Asli Selin Okyay, Luca Barana and Coleen Boland (eds)

Moving Towards Europe
Diverse Trajectories and Multidimensional Drivers of Migration across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic
This edited volume is based on research conducted in the framework of the Horizon 2020 Project ITFLOWS – IT Tools and Methods for Managing Migration Flows – which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 882986. This volume reflects only the views of the authors, and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

The authors of this volume would like to thank the participants in the ITFLOWS closed-door online expert workshop “Drivers and patterns of mixed migration towards the EU”, held on 28 September 2021, as well as the ITFLOWS project internal reviewers, for their invaluable feedback and input on earlier versions of this work.

Cover illustration: Shutterstock.com

ISSN 2624-8905 • ISBN 978-3-0343-4639-9 (Print)
DOI 10.3726/b20682

This publication has been peer reviewed.

© 2023, Asli Selin Okay, Luca Barana, Coleen Boland (eds).
Published by Peter Lang Group AG, Lausanne, Schweiz

info@peterlang.com - www.peterlang.com

Open Access: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution CC-BY 4.0 license. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.
Chapter 11 Increasingly exacerbated crises in Honduras

Abstract: From being a country of immigration during the first half of the twentieth century, by the 1990s Honduras had transitioned to one of emigration, with negative net migration. Systemic socioeconomic inequality fomented by land concentration and dispossession, combined with poverty and gang-related violence, are cited as key factors informing the departure of Honduran nationals. More specifically, political and economic instability, together with fragile institutions, corruption and insecurity represent destabilising mechanisms that contribute to both internal displacement and emigration. Weak social protections make the effects of climate disaster more acute. Violence at the hands of international criminal organisations renders Honduras one of the most violent countries in the world; its homicide rate, while recently slightly in decline, remains comparatively high, and systemic gendered violence is on the rise. While Hondurans on the move mainly choose the United States or Mexico, they also elect irregular migration pathways and submit asylum requests to Europe, mainly Spain. Nonetheless, despite persistent or inevitable threat to life, when Hondurans apply for asylum, they usually encounter difficulties in meeting the requirements for international protection, indicating further precarity and marginalisation in the future as flows continue.

Keywords: asylum recognition | weak state protection | international organised crime | gendered violence | climate disaster

A country of 9.9 million, with a population including combined Spanish and indigenous descent, Honduras is an interesting case in studying the Atlantic Route, as it became a country of significant emigration from the 1990s forward. It currently has a negative net migration, although it also experiences significant and sometimes forced return migration (UN Population Division 2020). Poverty, inequality and violence are cited as influencing this emigratory turn, in combination with fragile institutions, political instability and corruption (Gutiérrez Rivera 2018). Its nationals’ main countries of destination include the United States, Spain, Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Canada, although it can also serve as a transit country given its geographical location en route to North America (UN Population Division 2020).

This chapter explores the historical context of current Honduran migration and asylum flows to Europe and other international destinations, including
historical developments and international interventions and extractive projects that contribute to present reliance on micro and macro levels of remittances as well as NGO and international cooperation. It provides a further overview of internal displacement and interregional movement in light of recent history and current political, social and economic crisis, lack of social protection, increasing gender violence and climate disaster. This is followed by a close examination of migration flows to the EU and asylum applications to Spain and other EU member states, as well as patterns of Honduran settlement within Spain. These specific trends are then further fleshed out in a series of observations and concluding insights.

11.1 From immigration to emigration, internal displacement and movement to urban centres

In parallel with overall historical trends in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, Honduras was initially a country of immigration in the first half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, immigration policies encouraged foreign investors or professionals to engage with industries like the banana industry (López Recinos 2020). On the other hand, further immigration to Honduras also occurred in the 1970s with Salvadorians in search of land and work, and various nationalities from the Central American region fleeing conflict in the 1980s (Léon Araya and Salazar Araya 2016). At the same time, the trade and migratory ties between the United States and Honduras account for some small-scale migration of Hondurans to the North American country, up until the more voluminous migratory movements in recent history (ibid.). For example, the Afro-indigenous Garífuna population began to establish diaspora communities well before recent migration (Agudelo 2019).

