



The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants from Central America's Northern Triangle

Matthew Lorenzen¹
University of Southern California

Executive Summary

A growing body of literature has argued that the distinction between forced and voluntary migration can be, in practice, unclear. This literature points out that each individual migrant may have mixed motives for migrating, including both forced and voluntary reasons. Few studies, however, have actually set out to analyze mixed-motive migration.

This paper examines the mixed-motive migration of unaccompanied minors from Central America's Northern Triangle states (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador), using data from a small 2016 survey carried out in 10 shelters for unaccompanied child migrants run by a Mexican government child welfare agency. Using this survey, the paper identifies the immigrating minor's motives, which are oftentimes mixed, and details differences by nationality, gender, and age groups. Some of the key findings include:

- Around one-third of the child migrants surveyed had mixed motives, including both forced and voluntary reasons for migrating.
- Violence appears most often as a reason for migrating among minors with mixed motives, as opposed to the search for better opportunities, which appears more often as an exclusive motive.
- Significant differences between the three nationalities are observed. Relatively few Guatemalan minors indicated violence as a motive, and few displayed mixed motives, as opposed to Hondurans, and especially Salvadorans.

¹ The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Professor Roberto Suro at the University of Southern California (USC) for his crucial comments and advice, as well as to his colleagues at the Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO) and the Sistemas para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia (DIF) for their help and dedication. He would also like to acknowledge Mexico's Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACyT) and USC, as well as Professor Suro's mediation, regarding funding for the research stay at the USC, which made the writing of this paper possible.

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants

- The minors fleeing violence, searching for better opportunities, and indicating both motives at the same time were largely mature male adolescents.
- The minors mentioning family reunification as their sole motive were predominantly girls and young children.

The results indicate that binary formulations regarding forced and voluntary migration are often inadequate. This has important implications, briefly addressed in the conclusions. These implications include:

- the need for migration scholars to consider forced reasons for migrating in the context of mixed-motive migration;
- the fact that mixed motives call into question the established, clear-cut categories that determine whether someone is worthy of humanitarian protection or not;
- the need to have in-depth, attentive, and individual asylum screening because motives may be interconnected and entangled, and because forced reasons may be hidden behind voluntary motives; and
- the need for a more flexible policy approach, so that immigration systems may be more inclusive of migrants with mixed motives.

Introduction

The literature and political discourse on migration has traditionally made a sharp distinction between forced and voluntary movements, that is, between migrants fleeing persecution, violence, war, severe human rights violations, and other threatening situations, and migrants seeking to better their socioeconomic conditions, often referred to simply as economic migrants. This binary view has shaped refugee and asylum laws, migration policies, and even fields of knowledge — forced migration and refugee studies, on the one hand, and migration studies, on the other.

However, a small but growing body of literature has argued that the distinction between forced and voluntary migration can be, in practice, unclear (Richmond 1988; 1994; Van Hear 1998; 2012; Castles 2007; Van Hear, Brubacker, and Bessa 2009; Betts 2010; Suro, forthcoming). This literature has criticized the forced/voluntary binary from several, often interconnected, angles. One common objection is based on the fact that the structural causes of forced and voluntary migration can be entwined: countries and regions experiencing violence, war, political unrest, and severe human rights violations often also suffer from underdevelopment, high rates of poverty and inequality, and environmental fragility and vulnerability. Secondly, this entangling of structural causes can mean that both forced and voluntary migrants may travel in mixed flows or use the same migratory channels. Third, it is possible that forced migrants may become voluntary migrants, and vice versa, because of changes in the countries of origin, transit, or destination. Next, it has been argued that the use of the notion “voluntary” to refer to economic migrants can be misleading because

many are in dire situations and may not have many options available to them — in this sense, instead of a binary, forced and voluntary migration would represent two ends of a continuum. Lastly, the idea that each individual migrant can have mixed motives for migrating, including both forced and voluntary reasons, has been put forth, although it has rarely been put to the test.

This paper focuses on the issue of mixed motives, analyzing a very specific population: unaccompanied child migrants from Central America's Northern Triangle states (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador). This population represents a fitting candidate to analyze mixed-motive migration because of the multiple factors that have been presented to explain the recent "surge" of unaccompanied minors and families travelling from the Northern Triangle to the United States. These factors include violence linked to gangs and criminal organizations; the lack of economic and educational opportunities in the countries of origin; a prolonged drought and a coffee rust crisis that have damaged agricultural production; family separation due to prior migration flows; the power of people smugglers to persuade potential migrants; and the unintended consequences of US policies (see, among the many studies detailing these causes, Chishti and Hipsman 2014, 2016; Carlson and Gallagher 2015; Donato and Sisk 2015; Rosenblum 2015; US Senate 2015; Meyer et al. 2016).²

This article seeks to answer the following questions: do unaccompanied child migrants from Central America's Northern Triangle display mixed motives? How do immediate dangers, namely violence, mix with other, more voluntary, motives? Moreover, do the various motives and mixes of motives break down differently according to nationality, gender, and age? What does all of this tell us about violence in the Northern Triangle and about unaccompanied child migrants from this region? The answers to these questions are important not only because they provide needed information about a vulnerable population that has been the focus of recent discussions and analyses about migration in North and Central America, but also because they contribute to the largely uncharted issue of mixed-motive migration, as well as to the wider debate about the pertinence of having clear-cut distinctions between forced and voluntary migrants.

The paper contends that the concurrence of violence, lack of economic and educational opportunities, and family separation due to prior migration flows make the mixed-motive migration of unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle a common phenomenon. These mixed motives would include the overlap of forced and voluntary reasons, especially violence and economic motives, but also violence and family reunification.

In addition, distinct circumstances in the places of origin can be expected to lead to different motives and mixes of motives. Violence, linked largely to the expansion and widespread presence of gangs (*maras*) and other criminal organizations, has affected all three countries, but most notably Honduras and El Salvador. Since 2014, these two countries have had the highest intentional homicide rates in the world, with around 60 homicides per 100,000 people in Honduras in 2016, and around 80 per 100,000 in El Salvador. During the same

² Migration flows from and within the Horn of Africa, and West and South Asia, are other key candidates to analyze mixed-motive migration because of the confluence of violence, conflict, poverty, inequality, and natural disasters. Much of the literature on "mixed migration" focuses on flows from and within these regions. However, most of the attention has centered on mixed flows (distinct migrants traveling together or using the same migratory channels), while mixed motivations have remained a largely unexplored subject.

