee pre-emptively.⁹³

If a family wants to report a crime against one of its members, the whole unit has little choice but to leave. This may ultimately lead to their breakup and/or cross-border flight and an asylum claim because of the lack of viable options in El Salvador. If a successful prosecution is achieved, the risk level increases significantly, and may go beyond close relatives to the extended family. This may provoke further flight, including secondary displacement. In some cases, reporting abuse committed by the security forces follow similar patterns of increasing risk and displacement.⁹⁴

| FORMER GANG MEMBERS AND PRISONERS

Merely asking to leave a gang is perceived as disloyalty and may result in death. In less extreme cases, there are still significant potential risks associated with leaving that require careful negotiation, because members know sensitive information about a gang's activities, leadership and the location of bodies and weapons. Failure to do so may mean the person wanting to leave is forced into hiding, or worse.

Former prisoner who do not want to resume their gang activities after their release face similar risks, and there are few opportunities for reinsertion.⁹⁵ People with a criminal record have difficulty finding work, particularly if they have visible tattoos. Some former prisoners choose not to return to their homes or home areas for fear that they and their families may be harassed and persecuted by the security forces, gangs or former partners.⁹⁶

There is little support, although some churches and informal citizens' groups provide assistance for former prisoners who are unable or unwilling to return home. Many will go back to their gangs or leave the country. When former gang members flee to Mexico, however, hostels or *albergues* tend to refuse them entry because

of the risk of infiltration and compromising other migrants' security.⁹⁷

| ENMITY

People considered gang's enemies are at constant risk. They include members of the security forces and other state authorities, opposing gangs and their relatives - particularly when there are disputes over territory - and the relatives and associates of fellow gang members who have committed an infraction. The government's latest repressive response to gang activity has notably increased the enmity between gangs and the police. This may provoke violent attacks, killings and reprisals against family members.

| POLICE AND MILITARY

Members of the police, military and private security forces are at risk of threats, violence and displacement because of their work. Low-ranking police officers are poorly paid, so they tend to live in areas where gangs are active, which heightens the risk they and their partners and families face.

This leads to some reaching "hazard agreements" with gangs in their community, under which they agree to leave each other in peace.⁹⁸ Former members of the security forces are targeted for recruitment because of their expertise in weapons, and current members are also subjected to threats and pressure to collaborate, although the dynamics may be changing as gangs' enmity toward the police increases.⁹⁹

Members of the security forces and their families members are at risk of being killed, either because of specific problems with gangs or simply because of their work, and attacks have increased since the failure of the truce and political discourse in 2014 and 2015.¹⁰⁰ More than 90 per cent of soldiers and police officers killed die on leave rather than in line of duty. Only 15 per cent of the police officers killed in last two years were on duty. This means police officers are not safe in their homes, which may lead to their displacement.¹⁰¹

There is no protection system for threatened members of the security forces. They are limited to requesting transfers to other areas, or other duties in the same area, or asking to be confined to their stations or barracks, where they are separated from their families members

who may also have to be “self-contained” in their homes for their own safety.¹⁰² If a police officer is killed, their partner and family are at risk and may receive further threats, potentially leading to their displacement.¹⁰³

| GANG MEMBERS’ RELATIVES

Gang members’ relatives are vulnerable to threats that may lead to displacement. They receive threats from other gangs, or from the same gang if the member has violated its code. Disputes over territory may also provoke displacement. Families of an invading or a defeated gang may have to leave to escape reprisals. The security forces also extort or harass families and young people if they have a link to gangs – it may be as tenuous as knowing a person who is a member – and they may flee or resort to “self-containment” to avoid this.¹⁰⁴

| RESISTANCE

Resistance to gangs and their demands leads to displacement. Unwillingness or inability to pay extortion money, refusal to collaborate or provide professional services and involvement in community violence prevention programmes are all perceived as resistance.

| EXTORTION

Extortion or *renta* is a major cause of displacement because those unwilling or unable to pay have to leave to avoid risk. An extortion demand carries an implicit threat for the person targeted and their family as soon as they are told to pay, although “the threat of violence is usually intended to secure payment rather than provoke displacement”.¹⁰⁵ The longer non-payment continues, the more the risk increases, leading to explicit threats that eventually extend to family members. People flee at various points on this continuum of risk, depending on their tolerance levels, economic resources and social capital.¹⁰⁶

As such, displacement may be “pre-emptive and based on insight into the consequences of failing to pay, whether as a result of general knowledge or direct experience of escalating threats and attacks against the family”.¹⁰⁷ A family with a small business may shut it down and leave as soon as gangs demand extortion money rather than pay. Others may relocate their business. Either way they are likely to be miscategorised as

economic migrants, even though they fled the effects of generalised criminal violence.¹⁰⁸

Displacement often occurs as soon as explicit death threats for non-payment are received – these may be followed up on within days - or when people find themselves no longer able to meet a gang’s demands. The latter may be because of family’s deteriorating economic situation, or an increase in *renta*. The amount demanded is subject to unpredictable hikes, whether because the person targeted has witnessed a crime, their business is doing well or the expenses of the gang concerned have risen, perhaps because of legal or healthcare bills.

| DEMANDS FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Some people are forced to provide gangs with professional services. The manager of a taxi company may be obliged to make his drivers available, a nurse to treat a gang member shot in area where they live or a garage owner to provide his tow-truck for use in gang activities. Those unwilling to submit to a gang’s pressure to provide services and those who want to stop doing so may have to change their jobs or flee.¹⁰⁹

| VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Community leaders who speak up against violence and people involved in violence prevention programmes and schemes to avoid gang involvement are at risk and may receive threats from gangs who perceive them as being informants because of their work with the police. Those in frontline work with gangs, young people and prisoners operate in highly unpredictable circumstances and may also face the risk of state violence. Community leaders from both urban and rural areas have been displaced.¹¹⁰

| APPROPRIATION OF HOMES AND LAND

People who have their home or land appropriated have little choice but to flee. Gangs appropriate property in marginalised urban neighbourhoods and rural areas for use as lookout posts, the storage of weapons and drugs and other illicit activities. Gangs also expel people and communities in rural areas to exert control over territory, particularly if the areas are smuggling corridors. This is a distinct and deliberate act of forced displacement that tends to happen to individual households rather than collectively.

Most appropriations are for strategic purposes, but gangs may also demand homes simply so their members or their families can occupy them.¹¹¹ When appropriation is ordered, people are usually given between 24 and 48 hours to leave and the demand is often accompanied by a threat, often to kill the owner or occupant of the property or kidnap their children. Rather than intervene, the police bear silent witness and sometimes even help people collect their belongings and escort them as they flee.¹¹²

Some appropriations may be formalised by the legal transfer of property by a lawyer brought in by a gang, but these private transactions are not officially recorded.

There were also at least seven cases of whole communities being displaced in 2016.¹¹³ The shift in gang activity to rural areas in response to state crackdowns has led to this type of collective displacement. In one such case, gang members fleeing operations under PESS arrived in their grandparents' village in the mountainous region near the border with Guatemala and expelled residents. There have also been as yet unsubstantiated claims that gangs have been hired to expel people to make way for commercial projects.

| INSECURITY

| RISING RISK LEVELS

Some people flee because they know that their personal risk level, or that of their family, has risen. This may happen after the murder of a relative who is perceived to have committed an act of betrayal, after someone has been forcibly disappeared or after the killing of a spouse who is a police officer.¹¹⁴

Displacement may be triggered by an event in the community or deteriorating local security situation rather than direct violence or immediate threats and risk. Neighbours see children who grow up to become gang members and may feel unsafe and leave, or parents worried that their children will be targeted by gangs may leave pre-emptively because of rising risk.

Displacement may also be prompted by serious criminal acts such as a massacre, the murder of a family member or community leader or state security operations, which signal a more threatening situation. People may leave because they witnessed the act or are related

to a witness, know the assailants or victim, or fear the implicit threat.

It is useful to understand these threats as a continuum of highly targeted risk that does not diminish, but increases in intensity, immediacy and the number of people to whom it extends. People may undertake pre-emptive or preventative displacement once they are, or perceive themselves to be on a gang's radar. Such a decision lies at one end of the continuum. At the other lies the immediate risk of murder and violence that will be realised unless people take urgent reactive displacement.

In between there are different levels of risk that may rise suddenly or more gradually. There is slower latent risk in extortion, which can be kept in check with strict compliance, but will rise if people become unable to keep up with payments of a gang's capricious demands. Witnessing a murder or rejecting the sexual advances of a gang leader would evoke the sudden onset of intense risk. Depending on how a gang perceives the situation, the risk may continue after displacement, either in the form of intense pursuit of the person who flees or the exposure of family members left behind.

| LGBT PEOPLE

LGBT people flee violence perpetrated by their families, gangs and the security forces. Trans women in particular suffer intersectional persecution, a situation that "the state promotes with its silence".¹¹⁵ The violence meted out by criminal gangs tends to be either because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or general criminal violence used to force their collaboration.

LGBT people are not recruited into gangs, but may be made to collaborate in other ways. They may be forced to smuggle goods into prison, store weapons or drugs, undertake other criminal activities or give up a proportion of their earnings. If they refuse, they may receive death threats or be assaulted, which in turn may lead to their displacement.¹¹⁶

Displacement can also be provoked if a gang does not want LGBT people living in their territory. Gang members in a small town in La Paz department vowed in February 2017 to "exterminate" all trans women, and within 72 hours three in the town had been murdered. Many trans women in the department fled their homes

and briefly went into hiding, relying on other members of the LGBT community to shelter them.¹¹⁷

A lack of state protection and response led to their “self-containment” in internal displacement and then to their subsequent cross-border flight. In 2016, fifteen per cent of asylum claims in the southern Mexican city of Tapachula were filed by people from Central America’s LGBT community.¹¹⁸

| WORK-RELATED PERSECUTION

Journalists, environmentalists, community leaders, teachers and human rights defenders have received threats because of their work that have forced them to flee. Journalists who publish material about gangs, crime or corruption risk being threatened, particularly given that the line between criminal and political entities is not clear. They rely on network of professional and personal contacts to flee internally, a move which may be permanent.

Teachers may have to leave their homes and work for their own safety or for other reasons connected to violence and school abandonment, such as decreasing student numbers. Official figures show that several teachers each month are forced to flee threats, but it is not clear whether these are displaced internally or across borders.¹¹⁹

Human rights defenders and environmentalists may flee threats from range of perpetrators, and their source is not always clear. They may come from the security forces

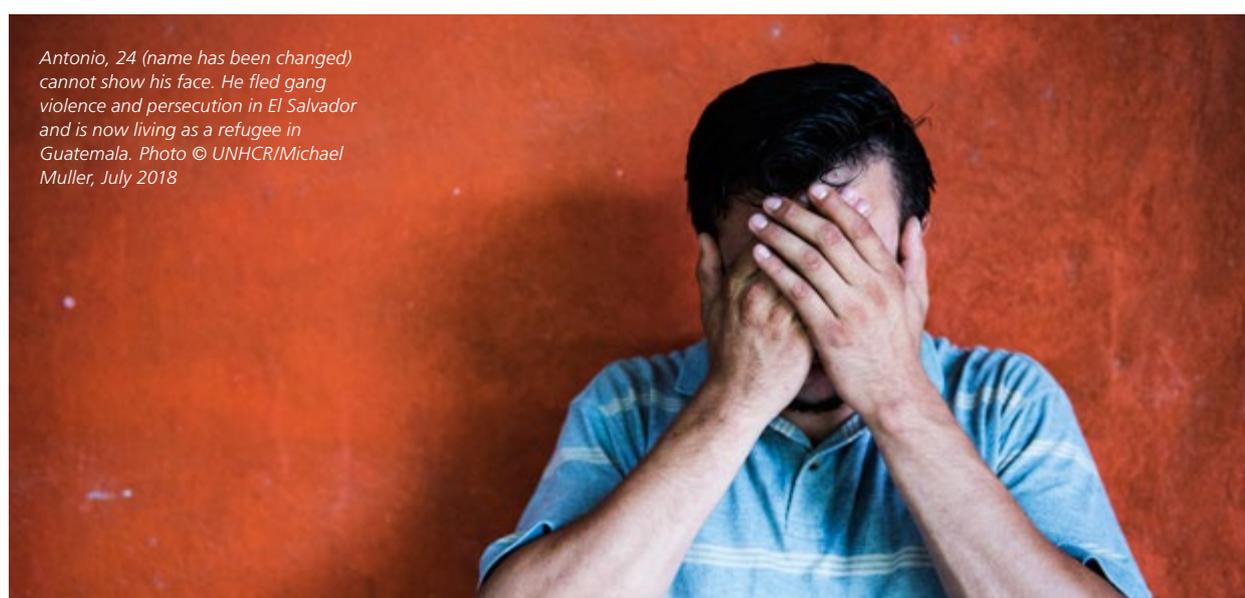
or criminal actors, both of which have been used by private companies to repress and persecute environmentalists in the NTCA. Those who flee often do so across borders and temporarily, although the displacement of land rights defenders does not happen in El Salvador as often as in other NTCA countries.

Prosecutors, judges and investigators working on organised crime and corruption, including the current attorney general, may be at risk of persecution but the extent to which this provokes internal displacement is not clear.¹²⁰

| SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE AND CRIME

The adverse effects of pervasive violence and endemic criminal activity on economic security, business opportunities and personal freedom are a factor in some people’s decision to move internally and across borders. People may close their businesses and leave because of the economic impacts of extortion and insecurity rather than any associated threats. This is particularly the case if the *renta*, services or goods a gang demands compromises their financial stability, or the amount of *renta* is increased.

Gangs’ territorial control restricts people’s freedom of movement, which affects access to education and employment opportunities. Children may be forced to leave school if they live in a certain area, or unable to attend if their journey to school crosses a rival gang’s territory. Families may move to another area so their



Antonio, 24 (name has been changed) cannot show his face. He fled gang violence and persecution in El Salvador and is now living as a refugee in Guatemala. Photo © UNHCR/Michael Muller, July 2018

children can attend school, or the children may be sent to live with relatives who have better access, breaking up the family unit in the process.