Indeed, throughout the century, until the 1990s, migratory movements of Hondurans largely remained within the country. The Honduran population was mainly distributed in rural areas (and a large portion remains in these areas today) with the majority involved in agriculture. A combination of factors meant that most disenfranchised land renters or agricultural workers had to rely on mobility, although the distribution and manipulation of land use by an elite few exercised and continues to yield great influence (Jolly and Torrey 1993). Boom and bust cycles of export commodities, in combination with decisions on land use made by these elite economic interests, translated to impoverished or unemployed rural populations that had to engage in cyclical or permanent migration to urban areas, or depend on family remittances (ibid.).
In addition to the hierarchical land ownership complicating the rural economy, development in the country was further affected by a shift in economic policies at the end of the Cold War in particular, heralding international emigration. Here, the Common Central American Market agreement, initiated in the 1960s and of which Honduras was a member, has allowed for some positive changes in the Central American region, and despite interruptions by crises in the 1980s, proceeded from the 1990s forward to coordinate interregional economic integration and free trade policies (Cordero 2017). Neoliberal restructuring of the Honduran economy can in particular be traced to early 1990s legislation under President Rafael Leonardo Callejas, as the Honduran state became decentralised and shifted towards market-friendly neoliberal policy (Hernández Rodríguez 2020: 86). It is also argued that United States involvement under the former President Reagan, in restructuring the Honduran economy to deregulate and arguably destabilise the coffee trade, had repercussions for traditional forms of agriculture (Nevins 2016).

The deterioration of living conditions in the past several decades in Honduras includes a lack of government prioritisation for social protections like housing, health, education and aid for populations like the elderly and disabled. With a vacuum in social services for Hondurans, international NGOs began (and continue) to take on the responsibility for providing social services and addressing a destabilised social welfare. Increasing 1990s Honduran emigration is particularly cited as economic and development related, and linked to a search for social and economic security. Emigration outside of the country became an increasingly frequent option for agricultural workers, and remittances a key resource for those who remained. In fact, between 1990 and 2005, it is notable that remittances had become the single largest source of foreign exchange in the Honduran economy (Reichman 2011). Social protections continue to reflect short-term, partisan policies that lack universal coverage or institutional coordination, financing, implementation, and evaluation, thus having little impact for vulnerable populations (Martínez Franzoni 2013).

Finally, it seems important to point out the relevance of the Central American integration process, which was the first of those processes in the LAC region, with support from the regional bloc Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and at the initiative of the Costa Rican, Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Honduran and Nicaraguan governments (Cordero 2017). Although in the second half of the twentieth century political will for integration in Central America has been variously expressed, Costa Rica has remained resistant, with an effect on control of migration flows and migration policies, which are not particularly streamlined (Solano Muñoz 2017).
11.2 International migration trends and asylum flows: Lack of state and social protection

This historical overview prefaces this century’s recent Honduran international migration, which can be attributed to intertwined factors of socioeconomic and political instability, violence and climate change or disaster, as the largely rural makeup of Honduras is particularly susceptible to environmental changes. Concurrently, on the one hand, while rural-to-urban migration represented a significant phenomenon pre-1990s, this internal migration is still prevalent today (Lamiño Jaramillo et al. 2019). On the other hand, there is substantial and frequently forced return migration to Honduras (IOM DTM 2021). Finally, Honduras sometimes serves as a transit country, in what seems to be an increasingly permanent trend, primarily for Haitians as well as Cubans and some African nationalities (IFRC 2016; IOM DTM 2021).

In a further examination of the origin context in Honduras, after having provided a brief sketch of the development situation in the country, we go on to detail how the socioeconomic situation is inextricably linked with political instability and corruption, with the weak state consequently leaving violence and crime largely unchecked. Political conflict has been rife in particular since the coup d’état of 2009. Since then, the conservative National Party has remained in power amidst allegations of corruption, with contested presidential elections taking place in 2013 and 2017 (Greene 2020). President Juan Orlando Hernández, presiding since 2014, is under US investigation for links to drug trafficking organisations, and his government has been most recently accused of graft in hurricane relief (Angelo 2021). Compounding this political corruption, in the last few years the economic policies enacted under President Orlando Hernández have been argued to worsen the economic situation. Government neglect, incapacity or corruption in the face of other crises, including humanitarian disaster and climate-related forced displacement, thus can often partially serve as a driving factor in Hondurans’ decisions to move ( Wrathall et al. 2014). Recent general elections were held in November 2021 and the election of the new left-wing President, Xiomara Castro, brought an end to the twelve-year rule of the right-wing National Party, inheriting a country in exacerbated crisis. As a result, according to Varieties of Democracy reports that the last election has “consolidated the country’s democratic progress” (Papada et al. 2023: 28).

Meanwhile, in addition to the intertwined political unrest, the extreme levels of violence in Honduras can drive both international migration, as well as cause forced displacement internally (Nelson-Pollard 2017). Violence is often (although not exclusively) perpetrated by the maras, criminal groups that originated from
the west coast of the United States in the 1980s and have currently expanded to form extensive organisations in Central America, which operate via local groups. In Honduras some of these groups include the Salvatrucha or Barrio 18, and primary activities include extortion, kidnapping, murder and drugs, weapons, and human trafficking (Obinna 2021: 808). These organisations exercise powerful social control, and state authorities have little control over them, and may even collaborate with them. Apart from organised crime triggering emigration, prevalent criminal deportation of Hondurans from the United States and Canada adds to instability (Burt et al. 2016).

