



INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION IN HONDURAS: A THEORETICAL APPROACH BASED ON MIGRATION NETWORKS

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Abstract: International migration in Honduras constitutes a structural and sustained phenomenon, closely linked to socioeconomic factors. The objective of this article is to analyze it using a theoretical approach centered on migration networks. Methodologically, review of the literature and relevant documents was conducted, complemented by the analysis of secondary data from the National Institute of Statistics (INE), the National Migration Institute (INM), the World Bank, and other international statistical sources. The results show that Honduran emigration is mainly driven by unemployment, the search for better employment opportunities, and low incomes, among other factors. Migration networks play a key role in connecting those who have already emigrated with those who remain in Honduras and in fostering intentions and plans to emigrate, primarily to the United States and Spain. In 2023, approximately 1.9 million people had access to migration networks; 961,313 intended to emigrate, and 419,368 already had concrete plans to do so. These networks have also influenced recent migration flows and the organization of migrant caravans. Finally, it is concluded that migration is a collective and cumulative process, sustained by social and migration networks that transform the social structure and reshape family and community dynamics in Honduras.

Keywords: International migration; emigration; migration networks; Honduras.

LA MIGRACIÓN INTERNACIONAL EN HONDURAS: UNA APROXIMACIÓN TEÓRICA DESDE LAS REDES MIGRATORIAS

Resumen: La migración internacional en Honduras constituye un fenómeno estructural y sostenido, estrechamente vinculado con factores socioeconómicos. El objetivo de este artículo es analizarla desde un abordaje teórico centrado en las redes migratorias. Metodológicamente, se realizó una revisión bibliográfica y documental, complementada con el análisis de datos secundarios procedentes del Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), el Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM), el Banco Mundial y otras fuentes estadísticas internacionales. Los resultados muestran que la emigración hondureña está impulsada principalmente por el desempleo, la búsqueda de mejores oportunidades laborales y los bajos ingresos, entre otros factores. Las redes migratorias desempeñan un papel clave al articular los vínculos entre quienes ya emigraron y quienes permanecen en Honduras, y al favorecer la formación de intenciones y planes de emigración, principalmente hacia Estados Unidos y España. En 2023, aproximadamente 1,9 millones de personas contaban con redes migratorias; 961 313 tenían intención de emigrar y 419 368 ya disponían de planes concretos. Estas redes también han incidido en los flujos migratorios recientes y en la organización de las caravanas. Finalmente, se concluye que la migración es un proceso colectivo y acumulativo, sostenido por redes sociales y migratorias que transforman la estructura social y reconfiguran las dinámicas familiares y comunitarias en Honduras.

Palabras clave: Migración internacional; emigración; redes migratorias; Honduras.

A MIGRAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL EM HONDURAS: UMA ABORDAGEM TEÓRICA A PARTIR DAS REDES MIGRATÓRIAS

Resumo: A migração internacional em Honduras constitui um fenômeno estrutural e contínuo, estreitamente vinculado a fatores socioeconômicos. O objetivo deste artigo é analisá-la a partir de uma abordagem teórica centrada nas redes migratórias. Metodologicamente, foi realizada uma revisão bibliográfica e documental, complementada pela análise de dados secundários provenientes do Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE), do Instituto Nacional de

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Migração (INM), do Banco Mundial e de outras fontes estatísticas internacionais. Os resultados mostram que a emigração hondurenha é impulsionada principalmente pelo desemprego, pela busca de melhores oportunidades de trabalho e pelos baixos rendimentos, entre outros fatores. As redes migratórias desempenham um papel fundamental ao articular os vínculos entre aqueles que já emigraram e aqueles que permanecem em Honduras, favorecendo a formação de intenções e planos de emigração, principalmente para os Estados Unidos e a Espanha. Em 2023, aproximadamente 1,9 milhão de pessoas contavam com redes migratórias; 961 313 tinham intenção de emigrar e 419 368 já dispunham de planos concretos. Essas redes também têm influenciado os fluxos migratórios recentes e a organização das caravanas. Por fim, conclui-se que a migração é um processo coletivo e cumulativo, sustentado por redes sociais e migratórias que transformam a estrutura social e reconfiguram as dinâmicas familiares e comunitárias em Honduras.

Palavras-chave: Migração internacional; emigração; redes migratórias; Honduras.

1 Introduction

Migration is a process of geographical movement of people from a place of origin to a destination, involving a temporary, semi-permanent, or permanent change of residence. This movement may occur within the same country or across international borders and leads to an adjustment in people's relationships and interactions in the place of arrival (Lee, 1966; Mangalam, 1970; Puerta, 2004).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, migration has become a strategy for social and social reproduction in contexts where well-being conditions are not fully guaranteed in countries of origin. Since the late twentieth century, economic liberalization, deregulation, and privatization policies have contributed to labor precarity, inequality, and various socio-environmental crises, factors that have driven migration within and beyond the region (Flores, 2017; Molina, 2019; García, 2023).

Honduras is located in Central America and shares borders with Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. It is divided into 18 departments and 298 municipalities. In 2023, it had a population of 9,703,734, of whom 52.7% were women and 47.3% were men. Of the total population, 821,737 people belonged to an Indigenous or Afro-descendant group, representing 8.5% of the national population (INE and IOM, 2023).

In 2024, remittances received accounted for approximately 26.27% of Honduras's gross domestic product, placing the country among the economies in the region with the greatest dependence on these flows (World Bank, 2025; Zolano, 2025; Zolano, 2026a; Zolano, 2026b). Honduras also has a medium level of human development and ranks 138th in the global ranking (UNDP, 2024), while continuing to face persistent challenges related to food security (FAO, 2024).

Over the past three decades, migration networks have been essential in explaining the movement of the Honduran population to other countries, primarily the United States, Mexico—as both a transit and, increasingly, a destination country—and Spain. The presence of family members and friends established in these countries has facilitated new departures through financial



support, the sharing of information, the identification of employment opportunities, and other forms of social support. This process is also linked to the migrant caravans that have taken shape since 2018, whose collective nature reflects the strengthening of social, migratory, and communication networks.

Studies on Honduras show that these connections are not merely antecedents of migration; they transmit information and resources that directly influence the likelihood of migrating. Using longitudinal data from 73 Honduran villages and 15,480 individuals, Thomas et al. (2026) demonstrated that incorporating social network variables substantially improves the explanation of migration decisions.

