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September 23, 2019

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-guatemalan-city-fueling-the-migrant-exodus-to-america-11563738141>

The Guatemalan City Fueling the Migrant Exodus to America

Guatemala is now the largest source of illegal immigrants headed to the U.S., with the emigration epicenter in Joyabaj, population 100,000 and falling
[Photo]: A hilltop neighborhood in Joyabaj, Guatemala.

By José de Córdoba | Photographs by Daniele Volpe for The Wall Street Journal
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JOYABAJ, Guatemala—Since the beginning of the year, schoolteacher Teresa Quezada watched her boys and girls vanish. One by one, eight of 27 second- and third-grade students stopped showing up. It was no mystery. They went north with parents chasing the American dream, part of a migration wave that has crashed on the U.S.-Mexico border. Guatemala is now the largest source of illegal immigrants coming to the U.S. Apprehension of Guatemalans jumped to about 236,000 in the first nine months of fiscal year 2019 from about 15,000 in 2007, according to U.S. government data.



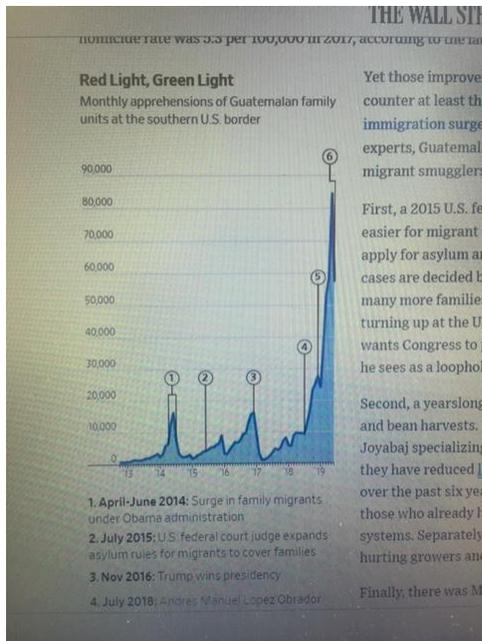
Schoolteacher Teresa Quezada, far left, in her classroom in Joyabaj. She has lost eight of her 27 students to migration since January.



Gaspar Zetino, center, told his teacher that he, too, will head to the U.S. ‘I’m going with my father,’ he said. “You miss them, but there is nothing to be done,” said Ms. Quezada of her

missing students. Gaspar Zetino, a shy, undernourished 9-year-old, confided to the teacher that he would be next. “I’m going with my father,” he said.

Guatemala, a Central American country of 17 million, is one of the hemisphere’s poorest. Six out of every 10 people live below the poverty line. Nearly half of the country’s population suffers from chronic malnutrition. It consistently ranks among the worst in the world for corruption and violence. Guatemala’s economy has averaged 3.4% growth in the past five years, and the homicide rate has fallen by half to 22.5 homicides per 100,000 people compared with 2009. The U.S. homicide rate was 5.3 per 100,000 in 2017, according to the latest available data.



1. April-June 2014: Surge in family migrants under Obama administration
2. July 2015: U.S. federal court judge expands asylum rules for migrants to cover families
3. Nov 2016: Trump wins presidency
4. July 2018: Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador wins Mexican presidency, promises better treatment of migrants
5. Dec. 2018: Lopez Obrador takes office, migrant detentions fall
6. April 2019: Under pressure from Trump, Mexico begins stepping up migrant apprehensions.

Yet those improvements haven't been enough to counter at least three events that drove the immigration surge, according to immigration experts, Guatemalan émigrés, local officials and migrant smugglers. First, a 2015 U.S. federal court ruling made it easier for migrant families with children to apply for asylum and stay in the U.S. until their cases are decided by a judge. After the ruling, many more families with children began turning up at the U.S. border. President Trump wants Congress to pass a law eliminating what he sees as a loophole in the law.

Second, a years long drought has shrunk corn and bean harvests. The manager of a bank in Joyabaj specializing in agricultural loans said they have reduced loans to local farmers by 60% over the past six years and now lend only to those who already have their own irrigation systems.

Separately, coffee prices have fallen, hurting growers and killing many seasonal jobs. Finally, there was Mr. Trump. The president's promise to build a wall along the U.S.'s southern border led many Guatemalans to conclude they should leave now—or risk getting shut out of the U.S. for good.

The epicenter of that emigration is the mountainous municipality of Joyabaj, population 100,000 and falling. During the first six months of 2019, the U.S. returned to Guatemala 627 deportees from Joyabaj, more than any municipality but one. It was surpassed by the nation's capital, Guatemala City, which has a population of 2.5 million and received 643 deportees. In the past 18 months, about 2,000 out of 16,400 first- through ninth-graders in Joyabaj public schools have gone north, said Clemente Sanchez, an education official.



A local smuggler who arranges trips to the U.S. from Guatemala.



A Guatemalan has attracted millions of viewers of the videos he creates and posts on his YouTube channel. Some are inspirational portrayals of Guatemalans leaving their country to find prosperity in the U.S.

Radio stations advertise the services of coyotes, as professional smugglers are known. “Tired of so much poverty? Tired of so much humiliation?” one radio spot said. Business is good. One smuggler barrels along roads in a bright yellow Hummer. He doubles as a priest in the Maya religion and is paid handsomely to perform ceremonies to insure a safe journey. Many Guatemalans use homes and plots of farmland as collateral for high-interest loans to pay smugglers.

A popular YouTube influencer has sophisticated equipment to create videos with such titles as “The American Dream,” and “I left for the US looking for a better life.” Together, they have notched almost three million views. Some of the inspirational videos are, in fact, advertisements for one of the area's most successful human smugglers. When couples marry, husbands often

plan to leave to the U.S. to work for a few years—to support the family, pay for the children’s education and build a house, start a small business or buy farmland.