Honduras’ aforementioned political, social and economic crises, alongside weak social protections, can be exacerbated by climate disasters, with highly visible examples including Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and Hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020 (Beltrán 2021; Wrathall et al. 2014). Approximately 45 per cent of Honduras’s nine million inhabitants live in rural areas, and the majority of households in these areas are dependent upon small-scale subsistence agriculture for food security (Dodd et al. 2020). These climate disasters destroy homes and schools, cripple health care networks and roads, entail loss in crops and mean a transfer of workers from the formal to the informal economy (Quijada and Sierra 2019). Repeated droughts also cause crop losses and increased food insecurity (Bermeo and Leblang 2021). Essentially, climate change scenarios and natural disaster can radically alter or destabilise rural livelihood systems in Honduras (Wrathall et al. 2014).

11.3 Current migration profiles and trajectories, alongside difficulties in obtaining international protection

In light of this origin profile, while it is difficult to document and likely underestimated, Honduran emigration is often classified as irregular (Hernández Rodríguez 2020: 89). In 2010, the World Trade Organisation estimated that 330,000 Hondurans resided in the United States without authorisation, while other studies indicate that roughly a third of Hondurans in Canada reside there without authorisation (Burt et al. 2016; Hernández Rodríguez 2020: 89). International protection may not be sought due to administrative barriers: either migrants may understand that few receive international protection for reasons like gang violence, or it is easier to report seeking economic opportunity or family reunification when undergoing administrative or deportation procedures (Nelson-Pollard 2017). At the same time, Hondurans also engage in regular migration pathways, primarily in applying for asylum or family reunification, but also via work permits and other avenues (Reichman 2011). As later described
in more detail, how receiving countries or regions define international protection as relates to Honduras, including the EU and its member states, particularly impacts the nature of Honduran migration.

Before turning to Honduran migrants’ destinations and the European context, two populations within the more general Honduran migration and asylum profile are important considerations. Notably, emigration from Honduras has become increasingly feminised, especially emigration to Europe (Hierro 2016). Gendered violence is cited as causing Honduran women’s migration, and while factors like organised crime can form part of this, domestic violence factors in as one of the leading causes of child migration (Obinna 2021; Portillo Villeda and Torres Zelaya 2014). Moreover, it is important to note the aforementioned ethnic Garífuna minority, an Afro-indigenous population historically linked to migration in its founding, dispersal and fragmentation. From the eighteenth century onward, the Garífuna have migrated back and forth in cyclical labour migration (Agudelo 2019). They continue to remain mobile within the region as diasporas in Belize, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and in the past decade their primary international destination outside of other countries in Central America has especially been the United States, where diaspora networks were established in the first half of the twentieth century (ibid.; Obinna 2021: 819; Wrathall et al. 2014).

To some extent, Hondurans’ destination countries can be explained by historical ties. In modern history, the United States is an important actor to consider when detailing Hondurans’ migration and asylum profile. US military presence and involvement is argued to be historically and currently related to the roots of Honduran emigration. As a destination country, the United States hosts more than 773,045 nationals as of 2020, making up 78.5 per cent of Honduran immigration (UN Population Division 2020). At the same time, notably, by 2010 it had deported more Hondurans than any other group from Central America since 1980 (Blanchard et al. 2011). The United States has been present in the country since the late 1800s, when American companies (banana-based) arrived, and US interests gained significant ownership of Honduran land (Nevins 2016). Further heavy US involvement occurred when the Reagan administration oversaw substantial intervention, including military presence and overall militarisation and restructuring of the Honduran economy (ibid.).

In essence, commercial ties throughout the twentieth century and the first trickle of migration to the United States aided in establishing Honduran diasporas, which increased with family reunification and the emigration uptick at the end of the century (Gonzalez 1988). Continual demand for low-paid labour in the US over the past decades coincides with a lack of regularisation policies, contributing to the irregularity of migration, including for those
motivated by family reunification which could potentially take place via regular routes (Musalo et al. 2015).