In reality, such movements are the result of a combination of interlinked causes, and they fall at different points along the continuum between voluntary and forced mobility. Recording these nuances is difficult, however, because survey respondents tend to have to choose a single reason for their flight, and interviewees may be reluctant to describe their circumstances fully.¹²¹ This means movements may be attributed to economic factors when the underlying cause is criminal violence.¹²²

DISPLACEMENT BY THE STATE

El Salvador's security forces victimise, threaten and harass young people in gang-controlled areas, even if they have nothing to do with the gangs. The state's repressive responses increasingly fuel the dynamics of violence and displacement, and feed the stigma of age, place and poverty. Fifteen per cent of the displacements Cristosal and the Quetzalcoatl Foundation recorded in 2017, and 11 per cent of those IDHUCA recorded, were caused by state agents. PDDH and ASDEHU have also noted this trend.¹²³

Harassment and threats target 15 to 20-year-old males almost exclusively, but may also extend to their families. State agents harass anyone who fits their preconceived image of gang members, targeting young men on the basis of their footwear, hairstyle or tattoos, or simply because they are out together after dark. In some areas this persecution has become systematic. The police and army also regularly target gang members' families, and harass and extort people whose relative, friend or acquaintance is in a gang.¹²⁴

Those targeted are subjected to being searched without a warrant; detained without reason and questioned; beaten and tortured to extract information or if they do not respond "correctly" to questioning; accused of being a gang member or collaborator, or of hiding a gang member; threatened with arrest for being in public places; and transferred to the territory of a rival gang. Police appear able to act without censure, and officers and soldiers not always display their ID or badges during operations.

"Death squads" made up of members of the security forces and civilians also operate in both rural and urban areas. Many of their tactics appear highly military and include planning and targeted killings, but their threshold for opening fire seems to be increasingly arbitrary and at times non-existent.¹²⁵

Police raids carried out as part of PESS have targeted innocent civilians, particularly young people. Under the *Casa Segura* or Safe House plan, officers search for and clear gangs' illicitly occupied properties and abandoned homes in the most high-risk areas, but one frontline worker living in a gang-controlled area also described nightly police raids that traumatised young children. Civil society organisations say that young single mothers are also particularly affected, especially if they live in informal accommodation or if they are related to imprisoned gang members.¹²⁶

Most of the displacement provoked by the security forces takes place in San Salvador, given that it is country's most populous area and where most police raids and confrontations with gangs take place. In some cases, displacement results from harassment and abuse of power rather than explicit threats and demands to leave, but in others the security forces have told people to go. Significant threats may arise if someone makes a complaint against the police and these may extend to the whole family. They are also likely to increase if there is a successful prosecution, although these are rare.¹²⁷

Some of those under threat may initially go into hiding, undergoing a period of "self-containment" before they flee because they are too scared to go out. Others may be sent away to stay with relatives. This type of displacement appears to have a strong cross-border element. Organisations in Mexico report cases of young men aged 15 to 20 who have fled state violence and persecution even though they had nothing to do with gangs, and that this is more common in El Salvador than in other NTCA countries. Asylum claims linked to police and death squad activity have also increased.¹²⁸

El Salvador's justice minister, Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde, acknowledged the state's role in causing displacement in April 2018. He said: "There are members of the police and armed forces who provoke cases" and noted that in the last few years "we also have many cases of people who have no confidence to go to the police, because those responsible for those acts are state agents".¹²⁹

4

DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS

In the absence of state protection, those displaced have to rely on their economic resources and social capital. They tend to live precariously and durable solutions are elusive. This may lead to unpredictable movements, untenable situations, further insecurity and secondary displacement, both internally and across borders. Displacement in El Salvador is characterised by restrictions on freedom of movement, such as “self-containment”, as well as repeated transitory movements and a significant cross-border element.

Some people who are returned or deported may have unresolved protection needs that mean they are unable to go back to their places of origin, and others may confront new protection needs that arise once back in the country. This is an issue of particular concern given the high and growing number of returns and the toughening of US policy, including the revocation of TPS.

| AFFECTED PROFILES AND POPULATIONS

Accurate data about the number of people affected by displacement and their profiles is limited by the lack of systematic data collection. The recent justice ministry profiling study does provide nationally representative data, but such information is generally only captured by agencies, both state and non-state, that provide services to people who approach them.

Those who do not come forward in search of assistance or protection, either because they are unable to travel to the places where it is available, or because they choose to remain off-radar because they mistrust the authorities or fear reprisals, are not recorded. This results in skewed data that is a long way from capturing the true number of people who flee and does not fully represent their reasons for doing so. In essence, it provides an incomplete snapshot which makes emerging trends more difficult to identify. Adolescents, for example, are a particularly hard-to-reach group.¹³⁰

Displaced people come from the areas most affected by violence and from the demographic groups most affected by violence.¹³¹ Violence and displacement disproportionately affects low-income families with low education levels who live in informal urban settlements or poor rural areas, as well as families with stable low-to-middle incomes. This applies no matter whether the violence is perpetrated by criminal gangs, state actors or death squads.¹³²

People with more economic resources are also forced to uproot and move. They tend to be affected differently by violence or threats and will use their resources to move somewhere more secure or to travel using regular means rather than people smugglers, perhaps even when at a lower level of risk and without reporting the crime.

Age is the second-biggest risk factor for displacement after poverty, and people aged 14 to 25 are disproportionately affected. Significantly more young men are displaced than young women, but figures for the latter have increased and are growing at a faster rate.¹³³ The profile of people displaced by the security forces is somewhat narrower, with males aged 15 to 20 almost uniquely affected. Men who flee often do so alone, but women tend to take the family members they are responsible for with them, some of whom may have additional needs and vulnerabilities.¹³⁴

As gang activities and targets change, as they have done following the state’s security-led responses, so does the profile of those affected by displacement. The forced recruitment and sexual exploitation of ever younger children means displacement increasingly affects not just the person directly targeted but whole families, when the family unit flees or the child is sent away to relatives. At the same time, increased enmity between gangs and the security forces had led to growing threats and violence against police and soldiers and their families, resulting in their displacement too. People who witness incidents or simply live where they are perpetrated are also increasingly at risk.



A man from El Salvador carries a child on his shoulders as they walk through Mexico to the United States. Photo © UNHCR/Markel Redondo, October 2015

Displacement previously affected small family units, but more recently the number of extended family groups of more than eight members fleeing has increased. Families are affected when an explicit or implicit threat extends to them all, either because of the nature of the threat itself or because it targets a child or the head of household.

Family groups are also often broken up by displacement. A father may leave the country with an older child or children while the mother flees internally with the younger ones, a child may be sent away or taken to stay with relatives, the person targeted may flee and leave their family to follow later, or older people may be left behind.¹³⁵

Some people are targeted and forced to flee because of their profile or their activities. Examples include police and military officers and their families, LGBT people, small business owners, drivers of public transport, witnesses of crimes, LGBT people, small business owners and public transport drivers, and people with past or current connections with gangs, including the partners, families and friends of members, former members and former prisoners. Increased risk to all these people should be understood in relation to *código* in that their

mere presence or ongoing activity represents an infraction of gang rules and expectations, which are linked to notions of betrayal, resistance, territorial control, who is allowed to live where and how they must behave.¹³⁶

WHAT MOVEMENT LOOKS LIKE

Displacement does not appear to have any geographical coherence. People flee from one area of San Salvador to another, and from other areas of the country to the capital and vice versa. Others leave the country altogether. Displacement is highly atomised and individualised, but looking behind the seemingly random movements reveals an underlying logic. People's decisions about displacement are dependent on their perception of violence and risk and their ability or willingness to tolerate it, which is reflected in "a diversity of risk management strategies".¹³⁷

| SPEED AND DISCRETION OF MOVEMENT

Most displacement is atomised and involves individuals or family groups fleeing swiftly and discreetly. The

nature of the threats they receive means people tend to leave immediately, within a few hours or a couple of days at most. Twenty-four hours is the norm if they have been ordered to leave. People tend to take relatively few belongings, and many flee at night or dawn without telling anyone that they are going, why they are leaving or where they are heading. Their movement is to all intents and purposes invisible, and the displacement is usually not documented.

The effect on communities tends to be slower, becoming gradually depopulated as people trickle away. That said, it is not unheard of for communities to be displaced en masse, when broad threats are issued or after a particularly violent incident or the murder of a community leader. Given that many rural areas are home to large extended families, this may involve the displacement of ten or twelve families at a time.

Either way the displacement of communities is more visible, particularly in rural areas, given the vacant homes and deserted streets left behind. As one academic researcher explained: "There are places in the country that we have visited and ... six months later they are depopulated".¹³⁸ Once a community is displaced, however, its members tend to disperse rather than stay together. Aside from the breakdown of community ties and social networks, this means they become less visible, posing a significant challenge to identifying those affected and responding to their needs.¹³⁹

I URBAN AND RURAL DISPLACEMENT DYNAMICS

Displacement was previously an intra-urban phenomenon, but people are increasingly on the move in all directions. Rather than fleeing within their cities, some people who leave high-risk urban areas are moving to other urban centres or rural areas.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, as gangs shift their activities into rural areas in response to state crackdowns people are also fleeing towns and villages in the countryside. This phenomenon, which was first observed after *mano dura* in the mid-2000s and has increased since, can be seen as a secondary impact of the state's repressive responses to criminality.¹⁴¹

That said, most displacement takes place from high-risk neighbourhoods in informal urban settlements, and from the outskirts of large towns and cities.¹⁴² People who flee internally tend to move at least initially within

their cities to other neighbourhoods where they can be received by friends or relatives.

Unless the threats or violence they have experienced is extreme, they look first for options in the same municipality so as not to disrupt their work, education and family and social networks. If they are unable to find a viable local option, they look further afield, to another municipality, city or department. Much of this movement within and between urban centres is invisible because those affected are reluctant to approach organisations or the authorities.

Although urban to rural displacement is on the increase, many of those who flee are reluctant to consider the option even if it offers safety and social capital for the lack of viable economic and education opportunities. Those who do not feel willing or able to flee within or between urban areas may choose to leave the country instead.¹⁴³

Those displaced from rural areas may also choose to leave the country rather than flee to towns and cities because they believe gang activity and violence to be worse in rural areas. Those who do flee internally tend to stay with relatives or move to the departmental capital, due to the often misguided assumption of better security, state presence and economic opportunities.

According to civil society organisations, people who flee from rural to urban areas are the easiest to identify because they are more willing to come forward to seek help. This makes them easier to assist, but it also makes any data collected somewhat unrepresentative.¹⁴⁴

I FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE INITIAL DISPLACEMENT

People's decision to leave depends on the degree of risk, individual tolerance levels and the vulnerability of those targeted. It also depends on who is persecuting them and why. In the absence of state protection, they also have to consider who goes, their economic resources and social capital and available options for a safe place.¹⁴⁵

Many, however, flee in panic without the time to plan, making them more vulnerable than those who are able to consider their options. Moving to an area under the same gang's control will alleviate the risk, but fleeing

to an area where an opposing gang operates is likely to mean they face different risk and suspicion.¹⁴⁶ Given that gangs are active in so many of El Salvador's municipalities, this narrows their options for safety considerably.

The decision about who goes is made by the person directly affected or by their parents in the case of a minor. In the case of extended families, the decision tends to be made by the women who have caring responsibilities. A family may also decide to stay put until the risk level rises, moving only after it has received a number of threats or one of its members has been subjected to violence.¹⁴⁷

People with more economic resources are more likely to flee in a planned way under less immediate levels of risk or to move pre-emptively before receiving a specific threat. If at immediate risk, those with social capital and economic resources are able to move swiftly and safely, and are more likely to move further away. They may also be able to plan cross-border flight, whether using regular travel options or people-smuggling services. Social capital outside the country is considered in the same way as within it. Networks of family and friends help to define people's destinations and shape their mobility.¹⁴⁸

Livelihood concerns may also influence the choice of destination. People who are economically active may try at least initially to find a safe place locally so they are able to sustain their livelihood, or they may flee to areas where they believe there are suitable economic opportunities.¹⁴⁹ People with the fewest resources and those living in extreme poverty may be unable to flee, which leaves them more exposed to threats and violence and may force them to resort to "self-containment".

| THE INDIVIDUALISED NATURE OF A SAFE PLACE

The degree to which people who flee criminal violence in El Salvador are forced to rely on their own resources and networks of family and friends both defines and limits their available options in terms of destination and the outcome of their displacement. Not all of the options available will be viable, however, and the nature of a safe place is highly individualised.

Gangs' persecution is individualised rather than generalised, and so too in turn are the viable options for a safe place. What constitutes a safe place depends on

highly individual factors and differs according to each person's situation. What may be a safe place for one person may not be safe for someone else fleeing an ostensibly similar situation.

Destination options for people who flee because of rising risk levels may be limited by gangs' territorial control as well as their own social capital and economic resources. These factors also apply to people who flee individual persecution and targeted threats or violence, but their options will be further limited by their specific circumstances - who is fleeing, from whom and why - and by the risk of pursuit and persecution after displacement. In this sense, the individualised nature of a safe place is most acute for people perceived to have committed an act of *traición* or betrayal or a violation of gang code.

| PRECARIOUS INTERNAL DIS-PLACEMENT

People may be able to establish a relatively normal life in internal displacement if they succeed in finding a safe place, supported by social capital and economic resources. If the latter are limited, however, which is often the case, they may find themselves living in another place affected by inequality, poverty and insecurity, where they continue to experience danger and risk to the extent that their displacement may become precarious.¹⁵⁰

Given pervasive insecurity, gangs' reach and the lack of state assistance and support, internal displacement tends to be precarious and for many not a viable option in anything but the short term. Those who flee lesser risk or move pre-emptively may be able to find safety and stability, but gangs' capacity to track people down means that the risks that many face continue and may often lead to secondary displacement.

REPEATED TRANSITORY MOVEMENTS

Both gangs and the security forces may pursue the people they are persecuting and continue to threaten and harass them, the latter particularly if they have reported or successfully prosecuted abuses. New arrivals in an area will be checked out, asked where they used to live and asked for their ID card, which bears their address. Given the small size of the country and gangs'

extensive surveillance networks, people can often be located within 24 hours. Gang members may even be informed and waiting when IDPs arrive. Some IDPs have been killed when they are found, and others have been prevented from renting a place to live. Some have moved and been sought out four or five times.¹⁵¹

Internal displacement may also fail as a protection strategy because of economic difficulties. Conditions in places where people flee, which are often chosen on the basis of family contacts, may make their situation financially unsustainable. If they are unable to find work, people move on again. Some may have to return to their place of origin, and women are particularly vulnerable in this sense because they have fewer options in the labour market.¹⁵²

IDPs may be rejected if their presence heightens or is perceived to heighten the risks that other families or the broader community face. They may also have to move on if their hosts are no longer able to support them. People who flee to an opposing gang's territory also face risks, and may be ordered to leave the area.¹⁵³

Insecure and precarious displacement provokes secondary movements, and is a significant driver of cross-border flight. Displaced people may move from place to place looking for a safe place wherever they have family links. They make many small moves within the country, perhaps staying for only a few days or weeks at a time, which poses particular challenges for larger or extended families. These movements are not documented. They only come to light if people come forward to a support organisation, but they nonetheless appear to be one of the defining patterns of displacement, given the absence of state protection and response.¹⁵⁴

SELF-CONTAINMENT

People living in gang-controlled areas may face significant restrictions on their freedom of movement. At their most severe this may lead to "self-containment", a form of forced immobility in which someone confines themselves to a single room, a family to their home or street, or a police or military officer to their station or barracks.