Honduran international emigration is driven by multiple factors, including poverty, lack of employment, low income, violence, political crises, and natural disasters (Flores, 2014a; López Recinos, 2020; Sosa, 2022; Santos et al., 2025; Zolano, 2025; Zolano, 2026c). In this context, the objective of this article is to analyze international migration in Honduras using a theoretical approach centered on migration networks.

The problem is framed around how networks connect people located in countries of origin, transit, and destination, and contribute to the reproduction of mobility. Three questions emerge from this issue: How do migration networks facilitate future emigration? Why do people leave their country, and what do they seek through migration? What is the profile of those who emigrate?

Excluding this introduction and the concluding remarks, the article is organized into three sections. The first presents the methodological procedure and sources of information; the second develops a literature review on migration, migration networks, and the New Economics of Labor Migration; and the third presents and discusses the results concerning recent Honduran migration, the profile of the emigrant population, and the role of migration networks.

2 Methodological Procedures

The article adopts a documentary research design with an exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory scope, integrating qualitative and quantitative evidence. Scientific articles, reports from national and international organizations, books, academic theses, and statistical documents on migration and development were reviewed. This review made it possible to identify theoretical and methodological approaches to international migration, particularly those related to migration networks, the New Economics of Labor Migration, and the social transformations associated with mobility.

The main quantitative source was the 2023 National Survey on Migration and Remittances in Honduras (ENMR), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Its sampling frame was based on the 2013 National Population



and Housing Census, which recorded approximately 2,169,302 households in urban and rural areas. Data were collected using mobile devices and CSPro 7.7 software. The sampling design was probabilistic, stratified, and two-stage; the sample consisted of 12,715 households, and data collection was conducted between February 27 and March 29, 2023. The survey did not include the departments of Gracias a Dios and the Bay Islands, a limitation that should be considered when interpreting some of the estimates (INE and IOM, 2023).

INE defines a household as one or more people, whether related or not, who live in the same dwelling and share a budget and food (INE, 2022). The ENMR also produced specific estimates for ten municipalities prioritized by the Comprehensive Responses to Migration in Central America program: Distrito Central, San Pedro Sula, Omoa, Choloma, Villanueva, La Ceiba, El Progreso, Nueva Arcadia, Santa Bárbara, and Catacamas.

One methodological limitation is that households whose members had all emigrated could not be included in the sample, as no one was residing in the dwelling at the time of data collection. This absence may result in an underestimation of cases of total family migration.

Additionally, data from the National Migration Institute on irregular migration and entry and exit records were consulted, along with remittance data from the World Bank and the Central Bank of Honduras, as well as information from organizations such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The 2001 and 2013 population and housing censuses were also taken into consideration.

The gap this study seeks to address is the need to gain a deeper understanding of migration networks as a component influencing the continuation of Honduran emigration, departure dynamics, and the profile of the emigrant population. To this end, the study analyzes family, friendship, and community ties established between countries of origin and destination, as well as their contribution to the reproduction of future migration flows.

Finally, through a review of scientific literature and documentary sources, together with the analysis of secondary data from various national and international institutions, this study examined the migration phenomenon in Honduras from a migration networks perspective. The integration of statistical information, theoretical contributions, and specialized documents provided a broader understanding of Honduran migration and the social relationships involved in this migration process. Therefore, the study fulfills its proposed objective.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Migration and the Brain Drain or Human Capital Flight

Migration has historically accompanied the formation and transformation of societies. It is not merely a movement between geographic coordinates, but rather a process that transforms the



social, economic, and cultural relationships of places of origin and destination. In the contemporary context, globalization and communication technologies have expanded the movement of workers and skilled human capital (Ribas, 2018; García-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Forero, 2026).

Orellana et al. (2022) point out that the persistence and growth of migration in both developed and developing countries justify its systematic analysis. This study distinguishes the basic forms of migration presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Conceptualization of Migration and Its Modalities

Category	Definition
International Migration	Movement of people across the borders of a state to reside temporarily or permanently in a country other than their country of birth or citizenship.
Internal Migration	Change in habitual place of residence within the borders of the same country, whether voluntary or forced.
Immigration	Entry and settlement of a person or group in a destination country or region.
Emigration	Departure of a person or group from their country or region of origin to settle temporarily or permanently in another territory.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the literature review and the IOM Glossary (2019a).

These categories are constructed based on the position occupied by each territory within the movement. International migration involves crossing state borders; internal migration occurs between localities, municipalities, or departments within the same country; immigration describes entry into the destination territory; and emigration refers to departure from the territory of origin. Other analytical categories are also included, such as return migration, transit migration, forced displacement, and refuge.

Although mobility is persistent, it is often interpreted as an exceptional situation or as a social problem, based on the assumption that people should remain connected to a stable territory. This perspective may obscure both the constraints that prevent people from moving and the conditions that make staying unviable. The decision to leave is shaped by the tension between personal aspirations and the actual capabilities to migrate (Sutcliffe, 1998; Aruj, 2008; de Haas, 2021).

De Haas's (2021) aspirations and capabilities approach complements the framework of the article: deprivation does not automatically generate mobility, because migration also requires resources, information, and the effective freedom to move. Networks can expand these capabilities



by providing money, contacts, and knowledge of migration routes, although they can also reinforce inequalities between those who have access to such networks and those who lack these connections.

Mobility also reflects the asymmetries of a global order in which wealth and opportunities are distributed unequally. States and labor markets attract certain categories of workers, including highly skilled professionals, while restricting the entry of those who do not possess the required credentials. When the sustained departure of scientific, technical, or professional personnel weakens the capacities of the country of origin, this is referred to as brain drain or talent drain (De la Vega, 2005, 2014; De la Vega, 2017; Ribas, 2018).

The migration experience also fosters transnational identities and practices. Migrants maintain economic, emotional, and cultural ties with more than one country, send remittances, transmit values, and recreate community practices in their destinations. In this way, home and belonging are no longer confined to a single geographic location (Arango, 2000, 2003; Díaz, 2015).

In forced migration, mobility is not a matter of fully free choice, but rather a response to threats, violence, persecution, or disasters. This situation requires migrants to be understood as rights-bearing individuals rather than merely as statistics or labor resources (Castles, 2003; Aruj, 2008).