Along rutted roads, gaudily painted mansions almost all belong to Guatemalans working in the U.S.—while the adobe brick shacks with dirt floors largely house families with no one working abroad. Last year, Guatemalans living outside the country sent more than \$9 billion home, making up about 12% of Guatemala’s gross domestic product.

Joyabaj natives living in the U.S. donated \$1.5 million to rebuild the town’s colonial Catholic church, which was all but destroyed in a 1976 earthquake. “When things get tough here, automatically one starts thinking about going to the U.S.,” Mayor Florencio Carrascoza said. He and his six brothers all entered the U.S. illegally and spent years working there. While many Guatemalans seeking asylum in the U.S. cite fears of violence at home, a 2016 poll by the United Nations’ International Organization for Migration found nine of 10 Guatemalans said they emigrated for financial reasons.



The biggest houses in Joyabaj are largely built with money sent from Guatemalans working in the U.S.



Downtown Joyabaj gets filled during its Sunday market in the main square. The adjacent Catholic Church was rebuilt with donations from Guatemalans working in the U.S.

Passport children

The Central American migration crisis erupted in 2014. Unlike previous waves of adult male migrants, a large number were children and teenagers traveling without their parents. One reason was passage of a 2008 law intended to protect unaccompanied minors from long stretches in U.S. custody. It also shielded them from deportation—except for minors from Mexico or Canada—and ordered their release to relatives in the U.S. as quickly as possible. To slow the migration, the Obama administration asked Mexico to step up deportations of Central

Americans crossing through Mexico. In addition, the U.S. began holding Central American families at border detention centers.

In July 2015, a federal judge ruled the detention of immigrant children and their mothers violated a court settlement known as the Flores Agreement. U.S. District Judge Dolly Gee determined that the agreement applied not just to unaccompanied minors but also to families with children. After the court decision, immigrant families claiming asylum were quickly released to await their court hearings in the U.S., often for years. The belief that children were the ticket to U.S. entry spread through Guatemala and neighboring countries. “Kids are the passports,” said Maria Elena Castillo, manager of the Joyabaj branch of the government office that issues identification documents.

In the 2015 fiscal year, authorities apprehended 39,838 people in family groups on the U.S.-Mexico border, according to the U.S. Border Patrol. The tally for the 2019 fiscal year, which begins in October, is 390,000. Human smugglers offer steep discounts for those who bring a child. That is because an adult traveling alone has to be taken on a dangerous journey across the U.S. border. A family claiming asylum can be dropped off at a U.S. border checkpoint. “It’s 65,000 quetzales [\$8,600] for an adult,” said David Reyes, who advertises his smuggling services on a local radio station. “18,000 quetzales each, for a child and adult.”

The Trump administration first tried separating families at the border, but under public pressure Mr. Trump ended most of the separations. Then the administration required tens of thousands of people claiming asylum to wait in Mexico for their U.S. court hearings. Mr. Trump’s promises to stop illegal immigration seemed to sound the starting gun for many Guatemalans, said Mayor Carrascoza, of Joyabaj: “Everyone thought, ‘If I don’t go now, I will lose my chance forever.’”



Florencio Carrascoza, mayor of Joyabaj, also spent time working in the U.S.



Mexican immigration authorities, accompanied by soldiers and police, at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Tapachula, Chiapas, near the border with Guatemala.

The election of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico a year ago contributed its own unforeseen consequences. During the presidential transition, Mr. López Obrador said his new government would treat migrants better and would offer humanitarian work visas. After he took office in December, detentions of Central American migrants in Mexico plummeted. Under pressure from Mr. Trump, who threatened to levy tariffs on Mexico’s exports, Mr. López Obrador reversed course and dispatched Mexico’s newly created National Guard to the border with Guatemala. In June, Mexico apprehended four times as many migrants as it had in December. “The road is hard in Mexico now,” one smuggler said. “There are many checkpoints. For now, nobody is moving. People will wait a couple of months.”

Most recently, the Trump administration has said migrants must ask for asylum in the first country they enter after leaving their own. That would require most Central Americans to seek asylum in Guatemala or Mexico rather than in the U.S. That order is under legal challenge.



A woman works in a bean field in Joyabaj.



Workers in downtown Joyabaj.

A new blouse

In March, the mother of Morelia Cetino, a girl in Ms. Quezada’s class, took one of her brothers, Tomasetino, and left for the U.S. In April, Morelia’s father followed, taking Morelia’s 12-year-old brother, Hebert. Harim Estrada, Hebert’s teacher, said the boy and his father crossed Mexico in four days and then surrendered to U.S. border agents. They were detained for eight days. After their release, they joined friends from their hometown. Morelia’s material well-being has improved since her parents left. She wears a new colorful Maya blouse, paid with money sent

from the U.S., Ms. Quezada said. The girl misses her mother badly but gets to speak with her frequently by smartphone.

Affordable cellphone service between Guatemalans and their relatives in the U.S. has quickly spread success stories, tempting others to leave. “If you work in the U.S., you get paid \$12 an hour for eight hours, that’s \$96 a day,” Mr. Estrada said. “Here you make 40 quetzales [\$5.30] a day when there is work. Not enough to live.” Sometimes mothers send a son or daughter north with an adult relative or friend pretending to be the parent. Many times it is to join family already living in the U.S. Ms. Castillo, who runs the office issuing government identity papers, is regularly offered bribes to change the names and ages of children listed in official documents. “I’d be rich if I did it,” she said.



Morelia Cetino in class at her school.