Men under the age of 20 are the most likely to be forced into self-containment. They may take this as an evasive

measure to avoid immediate threats and persecution, or as a preventative measure to avoid being targeted in the first place. Young people and adolescents not in work or education, for example, may stay at home because of prevailing insecurity to which they are disproportionately vulnerable. People at risk but who are unable to afford to leave may also contain themselves, as may those who have the resources to flee but fear the potential homelessness and destitution of displacement.¹⁵⁵

People contain themselves because of threats from gangs, arbitrary police harassment and brutality, or rising but latent risk such as their home being watched, the murder of a relative, or if they are members of a family left behind after the main target of a threat has fled. Self-containment may be a precursor to displacement for those who do not have the means to leave immediately, and it may happen before adolescents or young people are sent away to relatives within the country or abroad.

Most people resort who resort to self-containment do so for lack of other options. They are families with no resources and nowhere to go, people unable to turn to the state for support because there is nothing available or because they are reluctant or fearful to approach the authorities. They rely on social capital and their own economic resources to move and when these are limited, so is their mobility. "Were they not so poor, there would be more forced displacement, instead there is forced immobility".¹⁵⁶

People may also resort to self-containment after their displacement. This may be because the gang that forced them to flee catches up with them or for fear that it might, because their limited resources mean they have no option but move to another gang's area where they risk being identified, or because they are wary of arousing suspicion among neighbours simply by being new to the area. Even if IDPs are able to find a neutral area, it may be very small – possibly a single street – to which they are confined for fear of straying into dangerous territory. Former gang members in particular may resort to self-containment after displacement given their precarious circumstances.

People may also confine themselves to their homes if they have to return, whether from internal displacement or cross-border flight. They may have been deported or otherwise forced to leave their place of refuge, or they

may have abandoned displacement as a strategy having tried unsuccessfully several times to find a safe place to live sustainably.¹⁵⁷

Threatened members of the security forces have little recourse to protection. They are allowed to ask for a transfer to another area or other duties, or to live in their station or barracks. The latter constitutes a form of self-containment that estranges them from their family. In the absence of better protection, some police officers have left the force, fled internally or tried to claim asylum abroad. As is sometimes the case for others who have fled gangs' threats, the members of an officer's or soldier's family left behind may also be forced into self-containment if the departure of the main target fails to eliminate the risks they face.¹⁵⁸

CROSS-BORDER FLIGHT

Forced displacement in El Salvador has a strong cross-border element. In the absence of effective state protection and viable options internally, people flee the country. This has led to an unprecedented increase in associated asylum claims in Mexico and the US, and in the number of families and unaccompanied minors presenting themselves at the US border.

By April 2016, the number of people fleeing criminal violence in the NTCA had reached levels unseen since the region was affected by civil wars.¹⁵⁹ In 2017, Salvadorans lodged roughly 60,000 new asylum claims globally, a nearly 40 per cent increase on the previous year.¹⁶⁰ Many more are likely to be fleeing the country under the radar, either heading straight over the border or after abandoning internal displacement as a strategy, but their number is unknown.¹⁶¹

Of the Salvadorans interviewed by UNHCR in migration detention in Mexico in 2017, more than half had left their country to escape criminal violence, and one in three Salvadoran asylum applicants interviewed had tried to displace internally before leaving the country.¹⁶² Other factors at play included economic conditions, family reunification, extreme weather events and the impacts of climate change. UNHCR also reports seeing increasing numbers of young Salvadoran men and adolescents who have left because of state violence and persecution, even though they had nothing to do with gangs and had not committed a crime. Police and

military officers have also fled the country, either on their own or with their families.¹⁶³

Immediate cross-border flight and internal displacement share many of the same triggers. People resort to the former when they fear being tracked down or otherwise feel they are unlikely to find safety and protection if they remain in the country, and others may flee the country when they have been unable to find safety and security after internal displacement.

The more serious the violence, threats or risks people face, the more likely they are to leave the country immediately, and in some cases it may be the only viable option. This is particularly so if a gang decides someone has committed an act of *traición* or betrayal, such as reporting a crime or being suspected of infidelity, even within a forced sexual relationship. In the most extreme cases the person targeted may even be pursued after they have left the country.¹⁶⁴

Some people's profiles put them at particular risk, which limits their options for internal displacement. Threatened military and police officers and their families, for example, are relatively easy to identify and track down if they remain in the country.¹⁶⁵ So too are trans women. LGBT people more generally tend to leave the country not only to escape persecution and insecurity, but also because family estrangement reduces their social capital.

LGBT people who are returned to El Salvador face the same dangers and may leave again straight away, though this depends on how highly organised the gang in question is and its determination to pursue and continue persecuting them. People who flee harassment by the police or military may also have limited options for internal displacement given the security forces' broad intelligence network.¹⁶⁶

Other people who flee across the border will have tried to find safety inside the country first. A third of Salvadoran asylum applicants interviewed by UNHCR in migration detention centres in Mexico had previously been internally displaced.¹⁶⁷ Some who flee within the country before leaving it say they abandoned internal displacement as a strategy because their personal insecurity had continued or increased and the state had failed to protect them.¹⁶⁸ This in essence makes "internal displacement like a kind of transit rather than displacement".¹⁶⁹



"My dream is to save money to open my own stand in the market." Margarita, a Salvadorian refugee in Mexico, looks after her neighbour's child as a part-time job. In El Salvador, drug dealing, extortion, robbery, rape and murder made everyday life a living hell. When the gang targeted her son, demanding money, he fled the neighbourhood. Then they turned on Margarita and she knew she must leave or die. Taking a small bag of clothes she fled before dawn, taking a bus to the Mexico-Guatemala border where she crossed the river on a raft. Photo © UNHCR/Daniele Volpe, February 2017

As with internal displacement, people's economic resources and social capital influences their decisions about cross-border flight and may determine whether or not it is an available and viable option. The availability of information about asylum procedures is a factor too. Representatives from several civil society organisations also said that people from rural areas are much quicker to leave country, often after ruling out fleeing internally to an urban area on the basis that gang violence is worse in cities.

The long history of Salvadorans leaving their country means that many people have friends and relatives abroad, who may offer not only a destination but also help with paying for people-smuggling services, which are readily available in El Salvador. People who have access to resources may be able to reach North America or Europe, whether they travel by lawful means or contract people smugglers. Conversely, a lack of resources may prevent cross-border flight, particularly for large family groups. For people without social capital abroad, cross-border flight represents a complete break from support networks, an unplanned journey with no clear destination and heightened vulnerability.¹⁷⁰

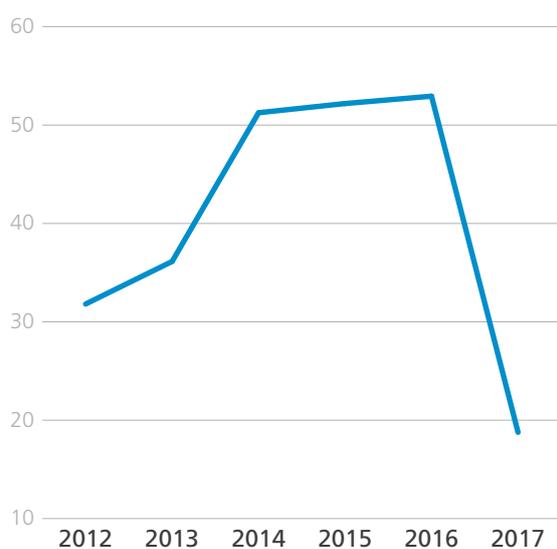
Agencies working on the ground in Mexico report that despite the normal seasonal dip the number of people from the NTCA arriving in Mexico continued to be very high at the start of 2018. Increasing numbers of Salvadorans are also arriving in other Central American countries and Europe. Agencies and *albergues* report that most are men aged 19 to 25; that the number of people fleeing, including minors under the age of 17, increased in 2017; that minors may travel unaccompanied, with their family or with a smuggler posing as a parent or relative; that an increasing number of families are fleeing whether with one or both parents; and that some older people are also fleeing alone. Many come from the departments or regions with the highest levels of violence, and tend to have little or no education or vocational training.¹⁷¹

RETURNEES

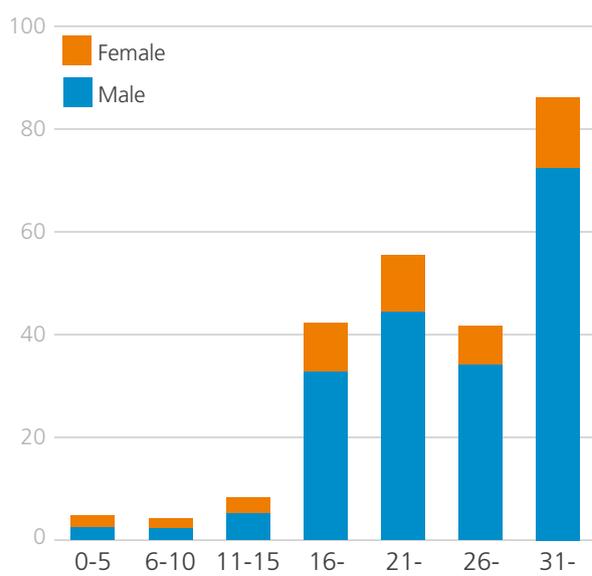
People deported or returned to El Salvador face many risks. Those who fled criminal violence or persecution face particular protection challenges and may be unable to return to their place of origin, meaning they find themselves displaced again. Such a plight should be understood as another stage of displacement that began when the person originally left their home.

FIGURE 3: Deportees to El Salvador

Number of deportees to El Salvador, in thousands



Deportees to El Salvador by age and gender, 2012-2017



Source: Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería de El Salvador (DGME), includes information from 01/01/2012 to 31/08/2017. Data accessed at UCA's Migration Observatory

For returnees who had few if any protection concerns before they left, risks may arise simply because they are deportees.¹⁷² Gangs may assume they have money and so demand extortion, or they may be unable to integrate socially and economically, making them vulnerable to recruitment. "Young deportees constitute one of the best gang recruitment pools."¹⁷³ These two points of risk, new and existing protection needs, may overlap. Many people are on the move throughout the region, a constant flow within countries and across borders of people at risk and unable to find a safe place. Returnees are part of this cycle.¹⁷⁴

Some returns may be voluntary to some extent, but most involve people returned because they were apprehended as irregular migrants, their asylum claim were rejected, they were denied the right to apply or they were pressured into discontinuing the process. Particular concerns have been raised about the deportation of minors and people with protection needs from Mexico, some of which may violate the principle of non-refoulement.¹⁷⁵ People are also deported from the US after irregular entry, serving prison sentences or being detained during immigration raids.¹⁷⁶

The Salvadoran state has full responsibility for identifying and addressing returnees' protection needs before or upon their return, and all the more so in cases where a Salvadoran consul has signed people's deportation papers. Consuls may or may not be aware of their needs, given that they may give a variety of reasons for flight and not all make a full disclosure. Procedures at NTCA consulates in Mexico tend to fall far below expected standards, though recent improvements at the Salvadoran consulate in Tapachula have been noted.¹⁷⁷

Reception centres for returnees in El Salvador have greatly improved, but limitations remain in the process of identifying and responding to people with protection needs by referring them to a protection framework. This is particularly the case for family groups. With the support of UNHCR, an OLAV has been set up at the reception centre in San Salvador to improve its identification process, but it is not yet backed up by a comprehensive response that addresses the needs of the people identified and guarantees their protection. In the meantime people are referred to civil society organisations, which one human rights organisation in Mexico City noted enables the state to absolve itself of responsibility for them once they have left the centre.¹⁷⁸

The establishment of specialised return centres for minors run by the Assistance Centre for Children, Adolescents and the Family (*Centro de Atención a Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia*, CANAF) is a promising step forward. If minors are to be deported back to a situation of vulnerability or risk, the consul must communicate with the reception agency, the Salvadoran Institute for the Comprehensive Development of Children and Adolescents (*Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo Integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencia*, ISNA) before they arrive. ISNA then investigates the resources available to protect them in community, and has 15 days to find a relative or other safe place for them to return to.

There may, however, only be limited support for minors when they leave the centres, and the primary objective is to return them to their place of origin, rather than relocating them and their family. The family or legal guardian also has to collect the minor in question from the centre. This has the potential to extend the risk they fled from to the family group, who may be displaced temporarily while they evaluate their options. This seems often to be a precursor to cross-border flight.¹⁷⁹

Returnees unable to go back to their places of origin tend to flee back across the border, many of them immediately after arrival and without contacting their family or friends in the country. This is particularly true of those who contracted a people smuggler when they first left the country, because the deals they purchase allow for as many as five attempts to enter the US.¹⁸⁰

Others will become internally displaced, often relying on their social capital.¹⁸¹ It is unclear how many returnees this applies to, whether they are able to find a safe place, or whether they end up moving a number of times in the absence of a secure and sustainable solution. More data is needed to identify the needs of people who return to life as an IDP and follow up on their outcomes.¹⁸²

Risk does not diminish, and the danger people fled continues when they return and may increase as a punishment or retaliation for having left. Returnees have been raped and killed once back in the country, and cases have been recorded of this happening within a matter of days. Media reports of such cases tend not to clarify whether the person concerned had fled with protection needs or if the risk arose when they returned, whether the state identified or addressed any protection needs on their return, or whether the person did not

return to their place of origin and become internally displaced after deportation.¹⁸³

Gangs may also target returnees who fled the country for reasons other than criminal violence with extortion demands on the assumption that they have money, and their subsequent persecution may lead to new displacement. Other returnees may face difficulties in their socio-economic integration, a situation that is aggravated if they no longer have close family in the country. Their lack of economic opportunities and social capital may also make them vulnerable to gang recruitment and involvement in crime.

