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INSTITUTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN  
CIENCIAS SOCIO HUMANISTAS

# My family, my roots, my future

## Migration and Youth in the Western Highlands of Guatemala





Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

This document offers a summary description of the *Estudio migración internacional y juventud en el altiplano occidental guatemalteco*, commissioned in 2021 by Catholic Relief Services – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and carried out by The Institute for Research in Socio-Humanistic Sciences, Department of Studies on Global and Territorial Dynamics, associated with the Vice-Rectoría for Research and Projection of the Rafael Landívar University in Guatemala City.

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## Acknowledgments

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) acknowledges the hard work of the following organizations and teams that made the research and preparation of this document possible:

- The Institute for Research in Socio-Humanistic Sciences (ICESH), Department of Studies on Global and Territorial Dynamics (DEDGT), associated with the Vice-Rectorate for Research and Projection (VRIP) of the Rafael Landívar University (URL), whose research team carried out the study.
- *Asociación para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Juventud* (ADESJU), whose community interviewers carried out the quantitative data collection in the field.
- The Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning Team from CRS/Guatemala Office.

We also extend sincere gratitude to our local partners, communities and individuals who participated in the research. Thank you for your valuable participation and for telling your story.

## Presentation summary

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) recognizes that to understand international migration, it is important to not only examine the causes that drive people to leave but also the factors that encourage them to stay in their communities.

In 2020, CRS commissioned a study on the push and retention factors of migration. This document represents a summary of a follow-up study, carried out in two phases between July 2021 and September 2022 in 18 municipalities in four departments (Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Totonicapán, and Huehuetenango), focused on factors that promote rootedness to better link CRS's interventions around migration in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.

The objective was **to identify, among existing socioeconomic initiatives that target young people, elements that have potential to function as alternatives to irregular migration, rooting youth to their communities.** The study examined the reality in the selected municipalities and outlined current local socio-economic initiatives for youth. In addition, the study took a closer look at the reality of young people in this region of the country, analyzing potential push and retention factors of migration.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

The study used a broad theoretical framework that considered push factors involved in the decision to migrate (*drivers*) and retention factors that intervene in the decision to stay (*aspiration/capacity for mobility*). Quantitative data was collected through secondary sources and a survey with 755 randomly selected young people between 18 and 30 years of age from 12 municipalities. For qualitative data collection, CRS selected stakeholders

involved in CRS programming or other local initiatives. A total of 181 people from 15 municipalities participated in 22 focus groups (with youth) and 62 in-depth interviews (with youth and key informants).

Secondary source research and document review indicate that the selected municipalities are characterized by structural elements that have the potential to facilitate and trigger international migration in young people: high poverty (17 of 18 municipalities have more than half of their population living in poverty), low human development (12 of

18 present at medium level and 6 at low level on the Human Development Index), and low education levels (between 15% and 46% of the population have not completed any type of education).

According to the 2018 Population Census, one in four people living in these municipalities are young (between 18 and 30 years of age). They face a variety of complex educational, socio-economic, political, community, and cultural challenges that affected their ability to fully develop in their communities of origin. Most of the young people surveyed dropped out of school between the ages of 10 and 20 or never studied. Less than half (48%) had (partially) completed the primary level. Among those who worked or worked and studied, only 4% had a formal employment contract and their existing jobs generated insufficient income, with 12% indicating some level of food insecurity.

In addition, many young people were dissatisfied with the government at the national (72%) and municipal (70%) level. Only 7% participated in a neighborhood committee and 5% in a political party or civic committee, indicating low levels of political participation. By contrast, they showed greater participation in community groups, with 42% participating in a religious or church group, 28% in a sports team and 13% in a group linked to cultural traditions or festivals. Other key challenges identified were discrimination on ethnic grounds, the *machismo* culture and gender gaps in nearly all spheres. Young women were educationally disadvantaged compared to men, assumed roles in the home at an early age and faced the greatest difficulties in accessing jobs and decent wages.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

Despite these *drivers* of migration, **7 out of 10 young people surveyed showed an intention to stay within the next 12 months.** Of the 29% with an intention to migrate, migratory intention was higher among men; those who completed middle school; those working without a formal employment contract; and among those engaged in activities such as ranching, construction and agriculture. Their main reported motivations confirm that the intention to migrate is closely related to the structural socio-economic problems faced by youth in the selected communities: 51% of respondents indicated that they would migrate to improve income and 40% to seek job opportunities.

Even though youth reported economic motivations to explain their intent to migrate, further statistical analysis identified other variables associated with greater migratory intent. Family support for migration increased the probability of migrating by more than 100%, followed by thinking about living abroad (73%) and having relatives or acquaintances in the U.S. (29-33%).

Furthermore, the study found that of the 71% of respondents who expressed an intention to stay, 42% did so because of structural limitations in the capacity for mobility (“involuntary immobility”), such as lack the funds to migrate or absence of parental authorization. On the other hand, 58% found themselves in a situation of “voluntary immobility”, as their motivations for remaining were related to an aspiration to stay, with 51% expressing that they did not want to be far from family.

**These data confirm the importance of family in the decision to migrate or to stay.** In 62% of cases, immobility was related to situations in the family environment, with 51% not wanting to be away from family and 11% not having parental authorization.

Further statistical analysis revealed additional attachment variables. Community participation in religious groups and cultural traditions reduced the probability of migrating by 35% and 48%, respectively, as did land ownership (37%). Young people who reported that there are opportunities in their communities were 56% less likely to migrate, making it the variable with the greatest impact on intention.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

Young people felt a strong attachment to their community of origin: 97% expressed feeling proud of their historical and ethnic roots and 92% indicated that they would miss their community if they had to migrate. However, 41% recognized that they did not always find opportunities in their communities to get ahead and be fulfilled, which led to the conclusion that for **attachment to the community and the family to function as retention**

**factors, attractive conditions for youth in their communities of origin must also exist.**

An overview of current socio-economic initiatives demonstrates that even if initiatives exist, they are not always appropriate for young people. Young people felt excluded from existing initiatives, which are primarily directed toward adults. They felt there



were insufficient options that met their interests (in technology, tourism, and the service industry, among others), that addressed other areas of life beyond the socio-economic (including psychosocial assistance and recreational and artistic activities), and that have an impact beyond the individual level, potentiating the construction of community and cultural ties.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

Based on these findings, CRS has identified seven key messages to guide its interventions around youth migration and promote rootedness in the Western Highlands of Guatemala:

- 1. Strong family ties and family attachment can significantly impact the intention of youth to migrate.** International development agencies should focus programmatic efforts on the family unit, strengthening family integration and promoting family livelihoods that include an active role for youth.
- 2. Youth are most eager to participate in initiatives that they lead and that reflect their aspirations.** To achieve the greatest acceptance by youth, initiatives should integrate a positive youth development framework, ensuring youth participation in program design and ongoing youth governance during implementation, such as through youth advisory councils.
- 3. Youth aspire to work beyond the agricultural production sector.** Economic activities should focus on youth interests in technology, commerce, services, and industry. In agricultural initiatives, efforts should intentionally link youth to relevant steps in the value chain.
- 4. Community participation, especially in leadership and decision-making spaces, fosters youth engagement.** To increase programmatic outcomes, development programs should prioritize capacity strengthening in youth leadership and working with communities to include youth in decision-making spaces, such as local development committees and cultural and religious leadership organizations.
- 5. Economic opportunity is only part of the solution.** Young people seek integrated programs that include elements such as psychosocial support and recreational and artistic activities. Programs should not only provide youth with

economic opportunities but also motivate and inspire them through activities that help them manage their emotions, address discrimination, and connect with their cultural identity.

- 6. Development programs for youth should examine, challenge, and seek to transform inequitable gender structures** by not only encouraging female participation but actively addressing the factors that foster gender inequalities as an integral part of program development, with a focus on building female leadership.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

- 7. Robustly investing in communities of origin** is the central factor to overcome high levels of poverty and low levels of human development and provide youth with an opportunity and desire to live and thrive in their home community.



Mexicans look at the other side of the border fence, reinforced with barbed wire and close video surveillance so that no one passes in Playas de Tijuana, Mexico that borders Imperial Beach, San Diego California.

Photographer: Osca Leiva/Silverlight for CRS use only

## Introduction

### Background

In 2020, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) commissioned a large study on push and retention factors of migration in Guatemala titled, *Between Rootedness and the Decision to Migrate: A study on the main factors that influence the intention to remain in the country of origin or migrate*. Compared to many analyses of the past, the study examined not only the causes that drive people to leave but more critically, the factors that encourage them to stay in their communities (CRS, 2020).

This follow-up study, conducted between July 2021 and September 2022, focused on some of the factors that could promote rootedness to better link CRS's interventions around migration in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. The objective was to identify, among socioeconomic initiatives that target young people in communities with high and low levels of migration, elements that have potential to function as alternatives to irregular migration, rooting youth to their communities. In addition, the study took a closer look at the reality of young people, to better understand the factors that drive migration as well as those that promote permanence in the country.