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants

period, Guatemala's homicide rate has been the sixth or seventh highest in the world, with around 30 homicides per 100,000 people in 2016.³ These rates dwarf the US homicide rate of close to five (UNODC 2017; Villalobos 2017). In this sense, we can posit that violence plays a more important role in the motives and mixes of motives of unaccompanied minors from Honduras and especially El Salvador, compared to minors from Guatemala, and, as a consequence, that mixed motives are more common for Honduran and particularly Salvadoran minors than for Guatemalans.

As a corollary, we can expect economic motives, particularly as the exclusive reason for migrating, to be more predominant in the case of Guatemalan minors, compared to Hondurans and especially Salvadorans. Economic conditions in these countries reinforce that possibility, since inequality and poverty are higher in Guatemala and Honduras than in El Salvador. For instance, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2017), the Gini Index in Guatemala and Honduras in 2014 were the highest in Latin America, at 0.55 and 0.56, respectively, while in El Salvador it was 0.49.⁴ According to ECLAC's methodology,⁵ in 2014 poverty stood at 67.7 percent of the population in Guatemala and 74.3 percent in Honduras — which represent the highest poverty rates in Latin America — while it stood at 41.6 percent in El Salvador.

Family reunification is likely to be a more common motive for Salvadoran minors than for Guatemalans and Hondurans because of the more significant background of mass migration from El Salvador to the United States, which dates back to the civil war of the 1980s. This is reflected in the fact that one in five Salvadorans live in the United States, compared to the still notable proportion of one in 15 Guatemalans and Hondurans (US Senate 2015, 15). In addition, this would confirm some of Katharine Donato and Blake Sisk's (2015) findings regarding Mexican and Central American child migrants, based on data from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects, showing a strong link, particularly in the case of Salvadorans, between parental migration and the likelihood that a minor will migrate to the United States.

Finally, concerning the gender and age of the minors, it is reasonable to assume that those migrating because of economic reasons, either as an exclusive motive or in combination with other motives, will predominantly be mature male adolescents. A simple reason for this is that male adolescents are more likely to be part of the work force than adolescent girls

3 *Maras*, including the notorious MS 13 and 18th Street gangs, are particularly present in Honduras and El Salvador, and have expanded since the 1990s, when the US government started deporting thousands of their members — from 1993 to 2013, around 250,000 criminals were deported from the United States to the Northern Triangle (US Senate 2015, 11). In Guatemala, *maras* are present but other local criminal groups, involved mainly in smuggling and trafficking, as well as some Mexican cartels, dominate the criminal landscape (InSight Crime 2017). It should be noted that *maras* are particularly violent groups, involved not only in smuggling and trafficking but also in extortion, kidnapping, forced recruitment and armed robbery, among other crimes, explaining the extremely high homicide rates and other indicators of violence in Honduras and El Salvador.

4 The Gini Index is one of the most common measures of economic inequality. It determines how close (or far) the income distribution of a population is to a hypothetical perfectly equal distribution. The calculation of a Gini Index yields a value between zero and one, with zero representing perfect equality (all people having the same income), and one representing maximal inequality (one person concentrating all the income).

5 The ECLAC's poverty line is based on the cost, differentiated by country, of a basic basket of goods and services.

and young children. This is reflected quite clearly in the data on the labor participation rate by age and gender, that is, the percentage of people working or actively looking for work with respect to the working-age population. According to the ECLAC (2017), in 2014, the labor participation rate of young people aged 15 to 24 was around 50 percent in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, compared to around 70 percent in the 25 to 59 age group. Women aged 15 to 24 had a participation rate of close to 30 percent in the three Northern Triangle countries, while men of that same age group had a participation rate of over 60 percent in the case of Salvadorans and of over 70 percent in the case of Guatemalans and Hondurans. On the other hand, we can expect that the groups of minors migrating because of other than economic motives, particularly violence and family reunification, will include smaller proportions of male adolescents and larger proportions of girls and young children.⁶

The study of unaccompanied child migrants from the Northern Triangle presents limitations due to the difficulties involved in tracking down and getting in contact with this population. Previous studies have relied on small samples, usually of minors in the custody of US or Mexican immigration or child welfare authorities (UNHCR 2014; UNHCR-Mexico 2014; Schmidt 2017). These small samples of very particular groups of unaccompanied minors cannot be expected to rigorously represent the entire population of unaccompanied child migrants from the Northern Triangle, but do provide us with indications of general trends and characteristics. This paper presents the same limitations since it makes use of data from a small survey that the author helped design and plan, carried out in June 2016 in 10 shelters for unaccompanied child migrants run by Mexico's Systems for Integral Family Development (Sistemas para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, or DIF). The DIF is a network of state and municipal government welfare agencies, coordinated by a national entity, the DIF Nacional, that provides assistance to the elderly, to families, and especially to children, particularly those who are in vulnerable situations (orphans, victims of domestic violence, unaccompanied migrants, etc.).

The paper is divided into three sections. The first presents a short literature review concerning the notion of mixed-motive migration and about previous studies dealing with the mixed motives of unaccompanied child migrants from the Northern Triangle. Next, the paper describes the DIF survey and analyzes the results regarding the motives and mixes of motives of unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle, indicating differences between the three nationalities, and breaking down the main motivation categories according to gender and age. Lastly, it points to some general implications of mixed-motive migration.

6 While it is common to associate labor migration mainly with young men, and family reunification and other motives for migrating with women and children, it is important to recognize the feminization of labor migration that has taken place in many countries and economic sectors. The case of female domestic and care workers, migrating in large part from South Asia and Southeast Asia, has received the most attention, although this is by no means the only significant group. Female migrant workers from many regions have become key to other economic sectors in the destination countries, such as garment manufacturing, the hospitality industry, and even the food and agriculture sectors (Morokvasic 2016). Even though unauthorized unaccompanied migrant children from the Northern Triangle have recently included a higher percentage of girls, most are still boys. Indeed, according to information from Mexico's National Immigration Institute on apprehensions of unaccompanied migrant children from the Northern Triangle, 18.8 percent were girls in 2010, increasing to 25.8 percent in 2016 (UPM 2017).

Literature Review

Mixed-Motive Migration

Surprisingly, the straightforward idea that each individual migrant may have multiple motives for migrating has received relatively little attention in migration literature, even though it is likely a widespread phenomenon with important implications. Mixed-motive migration has for the most part been addressed in the “mixed migration” literature, and has generally been explained as a consequence of the existence of various structural causes of migration coming simultaneously into play. In this literature, a crucial differentiation has been made between mixed-motive migration, which has remained a largely unexplored subject, and mixed flows, meaning distinct migrants traveling together or using the same migratory channels (particularly forced and voluntary migrants), which have received the most attention.