With the imminent return of as many as 200,000 Salvadorans from the US following the revocation of TPS, this presents a particular area of concern for the immediate future. A number of academics and civil society organisations have queried the government's capacity to deal with such a large influx of returnees, some of whom may have been living in the US for 20 years and have little or no connection with El Salvador. Such concerns arise from the ongoing insecurity in the country, and the government's failure to provide adequate reception conditions, such as language and reinsertion elements, in the *Bienvenido a Casa* or Welcome Home programme.¹⁸⁴

DISPLACEMENT IMPACTS

The impact of displacement at the individual, community and national level is far-reaching, given the absence of an effective state response and the consequent lack of durable solutions. Displacement represents the state's absolute failure to guarantee basic right of some Salvadorans to be in their country, with significant implications for the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. This failure also aggravates the very conditions that drive violence and displacement.

Displaced people in El Salvador suffer severe economic losses. They abandon their property and many leave all other assets behind when they flee. They lose their employment and income, and face challenges in accessing education, healthcare, justice, protection and security. Violence and displacement also have a detrimental effect on the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing on displaced people and on family members who are left behind. This is aggravated by the precarious nature of settlement after displacement and repeated movements.

Communities break down as people leave, tearing their social fabric and making them less resilient to future shocks. At the national level, violence and displacement have a deep economic cost, and perpetuate and aggravate the conditions of poverty and inequality that drive the phenomenon, resulting in a downward spiral.

INDIVIDUAL IMPACTS

| FINANCIAL

Displacement causes financial losses and deepens poverty. People abandon their homes and other assets when they flee, potentially leaving those unable to rely on social capital or economic resources destitute. Those with social capital may still have to live in overcrowded conditions and depend on friends or family to meet their basic needs or lend them money. The more urgent the

displacement, the more acute the losses. People forced to flee immediately have no time to sell property or gather their belongings.

Once displaced, day-to-day survival becomes many people's main concern. Those who left a small business or paid employment behind will have lost their source of income, and it is not easy to re-enter the labour market. El Salvador's unemployment rate is high, and many people may be unable to stay in one place for long before having to move on again. Most are only able to access informal work at best, even if they are qualified and experienced. In the absence of humanitarian assistance from the state, they may turn to civil society organisations for help just so they can feed themselves and their families.¹⁸⁵

Women are particularly affected by the economic impacts of displacement. They tend to be less embedded and secure in employment than men and more reliant on informal work, so they have to rebuild the way they generate income. People forced to leave their rural livelihoods are unlikely to have the skills to make a living in urban areas, leaving them with few options beyond informal street trade.

Displaced people may also resort to harmful coping strategies in order to meet their basic survival needs. Women in particular may be forced into sex work or dangerous activities such as smuggling items into prison. Trans women and gay men may also be forced into sex work or collaborating with gangs.¹⁸⁶

| ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

IDPs are in theory allowed to re-register with healthcare providers in their place of displacement, but some have been denied services because they have moved. Others may be unable to physically get to healthcare facilities because of gangs' territorial control. Those who are

HIV-positive are able to transfer their prescription to any public hospital, but people with other chronic conditions may not be able to do so as easily. Inter-agency work is currently being undertaken on ways to improve medicine delivery.¹⁸⁷

Displacement disrupts education, and children and young people may have to leave school or university. School abandonment levels have been very high since 2014, particularly in areas where violence is prevalent.¹⁸⁸ The main reasons given for school abandonment are insecurity and change of address, but given that data captured only allows for one reason, it is difficult to gauge how much is the result of internal displacement. Nor is it possible to determine what proportion of displaced students are able to enrol in another school and how many have to abandon their studies.¹⁸⁹

Pupils who want to enrol in a new school are generally only able to do so at start of a new school year. They may be able to transfer mid-year if they have hard copies of paperwork from their previous school, but many will not have had time to obtain them before their flight. Children and young people not in education or employment are extremely vulnerable to gang recruitment and exploitation, and some may resort to self-containment to reduce this risk.

The disruption of education represents a backwards step in development. Children achieve worse grades than their parents and young people's future employment options are limited. A flexible learning system has been introduced, which may help displaced and contained people return to education, but it is not specifically designed for that purpose.¹⁹⁰

I PSYCHOSOCIAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Displacement has a significant psychosocial and mental impacts, which are layered on top of those caused by people's exposure to violence and estrangement from their support networks. "The country is in mental health crisis."¹⁹¹ People are uprooted from their communities and familiar way of life. They lose their home, income and friends, and have to cope with deepening poverty and dislocation from their host community.

This has deep emotional as well as practical impacts, leading to feelings of anxiety and powerlessness,

particularly in men. Displacement that involves the separation of family members causes additional stress and distress, including for those left behind. A sense of secrecy may also disrupt family relationships, because displacement cannot be spoken about and is shrouded in silence and lies.¹⁹²

Once in displacement, people continue to suffer the trauma of their previous experiences, fear of insecurity in the present and uncertainty about the future. Their sense of isolation is heightened by the state's failure to provide assistance and protection. They also live in a state of constant alert, and are unable to confide in new people. This loss of trust has led to suspicion, paranoia and a more fragmented society. For the few able to access *albergue* accommodation, there is a psychological impact of effectively being imprisoned.

People suffer stress, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, and from psychosomatic symptoms such as chest pain when discussing their experiences. Violence and displacement may also aggravate previous mental health problems and generational trauma stemming from the civil war, triggering a mental health crisis.¹⁹³

Children are particularly affected. Many suffer fear and nightmares, and the incidence of trauma, depression and anxiety among youngsters is high, caused by "the damaging experience of being a child" in El Salvador.¹⁹⁴ Children recruited into gangs and forced to kill suffer the same mental health impacts as child soldiers, and those who used to live in high-risk areas may also be traumatised by the harassment and heavy-handed tactics of the security forces and the regular night-time raids to take people away.

These acute and widespread issues amount to nothing less than a national mental health crisis, but responses to it are far from adequate. There are not enough psychologists able to provide the specialist help that people including children need, psychosocial support is thin on the ground and the witness protection programme does not have an integral mental health component.¹⁹⁵

I INVISIBILITY

Just as people flee surreptitiously, they tend to try to remain under the radar and make themselves invisible during their displacement, the most extreme manifesta-

tion being self-containment. People keep a low profile for fear of reprisals or further persecution, particularly urban IDPs familiar with gangs' modus operandi. At the family level, the circumstances of displacement demand silence so as to not to raise suspicion in the host community and to reduce risk for those left behind. Displaced people may not even tell their partners or closest relatives where they are, they may lie about their location and families members may not discuss the estrangement they are suffering.¹⁹⁶

Nor do many people report their experiences, which makes individual cases - including their displacement - more invisible still. Their unwillingness to come forward is rooted in gangs' code of silence, fear of reprisals, and widespread distrust of the authorities. Hard-to-reach groups such as adolescents, LGBT people and survivors of sexual crimes may be particularly reluctant to report for fear of being re-victimised.

Some people do report to PDDH, particularly among those about to leave the country, to provide evidence for a potential asylum claim. The broad lack of reporting and recourse to state protection, however, may present difficulties for any future asylum claim. By not officially acknowledging internal displacement, let alone establishing a centralised register and engaging in a comprehensive response, the government contributes further to people's invisibility.

THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECT OF PRECARIOUS REFUGE

When displaced people are unable to find safety and have to move repeatedly, it undermines the stability they need to re-establish themselves. They face significant challenges in engaging in education and work, which increases their economic vulnerability. Uncertainty about how long their stay in each place will last and where they will go to next is a particularly burden for large families.

The impact of self-containment is extreme and multi-dimensional. It prevents people from exercising their basic human rights to move freely, attend education and work, and may leave them dependent on family or friends to meet their basic needs. The mental health implications of confinement and isolation, particularly in one room, and of living in constant fear are significant.¹⁹⁷

Cross-border flight brings additional protection concerns, particularly for those who travel irregularly through Mexico. Some may be able to secure international protection, but for most its absence means their displacement continues to be precarious, particularly given the hostile environment for migrants in Mexico and the US. There are also security concerns associated with the increasing international reach of El Salvador's gangs, which includes the infiltration of *albergues*.

They are exposed to the systematic criminal violence of Mexican gangs as they travel north. Some people may be aware of such risks before they flee, but despair in the absence of state protection at home means they are willing to risk their lives and that of their children trying to escape. Some people may try to apply for asylum, but their right to do so is not always upheld, and tougher migration policies in Mexico and the US have led to an increase in the number of apprehensions and deportations of NTCA citizens who may have protection needs and may not be able to return to their places of origin.¹⁹⁸

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

People may flee individually or one family at a time, but the cumulative impact over time tears communities apart. Some may become all but depopulated over a period of months, a phenomenon that is clearly visible in some rural areas, where only older people remain. In other areas, the decimation of communities may be less visible, but their social fabric is still left in tatters. Those left behind may adopt insular behaviour, staying in their homes and not talking to their neighbours for fear of repercussions.

Not only social capital and networks are lost. As people flee, communities also lose shops and services, and schools and healthcare facilities may close. When community leaders and those involved in development and social programmes leave, those left behind may be less inclined to continue their work and projects may be abandoned. These issues weaken communities' resilience to crime.¹⁹⁹

Gangs often appropriate the abandoned homes of people who have fled. They may gradually take over whole communities, particularly those that are socially excluded and isolated from state authority. This causes more insecurity, which in turn drives more displacement.



*A Salvadoran man passes in front of the Mara Salvatrucha graffiti, a symbol marking the gang's territory in a gang neighborhood in San Salvador.
Photo: Jan Sochor, May 2011*

Gangs may claim abandoned communities as their territory, expanding the control and diminishing an already weak state presence further.²⁰⁰

Given the nature of displacement in El Salvador, people tend to arrive in host communities in a trickle, making their arrival less evident than when people are displaced en masse. Host communities may be suspicious of newcomers and fearful of the increased risk they may bring. Such fears may lead to rejection, which in turn is a significant cause of onward displacement and cross-border flight.

For their part, IDPs are reluctant to divulge the circumstances that led to their arrival for fear of bringing increased risk upon themselves, which in turn aggravates hosts' suspicions and sets up a vicious circle of wariness. This feeds IDPs' isolation and makes them less able to integrate.

New arrivals can also lead to social tensions, if for example a family receives displaced relatives whom the wider community does not want there. It should be noted though, that despite these many challenges, there are plenty of cases in which IDPs are well received and assisted by communities that welcome them.²⁰¹

NATIONAL IMPACT

The economic cost of violence in El Salvador was estimated to be 49 per cent of GDP in 2017, based on loss of revenue and remedial spending, making it the 4th worst-affected country worldwide, on a par with South Sudan behind only Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁰² Violence also discourages potential investment. Displacement brings additional costs, many of them indirect. These include loss of economic activity, loss of government credit on abandoned homes, a reduction in young people's economic potential and decreased rural production.

When people abandon their home, they may also abandon any loans they have received from government agencies, leaving the state with a loss. As young people leave, the country loses members of its economically active generation, with potentially long-term impacts. The disruption of education and life plans is also a development setback for the country as a whole. At the same time, violence increases state spending on security and healthcare, leaving less to invest in addressing the poverty and inequality that drive further crime, violence and displacement.²⁰³

Endemic extortion costs El Salvador around \$4bn a year, or three per cent of GDP.²⁰⁴ Large numbers of small and micro businesses close every year because of the financial and emotional impact of extortion demand, which are also a cause of displacement.²⁰⁵ These closures not only affect personal income and financial independence, but also have knock-on effects on larger businesses and supply chains. Micro-finance businesses are also affected when loans are abandoned. The impact of extortion is not only economic: “Psychologically, extortion is a disease that has infected the whole country: fear and terror have become normal.”²⁰⁶

Displacement in rural areas drives down agricultural production, particularly among smallholders who produce for their own consumption and local markets. When entire rural communities are displaced, land lies fallow. Other people sell their land below market prices in search of quick ways to finance their displacement, and the agro-industry and tourism sectors may exploit their despair to snap up cheap land. This deepens the inequity of land distribution, with broader affects in local economies caused by following an economic model that fuels inequality.²⁰⁷

There are also economic beneficiaries of insecurity, violence and displacement, with politicians and elites who have financial interests in private security and arms sales, US arms manufacturers among them.²⁰⁸ This raises questions about how a sustainable solution the El Salvador’s crisis can be achieved.

People with economic resources are able to afford private security and have little or no incentive to pay higher taxes and apply political pressure to fund public security. This creates “an inequality of security”, in which the rich can buy themselves safety while the most vulnerable to crime are the least protected.²⁰⁹ People able to afford private security may feel they have bought protection. In the immediate sense, this may be true, but it detracts from addressing the drivers of violence and crime and is ultimately an empty spend.²¹⁰

Violence, crime and displacement also have a negative impact on national identity both among Salvadorans and abroad. Inside El Salvador, this manifests as a lack of confidence in the state to resolve the situation, which in turn leads to political disengagement. Outside the country, potential investors are deterred and reputational damage that may lead Salvadorans abroad to suffer stigma.

Although official recognition of the issue of internal displacement is vital, there are concerns that acknowledging the extent of problem would mean the government would also have to acknowledge that it does not have effective territorial control over most of the country. This would cause further reputational damage and investor wariness, which in turn could aggravate the conditions that incubate gang violence.²¹¹

The lack of reporting means displaced people are unable to access justice, resolution and reparations. Gangs are able to operate with impunity and the state has been ineffective in reining in their activity and punishing their abuses. This serves to perpetuate the situation and leaves little potential for change.

Internal displacement is not systematically recorded, masking the true scope and scale of the phenomenon. People’s profiles, needs and whereabouts are often unknown.

Data captured by state agencies and civil society organisations is weak and represents only those people who come forward in search of help. Data collection is also restricted by security and ethical concerns. Without a clear understanding of the situation, comprehensive measures to address it cannot be put in place to assist displaced people or prevent further displacement in the future.²¹²

6

CONCLUSION

This section pulls together the findings and themes from the previous four chapters, and presents key findings developed from analysis using a systems dynamics approach. The findings are presented against the backdrop of national sovereignty as responsibility and the state as duty-bearer, as set out in Guiding Principle 3:

1. National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction.
2. Internally displaced persons have the right to request and to receive protection and humanitarian assistance from these authorities. They shall not be persecuted or punished for making such a request.

One of the main challenges in understanding displacement caused by criminal violence in El Salvador lies in interpreting its ostensibly random patterns, which mean agencies struggle to predict how and where people will move and anticipate emerging trends. The phenomenon also has a number of distinct aspects in repeated transitory moves, restrictions on freedom of movement such as “self-containment” and its significant cross-border element.

The state has not to date collected data on displacement systematically, reduced the scale of the phenomenon or engaged in a comprehensive response to address the needs of those displaced. Instead, its successive repressive responses to gangs’ activities have had adverse consequences and are generating new patterns of displacement.