### Framework

#### Migration and immobility

Experts in migration studies (Massey, Hugo, & Kouaouci, 1998) have concluded that any satisfactory theory that seeks to explain migration must consider the following:

- Structural forces in the countries of origin.
- Structural forces in the countries of destination.
- Social, economic, and cultural structures that arise between the countries of origin and destination; and
- Motivations, objectives, and aspirations of migrants.

In recent decades, various scientists have argued that it is equally important to consider immobility studies to understand why people do not migrate. Therefore, a fifth consideration was added:

- Structural forces that restrict or resist migration in and between communities of origin and destination, as well as the aspirations of the actors who respond to these forces (Schewell, 2019).



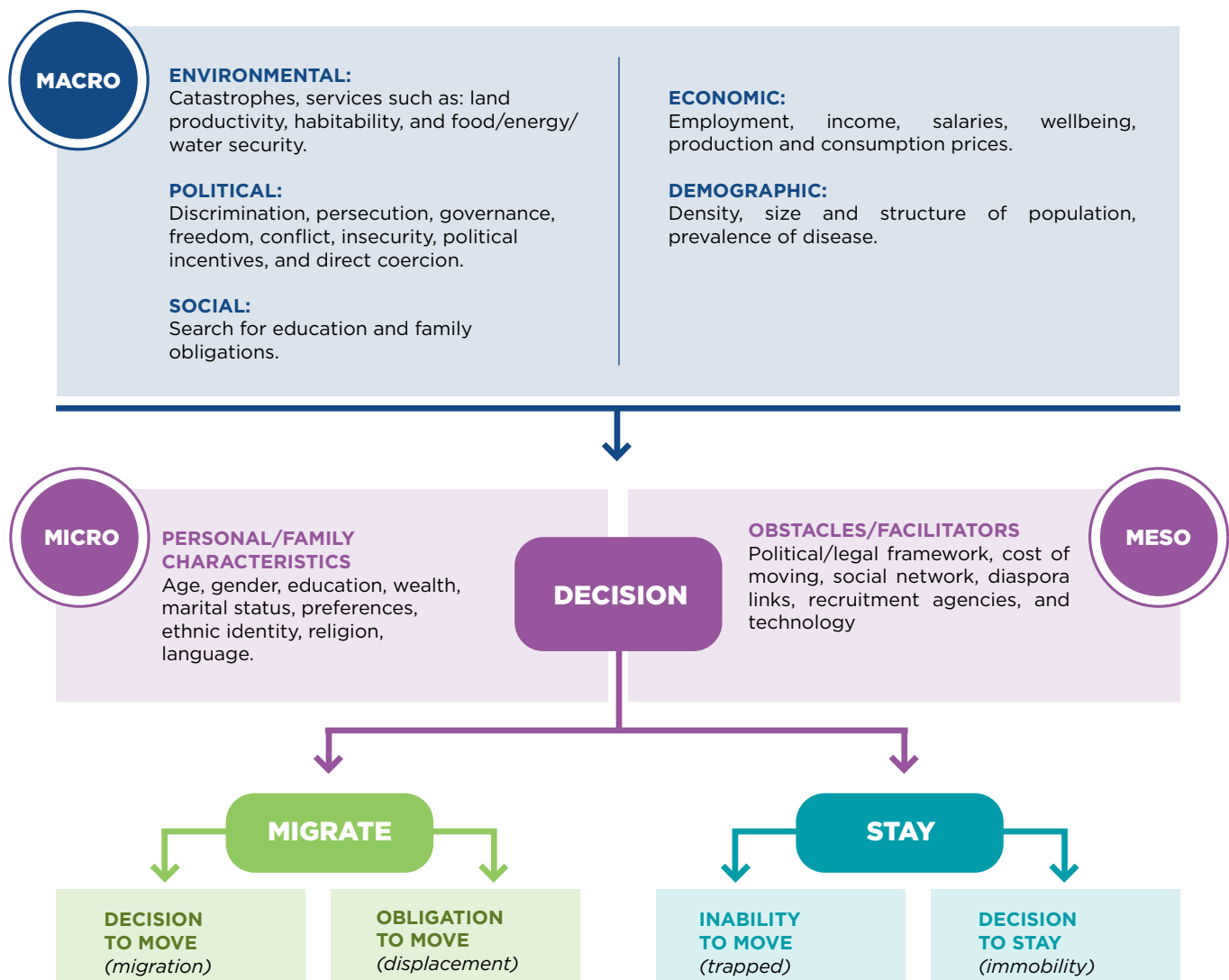
Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

Based on the above, a broad theoretical framework was used in the design and analysis of the results of this study that considered both factors involved in the decision to migrate and factors that intervene in the decision to stay, as shown in the following two explanatory models:

- The explanatory model of the driving factors of migration (figure 1): these answer the question of why young people migrate. This framework identifies five broad categories of drivers at the macro level, whose variability can create conditions for migration: demographic, economic, social, political and environmental.

**Figure 1**

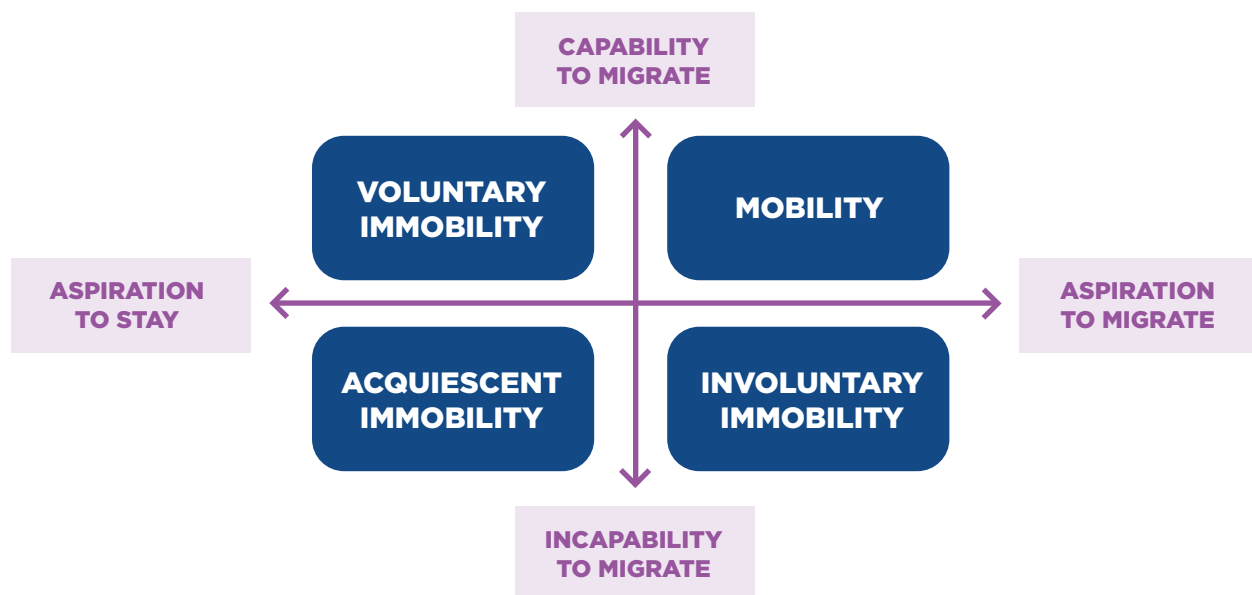
*Explanatory model of the driving factors of migration (UK, 2011)*



**Note:** Adopted from Foresight: Migration and Global Climate Change. Final Project Report: Executive Summary (p.9) by UK Government Office for Science, 2011.

- The explanatory framework of immobility, specifically the aspiration/mobility capacity model: to explain why young people remain in their community/country by looking at the relationship between the aspiration to migrate and the capacity to do so. This framework identifies the following four categories (Schewell, 2015):
  - **Mobility** (has the aspiration to migrate and the capacity to do so)
  - **Involuntary immobility** (has the aspiration but not the capacity to migrate)
  - **Acquiescent immobility** (has the aspiration to remain and the incapacity to migrate)
  - **Voluntary immobility** (has the aspiration to remain and the capacity to migrate)

**Figure 2**  
*Aspiration/capacity model in migration<sup>1</sup>*



According to this framework, immobility can be the result of structural limitations in the capacity to migrate or can result from an aspiration to stay voluntarily or acquiescently (Schewell, 2019). It considers people who do not migrate as active participants (as opposed to just vulnerable or disadvantaged), as it recognizes their capacity for agency and conscious decision making. Rootedness or attachment is to be understood as an element within the retention factors that could be associated with immobility, built from one or several of the following ties: family, economic, professional, cultural, territorial, historical and/or political.