In March, Domingo Lario, 42, a farmer from the hamlet of Xeabaj, heard that parents with children were being allowed into the U.S. with no questions asked. Mr. Lario, who had lived in the U.S. working in chicken and meat packing plants in Alabama and Nebraska, agreed to help two sons of a friend on a trip north. The two young men, both adults, carried false papers that identified them as minors. Each had paid the smuggler about \$1,500. U.S. border authorities were skeptical. “They said, ‘Those two boys aren’t yours,’ ” Mr. Lario said. “I didn’t want to go to jail, and I told them the truth.” They were quickly deported. Mr. Lario said he may try to head north again soon: “There’s no work here.”

The rainy season usually starts in May, but for the past five years rainfall has been erratic and well below average. Last year, more than four million people faced the risk of going hungry because of drought, said Juan Carlos Carias, Guatemala’s Minister of Food Security. Domingo Hernandez, a 63-year-old farmer, sat on the dirt floor of his adobe shack and pointed to a steep hillside planted with ankle-high corn. He predicted it would yield less than a third of a normal harvest. “There’s no rain,” he said. “Nothing grows.”



An American flag at a shop in Joyabaj that provides shipping services to the U.S.

<https://thefederalist.com/2019/04/04/border-crisis-money-making-machine-smugglers/>



The Border Crisis Is A Money-Making Machine For Smugglers

Whatever their reasons for leaving, a wall or a physical barrier will do nothing to stop immigrants from crossing the border.



By John Daniel Davidson

APRIL 4, 2019

Editor's note: This is the written testimony of Federalist senior correspondent John Daniel Davidson, delivered before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

About this time last year, I visited a migrant respite center in McAllen, Texas, run by Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, the charitable arm of the Diocese of Brownsville. Sister Norma Pimentel helped establish the center in 2014, at the height of the unaccompanied minor crisis, when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was overwhelmed with thousands of children and teenagers turning themselves in to U.S. Border Patrol agents.

At that time, the center was receiving between 60 and 120 migrants a day, nearly all of them families from Central America. Here's how it worked: Every afternoon, ICE dropped off the families at the Greyhound bus station downtown, about a mile from the respite center. Greyhound employees would call the center to let them know the migrants were there, and the center would send vans to pick them up.

Once at the center, the children would be sent to a separate room for a hot meal while the parents took turns working with volunteers to get in touch with friends and family members all over the country. The goal was to get them all bus tickets and get them on their way that same day, usually later that evening, because the next day there would be another group of families coming in, and there simply wasn't space for more than a couple dozen people to spend the night there.

This wasn't some gleaming facility. The center occupied one half of a run-down commercial building, consisting of a large multipurpose room, a bathroom and a shower, a small kitchen, and a separate room for the makeshift cafeteria. There was an area in a corner of the main room cordoned off for young children to play and a large stack of blue plastic mattresses in another corner. Staffed by a dozen or so volunteers daily, the center wasn't exactly a "shelter," but it was a non-stop hive of activity, operating at capacity nearly every day.

In December, the diocese moved the center to a larger location, a former nursing home, about 16,000 square-feet—many times larger than the old respite center. That's because the number of migrants turning up at the bus station skyrocketed. Today, the new respite center is receiving about 800 people a day, sometimes more. Last Sunday, 1,300 people were dropped off there and at other shelters around town.

(Overwhelmed by the number of migrants, Greyhound no longer allows ICE to drop people off at their stations. These are families that have been processed and discharged with orders to appear before an immigration judge, but once ICE drops them off, they're on their own. According to the Flores agreement, children can't be detained for more than 20 days, and because the Trump administration ended its family separation policy, parents and children are now being discharged together as fast as ICE can process them.)

McAllen, a city of fewer than 150,000 residents, is now facing the prospect of thousands of migrants discharged from ICE custody, wandering the streets and sleeping in doorways and on park benches—the city's mayor has said as much. What's more, in February the city ordered Catholic Charities to vacate the former nursing home and find a new location within 90 days, citing complaints from neighbors about constant traffic and strangers wandering nearby streets where children play. By any measure, the situation in McAllen is an emergency.

This is just one border town in Texas. Something similar is playing out all up and down the U.S.-Mexico border. In El Paso, hundreds of migrant families are turning themselves in to Border Patrol every day, overwhelming federal facilities and personnel. In a five-minute stretch one day in late March, Border Patrol apprehended two different groups totaling 400 people. On the night of President Trump's rally in El Paso in February, a group of 300 turned themselves in to the Santa Teresa Border Patrol station, which sits on an empty stretch of New Mexico scrubland 22 miles west of El Paso. Agents had to move all the ATVs out of the garage just so a hundred or so

migrants would have someplace warm to sleep that night. Since then, things have been getting worse.

Even smaller and relatively remote communities in Texas are seeing large groups of migrant families turn themselves in. Recently, a group of nearly 60 was apprehended near the port of entry in Eagle Pass, Texas. In February, a group of 90 was apprehended in the tiny town of Quemado, Texas, population 230. That group included children as young as one year old, as well as a pregnant woman who, upon arrival, went into labor and later gave birth. As mass numbers of migrants are being released from federal custody along the border, cities further inland have also begun to feel the effects. During the third week of March, about 1,000 migrants arrived in San Antonio after taking buses north from various points in the Rio Grande Valley. Catholic Charities and other non-profit groups are struggling to house and feed these people, and in many cases have appealed to municipal authorities for assistance.

It's important to understand what the reality is on the ground in these places. The migrant shelters now going up in Texas border towns are, like the former nursing home in McAllen, in most cases makeshift and temporary. The process and logistics are haphazard and fluid. No one is really in control.