The departure of young and highly skilled people can represent a loss of the social investment made in education and reduce the availability of specialized personnel. The diaspora can also transfer knowledge, create professional networks, and contribute to the country of origin when policies and institutions are in place to mobilize these resources (De la Vega, 2017; Bonilla et al., 2022).

The relationship between migration and development has been discussed in various international forums. The Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development recognized that orderly migration can benefit communities of origin and destination through remittances and the contribution of human resources, but it also maintained that the possibility of remaining in the country of origin must be viable (UN, 1995). Its objectives included addressing structural causes, promoting cooperation among countries, and supporting the reintegration of returnees.

In summary, the causes of migration are economic, social, political, environmental, and family-related. Their relative importance varies depending on the historical period and the position of each individual or household. This multiplicity makes it impossible to explain all forms of migration through a single theory (Aruj, 2008; Massey et al., 2008; Durand, 2022).



3.2 Migration Networks and Social Networks

Migration networks are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in places of origin, transit, and destination through kinship, friendship, neighborhood ties, or other forms of shared belonging (Boyd, 1989; Massey et al., 1993; Arango, 2003).

Pérez (2001), Gaete (2010), and Pedone (2010) distinguish between migration chains and migration networks. A chain typically describes a sequence of support through which one person facilitates another person's arrival; a network refers to a broader, dynamic, and branching structure. Both function as forms of social capital and can facilitate labor, residential, and community integration in the receiving society.

One of the main mechanisms of migration networks is the reduction of the costs and risks associated with migration. People with prior migration experience share information about routes, border crossings, accommodation, documentation, and employment. They may also finance the journey or provide support upon arrival, thereby reducing uncertainty for new members (Massey et al., 1993, 2008; Izcara, 2010).

Granovetter's (1973) distinction between strong and weak ties helps clarify this mechanism. Strong ties—family members and close friends—tend to provide trust, material assistance, and emotional support; weak ties—acquaintances, colleagues, or occasional contacts—can connect migrants to information and opportunities that do not circulate within their immediate social group.

When connections reach a certain level of density, each new migration experience expands the pool of people who have access to support for migrating. Migration can thus acquire a cumulative causation dynamic and continue even when the factors that originally triggered the flow change (García Abad, 2001; Massey et al., 1993; García Abad, 2003; Izcara, 2010).

Boyd (1989) identifies family and personal networks as central components of the migration process: they influence who migrates, the destination chosen, adaptation, and the continuation of migration flows. This perspective is particularly relevant to Honduras, where a large share of migration intentions is supported by family members or friends residing abroad.

Migration networks combine horizontal relationships of solidarity with ties of power, dependence, and asymmetry. Some intermediaries control access to housing, employment, or transportation and turn social capital into a business that may involve fraud, human trafficking, or labor exploitation (Pérez and Viruela, 2001; Pedone, 2010; Díaz et al., 2025).

Gender is another organizing principle of migration networks. In several Latin American migration flows to Spain, women have served as the first link in chains associated with domestic and care work and have subsequently facilitated the reunification of family members. These



dynamics give rise to transnational households and forms of motherhood in which caregiving is distributed among women living in different countries (Pedone, 2010; Díaz et al., 2025).

Recent evidence from Honduras reinforces the article's central argument. Thomas et al. (2026) analyzed kinship, friendship, and economic exchange networks across 73 villages and found that the transmission of information and resources within these networks helps explain international migration decisions. This finding makes it possible to connect the theoretical framework with empirical evidence specifically from Honduras.

Caravans represent a contemporary form of coordination between in-person and digital networks. The circulation of calls for participation, routes, meeting points, and recommendations through mobile phones and social media platforms facilitates collective coordination. At the same time, the caravan serves as a mobility and self-protection strategy in response to the costs and dangers of traveling individually (Huerta, 2019; Ramírez, 2020; Álvarez, 2022).

3.3 New Economics of Labor Migration

The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) shifted the analytical focus from the isolated individual toward broader social units, primarily the family and household. Developed from the 1980s onward through the work of Oded Stark and J. Edward Taylor, this perspective represents a critical revision of the neoclassical model (Stark, 1992; Taylor, 1999; Arango, 2003; Massey et al., 2008).

Whereas the neoclassical approach views migration as an individual decision aimed at maximizing income, the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) interprets it as a collective strategy to diversify sources of income and reduce the risks faced by the household unit (Palacios, 2007; Nieto, 2011).

Households in developing countries often operate in contexts where credit, insurance, and capital markets are incomplete or inaccessible. When they are unable to obtain loans or protect themselves against unemployment, poor harvests, or other adverse events, a family may send one of its members abroad. Remittances then function as an informal insurance mechanism, help overcome liquidity constraints, and, in some cases, finance investments in the place of origin (Stark, 1992; Massey et al., 1993; Taylor, 1999).

From this perspective, wage differentials are not a necessary condition for migration to occur, since risk diversification can remain an incentive even when the income gap is not extreme. NELM also incorporates the concept of relative deprivation: household well-being depends on its position relative to other households in the community, and the visible prosperity of those who receive remittances may increase the incentive to migrate (Stark, 1992; Quinn, 2006; Izcarra, 2010).

NELM also redefines return migration. While the neoclassical approach may interpret it as



the failure of an individual project, this theory understands it as the culmination of a family strategy: the individual migrates with goals of saving money, acquiring a home, purchasing land, or pursuing education, and returns once the intended goal has been achieved (Constant & Massey, 2002; Nieto, 2011).

Migration can be understood as a family strategy for social reproduction. The migrant seeks to diversify household income by working in a labor market offering higher wages, without necessarily intending to remain there permanently (Palacios, 2007; Taylor, 1999).

The NELM and network theory are complementary. The former explains why households distribute risk through migration, while the latter shows how social ties make this strategy possible by mobilizing information, money, housing, and employment opportunities. Together, they make it possible to understand migration as a social and family phenomenon that extends beyond the individual pursuit of higher wages.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 The Migration Phenomenon in Honduras: A Brief Overview

Honduras went from being a country that received immigrants associated with the mining and banana enclaves of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to becoming a major country of emigration. This transition accelerated during the 1990s, when structural adjustment policies affected the livelihoods of numerous households, and migration abroad came to serve as an economic and social “safety valve” (Puerta, 2004; Flores, 2012; López Recinos, 2021).