The findings below look beneath the surface of the observable patterns to identify the dynamics that drive them and provide new insight. They aim to contribute to a better understanding of the likely effectiveness and potential adverse consequences of future policy, and in doing so to inform an effective state response.

KEY FINDING 1: DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS ARE OSTENSIBLY RANDOM

Displacement provoked by criminal violence does not appear to have easily discernible geographical patterns, fixed places that people move to and from or any uniformity in flight trajectories. Given these ostensibly random movements, patterns of internal displacement are better explained by the nature of these movements and the reasoning behind them.

Some geographical patterns can be discerned – rural to urban, and movements to departmental capitals and within the peripheries of large cities – but these are by no means defining factors. People move in myriad different ways and to many different places as a result of highly specific circumstances. They flee alone or in small numbers, most often relying on networks of family and friends to accommodate them in the absence of a state response. This makes it hard to predict where people may move from or to.

It is more meaningful to frame these movements in terms of who is being targeted and how the places they move from are affected by gang activity, and then to examine people’s options in displacement given the absence of state protection and the individualised nature of a safe place.

Broadly speaking, where people come from can be defined a) geographically, from the areas worst affected by gangs and criminal violence; and b) demographically, from the groups most targeted. However, these patterns are dynamic and not fixed. Gangs’ territorial control, geographical reach, activities and modus operandi, the type of people they target and with what intensity all change over time, whether under the gangs’ own dynamics or in reaction to state crackdowns. This leads to shifting displacement patterns. As gangs target ever younger people, for example, more unaccompanied minors and family groups are on the move.

Where people flee to is not predictable and the notion of a safe place can change, depending on who is being persecuted, by whom and why, the nature of the threats and risks involved and what displacement options are available and viable. The nature of a threat affects the target's viable options. An act perceived as betrayal, for example, is likely to provoke intense pursuit and persecution after displacement. The intensity will depend on the gangs' degree of organisation and the extent of their reach. This means that options for flight are extremely limited, particularly within the country and in the long term. The target, nature and source of a threat also affects the number of people who flee, either because the risk extends to the family group or because the family leaves alongside a minor or head of household.

In the absence of state support, people rely on their own social capital and economic resources in displacement. The more limited these are, the more restricted their options will be. Available options may not be viable either. Given that gangs' territory, reach and surveillance networks cover much of the country, safe places are hard to find. As such, people's available options are highly individualised and their viable options are highly individualised.

| KEY FINDING 2: TARGETED THREATS CREATE A CONTINUUM OF RISK

The term "generalised violence" describes the situation of widespread and sustained criminal violence in El Salvador, but it does not adequately convey the highly targeted and individualised nature of threats and persecution by criminal gangs, nor the implications for individual protection needs or the dynamics of displacement it may provoke. The risk from targeted threats and violence does not diminish, but tends to increase in intensity and immediacy. It may extend to other family members, and include pursuit and persecution after displacement. This should be understood as a continuum of risk that affects people's decisions to flee, the immediacy of their flight, their options for a safe place and their protection needs after displacement.

The risk level can rise slowly or quickly depending on the nature of the threat, and whether it is perceived as an act of betrayal or a violation of gang code. There may be a very sudden onset of severe risk that necessitates immediate flight, or a slower onset of latent risk that

can be maintained at the same level by strict compliance but it will never diminish. Any transgression or perceived transgression, however, will increase the intensity and immediacy of risk and may extend it to other people. Nor does risk necessarily diminish after displacement.

People flee at all points on the continuum. They may make a pre-emptive move at the first onset of risk, an evasive move when latent risk increases, or an emergency reactive move when the threat becomes explicit. Decisions depend on people's different levels of tolerance and resilience, and their economic resources and social capital.

| KEY FINDING 3: THE NATURE OF A SAFE PLACE IS HIGHLY INDIVIDUALISED

The fact that criminal persecution is highly individualised affects the dynamics and outcome of internal displacement and makes the nature of a safe place highly individualised. What may be a safe place for one person may not be safe for someone else fleeing an ostensibly similar situation. This is very different from internal displacement in some other contexts, in which what constitutes a safe place may be the same or very similar for relatively large groups of people.

Destination options for people who flee because of rising risk levels may be limited by gangs' territorial control as well as their own social capital and economic resources. These factors also apply to people who flee individual persecution and targeted threats or violence, but their options will be further limited by their specific circumstances - who is fleeing, from whom and why - and by the risk of pursuit and persecution after displacement. In this sense, the individualised nature of a safe place is most acute for people perceived to have committed an act of *traición* or betrayal or a violation of gang code.

The individualised nature of a safe place presents unique and complex challenges for the state and other responders in providing protection and designing and delivering durable solutions, over and above those posed by general insecurity and the state's weak hold on some parts of the country. Responses that might be appropriate in other situations would not be in El Salvador, because they have the potential to increase people's vulnerability by signalling their presence to their persecutors.

At the same time, providing individually tailored attention to all of the country's IDPs would seem impractical given the scale of the phenomenon. Radical new thinking may be worth exploring, however, such as providing support to families or host communities who receive displaced relatives so as to strengthen social capital and make displacement less precarious.

Insecurity also poses a challenge for *albergues*, which have been targeted and infiltrated by gangs looking for people as far away as Mexico. Staff at *albergues* in El Salvador would find it difficult to conduct effective screening to mitigate this, given the immediacy of some people's flight and their need for emergency protection. As such, the challenge for the state is to balance these issues so as to fulfil its duty to provide IDPs with protection and assistance without placing them at further risk.

| KEY FINDING 4: THE PRECARIOUS NATURE OF DISPLACEMENT LEADS TO REPEATED TRANSITORY MOVES, SELF-CONTAINMENT AND SIGNIFICANT CROSS-BORDER FLIGHT

The lack of a state response and the individualised nature of a safe place means IDPs' options are often extremely limited. Internal displacement is often ineffective and unsustainable, leading to repeated transitory movements, self-containment and a significant cross-border flight. IDPs experience persistent insecurity and struggle economically, and a combination of neglect and heavy-handed security crackdowns means they are reluctant to approach the authorities. Many will not come forward to civil society organisations either for fear of putting their heads above the parapet.

These factors combine to undermine displacement as a strategy. Instead IDPs move from place to place, going wherever they have family links in search of safety and stability. They may only stay for a few days or a few weeks at time, before moving on again. This appears to be one of the most defining patterns of internal displacement in El Salvador.

It is perhaps unsurprising then, that after repeated attempts to find bearable conditions inside the country, many decide to take their chances further afield. For

them internal displacement becomes a transitory phase that eventually leads to cross-border flight, often with recourse to irregular means.

Others flee the country without attempting to move internally, because they know they would be unable to find safety and security. Those unable to secure international protection or regularise their migratory status are vulnerable to deportation, even though they may have protection needs that mean they are not able to return to their place of origin. They do not even make it back to square one before facing a new cycle of insecurity, instability and displacement.

Continued insecurity and persecution during displacement may also lead to self-containment, in which fear prompts people to confine themselves, sometimes to a single room. Self-containment may also happen when someone abandons displacement and is forced to return to insecure surroundings, or when people are unable to flee because they lack either resources, viable safe options or both.

| KEY FINDING 5: REPRESSIVE STATE RESPONSES ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO DISPLACEMENT

Successive state security crackdowns that aimed to rein in gangs' activities have had the opposite effect, leading both indirectly and directly to further and new patterns of displacement. Not only has gang activity shifted and increased, but operations by security forces have themselves also triggered displacement.

Gangs have responded to the crackdowns by changing their modus operandi. They have begun to recruit ever younger people, targeted members of the security forces, intensified their violence and moved into new areas, including rural parts of the country. This has widened both the geographical scope of displacement and the profile of those affected. This has resulted in displacement out of areas that may not have been previously affected and an increase in the overall number of people targeted and displaced, which now includes children not yet in their teens and their families.

Police officers and soldiers have also been displaced. With each crackdown enmity between gangs and the security forces has increased, and growing numbers of officers have been murdered. Many are now extremely



Mara Salvatrucha-13 gang member captured in Soyapango, reportedly one of the most dangerous areas of El Salvador. Photo: shutterstock/ES James, February 2008

| KEY FINDING 6: DISPLACEMENT HAS MAJOR IMPACTS AT ALL LEVELS THAT ARE AGGRAVATED BY THE LACK OF A STATE RESPONSE

People suffer significant financial losses, often including their source of income, when they are displaced and many struggle to meet their basic needs. Displacement has a major psychosocial impact at the individual, family and community level, compounded by the trauma of being exposed to violence and estrangement from support networks. People's exclusion from work and education and the break-up of their families have a long-term effect on individual development, socioeconomic marginalisation and households' financial stability.

These factors also heighten people's vulnerability to being a victim of, or becoming involved in gangs and crime. All of these impacts get worse when displaced people are unable to find safety, economic stability and a durable solution to their plight. Outcomes include repeated transitory movements, self-containment and cross-border flight by irregular means, including potential return to another cycle of displacement.

As people gradually leave a community its social fabric tears, leaving it less resilient to violence and displacement. This process is aggravated by gangs that appropriate abandoned homes, extending their activities and leading to further insecurity, violence and displacement. With people constantly on the move and high levels of suspicion toward newcomers, there are challenges for repairing the social fabric in both communities of origin and receiving communities.

Violence and displacement also have a significant impact at the national level, exacerbating the underlying economic conditions that drive them. Insecurity discourages investment that could open up new economic opportunities, and while some people are able to afford to pay for private security this reinforces deepening inequality and does nothing to address the causes of violence and displacement.

The phenomenon also has a negative impact on national identity and undermines people's confidence in the state, which is increasingly seen as unwilling or unable to look after its own people. The current security crack-

vulnerable even off-duty and risk has extended to their family members. Once displaced, members of the security forces have viable options inside the country, forcing many to resort to containment or cross-border flight. The state has failed both as their employer and under its sovereign responsibility to protect them.

The security forces, for their part, have stigmatised and arbitrarily harassed young people in gang-affected areas and targeted them with violence, forcing them to flee. Reports of abuses are met with a failure to investigate and prosecute, resulting in near impunity and *carte blanche* for police and soldiers to perpetuate their violence. Reporting abuses can also incite harassment, which can itself provoke displacement. In addition to the legitimate security forces, the increasing indiscriminate activities of death squads that operate in collusion with police and military officer are also causing displacement.

down has further eroded trust in the police and the authorities more broadly, contributing to people reluctance to report their plight and the abuses they have suffered and perpetuating a deeply harmful status quo.

The state's failure to meet displaced people's needs clearly worsens the impacts of displacement, which in turn perpetuates and aggravates some of the causes and drivers of criminal violence at individual, community and national level. This is in contrast to the state's responsibility to intervene to address these causes and facilitate durable solutions.

I KEY FINDING 7: DATA AND REPORTING ISSUES IMPEDE UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION ON DISPLACEMENT

Recent reports and studies have sought to qualify and quantify displacement in El Salvador, but fundamental issues of weak data and reporting remain. This impedes understanding of the scale of the phenomenon and the needs of those affected, without it is not possible to fund and deliver effective responses.

The lack of solid data is rooted in the absence of systematic data collection, a centralised register, or state protection and services for those who come forward and report. The government, however, is still to even officially acknowledge that internal displacement exists in the country.

What data is available from NGOs, civil society organisations, international agencies and the state may be skewed by sampling limitations and methodological approaches, and it is not fully representative of neither scale nor demographics. Data is only gathered from people who come forward in search of help, and some of the groups worst affected by violence and displacement are among the least likely to do so. Figures that seek to indicate the scale of the phenomenon have been extrapolated from survey data in a way that is not acceptable to some parties and does not deliver information about the profile and needs of affected people.

This is compounded by people's reluctance to report, which has its roots in their substantiated fear of reprisals from gangs, the culture of silence this imposes and concerns about the infiltration of state institutions. It

also stems from a justified lack of confidence in the state to provide protection or take effective action. People's knowledge of their rights is also generally poor, and many people prefer to move under the radar for their own safety.

In the absence of robust data, the state is unable - even if it were willing - to develop a comprehensive response to IDPs' plight or effective measures to prevent future displacement. Instead a void is left in which further human rights violations take place and the precarious nature of internal displacement leads to repeated transitory movements, self-containment and cross-border flight.

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 29. UNDP Human Development Reports, [Human Development Indicators for El Salvador](#), 2016; World Bank, [DataBank World Development Indicators for El Salvador](#).
 30. Voices on the Border, “[Ten Years Later- The Impact of Dollarization in El Salvador](#)”, June 2011.
 31. World Bank, [DataBank World Development Indicators for El Salvador](#); Voices on the Border, “[Ten Years Later- The Impact of Dollarization in El Salvador](#)”, June 2011; Interviews with representatives of a government agency, an NGO, a humanitarian agency, a civil society organisation, Cristosal, ORMUSA and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, San Salvador, March 2018.
 32. OECD, “[Key issues affecting youth in El Salvador](#)”.
 33. Interviews with a church minister and representatives of ORMUSA, CCNIS, NGOs, civil society organisations and a feminist organisation, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018.
 34. Interviews with a journalist, an academic researcher and representatives of an NGO, a civil society organisation, ORMUSA, an international organisation and a labour rights organisation, San Salvador, Mexico City and by Skype, March-April 2018.
 35. The school abandonment rate peaked at 30 per cent in 2015. Education statistics are available from the [Ministerio de Educación](#).
 36. OECD, “[Key issues affecting youth in El Salvador](#)”; Interviews with representatives of NGOs, CANAF the centre for returned migrants, a school association ORMUSA, CCNIS and a feminist organisation in San Salvador and Usulután.
 37. Representative of IDHUCA, San Salvador.
 38. This stigmatisation applies to young people, whether gang members or not. However, a frontline youth worker noted that the child gang members are called delinquents, terrorists and criminals in the media, even though their recruitment follows the same dynamic as that of child soldiers, with ten-year-olds forced to kill and mentally traumatised.
 39. OECD, “[Key issues affecting youth in El Salvador](#)”; Interviews with a frontline youth worker and representatives from INJUVE, the government agency for youth, an NGO, humanitarian agency, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and a civil society organisation, San Salvador, March 2018.
 40. United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2016; World Economic Forum, the Global Gender Gap Report, 2016.
 41. See Ministry of Justice and Public Security and Dygestic, “[Hechos de violencia contra las mujeres](#)”, 2018.
 42. Interviews with a frontline youth worker and representatives of NGOs, civil society organisations and women’s organisations, San Salvador, Santa Ana & Usulután, March 2018; ORMUSA, [Observatorio de la Violencia](#); UN Women, Global database on violence against women: El Salvador; Kids in Need of Defense, “[Neither Security nor Justice: Sexual and Gender-based Violence in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala](#)”, 2017; Latin America Working Group, “[Left in the Dark: Violence Against Women and LGBTI Persons in Honduras and El Salvador](#),” 2018; Diario Libre, “[Violación de mujeres, otro sello de las pandillas](#)”, November 2014; Central America Women’s Network, “El Salvador in focus: The criminalisation of abortion”, 2015; OECD, “[Key issues affecting youth in El Salvador](#)”.
 43. Interview with head of an LGBT organisation, San Salvador, 1 March 2018.
 44. Interviews with representatives of UNHCR, a LGBT organisation, NGOs, civil society organisations and Amnesty International Americas Secretariat, San Salvador and Mexico City, March-April 2018; Kids in Need of Defense, “[Neither Security nor Justice: Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Gang Violence in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala](#)”, 2017; Latin America Working Group, “[Left in the Dark: Violence Against Women and LGBTI Persons in Honduras and El Salvador](#)”, 2018.
 45. Only 23.5 per cent of victims reported the crime, according to IUDOP survey, 2015.
 46. “Each prosecutor has an average of 800 open cases – from mugging to kidnapping to massacre. You have to use investigative and prosecutor facilities strategically to try and make change. Political decisions have to be made about which cases proceed. But if there are 6,000 homicides in a year, how can you investigate and prosecute this?” Interview with academic researcher at UCA, San Salvador, March 2018; Interviews with academic researcher and representatives of civil society organisations, international organisations, USCRI CA and IDHUCA, San Salvador, March 2018; Kyra Gurney, “[Infiltration of security forces mark of El Salvador gangs’ capabilities](#)”, Insight Crime, 6 May 2014; David Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central