Migrant caravans from Central America have been a recent pattern, moving via land route to Hondurans’ primary destination country of the United States. Honduran migrants may select to travel in a caravan in order to make visible the root causes of their migratory decisions, to gain more protection via safety in numbers and to receive assistance from governmental and nongovernmental organisations (Astles 2021). Migrants in these caravans may lack required mobility documents, and their movement may thus be characterised as irregular as they encounter entry, transit or residence regulations along their journey. Still, whether in a caravan or opting for solo travel, Hondurans face dangerous conditions in transit to the US–Mexico border, which often take between two and six weeks (Obinna 2021; Quijada and Sierra 2019). The danger and violence, including risks of kidnapping, rape, disappearance, assault, trafficking and murder, is present not only throughout the journey in Central America but also when transiting through Mexico (Astles 2021). The risk of detention and deportation there can mean choosing alternative and more dangerous routes in order to avoid migration checkpoints (Sánchez-Montijano 2022). This is illustrated by a high-profile case of the kidnapping of 102 Honduran migrants in Tamaulipas state on the northeast Mexican-US border in 2013 (Reichman 2011). Irregular migration is often facilitated via a smuggler, or coyote, which costs thousands of dollars, although costs can be mitigated if travelling in a caravan (Astles 2021; Quijada and Sierra 2019).

11.4 Recent trends in Honduran migration to the EU, and primarily Spain

When analysing the data on immigration from Honduras to the European Union over roughly a decade (from either 2010 to 2019 or 2010 to 2020 depending on the data source), Spain clearly stands out as the country where a considerable number of Hondurans decided to move. During this decade, a total of 115,608 individuals with Honduran citizenship arrived in Spain (Eurostat 2021b). As illustrated in Figure 11.1 below, Italy represents the only other significant country of destination with a much lower figure of 2,159 arrivals in that same timespan. Belgium, the Netherlands and Romania were respectively the third, fourth and fifth country of destination, with 241 entrances for the former and 187 for the latter two. Considering these data, it is thus necessary to focus almost exclusively on Spain when examining Honduran immigration to Europe during the decade of the 2010s. Starting in 2013, there was a positive trend of arrivals
from Honduras, that grew linearly from 4,342 in that year to 29,080 in 2019. However, prior to that moment the figures were already considerably high, with 6,265 Hondurans reaching Spain in 2011, but started to decline from that year until a tendency shift in 2013. Regarding the gender division of immigration from Honduras, in Spain there was an overwhelming predominance of women, with a share moving between 66.40 per cent in 2019 – the only year when the percentage was less than 70 per cent – and 77.25 per cent in 2011.

![Graph of immigration to top EU country destinations by individuals with Honduran citizenship, 2010–2019](image)

**Figure 11.1:** Immigration to top EU country destinations by individuals with Honduran citizenship, 2010–2019

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Eurostat (2021a).

Turning from Eurostat data to United Nations Population Division data, for the last decade Hondurans only appeared within the top-ten list of foreign nationalities living in Spain in 2020, when they assumed tenth place. In 2009, they comprised the thirty-third demographic group of residents from a third country, a position that progressively and interruptedly escalated until reaching the tenth position in 2020. Throughout those years, there was a much larger presence of other Latin American nationals in Spain, for instance Ecuadorians, Colombians or Bolivians (to mention those who appear within the first ten largest groups each year), but also Argentinians, Brazilians, Dominicans, Venezuelans or Peruvians. Until 2017, the increase in the presence of Hondurans residing in Spain was quite linear, before significantly augmenting in 2018 in relation to the
Afterwards, the tendency again grew in a linear fashion until 2020; the current population as of 2020 totals 99,418 Hondurans (UN Population Division 2020). In terms of the difference between male and female residents from Honduras, there was a regular difference similar to the one corresponding to immigration, with an annual share of women that moved between 67.47 per cent and 73.69 per cent over the 2010–20 time frame.

To better capture the Honduran population in Spain, the authors analysed data from the Spanish municipal registry (censo municipal) as well. This is the Spanish state’s official statistics on all residents (including foreign) collected on a yearly basis and compiled at the national level. Figure 11.2 illustrates the populations of Honduran nationals in Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia, the three largest cities in Spain and also those that, among others, have a historical relevance in regard to migration movements. The pattern of rising Honduran residents roughly corresponds to the Eurostat data patterns of immigration of individuals with Honduran citizenship to Spain. From 2009 to 2020, there was a constant rise in the number of Honduran nationals living in the three metropolises, with the largest number being found in Barcelona. This fact contrasts with the usually higher presence of other Latin American nationals, for example Venezuelans or Colombians, in Madrid, Spain’s capital. For the previous decade, Barcelona hosted 28.18 per cent of the absolute number of Hondurans residing in Spain, with the greatest share peaking at 29.74 per cent in 2017. Madrid counted an average of 23.64 per cent of Honduran nationals residing in Spain between 2009 and 2020, with the highest share in 2020 at 27.04 per cent. In fourth position overall and third among the three selected cities, Valencia hosted 6.10 per cent of Hondurans residing in Spain in that same timespan, also experiencing its highest share of Honduran residents in 2020, with 6.99 per cent.
Within the three cities, the presence of Hondurans in the ranking of foreign populations also parallels residence overall in Spain. Starting with Barcelona, Hondurans only represented one of the top-ten nationalities from 2017 onwards, having risen from being the thirtieth demographic group in 2009. Hondurans reached the sixth ranking of foreign national communities in Spain in 2019, the only year that Hondurans topped the list of Latin American nationalities in Spain. Subsequently, in Madrid, Hondurans only appeared as the tenth and ninth position within the rank of foreign populations in 2019 and 2020, respectively, having previously constituted the twenty-eighth in 2009, to then rise from 2012 onwards. Honduran nationals were the fifth largest foreign national population in Madrid in 2020, behind Colombians, Venezuelans, Peruvians and Ecuadorians. Finally, Valencia demonstrates similar trends in Honduran national residents, with the slight difference that there was a decrease in 2010 in respect to their presence in 2009, when Hondurans descended from thirty-third place to thirty-fourth, to then become thirty-first in 2011 before climbing steadily to reach their highest location in 2020, as the eleventh foreign nationality, and never entering the list of the first ten communities. Nonetheless, in that year Hondurans comprised the third Latin American nationality in Valencia, behind only Colombians and Venezuelans.
11.5 Honduran asylum flows to the EU and Spain: 2010 to 2020