Reichman’s (2011) ethnographic study of a Honduran coffee-growing community shows how the decline of a local economy can rapidly transform undocumented migration into a recurring family strategy. His contribution connects economic restructuring with the gradual formation of networks between Honduras and the United States.

Hurricane Mitch, which struck in 1998, was a turning point: it destroyed productive infrastructure, displaced populations, and accelerated migration to the United States. In the aftermath of the disaster, the U.S. government granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Honduran nationals who were already in the country (Reichman, 2011; Flores, 2014b).

The causes of Honduran migration are multiple and structural. They include poverty, inequality, unemployment, underemployment, and the labor market’s difficulty in absorbing the young population. These factors are compounded by corruption, political instability, and deficiencies in the coverage and quality of public services such as healthcare and education (Puerta, 2004; López Recinos, 2020; Sosa, 2022).

Violence perpetrated by gangs, criminal organizations, drug-trafficking networks, and other actors has also led to internal displacement and forced migration. In these cases, people do



not migrate solely because of economic aspirations, but also to protect their lives and personal safety from threats, extortion, or forced recruitment (Flores, 2017; Sosa, 2022).

Among the recent manifestations of this phenomenon are the migration of unaccompanied children and adolescents, which became internationally visible in 2014, and the migrant caravans that began in 2018. The latter reduce some of the costs of the journey and provide a perception of collective safety in the face of risks associated with migrant smugglers and criminal networks, although they do not eliminate vulnerability during transit (Flores, 2014a; Flores, 2014b; Huerta, 2019; Ramírez, 2020).

There is a large population of Honduran origin in the United States, as well as a significant presence in Spain. Although recent emigrants continue to be predominantly male and young, women's participation is increasing, and there is also a segment of migrants with higher education. Income differentials and greater opportunities for labor market integration in destination countries are important incentives (López-Recinos, 2021; Flores, 2024).

The Honduran economy remains highly dependent on its diaspora: in 2024, remittances accounted for approximately 26.27% of GDP. These resources support the basic consumption, health care, and education of numerous households, but they can also deepen economic dependence. At the social level, prolonged separation redistributes caregiving responsibilities and contributes to the formation of transnational households (Flores, 2009; Zolano, 2026a).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricanes Eta and Iota exacerbated the economic and environmental pressures driving migration. Despite the dangers along the migration route and tighter border controls, migration continues to be perceived by some segments of the population as a pathway to achieving living conditions and opportunities that they cannot find in the country (Flores, 2021; Sosa, 2022).

4.2 Recent International Migration in 2023

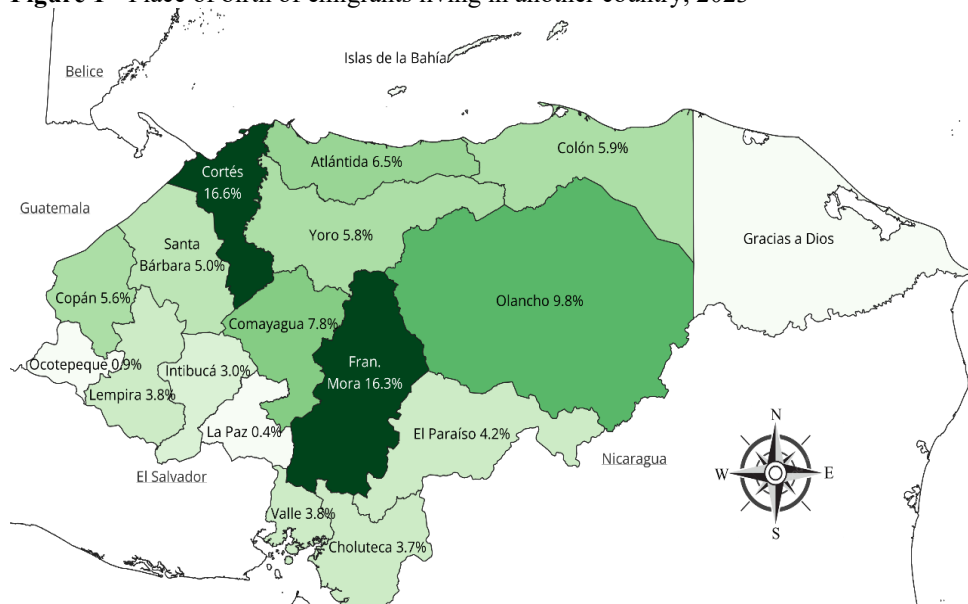
Of the country's total number of households, 17.7% (454,733) had a migration history, meaning that at least one household member had emigrated. The proportion reached 19.6% in rural areas and 16.5% in urban areas. In terms of population, an estimated 580,736 emigrants were linked to Honduran households (INE and IOM, 2023). Six out of every ten emigrants were men. Of all emigrants, 60.0% had emigrated recently, between January 2018 and March 2023, equivalent to 348,445 people; the remainder had left the country before 2018 (INE and IOM, 2023).

The fact that 17.7% of households have a migration history demonstrates that this is a widespread experience, present in nearly one in six households. The difference between rural areas (19.6%) and urban areas (16.5%) indicates a greater role for migration within rural families'

strategies for social reproduction. Flores (2009), Reichman (2011), and Santos et al. (2025) link this pattern to the fragility of livelihoods, the search for diversified sources of income, and the consolidation of networks connecting communities of origin with international labor markets.

The main departments of birth among the emigrant population were Cortés (16.6%), Francisco Morazán (16.3%), and Olancho (9.8%). These three departments accounted for nearly four out of every ten emigrants. They were followed by Comayagua (7.8%), Atlántida (6.5%), Colón (5.9%), Copán (5.6%), Yoro (5.8%), and Santa Bárbara (5.0%), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Place of birth of emigrants living in another country, 2023



Source: Prepared by the author using data from INE and IOM (2023).