- America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Stephen Dudley & Héctor Silva Ávalos, “[MS13 in the Americas: Major findings](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 16 February 2018.
47. Roberto Valencia, “[How Not to Repeat the Failures of El Salvador’s Gang Truce](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 14 August 2014.
 48. Interview with a consultant on security and development issues in the region, by Skype, April 2018.
 49. David Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “El Salvador: Information Gathering Mission Report, Part 1. Gangs in El Salvador and the Situation of Witnesses of Crime and Corruption”, 2016.
 50. Randal C. Archibold, “[Gangs’ truce buys El Salvador a tenuous peace](#)”, *New York Times*, 27 August 2012; Steven Dudley, “[2 divergent views on El Salvador gang truce, 1 sad conclusion](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 15 April 2014; Carlos Martínez & Jose Luis Sanz, “[How El Salvador’s security ministry dismantled truce, unleashed mayhem](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 28 May 2014.
 51. Declaración final de misión en El Salvador, Agnes Callamard, Relatora Especial sobre ejecuciones extrajudiciales, sumarias o arbitrarias de Naciones Unidas, 5 February 2018; Interview with frontline youth worker, San Salvador, 10 March 2018; Interviews with academic researchers, a journalist, a frontline youth worker and representatives of NGOs, international organisations and civil society organisations, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018; Héctor Silva Ávalos, “[El Salvador Violence Rising Despite ‘Extraordinary’ Anti-Gang Measures](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 3 October 2017; Crisis Group, “[El Salvador’s politics of perpetual violence](#)”, Report No.64, 19 December 2017; José Miguel Cruz, “[The Transformation of Street Gangs in Central America: Organized Crime, Mano Dura Policies and Lost Opportunities](#)”, *Revista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, Winter 2012; Sarah Esther Maslin, “[Can religion solve El Salvador’s gang problem?](#)”, *The Economist* 1843 Magazine, April/May 2018; *Insight Crime*, “[Reality Belies El Salvador Govt Rhetoric on ‘Extraordinary Measures’](#)”, 16 April 2018; Sonia Wolf, “[Distorting the MS-13 Threat](#)”, *NACLA*, 5 October 2017.
 52. Interviews with a consultant on security and development issues in the region, representatives of an NGO and an international organisation, and Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, San Salvador and by Skype, March-April 2018; Roberto Valencia, “[How Not to Repeat the Failures of El Salvador’s Gang Truce](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 14 August 2014; IUDOP, “Evaluación del país a finales de 2017 y perspectivas electorales para 2018”; OECD, “[Key issues affecting youth in El Salvador](#)”.
 53. Formed in September 2014, the Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadana y Convivencia brings together State institutions, municipalities, private businesses, private businesses, civil society, political parties, churches, the media and the international community to discuss solutions to violence and criminality under the coordination of a Secretaría Técnica from the United Nations Development Programme (Murcia 2015); Comunicado de la Presidencia: “[Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadana y Convivencia entrega al Presidente Sánchez Cerén el ‘Plan El Salvador Seguro’](#)”, the policy document is available [here](#).
 54. Interviews with representatives from Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Pública, IDHUCA, Save the Children El Salvador and a humanitarian agency, San Salvador, March 2018; AC-NUR, “[Informe oficial retrata la situación de desplazamiento forzado por violencia en El Salvador](#)” (login required), 5 April 2018.
 55. *Insight Crime*, “[El Salvador’s ‘Plan Seguro’ failing to make communities safe](#)”, 28 March 2016; In a promising development, in June 2018 the EU offered significant funding for the violence prevention stream of PESS; Prensa Gráfica, “[Unión Europea ofrece £63 millones para prevenir la violencia](#)”, 21 June 2018.
 56. Interviews with academic researchers, civil society organisations and a frontline youth worker, San Salvador, March 2018; El Salvador End of Mission Statement, Agnes Callamard, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, 5 February 2018; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on her visit to El Salvador, 23 April 2018, A/HRC/38/39/Add.1.
 57. *Insight Crime*, “[El Salvador Supreme Court labels street gangs as terrorist groups](#)”, 26 August 2015.
 58. *Insight Crime*, “[El Salvador Supreme Court labels street gangs as terrorist groups](#)”, 26 August 2015; BBC News, “[Corte Suprema de El Salvador declara a la Mara Salvatrucha y a Barrio18 como grupos terroristas](#)”, 25 August 2015; BBC News, “[¿Qué significa que declaren terroristas a las maras en El Salvador?](#)”, 25 August 2015; Interviews with civil society organisations and INJUVE, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018; A new rehabilitation programme in prisons, “[Yo cambio](#)”, has made initial promising steps towards rehabilitating some prisoners.
 59. Interview with church minister, San Salvador, 13 March 2018.
 60. Interview with an academic researcher at UCA, San Salvador, by Skype, 11 April 2018.
 61. Interview with an academic researcher at UCA, San Salvador, by Skype, 11 April 2018; Josefina Salomón, “[‘El Salvador Must Break the Cycle of Impunity’: UN Rep](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 16 February 2018; Interview with an academic researcher, a church minister and representatives of civil society organisations, San Salvador, March 2018.
 62. Stephen Dudley & Héctor Silva Ávalos, “[MS13 in the Americas: Major Findings](#)”, *Insight Crime*, 16 February 2018.
 63. Crisis Group, “[El Salvador’s politics of perpetual violence](#)”, Report No.64, 19 December 2017.
 64. D.J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Dudley & Silva, “Barrio 18”, *Insight Crime*, 2018; Óscar Martínez, “[Eternos indocumentados](#)”, February 2018; Interviews with a frontline youth worker, journalists and representatives from, USCRI CA, NGOs, civil society organisations, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, and LGBT and feminist groups, San Salvador, Santa Ana and Usulután, March-April 2018.
 65. Interview with regional head of a feminist organisation, Usulután, 15 March 2018.
 66. Interviews with a frontline youth worker and representatives of NGOs, civil society organisations, women’s organisations and an LGBT organisation, San Salvador, Santa Ana & Usulután, March 2018; Kids in Need of Defense, “[Neither Security nor Justice: Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Gang Violence in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala](#)”, 2017; Latin America Working Group, “[Left in the Dark: Violence Against Women and LGBTI Persons in Honduras and El Salvador](#)”, 2018; *Diario Libre*, “[Violación de mujeres, otro sello de las pandillas](#)”, 8 November 2014.
 67. Consejo Nacional de la Pequeña Empresa de El Salvador (CONAPES), Informe Annual 2017; Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (FUSADES), Extorsiones a la micro y pequeña empresa de El Salvador, 2016.
 68. 692 transport workers were killed by gangs in El Salvador between 2011 and 2016 - *New York Times*, “[Killers on a shoestring: Inside the gangs of El Salvador](#)”, 21 November 2016; D.J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, two journalists, a consultant on security and development in the region, an academic researcher, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, the head of a national association for small businesses, and representatives of Cristosal, ASDEHU, civil society organisations, an international organisation, an NGO and a labour rights

- organisation, San Salvador, Sonsonate and by Skype, March-April 2018.
69. The forced recruitment of children has been identified as a slavery-like practice by UN Human Rights Council, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences](#), on her mission to El Salvador, 3 August 2016, A/HRC/33/46/Add.1.
 70. Interviews with Mauricio Gaborit, a journalist, a frontline youth worker, and representatives of civil society organisations, NGOs, humanitarian agencies, San Salvador.
 71. IPS News, [“El Salvador: Gangs recruiting younger and younger members”](#), 28 March 2008.
 72. See Steven Dudley, [“Tregua entre pandillas en El Salvador: aspectos positivos y negativos”](#), Insight Crime, 10 June 2013.
 73. Roberto Valencia, [“How not to repeat the failures of El Salvador’s gang truce”](#), Insight Crime, 14 August 2014; Interviews with the head of psychology at UCA Mauricio Gaborit, a journalist, a frontline youth worker, and representatives of civil society organisations, NGOs, humanitarian agencies, San Salvador.
 74. The coercion of women and girls into forced sexual relations has been identified as a slavery-like practice by UN Human Rights Council, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences](#), on her mission to El Salvador, 3 August 2016, A/HRC/33/46/Add.1.
 75. The NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) [describes grooming as when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or trafficking](#).
 76. Under the Extraordinary Measures in place since April 2016, there have been strict restrictions on visits and many imprisoned gang members are not permitted visits, so some of these forced visits may have reduced; Insight Crime, [“El Salvador moves to clamp down on prisons, gangs”](#), 1 April 2016; OAS, [“IACHR Calls on El Salvador to not renew Extraordinary Measures in detention centres”](#), 26 March 2018; El Salvador End of Mission Statement, Agnes Callamard, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, 5 February 2018.
 77. Interviews with Mauricio Gaborit, Jeannette Aguilar, a journalist, a frontline youth worker and representatives of Cristosal, ORMUSA, USCRI CA, IDHUCA, a feminist organisation, a humanitarian agency and NGOs, San Salvador & Santa Ana, March 2018.
 78. Interview with representative of ORMUSA, San Salvador, 1 March 2018.
 79. Molly O’Toole, [“El Salvador’s gangs are targeting young girls”](#), The Atlantic; Interviews with representatives of ORMUSA, Cristosal and an international organisation, San Salvador & Mexico City, March 2018.
 80. Steven Dudley, “Drug Trafficking Organisations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras”, in *Organised crime in Central America: The Northern Triangle*, Woodrow Wilson Center Reports on the Americas #29, 2011; Steven Dudley, [“How drug trafficking operates, corrupts in Central America”](#), Insight Crime, 6 July 2016; Héctor Silva Ávalos & Felipe Puerta, [“GameChangers 2016: Sunset of the Central American Spring”](#), 7 January 2017.
 81. Interview with representative of an NGO, Usulután, 16 March 2018; D.J. Cantor & N. Serna, “The New Refugees: Crime and displacement in Latin America”, London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2016; Steven Dudley, “Drug Trafficking Organisations in Central America: Transportistas, Mexican Cartels and Maras”, in *Organised crime in Central America: The Northern Triangle*, Woodrow Wilson Center Reports on the Americas #29, 2011.
 82. Interviews with representatives of an international organisation, a national schools’ association and civil society organisations, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018.
 83. Interviews with academic researcher and journalist; Agnes Callamard, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, “El Salvador End of Mission Statement”, 5 February 2018; Insight Crime, , 28 February 2018; Insight Crime, , 23 August 2017; La Prensa Gráfica, , 10 February 2018; Nick Paton Walsh, Barbara Arvanitidis & Brian Avelar, CNN, 23 August 2017.
 84. D.J. Cantor & N. Serna, “The New Refugees: Crime and displacement in Latin America”, London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2016.
 85. IDMC’s internal definition for generalised violence is: “Widespread and sustained violence not meeting the threshold of armed conflict, including but not limited to civil unrest, state repression, violence in the aftermath of elections, organised criminal and gang violence, or communal violence along religious or ethnic lines, that seriously erodes public order and causes risk to human life, physical integrity or freedom of movement.”
 86. Interviews with the head of a national schools’ association, representatives of UNHCR, Cristosal, IDHUCA, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, CCNIS, USCRI CA, an international organisation, an education NGO, a feminist organisation and civil society organisations, San Salvador, Santa Ana, Usulután & Mexico City, March-April 2018; El Faro, [“ACNUR: las maras son en El Salvador la principal causa de ‘desplazamiento forzado’”](#), 19 March 2014.
 87. D. J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2014, 33(3).
 88. Walter Murcia, “Los pandillas de El Salvador: Propuestas y desafíos para la inclusión social juvenil en contextos de violencia urbana”, Santiago: Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2015; Sarah Kinoshian, [“Seven Facts about MS-13 and How to Combat the Gang”](#), WOLA, 18 July 2017; El Faro, [“ACNUR: las maras son en El Salvador la principal causa de ‘desplazamiento forzado’”](#), 19 March 2014; Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, a frontline youth worker, Mauricio Gaborit, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, the head of a national schools’ association and representatives of CCNIS, ASDEHU, a feminist organisation, an NGO and civil society organisations, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018.
 89. Nina Lakhani, [“It’s a crime to be young and pretty”](#), The Guardian, 26 November 2016.
 90. Molly O’Toole, [“El Salvador’s gangs are targeting young girls”](#), The Atlantic, March 2018; Walter Murcia, “Los pandillas de El Salvador: Propuestas y desafíos para la inclusión social juvenil en contextos de violencia urbana”, Santiago: Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2015; Interviews with journalists, Mauricio Gaborit, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, the head of a national schools’ association, and representatives of ORMUSA, Cristosal, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, USCRI CA and a feminist organisation, San Salvador, Santa Ana and Usulután, March 2018.
 91. Mark Townsend, [“Women deported by Trump face deadly welcome from street gangs in El Salvador”](#), The Guardian, 13 January 2018; Interviews with a journalist, the head of a national schools’ association and the representatives of a feminist organisation, San Salvador and Santa Ana, March 2018.
 92. The witness and victim protection scheme is available only to those who are actively involved in judicial processes, and it ends when proceedings finish. Interviewees reported deficiencies with the protection and accommodation it provides, especially for families; Government officials. For further analysis, see Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “El Salvador: Information Gathering Mission Report, Part 1. Gangs in El Salvador and the Situation of Witnesses of Crime and Corruption”, 2016.
 93. El Nuevo Herald, [“La violencia de las pandillas obliga a los](#)