Regarding asylum applications, Spain was also clearly the preferred choice for Hondurans from 2010 to 2020, with a sum of 16,780 applications out of the total number of 18,360 administered in the whole European Union (Table 11.1). Considerably fewer applications were lodged in Italy, Germany, Sweden and France, with 930, 190, 155 and 100 asylum claims, respectively. As with the data on immigration, the difference between Spain and the other four countries was notable. Overall, asylum applications in Spain processed between 2010 and 2020 accounted for 91.39 per cent of all the claims made by Hondurans in the European Union. Until 2015, the share of applications moved between 47.06 per cent and 66.67 per cent, only surpassing these figures in 2013, with 72.73 per cent. Nevertheless, in 2016 Spain accumulated 81.05 per cent of applications, a number that rose to 92.88 per cent in 2019 and to an even more overwhelming 96.51 per cent in 2020. At all times between 2010 and 2020, Spain comprised the first country of preference for Hondurans to request asylum, with the other four countries shifting their positions regularly, but with Italy becoming the second most solicited asylum destination from 2016 onwards.

Table 11.1: Honduran asylum applications to Spain and the EU, 2010–2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Asylum applications in Spain</th>
<th>Total asylum applications in the EU</th>
<th>As % of total applications in the EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>47.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>56.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>72.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>62.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>81.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1,315</td>
<td>1,490</td>
<td>88.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2,410</td>
<td>2,785</td>
<td>86.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>6,780</td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>92.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>5,525</td>
<td>5,725</td>
<td>96.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16,780</td>
<td>18,360</td>
<td>91.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Eurostat (2021b).
From 2010 to 2013, asylum applications from Hondurans in Spain ranged between 40 and 45 per year, but in 2014 they started to increase, slightly augmenting to 385 by 2016, after which there was a considerable jump to 1,315 in 2017. Subsequently, there was a significant rise in 2019 in relation to the numbers of 2018. In the year prior to the transnational spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the application of political measures restricting international and intranational movements of people worldwide, protection claims for Hondurans in Spain reached their highest point, with 6,780 applications, to then descend to 5,525 in 2020, figures that still surpass by far those of 2018 (see Figure 11.3).
when there was a larger share of women than men, in 2015, with a breakdown of 46.67 per cent men and 53.33 per cent women. In sum, the years when the gender gap was least acute were 2010 and 2011, with a difference of 55.56 per cent men and 44.44 per cent women in both instances. In other member states, there were more marked differences between the share of Honduran women and men soliciting asylum, although this again often took place when asylum claims were few. In that sense, in several years there could be a 100–0 division, due to a country only processing five asylum applications by Hondurans overall (all of which could be either male or female, for example).

To conclude, Honduras was the country with the fourth largest number of asylum applications processed in Spain between 2009 and 2020, with 16,795 claims (Figure 11.4), after Venezuela, Colombia and Syria with 106,215, 70,680 and 21,020 applications respectively. Closely behind Honduras, Ukraine followed with 14,625 applications for international protection.

![Figure 11.4: Asylum applications to Spain by nationality, 2009–2020](image)

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Eurostat (2021b).

As illustrated in Figure 11.4, Honduran international protection claims in Spain experienced a decrease in petitions in 2020, possibly as the result of the aforementioned restrictions applied across the globe to contain the Covid-19
pandemic. However, petitions still surpassed the number of applications from two years earlier. Finally, in 2009 Honduras comprised the forty-third country of origin in the list of asylum applications processed in Spain. In the following year, however, Honduran national applications reached the seventeenth position, to then descend slightly to twentieth in 2012. From that point onwards, the country continued to rise in the ranking, reaching the top-ten list in 2016 in seventh place. In 2018, Honduras became the fourth country on the list, and third in both 2019 and 2020, behind Venezuela and Colombia.