Among Trespassers Seeking Asylum, a Constant Pattern

If you spend enough time talking to migrants themselves, a pattern begins to emerge. Most of them have similar stories about why they left their home countries in Central America, and they report similar experiences of how they made their way through Mexico to the southern U.S. border. A few common characteristics stand out:

- A majority of the “family units” are men traveling with one or more children;
- Many of these men say they have a wife and other children back in their home country and that they intend to secure work in the U.S. and send money back to support them;
- They are headed for all points across the U.S. and have family members or friends in those places. Many of them also have jobs already lined up;
- Nearly all of them say they left their homes because it is dangerous, citing gang violence, threats, extortion, etc.; they are all claiming asylum.
- At the same time, many of them will admit that they don't plan to remain in the U.S. permanently, and in fact have a set amount of time they plan to live and work here before returning home;
- All of them say they paid a smuggler to secure safe passage to the border (the amount varies from \$2,000 to \$6,000 per person, sometimes more). Generally, they say they took cars or buses for transit through Mexico.

Despite the challenges and dangers they face in their home countries, the vast majority of these people are, strictly speaking, not refugees but economic migrants; very few of them have valid asylum claims. What's more, although violence in Central America is endemic, homicide rates in El Salvador and Honduras have dropped significantly in recent years.

That's not to say Central Americans don't experience high levels of violence and poverty, but that there is no correlation between violent crime and emigration out of these countries. Indeed, just the opposite: as murder rates have fallen, emigration has increased.

Whatever their reasons for leaving, a wall or a physical barrier will do nothing to stop them from crossing the border. Because these are family units seeking asylum, they are not trying to evade U.S. authorities. In fact, they are seeking Border Patrol agents out in order to turn themselves in and file an asylum claim.

In El Paso, where the Rio Grande River is shallow and easy to walk across, the limits of a physical barrier are plain to see. All migrants need to do is walk across the river, continue a hundred yards or so through a no-man's land between the river and the border fence, and then follow the fence until they reach one of the gates situated on top of a flood levy system. If you drive through certain areas of downtown El Paso near the levy and fence, you can see migrant groups on the south side walking toward these gates. There, they simply wait for Border Patrol to arrive with vans to pick them up. This is now happening on a daily basis, in broad daylight, with large groups of families.

Previously, when these migrants were processed and released by ICE, the adults would often be outfitted with an electronic ankle monitor. If they failed to check in at designated times or traveled outside a certain radius from where they told ICE they would be staying, immigration authorities would be notified. The ankle monitors are a major piece of ICE's Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP), an alternative to detention for those in immigration proceedings.

But the problem with the ankle monitors is that many migrants simply cut them off and throw them away once they're released from ICE custody. A former Border Patrol agent, who now works with a non-profit group that assists migrants in the Rio Grande Valley, told me that in his experience almost everyone released with an ankle monitor cuts it off at some point and absconds, effectively abandoning their asylum claim. At best, it's unclear whether releasing migrant adults with ankle monitors is an effective alternative to detention.

The Migration Pipeline Is a Vast Money-Making Machine

No discussion of the border crisis is complete without noting that, from the moment Central American migrants cross Mexico's southern border and begin their journey north, the entire process is a massive, multifarious, black-market, money-making machine.

A complex network of smugglers, corrupt local officials, truck drivers, landowners, lookouts, loan sharks, and Mexican drug cartels exert absolute control over the migration flows through Mexico and have, over the past decade or so, refined it into a lucrative business enterprise. Although exact figures are unknown—and likely unknowable—any back-of-the-envelope calculation will give you an idea of the amount of money changing hands along the migration pipeline.

For example, Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan said last week that the agency was on pace to apprehend more than 100,000 migrants in March. Assuming each migrant pays, on average, \$4,000 for safe passage over the border, that's about \$400 million—just for those apprehended crossing illegally in March. When we talk about the migration pipeline through Mexico, we're talking about an international smuggling industry worth billions. Some of the chief beneficiaries of this pipeline are Mexican drug cartels, which exert iron-fisted control over their territory. Cartels generally require every man, woman, and child who passes

through their territory on the way to the U.S. border pay a tax, which is often included in the total fee smugglers quote to Central American families. Without paying this tax, migrants cannot cross the Rio Grande, and in many cases are at risk of being kidnapped or otherwise exploited.

One of the reasons the large caravans that formed last year in Central America arrived in Tijuana, and not in the Gulf region near the Rio Grande Valley, is because they had not paid off cartels in the Gulf region. For those without resources to pay this tax, traveling in a large caravan—and avoiding cartel-controlled territory—is the only way they can make the journey north with any modicum of safety.

The amount of money cartels are now making off migrant smuggling is substantial. For example, 162,000 people were apprehended in the Rio Grande Valley sector in fiscal year 2018. Assuming that the total cost for each one of these people included an \$800 tax for the cartels—a conservative estimate—the cartels and cartel factions in the Gulf region made nearly \$130 million just off taxing people moving through their territory. For context, consider that funding for the Merida initiative, which is aimed at combating these cartels, is \$145 million for the current fiscal year

The black market for migration is remarkably sophisticated. At its inception point, in villages and towns across Central America, the market works mostly through word of mouth. If you want to migrate, you get a hold of someone whose family member or neighbor migrated, and they put you in touch with a local smuggler who will quote you a price, or sometimes a range of prices depending on certain conditions. For example, one Honduran man was quoted a price of \$7,000 on the condition he bring his 6-year-old daughter with him and they agree to surrender to Border Patrol once they cross into the U.S. Otherwise, the price would have been \$10,000.

The reason for the difference in price is that it's much easier for smugglers to transport migrant families intending to claim asylum in the U.S. than migrants who want to enter the country undetected. Instead of crossing with the migrants and trying to evade Border Patrol, both at the border and at checkpoints further inland, smugglers transporting asylum-seekers need only to take them up to a crossing-point on the Rio Grande and tell them when to go over. There is zero risk for the smugglers themselves, hence the cheaper price if an adult brings a child with them.