Stephen Castles (2007, 26) has noted that “[c]ountries with weak economies, increasing inequality and widespread impoverishment tend also to have tyrannical rulers, weak state apparatuses, and high levels of violence and human rights violations. Thus the conditions that cause economic migration are closely linked with those that cause forced migration, leading to the migratory movement of people with ‘mixed motivations.’” According to Castles (2007), mixed-motive migration is not a new phenomenon, but it has become more common because of the impacts of globalization, the rise in inequality, and the appearance of new sources of violence (international crime, drug cartels, terrorist groups, etc.).

In a similar way, Nicholas Van Hear (2012, 3) writes that “[o]ften poverty, inequality and conflict co-exist: those who flee a country where conflict, persecution, discrimination and human rights abuse are rife, for example, may also be trying to escape dire economic circumstances — which may themselves feed into such conflict, persecution, discrimination and human rights abuse.” In addition, Van Hear (2012, 2) notes that mixed-motive migration presents important policy challenges, since refugee and immigration policies tend to classify migrants by discrete categories based on single motivations — labor, high-skilled, refugee, family reunification, education, etc. Hence, a more flexible policy approach would be needed to properly address mixed-motive migration (Van Hear 2012, 2).

Indeed, immigration systems tend to compartmentalize migrants into specific categories, generally based on single motivations. In the United States, for instance, clear distinctions are made between family reunification visas, student visas, skilled and unskilled worker visas, and visas for individuals with protection needs (for example, victims of crimes and of human trafficking). While points-based immigration systems (like Canada’s) have the potential to address combinations of motives, they generally also end up compartmentalizing migrants into discrete categories (Van Hear 2012, 6).

On the other hand, both Castles and Van Hear explain that, as pathways to asylum in destination countries become ever more difficult, labor migration (often undocumented) may increasingly emerge as a means of seeking safety as well as a means of securing livelihoods (Castles 2007; Van Hear, Brubaker, and Bessa 2009, 15). Hence, with diminishing chances of obtaining refugee status, many potential asylum seekers may find it safer and easier to

remain underground as undocumented immigrant workers, rather than risk being returned to their countries of origin for not passing asylum screenings (Castles 2007, 30).⁷ Besides, applying for refugee status may entail long waiting periods and prohibitive costs, which many potential asylum seekers may want to avoid by opting for labor migration (Van Hear, Brubaker, and Bessa 2009, 16).

Van Hear, Brubaker, and Bessa (ibid., 17) also point out that, for those asylum seekers who manage to gain refugee status or other forms of humanitarian protection, many will still need to find means of survival and livelihood for themselves and the families they have left behind in their countries of origin, even if they receive some support from governments and relief agencies. In addition, they may need to pay back debts incurred to finance their migration (ibid., 18). By entering or attempting to enter the labor market, which can even involve secondary migration, these refugees incorporate economic motivations. Indeed, as Van Hear, Brubaker, and Bessa (ibid., 18) write, many refugees cannot avoid becoming economic migrants.

Finally, another interesting idea, presented by Juan Thomas Ordóñez (2015), is that the migrants themselves may not be fully aware of their mixed motives, at least not at first. Ordóñez documents the case of Guatemalan men in California who, after arriving in the United States as undocumented workers, discover the possibility that they may be eligible for asylum, a complicated bureaucratic process that they do not fully understand and that, as the author points out, does not seem to “understand” them either, since their experience is more aligned with that of undocumented economic migrants. According to Ordóñez (2015), people who are not familiar with the social and legal representations of suffering, violence, and persecution do not necessarily relate to these concepts as central motivations for migrating, particularly when economic motives overlap. Rather, they might conflate many of the motives for migrating, including economic hardship, political turmoil, and violence, into the general idea of “searching for a better life.” We should add that individuals who are unfamiliar with those social and legal representations of suffering, violence, and persecution are more likely to be particularly vulnerable populations, such as indigenous people, the poor, and children (see, for instance, Ordóñez 2015, and CMS and Cristosal 2017).

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants from the Northern Triangle

Despite the existence of a relatively large body of literature concerning unaccompanied child migrants from the Northern Triangle, written especially after the 2014 “surge”, the author has found only one article that deals meaningfully with the issue of mixed motives. That article, written by Susan Schmidt (2017), is based on the source data from a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, itself based on interviews carried out during 2013 with unaccompanied child migrants held in US federal custody. Four-hundred and four unaccompanied minors were interviewed, with 302 coming from the Northern Triangle (around 100 from each country), and the rest from Mexico (UNHCR 2014, 18). Schmidt (2017, 62) focuses specifically on the answers to one survey question,

⁷ In the case of Central American migrants in the United States, see CMS and Cristosal (2017).

namely “do you have ideas about how we can better help other youth who leave their countries?” Therefore, the article only deals indirectly with the children’s motives.

By pattern coding the answers of the minors, Schmidt (*ibid.*, 64) discovers that the interviewed children frequently mentioned economics, security, and education issues in relation to one another. This, according to Schmidt (*ibid.*, 73), “adds nuance to our understanding of children’s perspectives regarding the interrelated nature of economic, security, and education issues, suggesting that these issues cannot be considered in isolation and that migrant children may have entwined motivations for migrating that defy simple categorization.” Regarding the minors from the Northern Triangle, the author notes that Guatemalan children placed most emphasis on the relationship between education and economics; Salvadoran minors focused more on the connections between economics and security, and education and security; while the comments from Honduran children were more evenly distributed among the three domains (*ibid.*, 64).

Schmidt (*ibid.*, 64-67) also details several no-win situations that the children expressed regarding the relationships between those three domains. Concerning economics and security, the author notes that the minors feared that not working increased their risks of joining or being forcibly recruited into a gang, but that having a job increased the risk of being targeted by a gang for theft or extortion. In a similar way, the children expressed the idea that not attending school increased the risk of being recruited into a gang because of idle time, but that attending school increased the risk of being targeted by a gang for harassment or recruitment by individuals in or near the schools (see also Appleby, Chiarello, and Kerwin 2016). As for education and economics, the interviewed children noted the catch-22 situation in which well-paid work is necessary to pay for education (school fees, uniforms, supplies, etc.), while an education is necessary to find well-paid work. According to Schmidt (*ibid.*, 67), these no-win scenarios reveal an underlying calculation that may be made by children or their families when taking the decision to migrate.