11.6 Understanding Spain as destination country

When analysing Europe as a Honduran destination, the history between Spain and Honduras can account for the prevalence of migration to Spain in comparison to the rest of the EU member states, in a similar manner to several other LAC states. An object of Spanish conquest since the sixteenth century, Honduras gained independence from Spain in 1821, and Spanish continues to remain the primary language today, alongside Roman Catholicism serving as the main religion. Spaniards made up some of the investors and migrants to Honduras in the early twentieth century, and a Spanish diaspora currently exists in Honduras (UN Population Division 2020). The two countries engage in a close diplomatic relationship, and an agreement that allows for double nationality was also signed in 1966 (Spain Government 1967). Spain and Honduras also signed an agreement of ‘Social Cooperation’ that allowed for reciprocal right to work in the two countries, which has since been followed by several agreements and frameworks, as a result of a 2019 visit by the Honduran president (Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1979; El Mundo 2021).

In this sense, Honduran migration may be regular at the start of the journey. However, given that Hondurans are permitted to enter Spain via a visitor’s visa of up to three months, an irregular path includes arriving by air route to Spain and remaining after this visa expires (Gil Araujo and González-Fernández 2014: 8). Hondurans also request asylum in Spain, although the Spanish state generally does not recognise the situation in Honduras as meriting international protection, as further explained in the section on drivers. In recent decades, the literature notes the highly feminised patterns of migration from Honduras to Spain (Gil Araujo and Pedone 2014; Gil Araujo and González-Fernández 2014: 6).
11.7 Honduran migration and asylum flows to Spain in light of the socio-political context

In light of the previous section, important trends in Honduran migration to Spain include a significant increase in Eurostat-recorded immigration starting from 2018 (and consistent increase over the ten-year period when looking at municipal registration), asylum applications rising from 2016 onward until slightly dropping in 2020, feminised immigration, and the significant presence of Hondurans in Barcelona versus the more populated Spanish capital, Madrid. To begin, in exploring these trends, further explanation of the Honduran socio-political context, along with the closely related economic and security situation, can offer insight.

A key event was the 2009 coup, where the National Congress, Supreme Court, Public Ministry and Armed Forces forcefully removed elected President José Manual Zelaya, given his socialist agenda and attempts to enact a new Constitution (Mendes Loureiro 2018). Following this, among other factors leading to further destabilisation, criminal groups usurped state power in several strategic locales, and could be even described as providing more semblance of public services than the state (Altamirano Rayo 2021). Following the coup, it is alleged that there has been pervasive repression and misuse of government funds, along with loss of working rights, real wages and civil guarantees (Portillo Villeda and Torres Zelaya 2014).

Subsequently in 2012, the National Congress stacked the country’s Supreme Court to support the ruling conservative National Party, and in early 2013 it revised the Constitution to authorise a military police force (Jokela-Pansini 2020). In light of these political machinations, snowballing government corruption and neglect, and a tumultuous election year in 2013, it should be noted that the Eurostat figures on immigration begin their yearly increase starting in 2013. President Juan Orlando Hernandez took power in 2014 under this same party, which allegedly controls Honduran politics and squashes any dissent (ibid.). In 2015, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled in favour of unlimited presidential re-election. A series of protests led by self-titled indignados (‘the indignant’) called for accountability after it came to light that top government aides had embezzled hundreds of millions from the Honduran social security institution, and that the President had used some of this money in his 2013 presidential campaign (Beltrán 2021). This can perhaps go towards elucidating both the continued rise in immigration, as well as the significant increase in asylum applications to Spain beginning from 2016 onwards.

Moreover, a contested election took place in 2017 wherein Orlando Hernandez was re-elected amid allegations of electoral fraud, with the General Organisation of American States calling for a re-election. This led to popular protest and
clashes with military and police forces, as citizens viewed these procedures as illegitimate (Beltrán 2021).

Indeed, Honduras’ ruling political party has been repeatedly and consistently linked to corruption, including membership in or collusion with organised crime, both generally and with regard to certain instances. For example, over the time frame studied, many environmental activists were killed protesting corruption in government mining and dam contracts (Beltrán 2021). More specifically, President Orlando Hernandez’s brother had been cited as a co-conspirator in drug trafficking and money laundering, and his brother faced these charges and was in fact convicted in 2019 in the United States (Oxford Analytica 2021). Demonstrations and strikes peaking in April of 2019 in protest of the President’s alleged corruption, as well as in response to proposed health and education regulations, resulted in forceful crackdowns between March and July of 2019 (HRW 2020). This possibly sheds light on the 2019 spike in asylum applications to Spain (as well as a less significant but noticeable increase in those to Italy).