<sup>1</sup> Based on Schewell (2015, 2019)

**Table 1**  
*Explanatory framework of immobility*

As a result of structural limitations in the capacity to move (involuntary or forced immobility)	As a result of the aspiration to stay voluntarily or acquiescently
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political and legal limitations (i.e., migration controls).</li> <li>• Economic limitations (i.e., lack of financial resources).</li> <li>• Social limitations (i.e., lack of human or social capital, such as migration networks, knowledge of migration routes or guides).</li> <li>• Physical limitations (i.e., border walls).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Retention factors:</b> attractive conditions at home that reinforce the preference to stay (i.e., attachment to the homeland, community, family, spiritual and religious values).</li> <li>• <b>Push factors:</b> conditions in other places that reduce the intention to migrate (i.e., stress of leaving home, dangers of migratory journey, xenophobia and racism, moral depravity).</li> <li>• <b>Internal constraints:</b> elements of individual psychology that influence decision-making (i.e., lack of motivation for achievement, risk aversion)</li> </ul>

## Migration and youth in Guatemala

High levels of poverty and insufficient growth and economic development, as well as high levels of violence are among the structural causes of migration from the three countries of northern Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) (Canales, 2019).

The three northern Central American countries have gained notoriety in the last decade due to the migration crises that have become visible in the U.S. In 2014, then U.S. President Barack Obama made visible a “humanitarian crisis” due to the arrival of unaccompanied minors and family units at the southern border of the U.S., which was causing a collapse in the care capacity in immigration shelters and immigration courts. In 2018, during the administration of President Donald Trump, the issue was back in the news with the implementation of family separation at the border and resulting public outcry. In October 2018, the first caravan of Central American migrants departed from Honduras, seeking to travel in a visible and massive way towards the U.S. Since this first caravan, several more caravans have been registered.

These events have highlighted the most recent migration dynamics in the three Central American countries:

- a. **Diversification of the profile of the migrant.** Although the profile continues to be mostly male and adult, data indicate a transition towards family migration with an increasing presence of women, unaccompanied minors and family units.
- b. **Increasingly mixed flows.** In these flows, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between those who move motivated by economic factors and those who are forcibly displaced and need international protection.

**c. New migratory modalities.** Although the migratory flow continues to move mainly clandestinely and making use of coyote networks, recent years have also seen massive and visible exodus that defy the increasingly restrictive policies on irregular migration in the region (Gramajo, 2020).

In the case of Guatemalan migration, recent studies conducted by the Universidad Rafael Landívar (Gramajo and Rocha, 2017; Gramajo, 2019; and Roldán et al., 2020) affirm that although traditional patterns of internal and cross-border migration persist, international migration is currently the predominant trend among the Guatemalan population. The reasons for migrating are increasingly mixed, however, economic motivations and family reunification in the U.S. predominate.

In the most recent Americas Barometer Survey of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), conducted in 2021, 64% of respondents who intended to migrate indicated that the most important reason they had thought about migrating was the lack of economic opportunities. This data is relevant because it shows that nearly two out of every three Guatemalans who are interested in migrating seek employment opportunities abroad. In addition, according to this study, the greatest migratory intention was found among young people, men and those who self-identify as indigenous (Osorio, 2021).



■ Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

In the context of this study, the term youth is defined as young people between 18 and 30 years of age. According to the most recent Population Census of 2018, 36% of the national population is between the ages of 13 and 30, and within this population 62% are over 18 years of age. The 2018 Census also confirmed that seven out of 10 Guatemalans who migrated internationally between 2002 and 2018 did so before reaching 30 years of age (CONJUVE-UNFPA, 2020).

At the socioeconomic level, the young population face high levels of poverty. The results of the 2014 National Survey of Living Conditions (Encovi) show that 6 out of every ten young people between 13 and 19 years old live in poverty. This increases in rural areas, where 75% of the young population between 13 and 19 years old and 80% of the indigenous youth population live in poverty (Plan Internacional y Paz Joven, 2022).



## Methodology

### Summary

The study was carried out between July 2021 and September 2022 and consisted of two phases. A mixed methodology was used combining quantitative and qualitative tools.

Field work was carried out in a total of 18 municipalities in four departments of the Guatemalan Western Highlands (Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Totonicapán, and Huehuetenango).

### Ethical considerations

The study was carried out following ethical research guidelines.<sup>2</sup> Only young people between the ages of 18 and 30 were included in the study so that all participants were of legal age and could provide informed consent. Safety protocols were followed due to the COVID-19 pandemic context.

### Phases and geographical scope

- **First phase (July to September 2021):** Researchers developed a **socio-economic characterization** of the selected municipalities based on secondary sources. Researchers conducted exploratory field work through interviews with key actors and focus groups on August and September 2021, to **map and outline existing socio-economic initiatives for young people** in 10 municipalities in two departments (Quetzaltenango and San Marcos). The research team considered that mapping in these two departments was representative of the larger study population.
- **Second phase (March to September 2022):** Researchers conducted specialized surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups with youth, as well as individual semi-structured interviews with key informants, in 12 municipalities in four departments (Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Totonicapán, and Huehuetenango), followed by an analysis of the collected data. Data was collected to understand the **reality of young people** and the **push and retention factors of migration**, and to **identify elements that could function as alternatives to irregular migration**, rooting youth to their communities.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

<sup>2</sup> The Research Protocol for this study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Rafael Landívar University's Vice-Rector for Research and Projection.

## Selection of municipalities

The study sought to include both municipalities with high migration rates (above 20% of households) and municipalities with low migration rates (less than or equal to 10% of households), to establish whether there were significant differences between the reality and perspectives of young people in both categories of municipalities.

Municipalities were selected according to the following criteria:

- Municipal migration rate as a percentage of households.<sup>3</sup>
- Average deportation events per 10,000 inhabitants based on the records of deportation events of the Guatemalan Institute of Migration.
- Municipalities with CRS presence through community development projects and/or where the URL had contacts.

## Qualitative tools

The qualitative strategy consisted of fieldwork through focus groups and interviews in a total of 15 municipalities in four departments (first and second phase).

- Individual semi-structured interviews with local key informants (officials from governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as community and religious leaders), to get their perspective on the reality of young people and the context of migration.
- In-depth interviews with young entrepreneurs or beneficiaries of local initiatives, between 18 and 30 years of age, to outline socio-economic alternatives from the perspective of young people.
- Focus groups with young people between 18 and 30 years of age (between 5 and 8 people in each focus group), who are and who are not involved in local initiatives.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

<sup>3</sup> This rate is the relationship between households that have at least one migrant and the total number of households by municipality, based on the results of the 2018 Population Census.

**Table 2**  
Geographical scope of focus groups and interviews

	PHASE I (2021)	PHASE II (2022)	TOTAL
<b>Departments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quetzaltenango</li> <li>• San Marcos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quetzaltenango</li> <li>• San Marcos</li> <li>• Totonicapán</li> <li>• Huehuetenango</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<b>Municipalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• San Juan Ostuncalco</li> <li>• Cajolá</li> <li>• San Martín Sacatepéquez</li> <li>• Concepción Chiquirichapa</li> <li>• Palestina de los Altos</li> <li>• Tejutla</li> <li>• San Miguel Ixtahuacán</li> <li>• Sipacapa</li> <li>• Concepción Tutuapa</li> <li>• Comitancillo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Todos Santos Cuchumatán</li> <li>• San Juan Atitán</li> <li>• Chiantla</li> <li>• Santa María Chiquimula</li> <li>• Santa Lucía la Reforma</li> <li>• Tejutla</li> <li>• Cajolá</li> </ul>	<b>15</b> (Cajolá and Tejutla were visited in both phases)

**Map 1**  
Selected municipalities and departments



Source: Own elaboration of URL based on maps of the National Geographic Institute 2022.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

In the first phase, researchers interviewed 106 people, 53 women and 53 men through 17 focus groups and 36 interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with young entrepreneurs or beneficiaries of local initiatives, all of whom were between the ages of 18 and 30. Additional interviews were conducted with key actors of variable age. Among the key actors interviewed were municipal officials who work with youth, women or in food security and health programs and non-governmental organizations or associations that do organizational or productive work. Religious leaders were also included, such as priests, members of Catholic youth groups, as well as collective (cooperatives) or individual productive initiatives.

The work of the second phase focused on identifying local initiatives that represent alternatives to irregular migration, based on the findings of the first phase. Thirty-one individual or paired interviews were conducted with 75 people with some type of entrepreneurship or economic initiative, of which 42 were women and 33 were men; in addition, researchers conducted 5 focus groups, attended by 39 young people. At least four groups were made up of youth who are not part of CRS initiatives and in two cases do not participate in organized activities.

## Quantitative tools

The quantitative strategy consisted of a socio-economic characterization of selected municipalities from secondary sources and a survey in 12 municipalities in 4 departments with the participation of young people between 18 and 30 years of age.