- [salvadoreños al destierro interno](#)", 29 August 2015; Diario 1, "[El secreto de los desplazados de la colonia Dina](#)", 25 July 2016; Interviews with a journalist, an academic researcher, a frontline youth worker, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, the head of a national association for small businesses and representatives of civil society organisations, an NGO and an international organisation, San Salvador & Sonsonate, March 2018.
94. Interviews with a frontline youth worker, a journalist, the head of a national association for small businesses ASDEHU, and a consultant on security and development in the region, San Salvador, Sonsonate, Usulután and by Skype, March-April 2018.
 95. A new rehabilitation programme in prisons, "[Yo cambio](#)", has made initial promising steps towards rehabilitating some prisoners.
 96. Sarah Esther Maslin, "[Can religion solve El Salvador's gang problem?](#)", The Economist 1843 Magazine, April/May 2018, Interviews with a frontline youth worker, a church minister and representatives of INJUVE the government agency for youth and a feminist organisation, San Salvador & Santa Ana, March 2018.
 97. *Albergues* in Mexico usually have tight security such as 24-hour police guards who check identity cards before entry and share information about gang members through an online database. Interviews with a frontline youth worker, a church minister and representatives of INJUVE the government agency for youth and Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, San Salvador & Mexico City, March-April 2018.
 98. Interview with research fellow at UCA, San Salvador, by Skype, 11 April 2018.
 99. Agnes Callamard, "[El Salvador End of Mission Statement](#)", United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, 5 February 2018.
 100. Interview with academic researcher, San Salvador.
 101. Interviews with academic researchers, a journalist, representatives of Procuraduría General de la República, the head of a national schools' association and representatives of ASDEHU, IDHUCA, USCRI CA, an international organisation, a CSO providing legal support, an NGO and a CSO for human rights and peace, San Salvador and by Skype, March-April 2018
 102. Self-containment is a form of forced immobility where people have to confine or self-imprison themselves to their home for fear of going out. Self-containment is further explained in Chapter 4.
 103. Interviews with an academic researcher, a journalist and representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, NGOs, an international organisation, and civil society organisations, San Salvador; Insight Crime, "[El Salvador police resigning, seeking asylum abroad](#)", 25 October 2016.
 104. Interviews with representatives of Fundación Quetzalcoatl and an international organisation, San Salvador, March 2018; La Prensa Gráfica, "[Más familias abandonan sus hogares por pandillas](#)", 18 October 2016; D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014.
 105. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014.
 106. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Interviews with a journalist, representatives Procuraduría General de la República, a consultant on security and development in the region, the head of a national schools' association, the head of a national association for small businesses, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, an academic researcher and representatives of Cristosal, AS-DEHU, USCRI CA, CCNIS, UNHCR, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, an education NGO, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and civil society organisations, San Salvador, Sonsonate and by Skype, March-April 2018.
 107. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014.
 108. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Vickie Knox, "Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America", *Forced Migration Review*, 2017; Interviews with a journalist, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, a consultant on security and development issues in the region, the head of a national schools' association, an academic researcher, the head of a national association for small businesses, representatives of UNHCR, representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, and representatives of Cristosal, USCRI CA, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, a CSO for local development, an education NGO, ASDEHU, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, CCNIS and other civil society organisations, San Salvador, Sonsonate and by Skype, March-April 2018.
 109. Interviews with representatives of Cristosal, an international organisation and an NGO, San Salvador, March 2018.
 110. Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, the regional head of a feminist organisation and representatives of a CSO providing legal support and a CSO for local development, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018.
 111. For example, the case of Condominio América. *Revista Factum*, "[Los desplazados invisibles](#)", 5 December 2016.
 112. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Comunica, "[La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás](#)", 12 February 2016; Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, two journalists, the head of a national schools' association, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP and representatives of Cristosal, Save the Children, ASDEHU, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, CCNIS, a feminist organisation, a CSO for human rights and peace and an international organisation, San Salvador, Santa Ana and Usulután, March 2018.
 113. See for example: Jaime López, "[Los 7 casos de éxodo que las pandillas han provocado en lo que va del 2016](#)", *elsalvador.com*, 18 October 2016.
 114. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Vickie Knox, "Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America", *Forced Migration Review*, 2017; Walter Murcia, "Los pandillas de El Salvador: Propuestas y desafíos para la inclusión social juvenil en contextos de violencia urbana", Santiago: Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2015; Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, the head of a national schools' association, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, representatives of civil society organisations, NGOs, IDHUCA, Save the Children, USCRI CA, Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, an international organisation and a feminist organisation, San Salvador, Santa Ana & Mexico City, March-April 2018
 115. Head of an LGBT organisation, San Salvador.
 116. Interviews with an LGBT organisation, San Salvador and international organisation (UNHCR), Mexico City; A. P. Gómez Arévalo, "Entre la espada y la pared: Movilidad forzada de personas salvadoreñas LGBT", *Mediações-Revista de Ciências Sociais*, 2017, 22(1), pp.130-155; A. Winton, "Entre Fronteras: Un estudio exploratorio sobre diversidad sexual y movilidad en la Frontera Sur de México", 2016. Chi Tapachula.: Ecosur, A. Winton, "Movilidad y Supervivencia: Un estudio exploratorio sobre desplazamiento por violencia en el Norte de Centroamérica y el Sur de México." Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Sur/International Organization for Migration/United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2017.
 117. The head of an LGBT organisation in San Salvador explained that LGBT people experience high levels of family estrange-

- ment because they may be rejected by their family due to negative attitudes and discrimination about sexual orientation and gender identity. They may therefore be limited in the social capital that they can access to support them in internal displacement, and are likely to leave the country.
118. Interviews with an LGBT organisation, San Salvador and international organisation (UNHCR), Mexico City; A. P. Gómez Arévalo, "Entre la espada y la pared: Movilidad forzada de personas salvadoreñas LGBT", *Mediações-Revista de Ciências Sociais*, 22(1), 2017; Amnesty International, No Safe Place. Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans seeking asylum in Mexico based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, London, 2017.
 119. Susana Joma, "[Profesores se ven obligados a dejar la escuela para no ser víctimas de violencia y por no tener alumnos](#)", *elsalvador.com*, 10 May 2016.
 120. In February 2018, the Inter American Commission in Human Rights granted Precautionary Measures to Attorney General of El Salvador, Douglas Arquímedes Meléndez Ruiz, and his family because of threats and harassment related to his work. Interviews with a journalist and representatives of an LGBT organisation, ORMUSA, an NGO and Amnesty International Americas Secretariat, San Salvador & Mexico City, March-April 2018; UNHCR, "[UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from El Salvador](#)", 15 March 2016; also see América Latina en movimiento, "[Desconocida situación represiva del periodismo revela Informe de APES](#)", 14 February 2017.
 121. For instance, in the DGME returns interview.
 122. Interviews with the head of a national schools' association, and representatives of Cristosal, ASDEHU, an NGO and a feminist organisation, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018.
 123. Interviews with academic researcher, IDHUCA, ADHESU, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, the regional head of a feminist organisation and representatives of a civil society organisation and a humanitarian agency, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018; Cristosal, "Visibilizar lo invisible", 2018; El Faro, "[PDDH a Sánchez Cerén: los desplazamientos forzados son un problema nacional](#)", 13 December 2017.
 124. Interviews with academic researchers, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, and representatives of civil society organisations, including IDHUCA, Save the Children, ASDEHU, CCNIS, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, INJUVE the government agency for youth, an NGO and a feminist organisation, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018.
 125. Interviews with a church minister, a journalist and representatives of ASDEHU, Save the Children, CCNIS, IDHUCA, an NGO and a civil society organisation providing legal support, San Salvador; Agnes Callamard, "El Salvador End of Mission Statement", United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, 5 February 2018
 126. Interviews with academic researchers, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP and representatives of CANAF the centre for returned migrants, USCRI CA, a feminist organisation, an international organisation and civil society organisations, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018.
 127. Interviews with an academic researcher, a frontline youth worker, representatives of civil society organisations, CCNIS, IDHUCA, and a CSO providing legal support, San Salvador, March 2018; Cristosal, "Visibilizar lo invisible; Huellas ocultas de la violencia", 2018.
 128. Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, a frontline youth worker and representatives of ASDEHU and UNHCR, San Salvador & Mexico City, March 2018; Luis Fernando Alonso, "[El Salvador police resigning, seeking asylum abroad](#)", *Insight Crime*, 25 October 2016.
 129. El Faro, "[Ministro de Seguridad: 'Hay policías y soldados que provocan casos de desplazamiento interno'](#)", 26 April 2018
 130. The 2018 Government profiling study, "Caracterización de la movilidad interna a causa de la violencia en El Salvador", found that the majority of respondents who had been displaced had an adolescent (12-17) or young person (18-29) in the household. However, for reasons of security, respondents were not questioned about who was targeted by the threat that caused them to move; Interviews with representatives of ADHESU, IOM, Cristosal and civil society organisations.
 131. Interview with Walter Murcia, consultant on security and development, by Skype, April 2018. More than 50 per cent of homicide victims are aged between 15 and 29 years; the majority of them are young men from poor urban areas, however, homicide rates for young women increased alarmingly in recent years (OECD, "[Key issues affecting youth in El Salvador](#)").
 132. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, two journalists, the head of a national schools' association, a consultant on security and development in the region, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, an academic researcher and representatives of CANAF the centre for returned migrants, an education NGO, UNHCR, Amnesty International Americas Secretariat and civil society organisations, San Salvador, Usulután, Mexico City & by Skype, March-April 2018.
 133. Experts interviewed for this study noted that men were disproportionately affected. Civil society organisations that provide assistance to displaced people have recorded a slightly higher proportion of women registering and asking for assistance, and the Government's profiling study noted similar results. This area needs more research. This could, for instance, indicate that men are more likely to resort to cross-border flight in displacement.
 134. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, Mauricio Gaborit, the head of a national schools' association, and a consultant on security and development in the region, an academic researcher and representatives of ASDEHU, USCRI CA, Save the Children and ORMUSA, San Salvador and by Skype, March-April 2018.
 135. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Interviews with Fátima Ortiz the director of Atención a Víctimas at the Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Pública, Mauricio Gaborit and representatives of CANAF the centre for returned migrants, Cristosal, an education NGO, IDHUCA, a CSO providing legal support and an international organisation, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018.
 136. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, two journalists, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, the head of a national schools' association, an academic researcher, a consultant on security and development in the region, representatives of Amnesty International Americas Secretariat, CANAF the centre for returned migrants, UNHCR, an education NGO and civil society organisations, San Salvador, Usulután, Mexico City and by Skype, March-April 2018.
 137. Interview with academic researcher, San Salvador.
 138. Interview with academic researcher, San Salvador, March 2018.
 139. D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; *Diario 1*, "[El secreto de los desplazados de la colonia Dina](#)", 25 July 2016; *Comunica*, "[La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás](#)", 12 February 2016; Interviews with a journalist, representatives of INJUVE the government agency for youth and an academic researcher, San Salvador, March 2018.
 140. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, CANAF the centre for returned migrants, a feminist organisation and a civil society organisation, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018.

141. Interviews with a consultant on security and development in the region and representatives of Fundación Quetzalcoatl, San Salvador and by Skype, March-April 2018; Stephen Dudley & Héctor Silva Ávalos [“MS in the Americas: Major findings”](#), Insight Crime, 16 February 2018; El Heraldo, [“El Salvador: familias dejan casas tras amenazas de pandillas”](#), 17 September 2016.
142. Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, a journalist and representatives of USCRI CA, Fundación Quetzalcoatl and a CSO for human rights and peace, San Salvador, March 2018.
143. D. J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Interviews with Fátima Ortiz the director of Atención a Víctimas at the Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad Pública, the head of a national schools’ association, a church minister, a frontline youth worker and representatives of Fundación Quetzalcoatl, UNHCR, Save the Children, a CSO providing legal support, and the Heinrich Böll Foundation civil society organisations and an NGO, San Salvador & Mexico City, March 2018.
144. Interviews with a journalist, a consultant on security and development in the region, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP and representatives of a CSO for local development, IDHUCA, UNHCR, ORMUSA, ASDEHU, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and an NGO, San Salvador, Mexico City & by Skype, March 2018; El Heraldo, [“El Salvador: familias dejan casas tras amenazas de pandillas”](#), 17 September 2016
145. Journalists and civil society organisations maintain that there is generally no police presence except for while they gather their belongings. However, police have successfully assisted at least one displaced community to return.
146. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, Mauricio Gaborit and representatives of Cristosal, IDHUCA, a national schools’ association, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, ASDEHU, civil society organisations and an NGO, San Salvador, March 2018.
147. Interviews with a consultant on security and development in the region, representatives of civil society organisations, an NGO, a feminist organisation, ORMUSA, IDHUCA, and a national schools’ association, San Salvador, Santa Ana and by Skype, March-April 2018.
148. D. J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Interviews with the head of a national schools’ association, the head of an association for small businesses, a journalist and representatives of Save the Children a feminist organisation, a CSO delivering social programmes, a CSO providing legal support, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, UNHCR, an international organisation and NGOs, San Salvador, Sonsonate, Santa Ana & Mexico City, March 2018.
149. D. J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; Interviews with a church minister, Mauricio Gaborit, a journalist, an academic researcher and representatives of USCRI CA, IDHUCA, IDHUCA, ASDEHU, NGOs and a feminist organisation, San Salvador, Santa Ana & Usulután, March 2018.
150. Interviews with representatives of INJUVE the government agency for youth, a journalist and representatives of UNHCR, ORMUSA, an education NGO and a feminist organisation, San Salvador, Santa Ana, Usulután & Mexico City, March 2018.
151. Vickie Knox, “Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America”, *Forced Migration Review*, 2017; Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, a journalist, Mauricio Gaborit, a frontline youth worker, representatives of a civil society organisation and an NGO, San Salvador, March 2018.
152. Interviews with representatives of ORMUSA, UNHCR, Fundación Quetzalcoatl and an NGO, San Salvador & Mexico City, March 2018.
153. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, an academic researcher, a journalist and representatives of two NGOs, San Salvador March 2018.
154. Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, a frontline youth worker, Mauricio Gaborit and representatives of UNHCR and an NGO, San Salvador & Mexico City, March 2018.
155. Interview with academic researcher, the head of a national schools’ association and representatives of Cristosal and IDHUCA, San Salvador, March 2018.
156. Interview with an academic researcher, San Salvador; Interviews with the head of a national school’s association, academic researchers and representatives of civil society organisations, a feminist organisation, a humanitarian organisation, ASDEHU and an NGO, San Salvador & Santa Ana, March 2018.
157. Comunica, [“La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás”](#), 12 February 2016; Cristosal, “Visibilizar lo invisible”, 2018, p.43; Interviews with a frontline youth worker and representatives of a humanitarian organisation, San Salvador, March 2018.
158. Interview with academic researcher, San Salvador.
159. UNHCR, [“ACNUR pide acción urgente por el aumento de solicitudes de asilo de centroamericanos”](#), 5 April 2016. According to the DGME (Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería) data that records the reasons that people who have been deported or returned to El Salvador gave for their external migration, and records criminal violence as the second cause.
160. UNHCR, *Global Trend: Forced displacement in 2017*, 2018.
161. Vickie Knox, “Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America”, 2017; *Forced Migration Review*, MSF (Médicos Sin Fronteras), “Forzados a huir de Triángulo Norte de Centroamérica: una crisis humanitaria olvidada” 2017; Mexico City: MSF, REDODEM, (Red de Documentación de Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes), “Migrantes invisibles, violencia tangible”, 2014; UNHCR, [“Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection”](#), 2014; UNHCR, “Arrancados de raíz: Causas que originan el desplazamiento transfronterizo de niños, niñas y adolescentes no acompañados y/o separados de Centroamérica y su necesidad de protección internacional”, 2014; UNHCR, “Women on the Run: First-hand Accounts of Refugees Fleeing El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico.”, 2015; UNHCR, [“ACNUR pide acción urgente por el aumento de solicitudes de asilo de centroamericanos”](#), 5 April 2016.
162. Interview with representatives of UNHCR, Mexico City. Interviews were conducted with 350 people from the NTCA while in migration detention in 2017 and results are in an internal document that had not been published at time of interview.
163. Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, representatives of civil society organisations, UNHCR, Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, an international organisation and a feminist organisation, San Salvador, Usulután and Mexico City, Luis Fernando Alonso, [“El Salvador police resigning, seeking asylum abroad”](#), Insight Crime, 25 October 2016; Molly O’Toole, [“El Salvador’s gangs are targeting young girls”](#), The Atlantic, 4 March 2018.
164. Vickie Knox, “Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America”, *Forced Migration Review*, 2017; Vickie Knox, “Organised Crime and Migration in Mesoamerica. A morphogenetic approach”, doctoral thesis, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2017; Interviews with women’s organisations in Santa Ana, San Salvador and Usulután.
165. Interviews with an academic researcher, NGOs, an international organisation, the Procuraduría General de la República, a journalist and civil society organisations, San Salvador; Insight Crime, [“El Salvador police resigning, seeking asylum”](#)