Smugglers generally have a working knowledge of U.S. asylum policy, and they tell potential migrant families that if they claim asylum once in the U.S., they will be allowed to stay and work. This is of course true, due to the immense backlog in U.S. immigration courts, with wait times for a hearing of up to three years. But smugglers are incorporating these aspects of U.S. policy into their sales pitch to Central American families. It's all part of how they market their services.

Cartels Are Using Kids as Get Into U.S. Free Cards

Without a doubt, there is a crisis at the southern border. But it's a deeply misunderstood crisis that's being driven by specific factors and disproportionately affecting specific regions of the border, primarily the Rio Grande Valley and El Paso. In general, the growing numbers of migrants now crossing the border are being driven by three major factors:

- If you're a minor or a family, it's even easier to enter the U.S. now than it was during the Obama administration for the simple reason that there is no capacity at federal detention facilities and families can expect to be released soon after being detained by Border Patrol.
- Smugglers are now marketing to people —women, families—who don't want to undertake an arduous or dangerous journey. They have created a sophisticated and efficient busing package that has proven very popular with families, and word has gotten back to communities in Central America that, if they pay, the journey will be short, safe, and they will not be detained for long once inside the U.S.
- Conditions in Central America have not improved enough to induce people to remain in their home countries. Persistent poverty, violence, and corruption, combined with the fear that it's not going to be this easy to get into the U.S. forever, is prompting families to come now.

There is no easy solution to this crisis. Border security is part of the solution, but so is congressional action. As long as Central American families know they can gain entry to the U.S. by initiating asylum proceedings upon crossing the border, the crisis will continue. As long as cartels and criminal networks know they can profit from trafficking migrant families to the border, they will do so. And as long as conditions in Central America continue to fester, families who can afford it will seek a better life for their children by traveling north.
John is a senior correspondent for The Federalist. Follow him on Twitter.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/i-hate-this-mission-says-operator-of-new-emergency-shelter-for-migrant-children/2019/07/10/5728d888-a340-11e9-b732-41a79c2551bf_story.html

‘I hate this mission,’ says operator of new emergency shelter for migrant children

Health and Human Services officials say their youth holding facility in Carrizo Springs, Tex., aims to move children out of border patrol custody swiftly. (Monica Akhtar/The Washington Post)

By Neena Satija

July 10

CARRIZO SPRINGS, Tex. — As he stood before reporters in a newly opened emergency shelter for unaccompanied migrant children, the chief executive of the contracting firm that could be paid up to \$300 million to run the facility was far from thrilled about the task before him. “I hate this mission,” Kevin Dinnin, head of the San Antonio-based nonprofit BCFS Health and Human Services, said on Wednesday in this remote Texas town. “The only reason we do it is to keep the kids out of the Border Patrol jail cells.”

The Carrizo Springs shelter opened on June 30 to help alleviate cramped conditions in Border Patrol processing facilities, where people were recently seen sleeping head to toe on concrete floors, often lacking access to hot meals, showers and proper medical care. The shelter will be able to hold up to 1,300 teenage children, though it currently has just over 200.

Although reporters who visited the shelter Wednesday saw the children only briefly during a tightly controlled tour, conditions in Carrizo Springs appear far better than those in the Border Patrol stations. Children could be seen playing soccer outside, attending classes in groups of around 30 to 40 and making phone calls to their families. The facility is a scattering of dormitory buildings, trailers and tents that were once housing for oil field workers. Children's artwork — drawings of cartoon characters, flags and paper flowers — decorated the walls of their sleeping quarters. Lighted soccer fields allow children to play at night and avoid the harsh summer heat.



In this July 9, 2019, photo, a staff member cleans in a dining hall at the U.S. government's newest holding center for migrant children in Carrizo Springs, Tex. (Eric Gay/Reuters)

The children who come to Carrizo Springs are also meant to be those with only the most basic needs, and who are expected to be released soon to adults in the United States. Children sleep on bunk beds in carpeted rooms, with round-the-clock adult supervision. Dormitories are organized into groups of 12, with one shower and toilet, as well as a kitchen. There are 749 people on staff at the shelter, including those who care directly for children and emergency personnel. That's "more staff than we need right now," Dinnin said, adding that his goal is to make sure no children are there for more than 30 days.

Mark Weber, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which is in charge of caring for unaccompanied migrant children, said the shelter ordered nearly 200 pizzas for a recent 4th of July party. The two biggest complaints from kids, he claimed, were "not enough pizza" and "not enough soccer time."

Still, Dinnin and Weber agree that such "surge shelters" — which have opened periodically over the past several years during spikes in migrant crossings — are not an ideal place for children. Because of their temporary nature, federal officials have exempted the facilities from standard child-care licensing requirements. Although the facilities are officially considered shelters and not detention centers, they are fenced in and nearly impossible to leave. Two levels of fencing, with barbed wire atop one level, surround the Carrizo Springs center.

Surge shelters are also expensive to run because of their large size and how quickly they need to be able to come online. Costs at Carrizo Springs, which was set up in less than a month, are around \$750-800 per child per day, Dinnin said. BCFS will be paid \$50 million for its work in just the first few weeks, and Dinnin earns an annual salary of nearly \$500,000, according to the most recently available tax filings from the nonprofit organization.

The only other surge shelter in operation, in Homestead, Fla., is run by the for-profit company Comprehensive Health Services. The company was recently awarded a contract worth up to \$341

million to continue operating the facility, which recently housed more than 2,000 children. Several Democratic presidential candidates have criticized conditions at Homestead. The company that operates it has invited members of Congress to tour the facility and has said the well-being of the children in its care is its “primary concern.”