- Representativeness from a random probabilistic, two-stage and stratified sampling design in domains with high and low migration rates.
- Sample size of 855 surveys: 420 surveys in municipalities with high migration rates and 435 surveys in municipalities with low migration rates.
- 57 Primary Sampling Units (PSU). Within each sector, 15 households were selected randomly and prior to July 28 (when field work started); in each household, a young person between 18 and 30 years of age was surveyed.
- Data collection in the field was carried out in person through home visits between July 28 and September 30, 2022, using the CommCare technology tool on Android devices.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Data collection was carried out by interviewers from the Association for Sustainable Youth Development (ADESJU)

**Table 3***Overview of sectors by department, municipality, and domain.*

NO.	DEPARTMENT	MUNICIPALITY	SECTORS	PLANNED SURVEYS
<b>Municipalities with high rates of migration</b>				
1	Quetzaltenango	Cajolá	4	60
2	Huehuetenango	Unión Cantinil	4	60
3	Huehuetenango	Todos Santos Cuchumatán	9	135
4	Quetzaltenango	Concepción Chiquirichapa	5	75
5	Huehuetenango	San Juan Atitán	6	90
<b>Municipalities with low rates of migration</b>				
1	San Marcos	Tejutla	5	75
2	Huehuetenango	Santiago Chimaltenango	2	30
3	Huehuetenango	Chiantla	8	120
4	Huehuetenango	San Sebastián Huehuetenango	3	45
5	San Marcos	Sipacapa	3	45
6	Totonicapán	Santa María Chiquimula	6	90
7	Totonicapán	Santa Lucía La Reforma	2	30
		Total	57	855

The data collection process was carried out between July 28 and September 30, 2022. A total of 1,294 dwellings were visited and the database consisted of a total of 855 questionnaires, of which 88.3% (755) were valid questionnaires (completed and filled out) and 12 % were missing questionnaires (not completed). The expected non-response rate for this study was 20%. Households were selected completely randomly from a previous selection made on maps.

Out of the 755 completed surveys, 470 were conducted with women and 285 were conducted with men. The selection of participants was completely random, surveying the young people who were in the selected households at the time of the visits. In both migration domains (municipalities with high migration rates and municipalities with low migration rates) the proportion of women and men found in the households at the time of the survey was similar. The majority of respondents reside in rural areas (632), compared to those residing in urban areas (123).

### Statistical analysis

For the preparation of the final research report, a mixed-methods analysis strategy was developed based on the main findings that resulted from the quantitative analysis of survey respondent data as well as qualitative analysis of information collected from focus group discussions and key informant interviews.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

## Qualitative analysis

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed. The qualitative analysis was done with the support of the *Atlas.ti* (first phase) and *Dedoose* software (second phase). Based on the structure of the research instruments and the established categories of analysis, a selective coding of the information was carried out. The coding process allowed the generation of maps that made it possible to analyse the extracts from the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups, to make comparisons and triangulations between the reality in the different municipalities visited and from the diversity of actors interviewed. Subsequently, researchers began the process of analysing and organizing the information to generate the research report.

## Quantitative analysis



■ Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

The analysis of the survey results was carried out by the DEDGT research team using specialized statistical analysis software programs (R, SPSS and Excel) for database management, as well as specific tools for the descriptive and inferential analysis of the research results. All the records identified as valid questionnaires from the sample were used for a total of 755 records. A descriptive analysis of the sample was carried out according to the general characteristics of the individual and the household: the educational environment, the economic environment,

the political environment, and the community and cultural environment; and specific questions related to the migratory intention.

A probabilistic linear econometric model was developed to identify additional variables that influence the intention to migrate of the young people surveyed. The coefficients indicate the probability of young people's intention to migrate, which was the dependent variable. This was reclassified as a dichotomous variable, with 1 equal to "Yes" and 0 equal to "No". The responses of the explanatory variables were reclassified in the same way. Initially, a model was calculated with the majority of variables that, based on theory or logical assumption, are considered to have an influence on the intention to migrate in the coming months. From this model, most of the explanatory variables turned out not to be statistically significant, so a second model was calculated with those that were significant. Again, variables without statistical significance were identified, so a third model was estimated and accepted.

## Findings

### Socio-economic characteristics

According to the 2018 Population Census (INE, 2018), the selected 18 municipalities had a total population of 636,938, of whom more than 51% was female and 144,156 people were between the ages of 18 and 30.

Except for the municipalities of Unión Cantinil and Chiantla in Huehuetenango and Tejutla in San Marcos, most of the population self-identify as indigenous. The most important linguistic community in the selected municipalities is the Mam population, followed by the K'iché population. In addition, the majority resides in rural areas, apart from the municipalities of Cajolá (completely urban) and Santiago Chimaltenango and Concepción Chiquirichapa (> 50% urban).

Among the most important economic activities are agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, construction, domestic services, and health services.

### Reality in selected municipalities

- **High levels of poverty:** 17 of the 18 municipalities have more than half of their population living in poverty, according to the Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN) method (Zapil, 2022), with three municipalities exceeding 50% of their population living in conditions of extreme poverty. The only exception is Concepción Chiquirichapa, where 38% live in poverty.
- **Low levels of human development:** 12 of the 18 municipalities present a medium level and six present a low level of human development, according to the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) at the municipal level (2022).
- **High percentage of young population:** one in four people are young (between the ages of 18 and 30 years old), compared to the total population in the selected municipalities, according to the 2018 Population Census.
- **Educational challenges:** In many municipalities, a high percentage of the population has not completed any type of education (highest is San Juan Atitán at 46%). Only very few have managed to access higher level education (highest is Concepción Chiquirichapa at 4%).
- **Varying rates of international migration:** Rates range between 40% and 1% of households, with all municipalities showing a traditional, male migrant profile with an average age between 23 and 27 years old.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

## Characteristics of study participants

### Participant data from interviews and focus groups

For qualitative data collection, a total of 181 (95 women and 86 men) key informants and young people between the ages of 18 and 30 participated in 62 in-depth interviews and 22 focus groups (first and second phase).

- In the first phase, 106 people were interviewed (53 women and 53 men) through 17 focus groups and 36 interviews.
- In the second phase, 75 people were reached (42 women and 33 men) through 5 focus groups and 26 interviews.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

### Participant data from youth survey

For quantitative data collection, researchers visited a total of 1,294 homes (second phase). Of the sample size of 855 surveys, researchers obtained 755 (88%) valid surveys of young people between the ages of 18 and 30: 422 in Huehuetenango, 123 in Quetzaltenango, 108 in San Marcos, and 102 in Totonicapán. The non-response rate (NRR) was 12% (the expected rate was 20%).

- **Gender:** 470 (62%) of the respondents identified as female and 285 (38%) as male.
- **Area:** 632 (84%) of the surveys were conducted in rural areas and 123 (16%) in urban areas.
- **Ethnic self-identification:** Most self-identified as Maya (67%), followed by those who self-identified as Ladino (33%), with 82% of respondents from municipalities with high migration rates self-identifying as Maya, while in municipalities with low migration rates the proportion of Ladino and Maya was almost the same.
- **Linguistic community:** Most indicated that Mam was their native language (46%), followed by Spanish (41%), and K'iche (11%). Most respondents from municipalities with high migration rates indicated that Mam was their native language, while in municipalities with low migration rates, the majority indicated that Spanish was their native language.
- **Religious affiliation:** Most common religious affiliation was Catholicism (54%), followed by Evangelism (35%), with 8% of respondents reported not practicing any religion and the remaining practicing other religions.
- **Marital status:** Most respondents were single (60%), followed by married (21%), and in a common law union (19%). A higher percentage of single people (63%) was found in municipalities with high migration rates, compared to 58% in municipalities with low migration rates.



- **Household composition:** 41% of the respondents have at least one child. Most of the respondents identified their father (51%) as head of the household, followed by those who identified their partner (14%) or themselves (14%), with only 10% indicating the mother as head of household. For youth who identified themselves as heads of household, 24% were male and 8% female.
- **Living conditions:** Most of the respondents' homes are owned (93%), with most homes being connected to electricity (88%), water (82%), and fewer to drainage (45%) and telephone (10%). The average number of people in the home was 5.5, with a higher percentage of respondents living with their mother (33%) and siblings (24%) in municipalities with high migration rates, while in municipalities with low migration rates a higher percentage was observed living with their partner (17%).

## Reality of youth

The survey, interviews and focus groups explored the different areas in young people's lives to better understand their reality as well as push and retention factors of migration. Below is a summary of the main challenges faced by youth in the selected municipalities.

## Education

- **Early school dropout for essentially economic reasons.** Most of the young people surveyed dropped out of school between the ages of 10 and 20 or never studied. Eight percent of young people were registered for school in 2022. The rest were not registered due to the following economic reasons: lack of money (53%) and the need to work (20%). The average age of school dropout was 13 years (which coincides with the end of primary school), without considering young people who never studied.
- A young man with dark hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and a backpack, stands on a paved walkway in front of a building with yellow and red walls. He is holding a book or folder in his left hand. The background shows a clear sky and some greenery.
- Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS
- **Low level of schooling.** Almost half (48%) have completed (27%) or only partially completed (21%) primary school; 10% did not access any educational level and only 2% reached higher or university level. Most parents did not have access to any education (48%), which is even higher among the mothers of the young people surveyed (63%).
  - **Gender gap.** Men have reached higher levels of education (for example, 15% completed high school, compared to 10% of women) and a higher proportion of women (11%) compared to men (9%) do not have any level of education. On average, men dropped out at 15 years and women at 14 years,<sup>5</sup> with additional reasons applying to why women dropped out (i.e., because their parents did not want them to study, because they got married, and because of household chores, among others). Participants shared the perception that a career is not an option for women because they will not be able to exercise their training due to the demands of

<sup>5</sup> If young people who do not have any level of education are eliminated, men have stopped studying on average one year after women; men have left school at 15 while women at 14.

marriage and the home. Other women find it difficult to continue studying because they take on caretaking tasks at home, such as caring for younger siblings or doing housework.