Although the original UNHCR (2014) study does not analyze the issue of mixed motives in a significant way, it does visualize it in graphic form, using five-category Venn diagrams. According to the information in those diagrams, we can observe that mixed motives are predominant. Of the 302 interviewed minors from the Northern Triangle, 31.8 percent stated one sole motive and over two-thirds mentioned two or more motives simultaneously. Unfortunately, the use of so many categories to construct the Venn diagrams limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the mixed-motive data.

Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight that, in the case of the 100 Guatemalan minors interviewed by the UNHCR, 38 noted one sole motive, particularly the category of family reunification and better work or educational opportunities (30), while 54 mentioned family reunification and better opportunities together with other categories, notably abuse in the home. As for the 98 Hondurans, 27 indicated only one motive, principally violence in society or family reunification and better opportunities, while 63 mentioned this last motive together with other categories, mainly violence in society. Likewise, in the case of the 104 Salvadorans, 31 stated one sole motive, principally violence in society or family reunification and better work or educational opportunities, and 64 mentioned this last

motive — family reunification and better opportunities — together with other categories, especially violence in society.⁸

Survey Description and Results

The 2016 CONAPO-DIF Survey

This article is based on a survey, which the author helped design and plan, that was part of a larger joint project between the DIF Nacional and Mexico's National Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Población, or CONAPO), a demographic research institution. In early 2016, CONAPO and the DIF Nacional signed an agreement to carry out a study on the sociodemographic characteristics and the motivations of unaccompanied child migrants from Mexico and Central America. This study was to be based largely on data collected from the network of shelters for unaccompanied child migrants run by state and municipal DIF agencies. The data included monthly records dating back to 2007 and a survey that children residing in the shelters were asked to complete. The author of this paper began collaborating in the CONAPO-DIF project in March 2016 as the main researcher and as the author of the final report (for more information, see Lorenzen 2016).

DIF shelters for unaccompanied child migrants take care of two main groups of children: 1) Mexican minors repatriated from the United States, who are housed in the shelters until they can be reunited with family members in Mexico; and 2) undocumented foreign minors, mostly from the Northern Triangle, who are sent to the shelters after being apprehended by Mexican immigration authorities, often while in transit to the United States, and who are generally returned to their countries of origin. Most of the children who are housed in the DIF shelters stay for three days or less (close to 80 percent of them, between 2013 and 2015), and very few stay for more than two weeks (around three percent, during that same period) (DIF Nacional 2016).⁹

The CONAPO-DIF survey was carried out in June 2016 in the 10 DIF shelters that housed the largest numbers of children one year earlier, in June 2015. Indeed, in June 2015, those 10 DIF shelters jointly housed 83.6 percent of the children in the whole network of DIF shelters for unaccompanied child migrants (50 shelters in total).¹⁰ The sample size was 293 minors, corresponding to 15 percent of the number of children in June 2015 in those 10 shelters. Quotas were set by gender and age for each shelter to reflect the characteristics of the minors who were housed in June 2015 (according to detailed records for that year). The reason for basing the sample of the June 2016 survey on the June 2015 population

8 Ideally, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report would not have combined into one category family reunification and better work or educational opportunities. As different policy responses may be warranted for each of these motivations, their combination inhibits the development of a coherent policy response. It is to be hoped that, as scholarly examination of mixed-motive migration increases, separation of these very different and crucial factors for migrating will become commonplace.

9 In the case of children from the Northern Triangle, between 2013 and 2015, 65.4 percent stayed in the DIF shelters for three days or less, and 9.2 percent stayed two weeks or more (DIF Nacional 2016).

10 Those 10 shelters include two in Tapachula (Chiapas), and one shelter in each of the following cities: Acayucan (Veracruz); Tenosique (Tabasco); Juchitán (Oaxaca); Nogales (Sonora); Ciudad Juárez (Chihuahua); and Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, and Matamoros (Tamaulipas).

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants

was that the numbers and characteristics of the child migrants housed in the DIF shelters show significant monthly variations that largely recur every year. This is explained by the fact that decisions regarding the moment to migrate often depend on factors such as the weather, the agricultural growing season, and perhaps even the school calendar.

To ensure anonymity and more truthful results, the survey's short questionnaire, composed of 19 mainly multiple-choice questions, was answered and filled out directly by children 12 years of age and older. Younger children were aided in completing the survey by social workers. The shelter staff selected the children who would be asked to fill out the questionnaire based on whether they matched the age and gender quotas. The survey was included as an extension of the interviews that the shelter staff carry out with all newly arriving children to determine their needs and profiles. The children had the right to decide not to participate in these interviews (and by extension they could refuse to participate in the survey), although this seems uncommon.¹¹ No gifts or rewards were given to the children for their participation in the survey.

The survey methodology and the questionnaire were designed and planned in collaboration with colleagues at the DIF Nacional, and underwent an internal review process, particularly by officials at the DIF's General Directorate of Regulation, Advancement and Awareness of the Rights of Minors (Dirección General de Normatividad, Promoción y Difusión de los Derechos de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes). Feedback and guidance from the DIF was important to make sure that the questionnaire was appropriate for and understandable to children, and to guarantee that the rights of the minors were respected, and that no confidential information was recorded.

Of the 293 minors surveyed, 46 were Mexican, 75 were Guatemalan, 88 were Honduran, 78 were Salvadoran, one was a US citizen, and five did not specify their nationality. The focus of this paper is on the 241 children from the Northern Triangle. Of those 241 children, 192 were boys (79.7 percent) and 49 were girls (20.3 percent). Regarding age groups, 171 were 15 and older (71 percent), including 80 17-year-olds, 49 16-year-olds, and 42 15-year-olds, while 70 were 14 and younger (29 percent), with almost half of those (32) being 13 or 14 years old. The average age of the surveyed children was 14.5, and the youngest were four years old.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the CONAPO-DIF survey data, which are shared by other studies about unaccompanied child migrants from the Northern Triangle (for example, Kennedy 2014; UNHCR 2014; UNHCR-Mexico 2014; Schmidt 2017), and are linked to the difficulty of tracking down and getting in contact with this population. The small sample size of the CONAPO-DIF survey, as well as the particularity of the minors surveyed (namely, only those in the custody of 10 DIF shelters), mean that the results of the survey cannot be expected to rigorously represent the entire population of unaccompanied child migrants from the Northern Triangle. However, the results do provide us with broad indications about their characteristics and motives. Also, by comparing the results of the CONAPO-DIF survey with the other studies mentioned above, we can corroborate some key ideas.

¹¹ Unfortunately, no specific data on the response rate for the survey was made available by the DIF shelter staff.