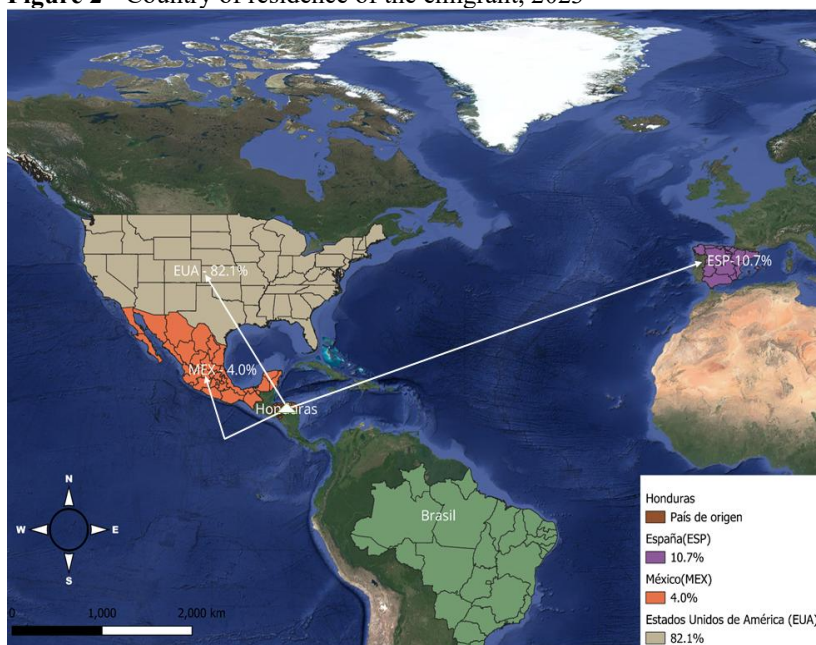
These findings are consistent with studies that identify Francisco Morazán and Cortés as important places of origin for emigration. Both departments have large populations, economic activity, labor markets, transportation infrastructure, and two of the country's main cities: Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Their prominence in Figure 1 shows that major urban areas function as places of origin, connection, and organization for international migration movements (Flores, 2012; IOM, 2021; Zolano, 2026a).

The 9.8% corresponding to Olancho reflects the continuity of a migration circuit with strong territorial roots. Flores (2009) examined the historical importance of migration and remittances among households in Olancho. Accumulated experiences, information shared among family members, and financial support from those residing abroad facilitate new departures and make migration a recurring strategy for families' social reproduction.

In turn, Cortés and Francisco Morazán also rank among the main recipients of remittances. The overlap between migration origins and remittance receipt reveals the formation of

transnational circuits: these departments bring together populations, family networks, labor markets, and transfers from abroad. Remittances support household consumption, finance health care and education, and sustain the ties that connect communities of origin with the diaspora (Zolano, 2026a).

Figure 2 - Country of residence of the emigrant, 2023



Source: Prepared by the author using data from INE and IOM (2023).

The United States accounted for 82.1% of the emigrant population associated with Honduran households. Spain was the second destination, with 10.7%, followed by Mexico, with 4.0% (Figure 2). Puerta (2004), Flores (2012), López-Recinos (2021), Santos et al. (2025), Zolano (2026a), and Díaz et al. (2025) identify the United States and Spain as the main destinations for Honduran emigration.

The concentration of emigrants in the United States reflects a migration trajectory that depends on historically established networks: previous migration flows create kinship ties, information, housing arrangements, and employment opportunities that make it more likely for new migrants to choose the same destination. The 82.1% figure reflects the interplay of wage differentials, labor demand, and accumulated social capital between the two countries (Reichman, 2011; López Recinos, 2021; Thomas et al., 2026).

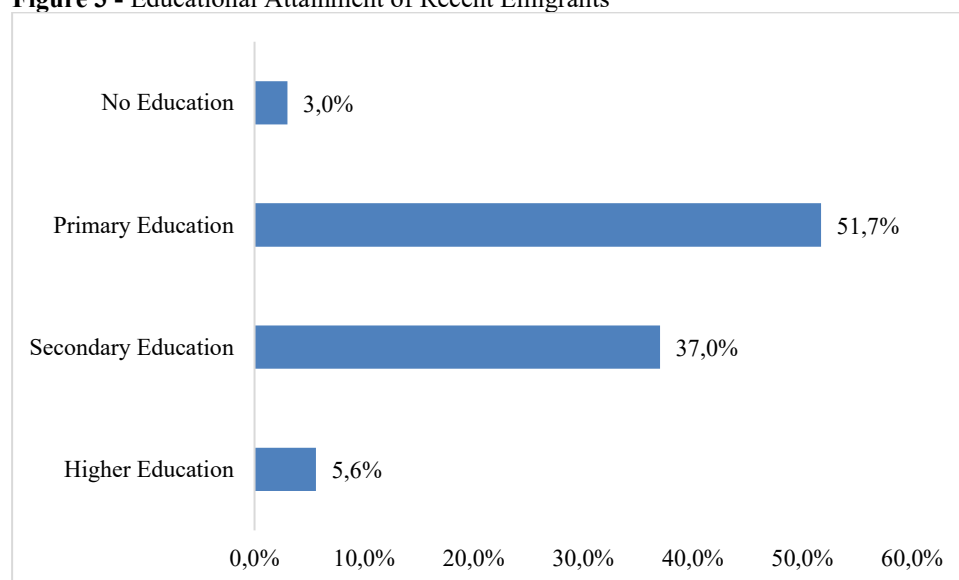
The 10.7% corresponding to Spain reflects a diversification of the Honduran migration system. Díaz et al. (2025) link this migration corridor to labor market integration networks and to women's participation in the care sector. Mexico accounts for 4.0% and serves a dual function as both a transit and destination country. The networks established along the journey, employment opportunities, and the conditions for accessing the United States can transform an intermediate stage into a place of residence.

4.3 Profile of Recent International Migration, 2023

Of the 348,445 Hondurans who emigrated between 2018 and 2023, 39.0% were women and 61.0% were men. By area of origin, 51.9% came from rural areas and 48.1% from urban areas, indicating a relatively balanced distribution (INE and IOM, 2023).

Men predominate among recent emigrants, but women account for a substantial share (39.0%). This female participation is associated with the diversification of destinations and employment sectors. The 3.8-percentage-point difference between rural and urban origins shows that emigration occurs across both settings. In rural areas, it is linked to the vulnerability of livelihoods; in urban areas, to unemployment, underemployment, and expectations of labor mobility. Wyngaarden et al. (2023) show that rural young people's life plans are shaped by the relationship between aspirations to stay, local opportunities, and material capabilities.

Figure 3 - Educational Attainment of Recent Emigrants



Source: Prepared by the author using data from INE and IOM (2023).