“Well, I finished sixth grade in 2008; my father has been in the US since then, he was always away. He didn’t let me continue my studies, so I didn’t continue studying for about six years; I was left wondering what I was going to do with my life because in agriculture, as people said, it is very difficult. I have worked with my parents, but one of them gets very tired; I even said to my father: ‘I want to study’, but he said no, that when you are a woman you don’t have the right to study”.

-Group of young people, Talmax, Concepción Chiquirichapa, personal communication, August 31, 2021

Furthermore, the interviews and focus groups revealed the following challenges:

- Limitations in educational coverage.
- Limitations in access to the labor market for those who completed their studies.
- Loss of interest in studying.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in an increase in dropout rates.
- Gender gaps in access to education.

### Socio-economic situation

- **High levels of informality at work:** Among the young people who work or work and study (45%), only 4% have a formal contract and only 3% have social security. Among respondents who were not working or searching, the main reasons given were: little education or training (32%), lack of experience (23%), not finding a job they like (12%) and the place of residence (8%).
- **Insufficient income to cover the basic food basket:** The average monthly income of young people is Q1,309/\$166, while the average monthly family income is Q1,749/\$221. This income is below Guatemalan minimum wage Q3,122.55/\$408<sup>6</sup> and is not enough to cover the basic food basket, estimated at Q3,454.98/\$451.<sup>7</sup> Average family incomes are higher in municipalities with high migration.
- **Food insecurity:** 12% of those surveyed indicated that they had run out of food in recent months due to lack of money and other resources. The response was almost twice as high for women (15%) than for men 8%, with this number being higher in municipalities with low migration rates.
- **Gender gap:** The fieldwork revealed that women face the greatest difficulties in accessing jobs and decent salaries. 72% of men had income-earning work at the time

<sup>6</sup> According to the Ministry of Labor in 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Basic and Amplified Food Basket, National Institute of Statistics, September 2022

of the survey, compared to 27% of women. 1% of men were dedicated to household chores, compared to 45% of women. The average monthly income was significantly higher among men (Q1,169/\$149) in relation to women (Q449/\$57).

“One stays in the kitchen or in agriculture” - Young woman from Aguacatán

Participants in focus groups and interviews pointed out additional challenges:

- Lack of formal employment opportunities, combined with lack of work experience and inadequate level of education.
- Job opportunities in activities that generate insufficient income.
- Job opportunities that are unsustainable over time.
- Lack of job opportunities that are attractive to youth.
- Deterioration of economic conditions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Difficulties related to living conditions (housing) and land (access, tenure, productivity).

### Political environment

- **Dissatisfaction with the authorities:** 72% are dissatisfied with the government at the national level and 70% are dissatisfied with the government at the municipal level.
- **Low levels of political participation of young people:** 7% participate in a neighborhood committee, 5% in a political party or civic committee, 5% hold a community position and 3% participate in an improvement committee. Of the total number of young people surveyed, 31% participate in at least one community group (26% of women and 38% of men); 76% of those surveyed consider that young people are not interested in political participation.
- **Young people perceive economic difficulties as the main problem:** The main problems that those surveyed indicate affect youth in the municipalities are difficulty getting a job (44%), economic problems (29%), excessive alcohol consumption (12%), lack of access to education (7%), or other reasons (8%).
- **Gender gap:** It is more difficult for women to participate politically because they must take away or add the time they dedicate to reproductive tasks and care work in their homes. They may also face the violence that many men in the family (partners, fathers, fathers-in-law, sons) exert over them, which inhibits their participation. Women are often prevented from participating in political activities, are silenced in meetings or are not taken into account. Discrimination by the community, added to the low self-esteem of many (caused by patriarchal violence) can also inhibit or hinder their participation.

Focus group and interview participants highlighted the following challenges:

- Youth feel excluded from political participation processes.
- Absence of institutional spaces that promote youth participation.
- Gender gap in political participation.

## Community and cultural

- **Young people show greater participation in community groups:** 42% participate in a religious or church group, 28% in a sports team, 13% in a group linked to the cultural traditions or festivals of their community, 7% in an artistic group, 4% in volunteering and 2% in a student group or parent school.
- **Access to digital tools:** 92% have used a cell phone in the last month, 64% have used social networks, 57% some Internet service, 18% a computer and 15% online games.
- **Low levels of perception of violence and discrimination:** 4% have been victims of an act of crime in their community in the last 12 months and 12% have heard of a murder in their community in the last 12 months. Only 9% indicated that they had felt discriminated against in their community.
- **Low levels of perception of risk of disasters or climatic effects:** 53% consider that it is unlikely or not at all likely that there will be a natural disaster in the next 5 years in their community. 26% indicate that they or someone in their immediate family have lost crops due to weather variations.
- **Gender Gap:** Violence against women and early pregnancies are considered part of a *machista* culture that persists in the four departments visited. This violence has many aspects: it can be psychological, sexual, economic, physical, and patrimonial. It can also manifest itself in different ways. On a personal level, it can take the form of rape, pregnancies in girls and adolescents, the abandonment by fathers of their obligations to their children, preventing women from taking an active role in deciding the number of children they wish to have, and receiving inheritances, among others.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

Focus groups and interviewees added the following challenges:

- Discrimination on ethnic grounds.
- Machismo culture, violence against women and early pregnancies.
- Impact of climate change and other environmental problems.
- Criminal violence and the presence of gangs (mentioned in two municipalities).

““

*“...there is a macho culture here and there is very little or almost no participation of women in processes; due to the machismo culture women cannot leave their homes without their children, they cannot go out because they have to do the household chores and always be aware of the needs of the family... unlike men, they have more freedom to go out, to be able to participate in a group.”*

-Youth Group A, Comitancillo, August 13, 2021

””

## Migratory reality of youth

### Intention to migrate among youth

Of the young people who participated in the survey, 29% (222 of 755) indicated their intention to migrate to another country within the next 12 months, with most planning to go to the USA (213). No statistically significant difference was found between the proportion of respondents with migratory intention in municipalities with high migration rates and those with low migration rates. Only 12% (90 of 755) of respondents indicated an intention to migrate internally.

The result of the survey is consistent with data recorded by other similar surveys, for example, those carried out by the LAPOP according to which the migratory intention has fluctuated between 14% (2012) and 36% (2021).

The interviews and focus groups showed that the motivations of those who migrate internationally are varied and are linked above all to the lack of opportunities to improve their living conditions. The driving force is multi-causal, but the central axis has to do with material conditions that are related to people's inability to improve their living conditions.

Another perceived change is that women are migrating more than before, even with the risks of gender-based violence. For some of those interviewed, behind this trend is the *machista* violence experienced in communities of origin, which manifests itself not only in expressions of violence but also in the precariousness of the lives of families. Many of the women who are migrating are single mothers or young mothers with small children that they cannot support.

### Migratory profile

Regarding the profile of young people with the intention to migrate, the study found the following:

- **Gender and ethnic self-identification:** Migratory intention was higher among young men from municipalities with high migration rates. No significant differences in migratory intention were found regarding ethnic self-identification.

- **Level of education:** Migratory intention was higher among young people from municipalities with high migration rates who have completed middle school. Migratory intention was lower among young people who were enrolled in an educational center at the time of the survey.
- **Employment:** Migratory intention was higher among young people from municipalities with high migration rates who were actively looking for work, while in municipalities with low migration rates, intention was higher among people who were studying and working at the same time.
- **Food insecurity:** Migratory intention was higher among young people who, at the time of the survey, responded that they had suffered economic difficulties in the last 12 months that led their household to have a food shortage.

- **Family ownership of productive land:** Among young people who live with family who own productive land that generates food for self-consumption, migratory intention was higher in municipalities with high migration rates but lower in municipalities with low migration rates. In municipalities with low migration rates, migratory intention was higher among young people who live in households that do not have land for cultivation or production for self-consumption.