The massive “tent city” children’s shelter in Tornillo, which was run by BCFS until it closed in January, also came under scrutiny. Government inspectors discovered last fall that BCFS hadn’t done FBI background checks, or required child protective services checks, on the staff working at Tornillo. The inspectors also reported that the number of clinicians at Tornillo — staff who provide services such as mental health assessments and counseling — was “dangerously low.” Both problems were promptly fixed, the nonprofit group says.

Dinnin had publicly complained for months about running Tornillo, which opened last June with just 400 beds but later swelled to 3,800. He told reporters on Wednesday that his criticism probably helped lead to Tornillo’s closure, and that he only agreed to run the Carrizo Springs facility on the condition that the government offer the public regular tours of the shelter and take other steps to be more transparent.

The shelter, though, may be less needed than it was a few weeks ago. Migrant crossings have dropped dramatically in the past month, and in recent days more unaccompanied children have been leaving the care of the federal government than have been entering it. No children are spending more than 72 hours in Border Patrol processing facilities, Weber said; in May, more than 1,000 children were in such a situation. Dinnin suggested as much to reporters. “They needed these beds, clearly, in May,” he said, adding that the opening of the shelter was “too much, too late.”

During the tour of the facility, Weber deflected numerous questions about why it did not open earlier. He insisted that even in May, the shelters open at the time had plenty of capacity to take on more children. As of June 25, the agency had nearly 700 open beds in its general and emergency shelters, according to data obtained by The Washington Post. Asked several times why so many children were stuck in Border Patrol processing facilities, Weber referred reporters to the Department of Homeland Security, which runs the Border Patrol stations. “You’d have to ask DHS,” he said. He added that, “we’ll wait for the next OIG report,” referring to that agency’s Office of Inspector General. DHS did not respond to requests for comment Wednesday afternoon.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/09/us/migrant-children-schools-border.html>

Schools Scramble to Handle Thousands of New Migrant Families



Dayvin Mungia, 7, worked on math problems with Nicol Sakellarios, a teacher at South Grade Elementary in Lake Worth, Fla. Credit: Eve Edelheit for The New York Times

By Miriam Jordan
July 9, 2019

LAKE WORTH, Fla. — Dayvin Mungia, 7, arrived from El Salvador at South Grade Elementary in South Florida last year with, it seemed, no schooling at all. “He didn’t even recognize the first letter of his name,” said Nicol Sakellarios, his second-grade teacher, as the smiling boy gamely stumbled through his ABC’s in summer school not long ago. “Good job, my love,” she said, prodding him on as he faltered again and again. Laura Martin, 16, who attended school for only three years in Guatemala and speaks an indigenous language, plans to enroll in high school in Florida next month. “Illiterate” and “0” were scrawled on a math work sheet that she tried and failed to complete after she made her way across the border in May.

Migrant children arriving in record numbers are creating challenges for school districts across the country. Many of the newcomers have disjointed or little schooling; their parents, often with limited reading and writing skills themselves and no familiarity with the American education system, are unable to help. Schools in places like Lake Worth, a city near President Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort that has become a favorite destination for Guatemalans, are scrambling to hire new staff and add summer sessions to support the newcomers.

Last year, the Palm Beach County school district enrolled 4,555 Guatemalan students in K through 12, nearly 50 percent more than two years earlier. Many of the students come from the country’s remote highlands and speak neither Spanish nor English. The number of elementary school students in K through 5 more than doubled to 2,119 in that same period. Ana Arce-Gonzalez, the principal at South Grade Elementary School in the heart of Lake Worth’s immigrant enclave, said that in 25 years as an educator she had never experienced anything like it. The school saw its enrollment rise from 820 at the beginning of the last school year to 910 in the spring, pushing it over capacity. “It speaks to what is happening at the border,” she said.

Under a 1982 Supreme Court decision, all children, regardless of immigration status, are entitled to a K through 12 education. With hundreds of thousands of new parents and children crossing the border in recent months, districts across the country are having to transfer teachers to affected schools, expand bilingual training for staff and prepare for students who may be traumatized. “We are going to educate every child on our doorstep,” said Cade Brumley, superintendent of schools in Jefferson Parish, La., outside New Orleans. But, “there is a fiscal impact. It’s not uncommon for us to hear legitimate concerns from the public about the allocation of resources,” he said.



Students walked to class at South Grade Elementary. Schools are scrambling to hire new staff and add summer sessions to support record numbers of migrant children.

The school district of 50,000 people enrolled 1,000 new Central American students last year, prompting a hiring spree of bilingual teachers and front office staff, and in the fall the district will roll out 15 dual-language schools and “newcomer centers” to cater to Spanish speakers. Nearly half of the books at the library in the Munger Mountain Elementary school in Jackson, Wyo., are in Spanish, where the immigrant population has ballooned in recent years. The school has recently begun offering all instruction in both English and Spanish

Scott Eastman, the principal, said that students do not just arrive with learning deficiencies. One child had been separated from his family, and was so traumatized he didn’t speak for weeks. “He constantly cried, worrying that his grandmother was going to be killed back in El Salvador and that he would never see his parents again,” Mr. Eastman said.

In Florida, Mayan Guatemalans first settled in Indiantown, a village northwest of Palm Beach’s luxurious estates, in the 1980s, to toil in vegetable fields and citrus groves after fleeing a counterinsurgency campaign by the Guatemalan military. Indigenous Guatemalans have arrived here ever since, but spiraling violence and an unforgiving drought that has driven subsistence farmers off their land back home has caused a surge in the last two years.

Lake Worth is a relatively affordable city of 39,000 people and easily accessible to hotels, golf courses, farms and nurseries that hire immigrants. It is also home to immigrants from Haiti and other Central American countries; still, Guatemalans represent the largest group among Hispanics, who now account for more than 40 percent of the city’s population.