11.8 Increasing insecurity, lack of social protections and systemic gendered violence

In combination with the political corruption and weak state is the continued erosion of the public sector, brought about in part by the neoliberal restructuring of the 1990s. Among other sectors, the healthcare system is extremely lacking, and the education system similarly poor (Portillo Villeda and Torres Zelaya 2014). As such, various protests form part of a wider trend of demand for democratic participation and representation in recent years from all sectors of society, including indigenous, Black and women’s groups (Loperena 2016; Obinna 2021). In tandem with the political turmoil, drug harvesting and trafficking results in land transfers or ‘grabs’ that are in turn shared with corporate interests or corrupt state actors, all of which significantly affects the dispossession of these underprivileged, indigenous or Afro-descendent populations (McSweeney et al. 2018). Essentially, both legally and physically, these groups are coerced to cede resources. Furthermore, mining industry exploitation in recent decades has affected these groups, and the greater Honduran population, in similar ways (Bebbington et al. 2019).

In addition, Honduras, like its neighbouring Central American countries, is classified as one of the most violent countries in the world, with the most recent data from 2016 indicating a murder rate of 59 out of every 100,000 people (Obinna 2021). Some data suggest that violence decreased after 2011, thus perhaps serving as a factor in the slight decrease in Eurostat immigration numbers.
from 2011 (Landa-Blanco et al. 2020). However, while over the ten-year period under study the homicide rate may have been declining, Honduras still ranks highly for overall violence and crime, and includes some of the world’s most violent cities (Bermeo and Leblang 2021). This can go towards partially explaining the continual rise in immigration to and municipal registration in Spain, as such violence perhaps precludes internal (rather than international) migration due to additional factors like climate or environmental shocks.

The way violence affects certain groups in Honduras is important to examine. Gendered violence in Honduras, observed frequently by both human rights organisations and scientific studies, provides further understanding of feminised migration beyond the more typical explanation of Spanish demand for domestic care work (Hierro 2016). In particular, this issue could pertain to the greater percentage of women asylum applications over the ten-year period. Apart from the Autonomous University of Honduras’s Observatory on Violence reporting 224 femicides in 2020, literature and advocacy groups note that gender-based violence is normalised and structurally endemic, with increasing gang violence and militarisation (especially during 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic) (Amnesty International 2021; Jokela-Pansini 2020; Menjivar and Walsh 2017). Enforced disappearances during and after the 2009 coup are accompanied by overall rape, kidnapping and systemic domestic violence during the period under study (Obinna 2021).

These considerations as to political, social, economic and security factors help to explain the consistently increasing trend in municipal registrations in the selected most populated cities in Spain over the ten-year period. In referencing this data, it bears mentioning that the notable Honduran presence in Barcelona versus Madrid and Valencia could be explained by the ties established by Catalan businessmen in the nineteenth century, as part of the Spanish immigration to Honduras described earlier; Catalan immigrants in Honduras still exist to this day (Delgado Ribas 1982). This diaspora can also be compared to the transnational Palestinian community present in Central America; Palestinians first arrived in Honduras in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and after over a century of immigration of merchants and entrepreneurs the community has established itself as an economic and political elite (Gutiérrez Rivera 2014). However, it is also likely that the trend relates to the more inclusive immigration and integration policies in the Catalan pale region (Casademont Falguera and Serra Serra 2021).

Finally, two further groups need mention here. While the data examined do not speak to LGBTQI+ individuals, and although they are not officially recognised in Honduran statistics, it is important to emphasise that these individuals have
been reported by various rights organisations as particularly subject to abuse and violence (Amnesty International 2021; Portillo Villeda 2020). The second group is Honduran children. The migration of minors, especially along the corridor to the United States, is characterised by various interventions, including efforts by UNICEF and temporary measures by the Honduran governance; for example, a programme was enacted in response to the Zika virus of 2011 (Hernández Rodríguez 2020). However, again, continued migration to Europe may reflect how there is no prolonged strategy to assist Honduran children suffering from endemic structural problems in the country (ibid.).

11.9 The United States as a destination country

Given this general outline of the situation in Honduras itself, the most significant consideration in terms of transit influences is the US President Donald Trump’s administration from 2017 until 2021, as well as his declarations as President Elect in 2016. Trump’s immigration positions and policies markedly denounced or placed stricter control on Central American caravans arriving through Mexico, and as early as 2016 Honduran migrants were recorded as having turned to Spain as an alternative option to the US (Ojea 2018). Again, as migration to the US is estimated to make up almost 80 per cent of total Honduran immigration, the highly visible Trump administration rhetoric (and later actions) regarding Central American and Mexican immigration could play into the significant number of asylum applications to Spain in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (Eurostat 2021a).