Another limitation is that the survey tool was mainly close ended. The possibility of selecting and specifying “other” was provided for most questions, although this was rarely done by the minors. This limits the understanding of the motives for migrating, since the options were previously provided. It is also important to recognize that some children, especially younger ones, may not be fully aware of all the reasons why they migrate. Indeed, their migration is often a decision made by adult family members, who may not always give a full explanation to the children. Finally, some children may be unwilling to acknowledge motives that are particularly distressing, like domestic violence or gang threats.

The Motives and Mixes of Motives of Unaccompanied Minors from the Northern Triangle

One of the main questions of the 2016 CONAPO-DIF survey was about the motivations for migrating. The minors were allowed to indicate one or more of eight non-mutually exclusive motives, which were selected based on the main motives found in other studies on unaccompanied child migrants from the Northern Triangle (Kennedy 2014; UNHCR 2014; UNHCR-Mexico 2014). These eight motives were: 1) to contribute to the family’s income; 2) to work; 3) to find better opportunities; 4) to study; 5) to reunite with family members; 6) to escape violence in the place of origin (criminals, *maras*, cartels, etc.); 7) to escape family violence in the home; and 8) other reasons. Each child could select as many of these eight motives as applied to their situation. Answers 1 through 3 are quite similar and often overlapped, so the decision was made to consider them as one sole category, labeled “economic motives.” In other words, children who selected answers 1, 2, and/or 3 were considered to have chosen the single category of economic motives.

In Figure 1 we can observe the children’s motives for migrating, without yet showing the mixes of motives. Of the 241 minors, 57.7 percent indicated economic motives, 37.8 percent mentioned family reunification, 27.8 percent stated education, 24.9 percent indicated violence in the place of origin, while domestic violence and other motives were selected by a very small proportion of children. Since the answers were not mutually exclusive, the percentages add up to more than 100 (each child could select more than one answer).

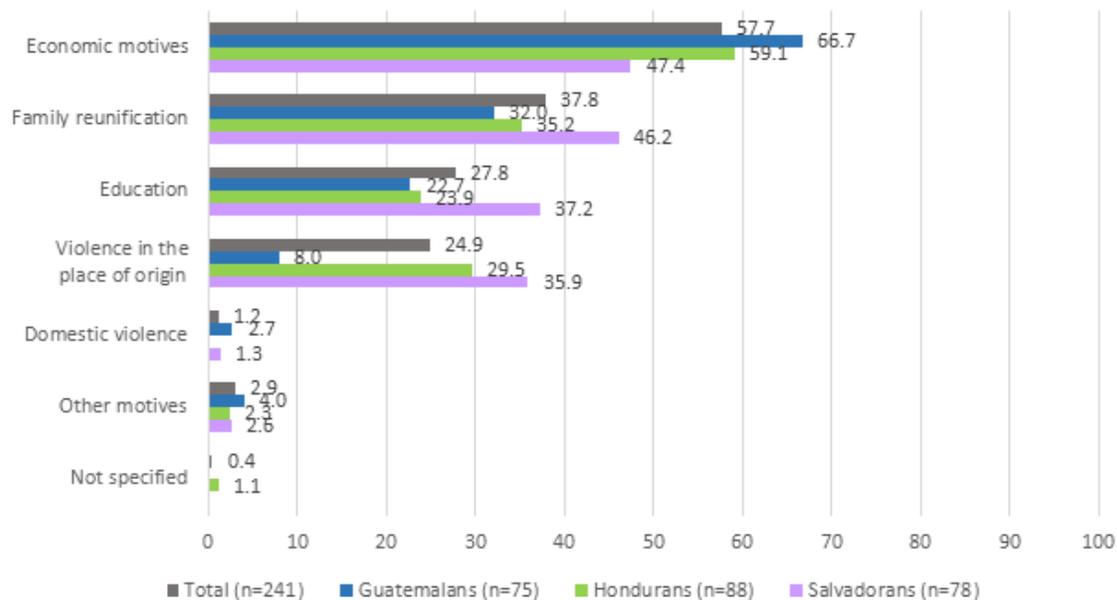
To observe and analyze the mixes of motives, the author made the decision to group economic motives and education into one category. Thus, children selecting economic motives and/or education were considered to have chosen the single motivation labeled “the search for better economic or educational opportunities.” In the same way, violence in the place of origin and domestic violence (only three minors mentioned this last motive) were also grouped into one category, labeled simply “violence.” The decision to bundle these four motives into two categories was done to more clearly visualize and analyze the mixes of motives. As indicated above regarding the UNHCR (2014) study, the use of too many categories to study mixed motives hinders the interpretation of the data.

However, the decision to group economic motives and education into one category, and domestic violence and violence in the place of origin into another category, was not taken lightly. Indeed, economic motives and education most often overlapped, as well as domestic violence and violence in the place of origin. Of the 67 children who mentioned education, 39 also indicated economic motives, and of the three minors who mentioned domestic

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants

violence, two also indicated violence in the place of origin. On the other hand, education can be considered as a component of economic motives, since it is widely recognized as crucial for social mobility, including by child migrants from the Northern Triangle, as noted by Schmidt (2017, 67).

Figure 1. Motives for Migrating of Unaccompanied Minors from the Northern Triangle Housed in 10 DIF Shelters, Total and by Country of Origin (percentages)