Like other districts serving low-income and immigrant students, Palm Beach County receives an infusion of federal funds to provide extra help for disadvantaged students and those who struggle with English. And while more money would be welcome, it is not the crux of the problem, said Harvey Oaxaca, head of the district’s multicultural education programs. The district identified 2,000 students in the seventh to 11th grades for remedial summer school English classes. Only half have registered. Many are tending to younger siblings or working to help their families make ends meet.

Lake Worth High School offers evening tutorials and other programs. But district officials said many students choose instead to work — either to send money home, to pay off debts to migrant smugglers or to support themselves in the United States. “They have to go to school, but that is not what they came here for,” Mr. Oaxaca said.



Sherly Perez, who crossed the border with her father. “I want to learn more English. I want to read a lot,” she said.

Critics say immigrant students could do better if the district provided more support, including hiring more interpreters. But district officials say it has been tough to hire speakers of Mayan languages, such as Q’anjob’al and Mam, whose educational qualifications fulfill state requirements. Currently, only four interpreters make the rounds of the entire district.

Parents recognize the value of education for their children, say those who work with the Guatemalan community. An early literacy program offered by the Guatemalan-Maya Center, a nonprofit that serves migrant families, is oversubscribed. But in addition to poverty, language barriers and financial stresses, the families’ tenuous stay in the United States — most are in deportation proceedings — hangs over them and their children.

After Mr. Trump announced a nationwide series of planned immigration raids last month, which he later suspended, students began to miss summer school. A new Florida law passed in May that requires local government agencies to cooperate with federal immigration authorities has also sown fear and confusion. “The constant state of anxiety creates toxic stress for every member of the family,” said Amanda Escalante, who leads the team of early-learning specialists from the Guatemalan-Maya Center. “The kids don’t feel safe and secure.”

Jakelin Raquek, 4, was making steady progress in her pre-K class until her father was arrested by immigration agents in front of her, and later deported. “She was getting sassy in English,” said her teacher, Magda Arguelles. After the episode, she said, the little girl fell apart. “We were never able to get her back into learning mode.”

South Grade Elementary illustrates the challenges. There are children like 8-year-old Sherly Perez, who crossed the border with her father and lives in a room at her aunt’s house. One child lives with 10 other people in a house with just one bathroom. Some fourth and fifth graders have been suicidal and depressed, school officials say. A quarter of the children last year who enrolled at the school in third grade, the grade during which the state tests student progress in reading and math, were newcomers. Only 11 percent of kindergartners were assessed as “kindergarten ready” when they started school.

Dayvin Mungia, the second grader who had never attended school, was one of several students who were taught numbers and letters on the side by his teacher when the rest of the class was engaged in other activities.



Shirley Duffy, a kindergarten teacher at South Grade, worked on reading skills with students.

Ms. Arce-Gonzalez decided it was vital to offer year-round instruction if children were to have any hope of catching up. This summer, South Grade has an intensive pre-K section and supplemental kindergarten, first- and second-grade classes funded by a combination of district and nonprofit money. In the fall, the school will offer four dual-language kindergarten classes. A Cuban-American who is entering her third year at the school, Ms. Arce-Gonzalez said she has wrestled with ways to connect with families, and began making home visits. “It takes a lot of hand-holding. But once you are face-to-face with the parents, they get it,” she said.

To entice parents to attend evening information sessions, she began distributing items, like toiletries, to those who came and stayed until the end. The school opened what she calls a “mini Goodwill store,” which families can visit a couple of times a week. “I consider us a full-service school. I dress, feed and provide social-emotional support,” said Ms. Arce-Gonzalez, as she showed off cabinets and shelves stocked with new crisp school uniform tops and bottoms, secondhand clothes and food items such as canned vegetables, cereal and pasta, donated by the National Council of Jewish Women and other organizations.

Her courtship worked. When the district redrew its boundaries and several students were threatened with having to go to another school, some of the immigrant parents fought to stay at South Grade. Juana Enrique is paying higher rent after relocating to an apartment with an address that guarantees her daughter, Annie Reyes, can stay at South Grade. “My daughter loves the school, and I appreciate the teachers. It is worth the sacrifice,” said Ms. Enrique, who is from El Salvador.

Many Lake Worth residents have welcomed the diversity brought by the city’s now numerous immigrants, but some also worry that they could be dragging down educational standards for other students. “You have to be experiencing real hardship to carry your toddler through the desert to seek a better life,” said Dan Brown, a mail carrier, who said the new immigrants are “perfectly fine neighbors,” but who also said he was considering moving to a place with less-impacted schools when his 2-year-old son is ready for kindergarten.

Some other residents wondered whether they were subsidizing the newly arriving families. “They’re poor and can’t make it here,” said Jonathan Harris, a real-estate investor who favors stronger controls on immigration. “I am pretty confident that we have enough people already here illegally to do all the jobs that Americans don’t want to get their hands dirty doing,” he said. But Kim Lingle, a paralegal who has lived for years in Lake Worth, said the new families have been an asset. “The immigrants are loving, caring, hard-working families,” she said. “They contribute to the fabric of our kitschy little campy town.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/27/journey-of-faith-the-guatemalan-pastors-helping-smuggle-people-into-the-us>

'May God bless you': evangelical pastors' hidden role in human smuggling's boom

As trusted individuals in a Guatemalan culture rooted in religion, pastors and priests play a role in the booming business behind immigration

Sarah Kinosian in Huehuetenango department

Fri 28 Jun 2019



Salvadorean migrants pray as they wait to enter the Guatemala-Mexico international border bridge in Ciudad Tecun Uman, Guatemala. Photograph: Marvin Recinos/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

Early in the morning, Antonio knelt before an altar with white candles and a small statue of the Virgin Mary and prayed for a miracle. It was still dark when he piled into a blue van with his six-year-old son, Gaspar, and a group of other farmers and their family members hoping to reach the United States. They set out from their home town in the highlands of Guatemala and rode for hours before pulling down a narrow dirt road which ended in a clearing near the Mexican border. The migrants bowed their head as their guide – an Evangelical pastor – cracked a Bible, and prayed for the group’s safe passage. At the border, he whispered a last “*Que Dios te bendiga*” (“May God bless you”) to each before passing them to the next handler.