The average age at the time of emigration was 27 years for both men and women. Regarding educational attainment, 51.7% were enrolled in or had reached the primary education level; 37.0%, the secondary level; 5.6%, higher education; and 3.0% had no formal education (Figure 3). Primary and secondary education together accounted for 88.7% of recent emigration.

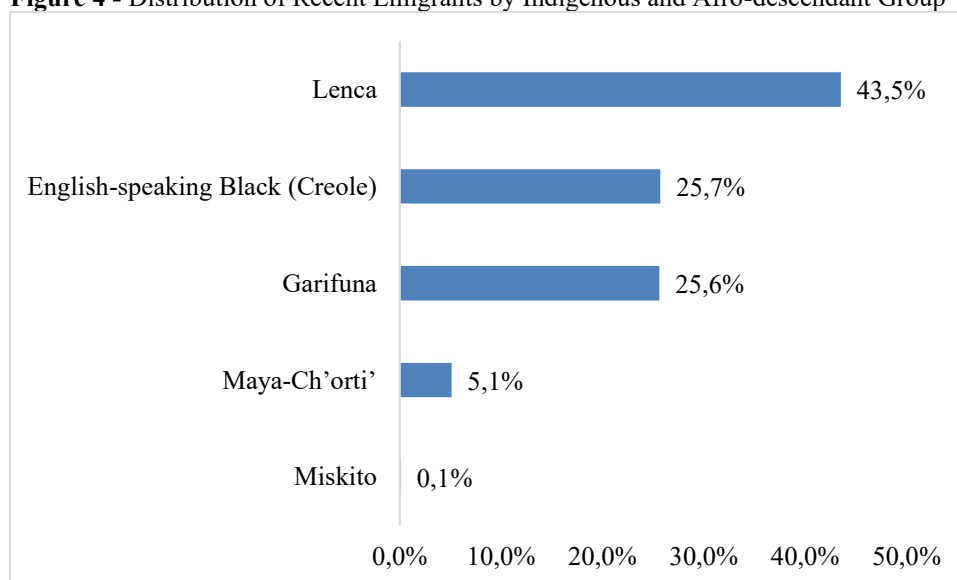
The combination of a low average age and the predominance of primary or secondary education is consistent with a predominantly labor-driven flow, composed of people who migrate during the early stages of their working lives. Flores (2024) highlights the young age profile of Honduran emigration and the difficulty of the domestic labor market in absorbing new workers. This educational profile is associated with the integration of the migrant population into labor-

intensive sectors, such as agriculture, construction, services, and care work, as described by IOM (2021).

The group with higher education, accounting for 5.6%, represents a quantitatively smaller segment but is strategically important because of the technical, scientific, and professional training it encompasses. Their departure may reduce the availability of specialized personnel and contribute to brain drain processes. At the same time, professional diaspora networks facilitate the exchange of knowledge, cooperation projects, and academic ties with the country of origin (Borjas, 2020; Bonilla et al., 2022; Bertè et al., 2023).

Among recent emigrants, 9.7% belonged to Indigenous or Afro-descendant groups, representing approximately 33,947 people. Within this group, 43.5% identified as Lenca; 25.7% as English-speaking Black or Creole; 25.6% as Garifuna; 5.1% as Maya-Ch'orti'; and 0.1% as Miskito (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Distribution of Recent Emigrants by Indigenous and Afro-descendant Group



Source: Author's own elaboration based on information from INE and IOM (2023).

The proportion of recent emigrants belonging to Indigenous or Afro-descendant peoples (9.7%) is 1.2 percentage points higher than their share of the national population (8.5%). This finding demonstrates the significant presence of these populations in international migration. The participation of the Lenca population is related to its demographic weight within the country, while the percentages of Garifuna and English-speaking populations highlight the importance of historical transnational connections, particularly in Caribbean territories. This composition suggests a research agenda on ethnic networks, labor market integration, cultural circulation, and community ties between Honduras and destination countries (INE and IOM, 2023).

The main reasons for emigrating were economic: unemployment (52.0%), seeking a better



job (51.5%), and low income (36.0%). Other reasons included family reunification (9.9%), lack of access to education (2.8%), lack of access to health care services (2.8%), and insecurity in the community (2.7%). Lower percentages were reported for threats or extortion, lack of access to food, violence, marriage or union, domestic violence, crop losses, and natural disasters. The multiple-response nature of the data highlights the overlap of economic, family, social, and environmental factors within a single migration decision (INE and IOM, 2023).

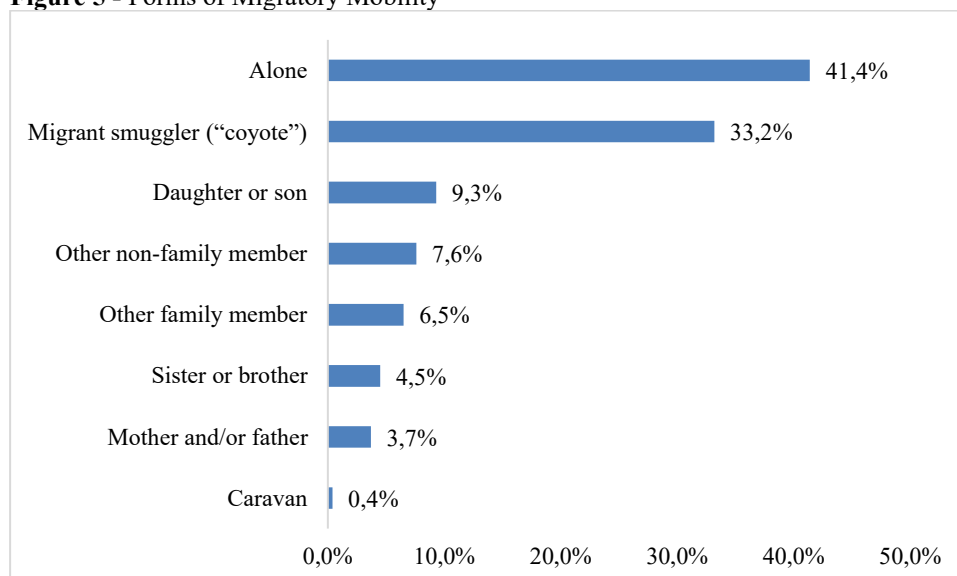
Unemployment and underemployment are structural problems: part of the working-age population is unable to enter the labor market or does so in inadequately paid jobs. This situation drives people to seek opportunities abroad (López Recinos, 2020; Sosa, 2022; Durand, 2022).