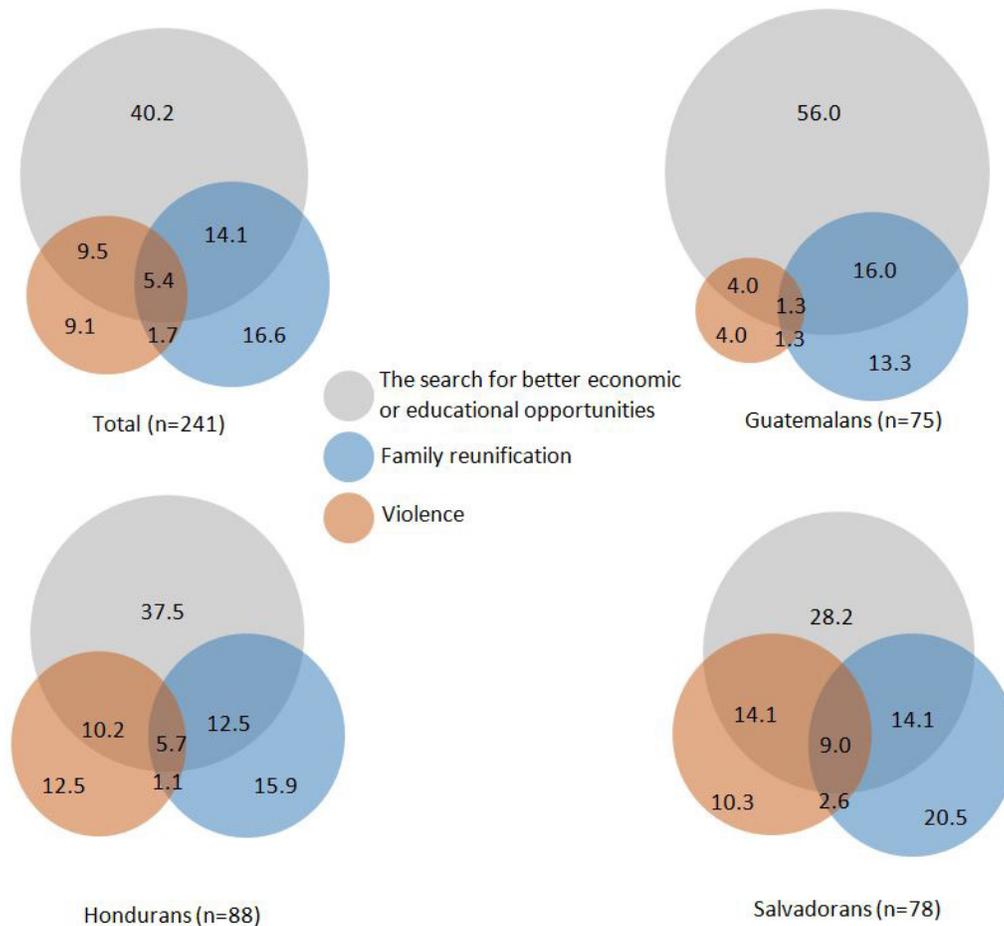
Source: CONAPO and DIF Nacional (2016).

With the resulting three nonexclusive categories, namely the search for better economic or educational opportunities, family reunification, and violence, the author used the 2016 CONAPO-DIF survey to construct Venn diagrams of the motives for migrating of the unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle as a whole, as well as by country of origin (see Figure 2). The use of only three categories, in addition to the use of circles with different dimensions to roughly reflect the percentages, makes the interpretation of the mixed-motive data much more straightforward than in the case of the UNHCR study. “Other motives” were included in the calculations but not visualized in graphic form because their importance is minimal and because they were, for the most part, indicated as exclusive motives — that is, the children who mentioned “other motives” generally only selected this option (see the notes in Figure 2).

First, we can note that 31.1 percent of the 241 minors surveyed mentioned two or more motives in combination (including “other motives”), while over two-thirds indicated only one motive for migrating. This is in contrast with the results of the UNHCR (2014) study reviewed above, in which these two proportions were inverted. Nevertheless, the roughly one-third of the children expressing mixed motives is still a considerable proportion. Evidently, these differing results are largely explained by the use of distinct methodologies

and motivation categories, although real-world changes might also come into play, in particular a reduction in indicators of violence in Guatemala and Honduras. Indeed, in 2013, when the UNHCR study was carried out, the intentional homicide rate in Guatemala was 34.3 (per 100,000), dropping to 27.3 in 2016, while in Honduras it fell from 79 to 59.1, although in El Salvador it rose from 43.7 to 81.2 (Villalobos 2017).

Figure 2. Motives and Mixes of Motives for Migrating of Unaccompanied Minors from the Northern Triangle Housed in 10 DIF Shelters, Total and by Country of Origin (percentages)



Notes: Not visualized in the diagrams are the 2.9 percent of total minors, four percent of Guatemalans, 2.3 percent of Hondurans, and 2.6 percent of Salvadorans who mentioned “other motives,” in all instances as exclusive motives except for 1.3 percent of Salvadorans, who mentioned “other motives” in combination with family reunification. The 0.4 percent of total minors (and 1.1 percent of Hondurans) who did not specify their motives are not visualized either. Source: CONAPO and DIF Nacional (2016).

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants

The use of oral interviews in the UNHCR study, compared to the use of written surveys in the CONAPO-DIF study, is most likely also of significance. In-depth interviews, such as those carried out in the UNHCR study, may uncover a wider array of motives, as well as motives that are distressing for the respondents that might not be indicated in a written survey. Also, as Ordóñez (2015) has argued, some migrants, particularly vulnerable populations, might conflate voluntary and forced reasons for migrating into the general idea of “searching for a better life,” although an in-depth interview may disentangle mixed motives in those cases.¹²

Of the 241 minors surveyed, 40.2 percent mentioned the search for better opportunities as their sole motivation, 16.6 percent stated only family reunification, and 9.1 percent noted only violence. Nevertheless, 14.1 percent indicated both the search for better opportunities and family reunification; close to 10 percent mentioned both the search for better opportunities and violence; just over five percent noted all three categories at the same time; and less than two percent stated violence and family reunification. In this way, while the search for better opportunities is more often mentioned as an exclusive motive (40.2 percent) than in combination with one or more additional motives (29 percent), family reunification and violence are more often indicated in combination with one or more additional motives than as exclusive motives. Indeed, family reunification was mentioned in combination with one or more supplemental motives by 21.2 percent of the minors (compared to 16.6 percent who stated it as an exclusive motive). This difference is even more significant in the case of violence, which was noted together with one or more additional motives by 16.6 percent (almost two times the percentage of those who mentioned it as their sole motive).

Therefore, the surveyed unaccompanied minors who were fleeing violence were most often also looking for better economic or educational opportunities, or attempting to reunite with family members. In other words, violence is the motive that mixes the most with other motivations, principally with the search for better opportunities, and to a lesser extent with family reunification.¹³ We have already seen some clues as to why this may be. First, people fleeing violence often cannot avoid becoming economic migrants, since they may need to provide for themselves, their families, and pay off debts incurred to fund their flight. Secondly, economic motives and violence may be intricately linked, for example when people flee economic extortion by gangs, and hence are fleeing violence but may also be migrating to find new livelihood opportunities. In the same way, education and

12 Of course, written surveys, such as the one used for the CONAPO-DIF study, have their advantages, including that they require less resources and time to carry out, and can be more readily replicated and more easily carried out in numerous locations. On the other hand, an anonymous written survey filled out directly by the respondents (as in the case of older children in the CONAPO-DIF survey) might actually produce more truthful results than in-depth interviews, especially if the respondents have difficulty trusting or feel intimidated by the interviewers, which is especially likely in the case of child migrants and other vulnerable populations. Also, it is possible that interviewers might induce response bias, especially when dealing with vulnerable populations. This might be better controlled with well-designed written surveys. Clearly, future research on child migrants should consider using both written surveys and in-depth interviews, whenever possible. This would allow researchers to benefit from the advantages of each method, and to contrast the results and be more certain of their validity.