Guatemala is one of the biggest sources of migrants to the US, and across the highlands of this poor Central American country, churches and clergymen also play a role in the booming business of people-smuggling. As trusted individuals in a deeply religious society, pastors and priests can offer comfort and a promise of safety to those undertaking the dangerous trek north. They also take a cut of the profits. “The church is an invisible actor in migration,” said Francisco Simón, a researcher on migration and smuggling at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala. “Using the image of the pastor is just one of the many ways *coyotes* [people smugglers] recruit clients. He has credibility and the trust of the people.”

Out of 23 towns Simón recently visited in the western highlands, he found cases of pastors and priests helping people to migrate in 14 of them. Some churchmen physically guide clients on the first leg of their journey – as with the pastor who led Antonio to the border – but most simply link up coyotes and potential clients. Evangelical leaders were more frequently involved in migration than Catholic priests, Simón found.

As night fell in a small highland town 70 miles from the Mexican border, a few dozen people sang pop-inspired Christian music in a simple, single-room Evangelical church. In an office next door, drinking a Pepsi and catching up on his accounts, was Pedro, who recruits customers for a coyote. “Pastors can act as a bridge between people who want to migrate and people who can take them,” he explained. “They know the community.”



Fernando Cuevas, of the Scalabrinian Missionaries, celebrates Mass at a Catholic church in Ciudad Tecun Uman, Guatemala, on the border with Mexico. Photograph: Moisés Castillo/A

At this church, three of the pastor’s brothers are well-known coyotes, according to Pedro and members of the congregation. For each customer he recruits, the pastor makes \$250; he earns another \$150 for praying with a group before they set out. After the service, Manuel, 19, a member of the congregation, said that the pastor had previously helped his brother travel to the US, where he now works on construction sites in North Carolina. “I know a lot of people who have traveled with this pastor. I would go, but I don’t have any money,” said Manuel. “But pastors typically know how to get you north.”

While around half of Guatemala’s population is Catholic, in the last 25 years Pentacostal churches have grown increasingly important, and the country now has proportionately one of the largest Evangelical populations in Latin America. The movement first gained traction after the country’s first Evangelical leader, Efraín Ríos Montt – an army general and part-time lay preacher – seized power in a 1982 coup. The US-backed dictator gave weekly televised sermons – even as the military murdered, raped and disappeared thousands of indigenous Guatemalans in the country’s 36-year civil war. Catholic priests were often targeted in retaliation for their perceived sympathies with leftwing Liberation Theology. Some ordinary Guatemalans turned to Protestant churches in the hope of protection. Even after a peace deal signed in 1996, violence, corruption, racism and poverty have persisted.

The Guatemalan state remains absent from many rural areas, and Evangelicalism has mushroomed as Pentecostal churches step in to provide public services, said Kevin Lewis O’Neill, a professor at the University of Toronto who studies Christianity in Guatemala. “Historically, there’s no reason to trust any institutions in Guatemala – other than the church.

Evangelical churches in particular have been able to maintain trust by supporting these places with little state presence which live in the shadow of the war,” he explains.

Pentecostal churches are omnipresent in the mostly indigenous regions where most of the country’s migrants are from. Those churches cater not only to religious faith but also to baser motives: worshippers are told they will achieve health and wealth in exchange for regular tithes, and congregants typically pay 10% of their income to the church. “Every Evangelical church is a moment of entrepreneurialism. You only need 10 families and you’re breaking even, if you take tithing seriously,” said O’Neill. “It’s a way to create a job out of nothing. It is also why there is so much competition in Guatemala – and why there are so many churches.”



A migrant prays at a church in the town of Huixtla, Chiapas state, Mexico. Photograph: Alejandro Cegarra/Bloomberg

On top of tithes, pastors and priests can also make hundreds of dollars for each migrant they recruit, and further bonuses for praying with each group. Successful migrants will sometimes also send small remittances. In return, churchmen can recommend trustworthy coyotes who will safely help migrants through at least the first stage of their long journey north.

In a dusty, drought-plagued town in the Huehuetenango department, Victor was recently working on a new second floor at the home of his brother, an evangelical pastor. The freshly-painted house stood out from the neighbouring homes made of wood and corrugated metal, and gave testament to his good fortunes. “[My brother] works as a middleman for people who want to go north,” Victor said. “He knows who the smugglers are because he sent his two children to the USA.”

The booming business for smuggling people to the US: 'Everyone wins'

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/apr/08/the-booming-business-for-smuggling-people-to-the-us-everyone-wins>

Coyotes sometimes use Christian messaging in their advertising, said Simón. One card handed out by a smuggler features a quotation from the book of Psalms – “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delighteth in his way” – emblazoned over a picture of a bus. Underneath, a caption reads: “If you need to travel to the United States have “FAITH,” trust in God and in the trip. We take: older people, minors, fathers and mothers with children.” And potential migrants sometimes turn to their pastors for advice when they are seeking a guide north.

One recent evening a young woman called Dina, logged onto Facebook and messaged an evangelical pastor she knew. “I want to go to the US,” she wrote. He replied instantly: “I have contacts with some coyotes because when people leave for their trip I go to pray for them. I can recommend you to one and help you with prayer. “Come by on Tuesday to discuss.”