The simultaneous predominance of unemployment, the search for better employment, and low incomes supports the interpretation offered by the New Economics of Labor Migration: households do not respond solely to the absolute absence of employment, but also to the quality of labor market integration and the need to diversify their sources of income. Orellana et al. (2022), Durand (2022), and Sosa (2022) describe a similar combination of precariousness, inequality, and expectations of well-being in Mesoamerican migration movements. Although family reunification accounts for a smaller percentage, it provides direct evidence of the functioning of previously established migration chains and networks.

Community insecurity was mentioned by 2.7%, while other forms of violence are distributed across threats, extortion, and domestic violence. Hiskey et al. (2018), using surveys conducted in Central America and twelve Honduran municipalities, found that victimization increases the likelihood of considering emigration. These findings show that violence is intertwined with unemployment and low incomes: it threatens everyday security, weakens the prospects for remaining in the country, and reinforces the search for alternatives abroad.

The most common arrangement was traveling alone (41.4%), followed by using the services of migrant smugglers, or “coyotes” (33.2%). Among those who traveled with others, the companions included sons or daughters (9.3%), non-family members (7.6%), other relatives (6.5%), brothers or sisters (4.5%), and a father or mother (3.7%). Traveling as part of a caravan accounted for 0.4% of the total (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Forms of Migratory Mobility



Source: Author's own elaboration based on information from INE and IOM (2023).

The combined share of those who traveled alone and those who relied on a coyote reached 74.6%, indicating the predominance of individual forms of travel or travel facilitated by informal transportation services. Traveling alone coexists with networks that operate remotely through money, instructions, contacts, and real-time location sharing. Darling (2023) observed that Honduran migrants use phones and digital channels to maintain communication, assess routes, and coordinate support during journeys undertaken with coyotes, caravans, or independently.

Caravans gained visibility beginning on October 13, 2018, when social media and messaging services disseminated meeting locations for starting the journey to the United States. San Pedro Sula was the main departure point for the first major mobilization and continued to be an important location for subsequent gatherings (IOM, 2019b; Huerta, 2019; Álvarez, 2022).

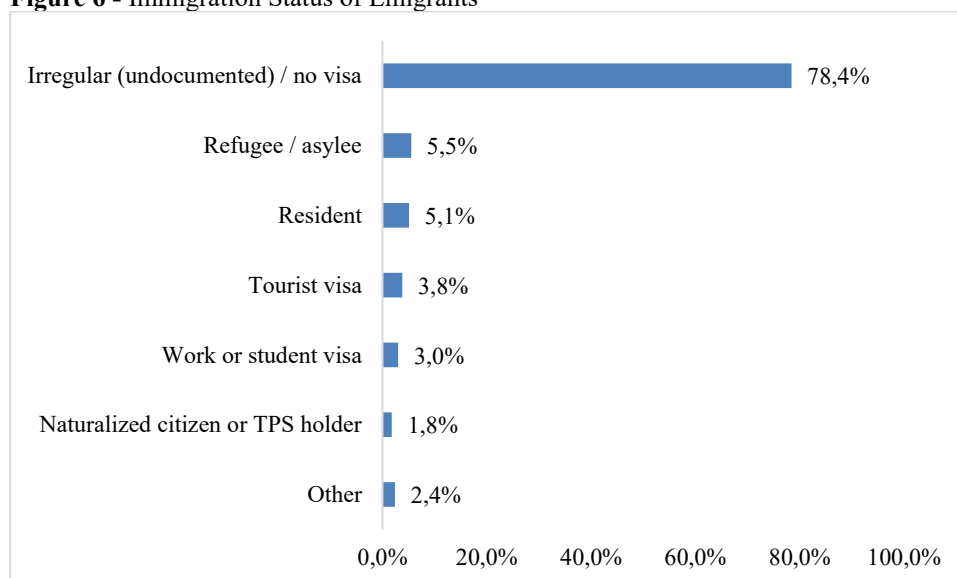
The second caravan brought together people from different localities in Honduras; subsequent mobilizations were also organized from El Salvador and southern Mexico. These actions can be interpreted as an expression of expanded migration networks, as they rely on the exchange of information, accompaniment, and mutual support. They also constitute a collective strategy for mobility and political visibility (Ramírez, 2020; Álvarez, 2022).

The 0.4% corresponding to caravans represents a small fraction of the recent migration accumulated between 2018 and 2023, although this form of mobility has high public and political visibility. Its significance lies in its form of organization: caravans transform scattered information, individual needs, and digital networks into collective action. Rizzo (2026) explains participation through the combination of threats, available resources, social ties, and mobilization capacity.

The immigration status of 78.4% of recent emigrants was irregular or without a visa, representing approximately 273,128 people. Within this group, 87.3% resided in the United States,

6.0% in Mexico, and 5.4% in Spain. The term “irregular immigration status” accurately describes this administrative condition. Lack of documentation increases exposure to labor exploitation, detention, deportation, and other human rights violations (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - Immigration Status of Emigrants



Source: Prepared by the author using data from INE and IOM (2023).

The magnitude of irregular migration reveals two distinct dimensions of the process: networks facilitate movement and settlement, while access to regularization is conditioned by state policies, documentary requirements, and legal opportunities. Córdova et al. (2024) show that in northern Central America, new migration attempts persist after experiences of detention or deportation, driven by violence, food insecurity, and transnational family ties.

A total of 19,294 people had refugee status or had been granted asylum, equivalent to 5.5% of recent emigrants. Of this group, 99.8% were concentrated in the United States (90.4%), Mexico (6.6%), and Spain (2.8%). The United States was home to 283,764 recent emigrants; of these, 3.6% held some type of visa (1.2% tourist, 0.6% student, and 1.8% work), 3.0% had residency status, and 0.7% were covered by TPS. These results demonstrate the significant prevalence of irregular status in the main destination country (INE and IOM, 2023).

Ayala (2023) identified heterogeneous conditions of legal status and precariousness among Honduran women employed in domestic work in the United States. Her study complements the ENMR findings by showing that immigration status interacts with type of employment, income, savings, and social security coverage. Irregular status is thus reflected in labor market participation, economic stability, and the day-to-day exercise of rights.