13 Data from the UNHCR (2014) report corroborates the idea that violence mixes more with other motives, compared to the category family and opportunity: violence in society was mentioned as a mixed motive by over 80 percent of Central American minors interviewed, while family and opportunity was indicated as a mixed motive by around 70 percent.

violence may be inexorably connected, particularly when gangs target minors at schools or when children are afraid to go to school because of gang presence (see Appleby, Chiarello, and Kerwin 2016). In these cases, children may not only be searching for educational opportunities, but also escaping persecution. We should add that children without parents at home (generally because they have emigrated to the United States) are at particular risk of being targeted by gangs at school or in their communities (*ibid.*, 4).

In many cases, fleeing violence is a family decision, and therefore may be inextricably linked to family reunification.¹⁴ For instance, parents working in the United States often make arrangements with people smugglers to bring their children from the Northern Triangle as a way to evade gang threats and violence (extortion, forced recruitment, harassment, etc.). Sometimes, having family in the United States is precisely the reason for being extorted by gangs, since it is assumed that they have money (see, for instance, CMS and Cristosal 2017, 22).

It is also important to note, particularly in cases in which family reunification overlaps with other motivations, that it may be more accurate to describe family networks as a crucial enabling factor and as a compass for migration (by financing and reducing the costs and risks of migration, as well as by providing a destination), rather than as the immediate motivation (or trigger) or even the underlying cause. The fact that at least 85 percent of Central American unaccompanied minors apprehended in the United States in 2014 had parents or other family members living there (US Senate 2015, 15), but that less than 40 percent of the Central American minors in the CONAPO-DIF survey mentioned family reunification as a motive for migrating, most often in combination with other motives, gives credence to this subtle distinction.¹⁵ In addition to being a crucial enabling factor and compass for migration, family reunification creates a self-reinforcing “snowball” phenomenon from the inertia of network effects, that is, the fact that migrant networks tend to expand to include more and more people from sending and receiving communities, as explained by Michael Clemens (2017) precisely regarding unaccompanied child migration from the Northern Triangle.

14 The role of family networks in the countries of origin and destination to provide protection for Central Americans fleeing violence and persecution has recently been analyzed in a report by CMS and Cristosal (2017). According to that report, based on in-depth interviews with migrants, familial assessment of risk and resources influence the decision about who leaves and who stays, and families contribute through “accompaniment during the trip, contacts, payment of the coyote (smuggler), and reception of the survivor in the United States. It is there — along with networks of neighbors or fellow nationals — that the family assumes the function of protection and vigilance” (*ibid.*, 13-14). In this way, families come to meet certain functions of protection that typically fall on the state (*ibid.*, 14).

15 In this sense, Nicholas Van Hear (1998, 18-22) makes an interesting distinction between the underlying structural factors of migration, the proximate causes, the precipitating causes, and the enabling factors. The underlying structural factors predispose a population to migrate, and include the state of social order and security in the countries of origin, and the economic and human security disparities between places of origin and destination. The proximate causes derive from the working out of the structural factors, leading, for example, to economic downturns or a worsening of security and human rights. The precipitating causes are those that actually trigger departure at the individual or household level (for instance, unemployment, factory closures, a collapse of farm prices, persecution, the outbreak of war, etc.). Finally, the enabling factors make migration possible and more likely, and are composed of elements such as means of transport and communication, smuggling networks, and migrant networks.

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants

This two-layered distinction regarding the causes of migration (immediate or underlying), on the one hand, and the enabling factors and the compass for migration, on the other, could also apply to the search for better economic and educational opportunities. In this way, the first layer might be the need to flee, rooted in violence, while the second level, regarding where to flee (and how), could be rooted in economic, education, and/or family reunification considerations.

Distinctions by Country of Origin

The differences by country of origin are significant, both regarding the motives and mixes of motives. Economic motives were the most important reason for migrating for all three nationalities, but particularly for Guatemalans and Hondurans. Indeed, two-thirds of Guatemalans indicated economic motives (exclusively or in combination with other motives), as well as close to 60 percent of Hondurans, and less than 50 percent of Salvadorans (see Figure 1). Family reunification was the second most significant motive in all three cases, being mentioned by around one-third of Guatemalans and Hondurans, and almost one-half of Salvadorans. As for education, it was noted by 20 percent of Guatemalans and Hondurans, but by almost 40 percent of Salvadorans.¹⁶ We see the most significant differences in the case of violence in the place of origin, since it was indicated as a motivating factor by only 8 percent of Guatemalans, compared to 29.5 percent of Hondurans and 35.9 percent of Salvadorans.

These differences between nationalities largely coincide with the suppositions presented in the introduction. In addition, some differences between nationalities are corroborated by the UNHCR (2014) and UNHCR-Mexico (2014) studies, as well as by Schmidt's (2017) article, mentioned above. In this way, we can confirm that economic motives are the main motivation of Guatemalan child migrants, and that a smaller but still notable proportion migrate to reunite with family members and to flee violence. In the case of Honduran and Salvadoran minors, we can corroborate that family reunification and economic motives have more similar weights, while violence is a much more significant motive for migrating compared to Guatemalans. We can also corroborate that family reunification is especially important for Salvadorans.¹⁷

16 Michael Anastario et al. (2015) offer an explanation regarding why education is such an important motive for Salvadoran child migrants. According to the authors, the Salvadoran State provides free education only through the ninth grade, after which a student must pay to complete a Bachillerato (high school) degree before beginning university studies. Therefore, for Salvadorans who cannot afford tuition, "the lack of educational opportunities may represent a considerable push factor, as migration to the United States offers an academic trajectory and job opportunities." (Anastario et al. 2015, 101).

17 For example, according to the UNHCR-Mexico (2014) study, based on interviews with unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle held in immigration detention centers in Mexico, half of Guatemalan minors mentioned economic motives for migrating, one-third indicated violence, and roughly 15 percent spoke of family reunification. In the case of Hondurans, economic motives and family reunification were both mentioned by around 20 percent, while 59.5 percent indicated violence. Twenty percent of Salvadorans, for their part, stated economic motives, while violence and family reunification were both mentioned by 40 percent (UNHCR-Mexico 2014, 47-50). Note that the UNHCR-Mexico study is based on mutually exclusive categories, as opposed to the UNHCR (2014) study and the CONAPO-DIF survey.