As touched on earlier, the US can engage in a lack of immigrant regularisation or enforcing regular migration and asylum programmes. Both the US and Mexico engage in restrictive migration policies with preventive or punitive measures, and sometimes discretionary practices. While the land route through Central America and Mexico to the US is one of the most dangerous for irregular migration, it is chosen more frequently than paths to Europe by Honduran and Central American migrants. The land route is more accessible for those with less resources: lack of visas and passports, limited financial resources and lack of knowledge of regular migratory processes, among other factors. Exclusion from regular migratory programmes has resulted in irregular channels, where strategies utilised include reliance on smuggling and trafficking networks that can allow for delayed or non-monetary payment, information sharing via word of mouth and family ties in the destination country.
11.10 Difficulties in regular migration pathways and receiving international protection in Spain

In turning to the destination context and considering factors that may have impacted Hondurans choosing Europe, and primarily Spain, it should be noted that these asylum measures or lack thereof may affect both number of asylum applications and irregular migration. Despite the structural and democratic decay of the Honduran state, high political and economic instability and systemic violence of organised crime, and compounded ramifications of climate shocks, it is difficult for Hondurans to meet the requirements for international protection in Spain and Europe. For example, while Honduran nationals may be clearly targeted by organised crime and certain to risk their lives if they stay, the Spanish state does not normally classify this as a type of violence based on the grounds of race, religious affiliation, nationality, belonging to a specific social group or holding a particular political opinion, which would allow them refugee status under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention (CEAR 2018).

For instance, in 2019, out of the 6,780 asylum applications to Spain that year, only 226 Hondurans received favourable resolutions (Eurostat 2021a). At the same time, the Spanish National Court did rule in November of 2017 (in its sentence from Audiencia Nacional 2017) that Honduran victims of the maras, or international organised crime groups, should be granted international protection in that the Honduran state security forces were unwilling or unable to protect their citizens, and given how such groups are intricately implicated in all levels of the Honduran societal fabric and political system. This could also contribute to the significant increase in asylum applications beginning from the year 2017.

In concluding this overview of drivers, we should reemphasise the qualification that while the data reflect a slight decrease from 2011 to 2013 in immigration, the municipal registrations in Spain consistently rise. Again, this is significant as even those Honduran nationals residing in Spain for two consecutive years can be eligible to apply for Spanish citizenship and may no longer factor into these rising numbers. And of course, the lack of data available on irregular migration means the volume and characteristics of migration may not be completely accurate, and are no doubt underestimated. Moreover, despite the stark evidence of the relatively consistent levels of poverty as well as economic and political uncertainty, Honduran migration decisions must be understood beyond the structural, to also reflect individual-level drivers.
11.11 Ultimately, continued non-linear trajectories of asylum and migration flows

To conclude, considerations on Honduran migration are complex, and can be characterised as comprising agricultural workers, internal and international migrants, and asylum seekers, in the context of systemic poverty, inequality, land concentration or dispossession (from seizing land for drug trafficking, mining or extractive industries), climate vulnerability, varied forms of violence, lack of social protections in combination with neoliberal policies and US presence or intervention and its effects. Migration is notably non-linear in that there is often forcible displacement within Honduras before moving on to a third country. The combination of factors outlined that often prevent regular migration pathways result in varied strategies. Significant Honduran emigration at the turn of the century and its continued volume now translates into a transgenerational migratory project as well, already taking place in Honduran migration to the United States, but also becoming distinctive in Europe.

In the origin context, normalised violence drivers, humanitarian crises, lack of social protection and systemic gendered violence are consistently met with state inaction or lack of protection. It remains to be seen whether EU member states and Spain in particular will take into account the increasing vulnerability and lack of recourse of those Honduran individuals seeking international protection. Moreover, while it was noted that some bilateral frameworks between Honduras and Spain may offer pathways to regular migration, they remain few, while other opportunities like informal demand for feminised labour continue. Given the trends observed here, transgenerational migratory projects and increased Honduran national residence in Spain promise to continue, regardless of precarity and support in the form of regularised pathways and recognition of asylum claims.

References


Bermeo, Sarah and David Leblang (2021), ‘Climate, Violence, and Honduran Migration to the United States’, in Future Development Blog, 1 April, https://wp.me/p7KzvY-621y


Delgado Ribas, Josep M. (1982), ‘La emigración española a América Latina durante la época del comercio libre (1765–1820), El ejemplo catalán’, in


Eurostat (2021a), Asylum Applicants by Type of Applicant, Citizenship, Age and Sex: Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded), last update 5 December 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza/default/table


Quijada, José Alejandro and José David Sierra (2019), 'Understanding Undocumented Migration from Honduras', in International Migration, Vol. 57, No. 4, pp. 3–20, https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12429