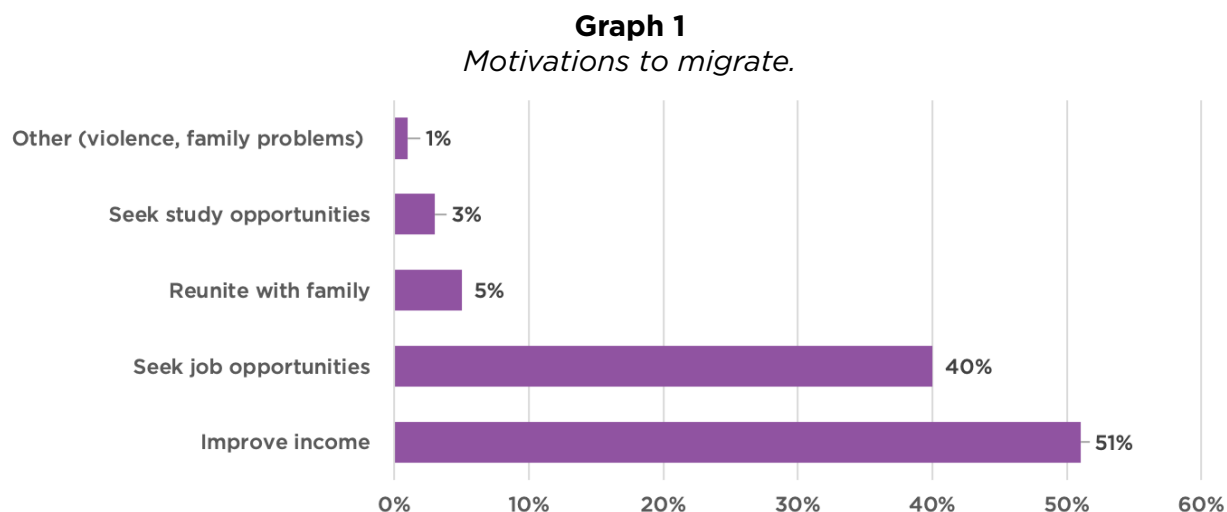
Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

- **Monthly family income:** In municipalities with high migration rates, migratory intention was highest among young people with a monthly family income of > Q2,063.00 (equivalent to USD 270.00), while in municipalities with low migration rates, young people living in higher income families have less or no intention to migrate. Similarly, young people from municipalities with high migration rates who considered their economic situation better than that of a year ago presented greater migratory intention, whilst this same situation resulted in lower migratory intention in municipalities with low migration rates.
- **Ownership of land, housing, and business:** Migratory intention was lower among young people who own land, property and/or a business.
- **Community participation and discrimination:** Migratory intention was higher among young people from municipalities with low migration rates who have not experienced discrimination. No significant differences were found between municipalities with high between young people who participate or do not participate in their community. Regarding community participation, there was no difference in the number of youth expressing intention to migrate and who participate in a group in their community between municipalities with high migration rates and those with low migration rates.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In municipalities with high migration, 3 out of 10 young people (70%) who participate in a group in their community intend to migrate and for municipalities with low migration rates the same is true (72%).

## Motivations to migrate

Of the 222 (29%) respondents who indicated an intention to migrate to another country, 51% said they would do so to improve income and 40% to seek job opportunities or work. Variables such as climate change and the pandemic had little or no impact on the migratory intention of young people.



The respondents who showed migratory intention stated that they will pay for the trip to the USA by taking out a loan with relatives (47%) or with a lender (28%); 10% mentioned that the trip would be paid for by a relative in the USA and 31% indicated that they know a guide or coyote to take them to the USA if they decide to migrate.

## Migration networks

The survey also analyzed migratory intention in relation to migration networks:

- 43% of respondents indicated that they have a member of their household currently living in the USA, with a higher proportion of respondents with relatives in the USA among those who showed an intention to migrate.
- 77% of respondents indicated that they have close friends or neighbors currently living in the USA. Respondents with migratory intent have a higher proportion of close friends or neighbors currently living in the USA.
- 35% of respondents have received remittances from the USA in the past 12 months. This percentage is higher among respondents who did not show an intention to migrate than among those with an intention to migrate.

Finally, 54% of respondents indicated that their family would support them if they decided to migrate. Although 76% of respondents expressed knowing the dangers they may face on the migratory route, they considered that many people migrate due to economic needs (64%), lack of opportunities in the community (15%), sacrifice for family (13%), among other reasons (7%).

## Intention to stay among youth

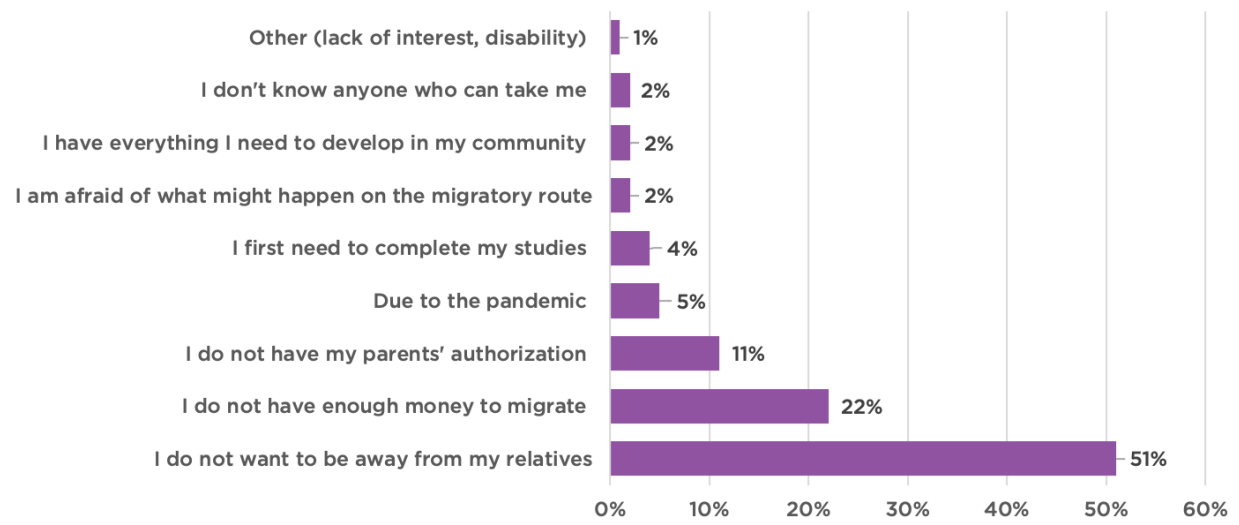
Of the young people who participated in the survey, 71% expressed no intention to migrate to another country within the next 12 months. Of the 533 respondents who indicated an intention to stay, their main motivations were:

- Not wanting to be far from family (51%).
- Lack of funds (22%).
- Lack of authorization from parents (11%).
- Other reasons: due to the pandemic (5%); fear of dangers on migratory route (3%); development opportunities in community (2%); do not know who can take them (2%); and lack of interest or disability (< 1%).



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

**Graph 2**  
*Motivations to stay*



The above graph shows that in 62% of the cases, immobility was related to situations in the family environment: not wanting to be away from family members (51%) or not having parental authorization (11%).



## Variables associated with the intention to migrate or stay

Further statistical analysis through a probabilistic linear econometric model revealed other variables or factors associated with the intention to migrate or stay (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Variables related to the intention to migrate and the intention to stay.*

INTENTION TO MIGRATE	INTENTION TO STAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family support for migrating.</li> <li>• Thinking about living abroad.</li> <li>• Existence of a relative or acquaintance in the USA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived opportunities for youth in the community of origin.</li> <li>• Community participation in groups (traditions, cultural, religious).</li> <li>• Land ownership.</li> </ul>

## Existing local initiatives for youth

The study included exploratory field work through interviews with key actors and focus groups to map and outline existing socio-economic initiatives for young people. Table 5 provides a summary of the findings.

**Table 5**

*Existing activities for youth in selected municipalities*

FIELD	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of educational scholarships, provided by cooperatives, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).</li> <li>• Availability of technical training, provided by NGOs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-economic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little access to economic development opportunities.</li> <li>• Some opportunities to help young people develop their own business by providing training and seed capital, provided by NGOs in alliance with municipal governments.</li> <li>• Some agricultural initiatives (i.e., coffee, flowers, vegetables), directed by cooperatives or associations.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater youth participation in municipalities with a presence of NGOs focused on youth advocacy.</li> <li>• 1 municipality with an established youth policy, which has resulted in a municipal youth office and employment opportunities (Chiantla).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community / Cultural</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community and cultural work linked to the reality of international migration (i.e., family reunification, humanitarian assistance), provided by associations.</li> <li>• Community programs with cultural relevance (i.e., protection of Mayan identity and community agroecological practices), developed by non-governmental organizations.</li> </ul>

## Discussion

### Drivers of international migration in selected municipalities

#### The reality of poverty and low human development

Following the explanatory framework around the driving factors (*drivers*) of international migration, the reality in the municipalities studied clearly shows that there are structural elements that have the potential to facilitate and trigger international migration processes among youth residing in this region of the country.

#### Young people face challenges in different areas

Young people between the ages of 18 and 30 represent around a quarter of the total population in the selected municipalities. The study showed that the socioeconomic conditions of the municipalities have an impact on the reality faced by young people in different spheres: educational, socioeconomic, political, community and cultural. This situation directly affects the ability of young people to fully develop in their communities of origin based on access to basic rights such as education, employment, and social and political participation.

“

*“... for me it is because of the lack of economy and the lack of work that most young people despair. One has graduated...so, one looks for work, but we know that here in Guatemala sometimes job opportunities are not available. So, more than anything, it is the lack of work and that is why there are young people who sometimes go to the other side. Why? Due to the same situation.”*

*–Youth Group, Pastoral Social Santa Maria Chiquimula, July 27, 2022*

”

### Intention to migrate and to stay among youth

#### Most young people want to stay

Seven out of 10 young people surveyed showed interest in staying in the next 12 months, while three out of 10 young people showed interest in migrating to another country in the next 12 months. There was no statistically significant difference between the proportion of respondents with migratory intention according to the domains (high and low migration municipalities) of the study. Young men have a 7% to 19% higher migration intention compared to women, from the low and high migration municipalities respectively.