4.4 Honduran Migration Networks



Approximately 4,096,028 people had a relative living abroad, equivalent to 58.9% of the population aged 15 and older. Of these, 1,927,948 people—27.7% of this age group—had family members or friends abroad who could help them if they decided to emigrate (INE and IOM, 2023).

The 31.2-percentage-point gap between having a relative abroad (58.9%) and having someone who could help with migration (27.7%) makes it possible to distinguish between transnational kinship and an effectively active network. Social capital emerges when the relationship mobilizes information, financial resources, housing, or employment contacts. Its availability depends on the closeness between individuals, economic resources, immigration status abroad, and the willingness to assume costs or risks (Boyd, 1989; Granovetter, 1973).

The availability of support was similar among women (26.8%) and men (28.8%). By area of residence, networks were more common in urban areas: 61.7% had relatives living abroad, compared with 54.8% in rural areas. Potential support for emigrating reached 29.8% in urban areas and 24.6% in rural areas.

This distribution reveals two territorial dimensions of the process. Rural households have accumulated greater migration experience, while urban residents more frequently report having networks available in the present. Connectivity, the concentration of resources, and the diversity of contacts in cities facilitate the activation of these ties and expand the possibilities of organizing a new departure.

A total of 961,313 people, equivalent to 13.8% of the population aged 15 and older, expressed an intention to emigrate during the twelve months following the survey. In addition, 419,368 people (6.0%) expressed this intention and had either a specific plan or a clearly defined course of action for living in another country (INE and IOM, 2023).

The 7.8-percentage-point difference between intention and planning represents the transition from aspiration to prepared action. People with a plan account for approximately 43.6% of those who expressed an intention to migrate. Access to resources, documents, information, contacts, and financing transforms the desire to migrate into a concrete project, as proposed by the aspirations-capabilities framework developed by de Haas (2021). Networks play a central role in this transition by reducing costs and organizing support.

Among those with concrete plans to emigrate, 55.8% were men and 44.2% were women, while 69.4% lived in urban areas. The largest age group was 18 to 29 years old (40.7%), followed by those aged 40 to 59 (24.7%), 30 to 39 (22.6%), and 15 to 17 (6.6%).

The concentration of migration plans among those aged 18 to 29 is consistent with the average age of 27 observed among those who have already emigrated. This correspondence reinforces the interpretation of migration as a strategy linked to entering the labor market and building a life project. Nevertheless, Wyngaarden et al. (2023) point out that young rural



Hondurans also have aspirations to remain in their communities; migration may occur when they lack the material capacities needed to sustain that preference.

Among those who had plans to migrate, the main reasons were the search for a better job (59.8%), low wages (41.2%), unemployment (38.6%), and family reunification (10.4%). Other reasons, each accounting for less than 4%, included insecurity, lack of access to services, food, education, or health care, threats, extortion, and marriage or union.

The hierarchy of motives varies slightly depending on the stage of the process: among those who have already emigrated, unemployment stands out, whereas among those preparing to leave, the search for a better job ranks first. This variation reflects the transition from a situation of labor market exclusion to an expectation of occupational mobility. Both groups place employment and income at the center of the decision, along with family reunification as an explicit mechanism for sustaining migration networks.

Networks have also become increasingly important in women's migration to the United States and Spain. In the latter country, the integration of Honduran women into domestic and care work may facilitate the subsequent arrival of family members and friends, although it also reproduces labor and gender inequalities (Díaz et al., 2025). In the United States, Ayala (2023) shows that Honduran domestic workers experience different conditions in terms of income, savings, assets, and social security. This female participation takes place within segmented labor markets with varying levels of protection.

Migration networks are not static: they expand, weaken, or are reconfigured in response to migration policies, economic conditions, and the availability of communication technologies. They also play a role in the sending of remittances, the exchange of information, and the transformation of consumption practices and lifestyles in communities of origin (Díaz et al., 2025; Zolano, 2026a; Zolano, 2026b).

The findings of Thomas et al. (2026) help refine this interpretation: in Honduran villages, relationships that transmit information and resources showed greater explanatory power than mechanisms based solely on status comparison. The effectiveness of a network depends on the resources that circulate, the people who participate, and the degree of trust among them.

Caravans provide a visible example of the coordination among family, community, organizational, and digital networks. These networks facilitate mobilization and movement while also operating within power relations and risks associated with transit. Their functioning combines collective support, reliance on intermediaries, and exposure to various forms of exploitation.

Given the importance of migration networks in Honduras, Zolano (2026a, 2026b) notes that the number of Honduran emigrants abroad increased from 157,813 in 1990 to 1,397,584 in 2024. This increase demonstrates the consolidation of these networks and the sustained growth of



mobility, with the United States being the primary destination. A similar pattern can be observed in the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America: Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

In summary, migration can be understood as a dynamic social process sustained by family, community, and friendship ties. Networks reduce certain economic, social, and emotional costs; transmit information; provide financial support and companionship; and facilitate mechanisms for integration at destinations. Migration decisions thus acquire a collective and cumulative character.

5 Final Considerations

The article analyzed international migration in Honduras using a theoretical approach focused on migration networks. The results place the phenomenon within the interplay of economic factors, family dynamics, and social relationships built over time. Networks constitute a structuring element that facilitates, sustains, and reproduces migration flows between Honduras and the main destination countries, particularly the United States and Spain.

Honduran emigration is driven by structural factors, including unemployment, low incomes, inequality, violence, and the limited capacity of the state to ensure adequate conditions for well-being. These factors interact with social networks that reduce costs and uncertainties while expanding opportunities for migration and integration in destination countries.

Mobility also serves as a household strategy for social reproduction: it allows households to diversify their income, manage risks, and sustain consumption through remittances. Kinship ties between those who remain in Honduras and those who reside abroad are a central component of this dynamic and contribute to the formation of new migration intentions and plans.

Caravans reflect contemporary forms of collective organization based on shared information, mutual support, and a greater sense of security during the journey. They demonstrate the cumulative nature of migration, while also showing that networks can involve inequalities, intermediation, and risks.

In conclusion, Honduran migration is a structural and sustained dynamic driven by domestic socioeconomic conditions and the density of transnational networks. Its effects can be observed in the formation of transnational households, dependence on remittances, and transformations within communities of origin. Future research should longitudinally compare migration intentions with actual migration, examine gender and territorial differences, and explore related processes such as return, reintegration, and the circulation of knowledge.

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