- [abroad](#)”, 25 October 2016.
166. Vickie Knox, “Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America”, Forced Migration Review, 2017; Interviews with a journalist, a frontline youth worker and representatives of ASDEHU, UNHCR, a CSO for local development, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, a feminist organisation, an LGBT organisation, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and civil society organisations, San Salvador, Santa Ana, Mexico City and by Skype, March 2018.
 167. Interview with representatives of UNHCR, Mexico City.
 168. Vickie Knox, 2017. “Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America”, Forced Migration Review.
 169. Interview with Jeannette Aguilar, IUDOP, San Salvador, March 2018; Vickie Knox, 2017. “Factors influencing decision making by people fleeing Central America”, Forced Migration Review; Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, a frontline youth worker, an academic researcher and representatives of UNHCR and Save the Children, San Salvador & Mexico City, March 2018.
 170. Interviews with a journalist, an academic researcher and representatives of ORMUSA, a feminist organisation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018.
 171. Interviews with representatives of Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, a humanitarian agency and a CSO for local development, San Salvador & Mexico City, March- April 2018.
 172. IDMC, “Today’s returning refugees, tomorrow’s IDPs”, June 2017.
 173. Insight Crime, [“5 ways ending TPS could impact Central America security”](#), 7 November 2017.
 174. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, representatives of UNHCR, an LGBT organisation, USCRI CA, Conmigrantes and CANAF the centre for returned migrants, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018; Refugees International, 2018, [“Putting lives at risk: Protection failures affecting Hondurans and Salvadorans deported from the United States and Mexico”](#).
 175. Amnesty International, “Home Sweet Home? Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador’s role in a deepening refugee crisis”. London: Amnesty International, 2016; HRW (Human Rights Watch), “Closed Doors: Mexico’s failure to protect Central American refugee and migrant children”, 2016.
 176. Interviews with representatives of USCRI CA and Amnesty International Americas Secretariat, San Salvador & Mexico City, March-April 2018.
 177. Interviews with Mauricio Gaborit and representatives of UNHCR and Amnesty International Americas Secretariat, San Salvador & Mexico City, March-April 2018.
 178. Interviews with Mauricio Gaborit and representatives of UNHCR and Amnesty International Americas Secretariat, San Salvador & Mexico City, March-April 2018.
 179. Interviews with Mauricio Gaborit the head of the psychology department at UCA and representatives from CONNA the government agency for children and UNHCR, San Salvador, March 2018; Refugees International, [“Putting lives at risk: Protection failures affecting Hondurans and Salvadorans deported from the United States and Mexico”](#), 2018.
 180. According to an international organisation in San Salvador, the number of attempts that smuggling packages now allow for has increased from three to seven since the hardening of migration policy and enforcement in Mexico since 2014. The cost of smuggling has also increased; Insight Crime, [“Trump’s border policies strengthen organised crime. Here’s how”](#), 20 June 2018.
 181. Interview with representative of USCRI CA, an organisation that provides assistance returned minors, San Salvador, March 2018; the interviewee noted that they were unable to provide assistance to those who could not return to their place of origin because of ongoing protection needs.
 182. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, CANAF the centre for returned migrants, USCRI CA and an NGO, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018.
 183. K. Dingeman-Cera & E.G. Kennedy, “Welcome Home? Deportation to El Salvador”, 2015; Molly O’Toole, [“El Salvador’s gangs are targeting young girls”](#), The Atlantic; Amnesty International, “Home Sweet Home? Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador’s role in a deepening refugee crisis”, London, 2016. Elizabeth Kennedy compiled over 80 cases documented by the Salvadoran press from 2007 to 2015 of Salvadorans murdered after their deportation from Mexico and the US, more than 70 of them from 2013 to 2015. Likewise, two of five fathers deported from the US of the children she and Karla Castillo interviewed in 2014 were murdered, and US attorneys informed her of at least five Salvadorans who sought legal relief in the US being murdered after their deportation.
 184. Interviews with representatives of CANAF the centre for returned migrants, an LGBT organisation, USCRI CA, UNHCR, and an NGO, San Salvador and Usulután, March 2018; Héctor Silva Ávalos, [“5 ways ending TPS could impact Central America security”](#), Insight Crime, 7 November 2017; Refugees International, [“Temporary Protected Status for El Salvador: Findings of a Refugees International research mission”](#), 21 December 2017; Refugees International, [“Putting lives at risk: Protection failures affecting Hondurans and Salvadorans deported from the United States and Mexico”](#), 2018.
 185. Interviews with a journalist, Mauricio Gaborit and representatives of Cristosal, IDHUCA, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, civil society organisations, an international organisation and an NGO, San Salvador, March 2018; D. J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, Refugee Survey Quarterly, 33(3), 2014. Comunica, [“La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás”](#), 12 February 2016. Also see above for Supreme Court rulings on *amparo* cases.
 186. D. J. Cantor, “The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico”, Refugee Survey Quarterly, 33(3), 2014. Interviews with two journalists, the head of a national schools’ association, a consultant on security and development in the region, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, Mauricio Gaborit, a church minister, an academic researcher and representatives of INJUVE the government agency for youth, a feminist organisation, an LGBT organisation, ORMUSA, a labour rights organisation, a CSO for local development, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, an international organisation and an NGO, San Salvador, Usulután & by Skype, March-April 2018.
 187. Interviews with representative of an LGBT organisation, ORMUSA, an NGO and CCNIS, San Salvador, March 2018.
 188. The school abandonment rate peaked at 30 per cent in 2015. [Education statistics are available from the Ministerio de Educación](#). Teachers are also affected, either when they have to move for their own safety or when school abandonment results in lower pupil numbers; elsalvador.com, [“Profesores se ven obligados a dejar la escuela para no ser víctimas de violencia y por no tener alumnos”](#), 10 May 2016.
 189. Interviews with a schools’ association, education NGOs, ORMUSA, CCNIS, ASDEHU, civil society organisations and an international organisation. Also see Cristosal, “Testimonial report on forced displacement in El Salvador - Focus on children, adolescents and youth”, 2016.
 190. Interviews with NGOs, ORMUSA, CCNIS, ASDEHU, civil society organisations, an international organisation, and a school association. Also see Cristosal, “Testimonial report on forced displacement in El Salvador - Focus on children, adolescents and youth”, 2016.
 191. Interview with representative of a civil society organisation, San Salvador, 20 March 2018.
 192. Interviews with ORMUSA, INJUVE the government agency for youth, Jeannette Aguilar, Mauricio Gaborit, Fundación

- Quetzalcoatl, civil society organisations, academic researchers, women's organisations, a school association, a church minister and a frontline worker, San Salvador, Santa Ana and Usulután, March 2018; Comunica, "[La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás](#)", 12 February 2016.
193. Interviews with CCNIS, Jeannette Aguilar, Heinrich Böll Foundation, civil society organisations, humanitarian agencies, academic researchers, a frontline worker and a journalist, San Salvador and Santa Ana.
194. Interview with Mauricio Gaborit, Head of the Psychology Department at Universidad Centroamericana 'José Simeón Cañas', San Salvador, March 2018.
195. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, Mauricio Gaborit, a frontline youth worker, an academic researcher, representatives of IDHUCA, civil society organisations, two NGOs and a humanitarian agency, San Salvador & Mexico City, March & 2018; Sarnata Reynolds, "[Investigating Mexico and El Salvador's Internally Displaced](#)", Refugees International, 9 June 2015; El Mundo, "[Más de 100 familias dejan cada mes sus hogares por acoso de pandillas](#)", 25 May 2015; Comunica, "[La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás](#)", 12 February 2016.
196. Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, two journalists, a frontline youth worker and representatives of INJUVE the government agency for youth, Cristosal, Save the Children, an education NGO, an international organisation, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, a CSO for local development, a feminist organisation, NGOs and civil society organisations, San Salvador & Santa Ana, March 2018; Comunica, "[La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás](#)", 12 February 2016.
197. Interviews with a frontline youth worker and representatives of a civil society organisation and an NGO, San Salvador, March 2018.
198. Interviews with Mauricio Gaborit, a frontline youth worker and representatives of Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes and a feminist organisation, San Salvador, Santa Ana & Mexico City, March-April 2018; Amnesty International, "Home Sweet Home? Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador's role in a deepening refugee crisis", London, 2016; HRW (Human Rights Watch), "Closed Doors: Mexico's failure to protect Central American refugee and migrant children", 2016.
199. Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, Mauricio Gaborit, a frontline youth worker and representatives of ORMUSA, Save the Children, an education NGO, a CSO for local development, a feminist organisation, civil society organisations, and an NGO, San Salvador & Santa Ana, March 2018; D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014.
200. Interviews with Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, Mauricio Gaborit, a journalist and representatives of ORMUSA, CCNIS, Save the Children, an education NGO and civil society organisations, San Salvador, March 2018; D. J. Cantor, "The New Wave: Forced displacement caused by crime in Central America and Mexico", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 33(3), 2014; El Mundo, "[Más de 100 familias dejan cada mes sus hogares por acoso de pandillas](#)", 25 May 2015; Comunica, "[La incertidumbre de dejar todo atrás](#)", 12 February 2016.
201. A forthcoming (Cristosal) study will examine some receiving communities to understand the basic actors and conditions that are needed to achieve durable solutions; Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, Mauricio Gaborit, a journalist and representatives of Cristosal, ORMUSA, IDHUCA, Fundación Quetzalcoatl, UNHCR, a feminist organisation, civil society organisations and an NGO, San Salvador, Santa Ana and Mexico City, March 2018.
202. Institute for Economics and Peace, "Global Peace Index 2017" .. Also see: "Estimación del Costo Económico de la Violencia en El Salvador 2014", Redibacen, April 2016.
203. Interviews with the head of a national schools' association, two journalists, an academic researcher, a frontline youth worker, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, and representatives of IDHUCA and two NGOs, San Salvador & Usulután, March 2018.
204. "Estimación del Costo Económico de la Violencia en El Salvador 2014", Redibacen, April 2016.
205. Consejo Nacional de la Pequeña Empresa de El Salvador (CONAPES), Informe Annual, 2017; Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (FUSADES), "Extorsiones a la micro y pequeña empresa de El Salvador", 2016; Central America Data, "[Más extorsiones, menos empresas](#)", 7 May 2018; Elsalvador.com, "[Cada semana dos empresas cierran debido a las extorsiones](#)", 4 May 2018.
206. Interview with the head of a national organisation for small businesses, Sonsonate; Interviews with representatives of the Procuraduría General de la República, a journalist, Jeannette Aguilar of IUDOP, an academic researcher, the head of a national association for small businesses and representatives of Cristosal and an education NGO, San Salvador & Sonsonate, March 2018.
207. Interviews with a journalist, a frontline youth worker, a consultant on security and development in the region, the head of a national schools' association, and representatives from USCRI CA, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, a CSO for local development and a CSO for human rights and peace, San Salvador and by Skype, March 2018.
208. Interviews with a journalist, a frontline youth worker and representatives of a civil society organisation, NGO and donor, a consultant on security and development in the region, San Salvador & by Skype, March-April 2018.
209. Sarah Kinosian & James Bosworth, "Security for Sale", March 2018.
210. Sarah Kinosian & James Bosworth, "Security for Sale", March 2018; Interviews with a journalist and an academic researcher, San Salvador, March 2018.
211. Interviews with a frontline youth worker, the head of a national schools' association, a church minister, a consultant on security and development in the region and representatives from the Heinrich Böll Foundation, San Salvador & by Skype, March 2018.
212. Interviews with the head of a national schools' association, the head of a national association for small businesses and representatives of ORMUSA, Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes, IDHUCA an NGO, San Salvador, Sonsonate & Mexico City, March-April 2018.



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