Even though the survey results show a preference for international migration (29%) compared to internal migration (12%), internal and cross-border migration continue to be survival strategies used by the population in the Guatemalan Western Highlands to ensure means for subsistence.

## Profile of young people with the intention to migrate

Of the sample of young people surveyed, 222 (29%) surveyed indicated their intention to migrate to another country in the next twelve months. Most of the young people with the intention of migrating to another country expressed that they plan to go to the USA (96%). The migratory intention was higher among men, those who have completed middle school and those who are not currently enrolled in an educational center. In municipalities with high migration rates, two out of five men have migratory intention, while in municipalities with low migration rates it is one out of three men.

In the municipalities with high migration rates, the highest migration intention was registered among young people who had completed basic education and among those with incomplete university or higher education.

Meanwhile, in the municipalities with low migration rates, the highest migration intention was registered among those who had completed primary school and basic education.<sup>9</sup> It is relevant to mention that none of the young people with completed university studies (18 out of 755) showed any intention to migrate. **Study findings suggest improved access to higher education in this region of the country could serve as a retention factor by creating attractive conditions for youth.**

The migratory intention was also higher among young people who were working and did not have a formal employment contract and among those engaged in seasonal activities such as ranching, construction/masonry, and agriculture.

## Youth report economic motivations behind the intention to migrate



■ Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

According to the survey, the main **reported** motivations to migrate were essentially economic. Of the 222 (29%) of respondents who indicated an intention to migrate, 51% said they would do so to improve income and 40% to seek job opportunities or work. The interviews and focus groups confirmed that the intention to migrate is closely related to structural socio-economic problems that do not allow or limit the possibilities of young people to generate income and meet basic needs. Lack of formal employment opportunities that generate sufficient and sustainable income over time and limited opportunities to access higher

education are some of the main challenges identified.

<sup>9</sup> Test of difference between proportions: according to the tests carried out with a confidence level of 90%, young people who intend to migrate and have incomplete or complete primary education generate a significant difference according to the domain of the study. That is, young people with incomplete primary education have a higher intention to migrate in municipalities with high migration rates and young people who have completed primary education have a higher proportion with the intention to migrate in the domain of low migration rates. For the rest of the educational levels, the test performed indicates that there are no differences between the different proportions of the two domains of the study.

## Motivations to stay: forced immobility and voluntary immobility

Following the explanatory framework of immobility in relation to aspiration/capacity, the results of the survey, with similar results from the focus groups and interviews, reveal that a large percentage of young people who showed an intention to stay are in a situation of “forced or involuntary immobility” (42%), as their motivations seem to be more related to a lack of capacity to migrate (i.e., lack of money or parental authorization).

On the other hand, 58% found themselves in a situation of “voluntary immobility”, because their motivations for remaining seem to be related to an aspiration to stay (i.e., a desire not to move away from their relatives).



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

**Table 6**  
*Explanatory framework of immobility: Survey results*

IMMOBILITY	
<p><b>As a result of structural limitations in the capacity to move (forced or involuntary immobility)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political and legal (for example, immigration controls).</li> <li>• Economic (for example, lack of financial resources).</li> <li>• Social (for example, lack of human or social capital).</li> <li>• Physical (for example, border walls).</li> </ul>	<p><b>As a result of the aspiration to stay voluntarily or acquiescently</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention factors (attractive conditions at the origin, attachment to the territory, attachment to the family).</li> <li>• Push factors (conditions elsewhere that reduce the intention to migrate).</li> <li>• Internal restrictions (elements of individual psychology).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Survey results: (+/- 42%)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>22% do not migrate because they lack money to do so.</b></li> <li>• 11% do not migrate because they do not have parental authorization.</li> <li>• 5% do not migrate due to the pandemic.</li> <li>• 3% do not migrate for fear of the migratory route.</li> <li>• 2% do not migrate because they do not know who can take them.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Survey results: (+/- 58%)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>51% expressed not wanting to be away from their families.</b></li> <li>• 4% must first finish their studies.</li> <li>• 2% consider that in their community they find development opportunities and therefore do not want to migrate.</li> </ul>

Those who find themselves in a situation of involuntary or forced immobility are potential migrants; if they manage to overcome any of the structural limitations in the capacity to migrate, it is likely that they will seek to migrate.

## Economic factors are not everything: other variables associated with migratory intent

Even though youth reported economic motivations for their intention to migrate, further statistical analysis through a probabilistic linear econometric model identified other variables associated with a greater or lesser migratory intent.

Family support for migration increased the probability of migrating by more than 100%, followed by thinking about living abroad (73%) and having relatives or acquaintances in the USA (29-33%).

On the other hand, community participation in religious groups and cultural traditions reduced the probability of migrating by 35% and 48%, respectively, as did land ownership (37%). **Young people who reported that there are opportunities in their communities were 56% less likely to migrate, making it the variable with the greatest impact on retention.**

## Importance of family in the decision to migrate or stay



Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

In the cases where young people expressed their intention to stay in the next twelve months (71%), the main reasons expressed were: I do not want to leave my family/I am very close to my family (51%), not having money to do so (22%) and not having parental authorization (11%). Therefore, in most cases (62%), immobility was related to situations in the family environment, such as not wanting to leave family or not having parental authorization to migrate. This data confirms the important weight that the family has in

the migratory decision, as well as the importance of attachment to the family as one of the main retention factors in the young people who participated in this study. On the other hand, the survey also revealed that those who have the support of their family to migrate or those who have a member of their household living in the USA expressed greater migratory intention.

This data could be related to what some migration scholars say about the double role that having relatives in the USA can play. On the one hand, it may be a factor that encourages people to migrate seeking family reunification; however, it can also operate as a retention factor. If there is already a member of the household abroad, it may not be necessary for another member to migrate.

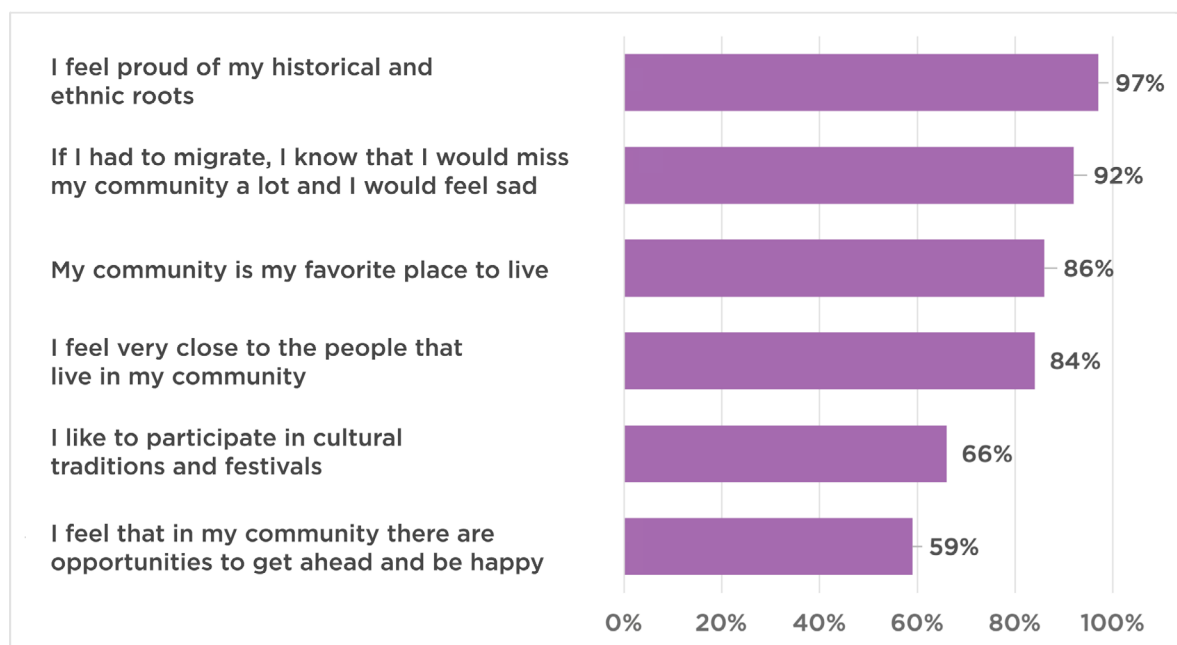
## Attachment to the community as a retention factor

The survey showed that young people feel a strong attachment to their community of origin: 97% of young people expressed feeling proud of their historical and ethnic roots, 92% indicated that they would miss their community a lot if they had to migrate and 86% indicated that their community was their favorite place to live. However, young people also recognize that in their communities they do not always find opportunities to get ahead and be fulfilled (41%).

We can conclude from the interviews and focus groups that in order for attachment to the community and attachment to the family to function as retention factors, attractive conditions must exist for youth in communities or origin, such as economic opportunities beyond agriculture and access to higher education.

**Graph 3**

*Attachment to the community: Statements with which respondents identify.*



## Existing socio-economic initiatives for youth

### Young people are excluded from existing initiatives

The survey showed that among the participants only one young person indicated that they were a beneficiary of some educational program, seven indicated that they were beneficiaries of some economic support program, and two indicated benefitting from a municipal support program. This shows that young people are excluded from existing initiatives, which are mostly directed toward adults, many of which prioritize mothers.

## Young people want options that meet their interests

Existing local initiatives focus on the family economy or the satisfaction of basic needs. Several family farming or other agricultural projects reinforce gender roles and do not question the role of women or men in the reproduction of power relations that generally translate into more work for women. In addition, young people generally do not find this type of initiative attractive and expressed a need for initiatives that meet their interests (i.e., in technology, commerce, tourism, or service industry).



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

## Importance of initiatives that enable community ties

Many existing initiatives seek to have an impact at the individual level, such as through entrepreneurship; initiatives targeting the family or community are limited. Some of the existing initiatives seek to provide technical skills and seed capital to people so that they can develop small businesses and generate income. The study found that these types of projects have faced certain limitations due to lack of planning and coordination, resulting in market saturation and competition at the local level. Although other local initiatives identified that address other areas of life do not necessarily generate significant income, they do strengthen community ties around identity. These initiatives were found to be more important to women and could be relevant for youth in the context of international migration.

## Importance of initiatives that address other areas of life

Beyond socioeconomic initiatives, the study revealed a lack of youth initiatives that address other areas of life. Young people seek:

- Spaces for psychosocial support to strengthen leadership, identity, political participation, and a sense of community.
- Spaces of belonging, where they can feel useful to the community and exercise their vocation of service.
- Spaces for expressing their talents and interests through sports, artistic, technological, or other recreational activities.

## Potential for community participation

Only 31% of young people surveyed participate politically in groups in their community and they often feel left out of the decision-making processes that impact life in the community. Reference was also made to the absence of opportunities for intergenerational dialogue that would allow youth to voice their opinion and propose solutions to their problems and alternatives to their needs.

However, when asked about other community spaces, participation was higher. For example, 42% of those surveyed participate in a religious or church group and 28% participate in a sports team. These data reveal the importance of other spaces in promoting youth participation.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS



## Possible alternatives to irregular migration

After mapping existing local initiatives for youth, the study analyzed the potential of these initiatives to offer alternatives to irregular migration and/or strengthen the interest of young people to remain in their municipalities. Table 7 summarizes some of the characteristics of initiatives that have been recognized as successful, and those that have not been successful.

**Table 7**

*Characteristics of successful and unsuccessful initiatives in selected municipalities*

CHARACTERISTICS	SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES	UNSUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES
<b>Who offers them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-governmental actors (have more resources generally).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governmental actors (fewer resources, continuation may depend on politics / government period).</li> </ul>
<b>Participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directed specifically for youth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directed at adults / heads of family.</li> </ul>
<b>Education and technical training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scholarships or educational loans if linked to specific employment or entrepreneurship options in communities of origin.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No link with trades that can be developed in communities of origin.</li> <li>Require a high initial investment to start the business.</li> </ul>
<b>Productive projects and entrepreneurship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agricultural: integration of issues such as sustainability, food security and cultural worldview.</li> <li>Non-agricultural: appeal to the interest of young people (i.e., technology, hotel, and tourism industries).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agricultural initiatives: reinforcement of gender roles.</li> <li>Operate in a saturated market.</li> <li>Lack financing opportunities (i.e., seed capital, credits).</li> </ul>
<b>Political participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In municipalities with youth offices or youth policies, encouraging youth organization and participation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In municipalities where young people feel excluded from participating in decision-making at the local level.</li> </ul>
<b>Community and cultural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer spaces for psychosocial care and/or facilitate exchange and sharing between different groups (women, relatives of migrants).</li> <li>Offer spaces for recovery or revitalization of ethnic identity.</li> <li>Offer recreational spaces for youth on areas of interest (i.e., art, sports, technology) or address topics that are relevant to youth (i.e., social housing, sexual and reproductive health, vocational and life expectations).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer spaces focused and centered around adults.</li> <li>Designed for young people, but from the interests of adults.</li> </ul>
<b>Job opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunities to access first job (i.e., internships, employment opportunities).</li> <li>Companies or organizations that offer formal jobs with minimum wage (i.e., call centers, banks, NGO's).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Companies that establish themselves for a few years in a location and then leave (i.e., mining).</li> <li>Jobs in government sector.</li> <li>Informal jobs that generate insufficient income (i.e., agriculture, construction).</li> </ul>

## Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, CRS has identified seven key messages to guide its interventions around youth migration and promote rootedness in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.

- 1. Strong family ties and family attachment can significantly impact the intention of youth to migrate.** International development agencies should focus programmatic efforts on the family unit, strengthening family integration and promoting family livelihoods **that include an active role for youth.**

This study found that family is a key retention factor, and that in addition, youth feel a strong attachment to their community of origin: 97% of young people surveyed expressed feeling proud of their historical and ethnic roots, 92% indicated that they would miss their community a lot if they had to migrate, and 86% indicated that their community was their favorite place to live.

- 2. Youth are most eager to participate in initiatives that they lead and that reflect their aspirations.** To achieve the greatest acceptance by youth, initiatives should integrate a positive youth development framework, ensuring youth participation in program design and ongoing youth governance during implementation, such as through youth advisory councils.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

After mapping existing local initiatives, the study analyzed the potential of these initiatives to offer alternatives for irregular migration, rooting youth to their community of origin. This analysis showed that initiatives were more successful when they were directed specifically for youth—reflecting their needs, interests, and dreams—in municipalities with youth offices or youth policies, and when they encouraged youth organization and participation.

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*“My biggest dream right now, well, I’m starting right now, but my biggest dream and first may it come true is to have my own house, to help women who suffer from machismo, from discrimination, from physical and psychological abuse. To graduate and help them at any time they need support.”*

– Young entrepreneur, Chiantla, May 4, 2022.

”

- 3. Youth aspire to work beyond the agricultural production sector.** Economic activities should focus on youth interests in technology, commerce, services, tourism, and industry. In agricultural activities, efforts should be made to intentionally link youth to relevant steps in the value chain.

The analysis found that existing local initiatives often focus on the family economy or the satisfaction of basic needs. Too often family farming and other agricultural initiatives reinforce gender roles. Young people generally do not find this type of initiative attractive and expressed an aspiration to work in non-agricultural sectors such as technology, commerce, tourism, services, and industry.

- 4. Encourage community participation, especially in leadership and decision-making spaces.** Development programs should prioritize supporting youth leadership capacity and working with communities to include youth in decision-making spaces, such as local development committees and cultural and religious leadership organizations.

Only 31% of young people surveyed participated politically in groups in their community and they often felt left out of the decision-making processes that impact life in the community. By contrast, community participation was higher: 42% of those surveyed participated in a religious or church group and 28% participated in a sports team. This data reveals the importance and potential of community participation in promoting youth participation. Furthermore, successful initiatives were those that offered spaces for recovery or revitalization of ethnic identity.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS

- 5. Economic opportunity is part of the solution but not all of it. Young people seek integral programs that include elements such as psychosocial support and recreational and artistic activities.** Young people seek programs that not only provide them with economic opportunities but also engage them in activities that motivate and inspire them, such as activities that help them manage their emotions, address discrimination, and help youth understand and connect with their cultural identity.

Beyond the socioeconomic initiatives, the study revealed a lack of youth initiatives that address these other areas of life.

- 6. Development programs for youth should examine, challenge, and seek to transform inequitable gender structures** by not only encouraging female participation but actively addressing the factors that foster gender inequalities as an integral part of program development, with a focus on building female leadership.

The study found that respondents identified gender gaps in nearly all spheres. Young women were educationally disadvantaged compared to men. Some parents prefer their sons study over their daughters. Women assumed roles in the home at an early age and faced the greatest difficulties in accessing jobs and decent wages. They also suffered and faced discrimination, machismo, and inequalities in cultural and community activities.

- 7. Robustly investing in communities of origin is the key to overcome high levels of poverty and low levels of human development and provide youth with an opportunity and desire to live and thrive in their home community.** The reality in the municipalities selected for this study clearly shows that there are structural elements that have the potential to facilitate and trigger international migration processes in the young population residing in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.



Photo by Luis Cocón/CRS



Image: Women from Nicaja Community in Momostenango Guatemala leaves after a weekly meeting of their Savings and Internal Lending Committee (SILC) group as a part of the activities promoted by CRS. Photo by Oscar Leiva/Starlight, for CRS use only.

## Appendices

### Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>ADESJU</b>	<i>Asociación para el Desarrollo Sostenible de la Juventud</i> [Association for the Sustainable Development of Youth].
<b>COVID-19</b>	Corona Virus Disease 2019
<b>CRS</b>	Catholic Relief Services
<b>DEDGT</b>	Department of Studies on Global and Territorial Dynamics
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>ICESH</b>	Institute for Research in Socio-Humanistic Sciences
<b>INE</b>	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estadística</i> [National Statistics Institute]
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NNR</b>	Non-Response Rate
<b>UBN</b>	Unsatisfied Basic Needs method
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>URL</b>	Rafael Landivar University
<b>USA / US</b>	United States of America
<b>VRIP</b>	Vice-Rector for Research and Projection

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