We can also confirm that Honduran and Salvadoran minors have more mixed motives than Guatemalans. This is linked to the significance of violence as a motivation for migrating from those two countries. Indeed, slightly less than a quarter of Guatemalans surveyed had mixed motives, according to the three motivation categories used in Figure 2. This mainly includes 16 percent who mentioned family reunification in combination with the search for better economic or educational opportunities, and four percent who specified violence in combination with the search for better opportunities. The most significant motivation category is undoubtedly the search for better opportunities as the sole motive, indicated by 56 percent of Guatemalan minors.

As for Hondurans and Salvadorans, we can see that the three categories of motives have more equal weights, and that mixed motives are more significant — 29.5 percent of Hondurans had mixed motives, as well as 41.1 percent of Salvadorans.¹⁸ The search for better opportunities was mentioned in combination with family reunification by 12.5 percent of Hondurans and 14.1 percent of Salvadorans, which is similar to the percentage regarding Guatemalans. We see more significant differences in the case of violence, since it was indicated in combination with the search for better opportunities by 10.2 and 14.1 percent of Honduran and Salvadoran minors, respectively (as opposed to four percent of Guatemalans). In addition, all three categories of motives were indicated together by 5.7 percent of Hondurans and nine percent of Salvadorans (compared to only 1.3 percent of Guatemalans). As for the exclusive motives, the search for better opportunities was stated by 37.5 and 28.2 percent of Hondurans and Salvadorans, family reunification was mentioned by 15.9 and 20.5 percent, respectively, and violence by 12.5 and 10.3 percent.

It is thus apparent that violence explains the differences by nationality regarding the significance of mixed motives, since all three cases had similar proportions of minors mentioning better opportunities in combination with family reunification. These mixed-motive differences between nationalities are confirmed by the UNHCR (2014) study. According to that report, just over 60 percent of Guatemalans had mixed motives, while this proportion was over 70 percent in the case of Hondurans and Salvadorans. In addition, 20 percent of Guatemalans mentioned violence in society as a motive (18 percent as a mixed motive), compared to 43.9 percent of Hondurans (35.7 percent as a mixed motive), and 66.3 percent of Salvadorans (54.9 percent as a mixed motive) (UNHCR 2014).

The data from the CONAPO-DIF survey, corroborated in part by the UNHCR report, suggests that it is possible to visualize a continuum encompassing not only forced and voluntary migration but also mixed and exclusive motives, because, as mentioned above, violence is the motive that mixes the most with other motivations. Guatemalan minors are closer to the voluntary- and exclusive-motive end of this spectrum than Hondurans and Salvadorans, since a larger proportion seek better opportunities and fewer have mixed motives. Hondurans and especially Salvadoran minors are closer to the forced- and mixed-motive end of the continuum, with a larger proportion mentioning violence and having mixed motives.

18 This last number includes the 1.3 percent of Salvadorans who mentioned “other motives” in combination with family reunification.

Breakdown of the Motivation Categories by Gender and Age

To take the analysis one step further, it is worth connecting the mixed and exclusive motives with the basic demographic characteristics of the minors (gender and age groups). Table 1 shows the cross tabulation between the gender and two age groups of the minors and the five main motivation categories derived from the Venn diagrams: 1) only the search for better economic or educational opportunities; 2) only family reunification; 3) only violence; 4) the search for better opportunities and family reunification; and 5) the search for better opportunities and violence. The table does not include the following motivation categories that had a small number of cases: a) family reunification and violence; b) the search for better opportunities, family reunification, and violence; c) only “other motives”; and d) “other motives” and family reunification. However, the right total column includes all 241 cases.

Table 1. Cross Tabulation of the Five Main Motivation Categories and the Gender and Age Groups of Unaccompanied Minors from the Northern Triangle Housed in 10 DIF shelters, June 2016

	Only the search for better opportunities	Only family reunification	Only violence	The search for better opportunities and family reunification	The search for better opportunities and violence	Total
Gender						
Boys	86 (44.8%) (88.7%)	18 (9.4%) (45%)	19 (9.9%) (86.4%)	24 (12.5%) (70.6%)	22 (11.5%) (95.7%)	192 (100%) (79.7%)
Girls	11 (22.5%) (11.3%)	22 (44.9%) (55%)	3 (6.1%) (13.6%)	10 (20.4%) (29.4%)	1 (2%) (4.3%)	49 (100%) (20.3%)
Age groups						
14 and younger	18 (25.7%) (18.6%)	30 (42.9%) (75%)	5 (7.1%) (22.7%)	9 (12.9%) (26.5%)	4 (5.7%) (17.4%)	70 (100%) (29%)
15 and older	79 (46.2%) (81.4%)	10 (5.9%) (25%)	17 (9.9%) (77.3%)	25 (14.6%) (73.5%)	19 (11.1%) (82.6%)	171 (100%) (71%)
Total	97 (40.2%) (100%)	40 (16.6%) (100%)	22 (9.1%) (100%)	34 (14.1%) (100%)	23 (9.5%) (100%)	241 (100%) (100%)

Notes: The motivation categories that had 13 or less cases are not included in the table, namely: a) family reunification and violence; b) the search for better opportunities, family reunification, and violence; c) only “other motives”; and d) “other motives” and family reunification. However, the right total column includes all 241 cases.

Source: CONAPO and DIF Nacional (2016).

The five motivation categories break down quite differently according to the gender and the two age groups of the minors (14 years old and younger, and 15 years old and older). Those who only mentioned the search for better opportunities were essentially boys (88.7 percent) and mature adolescents 15 years old or older (81.4 percent). Another way to put this is that close to half of the boys and of the mature adolescents surveyed indicated the search for better opportunities as their sole motive. This is to be expected, since mature male adolescents are more likely to be part of the work force than girls or young children, as indicated in the introduction, and hence are more likely to be labor migrants.

Minors who only stated family reunification as a motive for migrating include larger proportions of girls, with 55 percent, and of younger children (under 15 years old), with 75 percent. Another way to describe this is that over 40 percent of the girls and of the younger children surveyed mentioned family reunification as their sole motive. This is not surprising, since migration for family reunification often involves dependent members of a household, and since minors with economic motives are excluded (those more likely to be mature male adolescents). Indeed, when family reunification motives are mixed with the search for better economic or educational opportunities, we can notice that boys and mature adolescents are once again more numerous: 70.6 percent of the minors mentioning these two motives in combination were boys, and 73.5 percent were mature adolescents.

The minors who mentioned violence in combination with the search for better economic or educational opportunities were even more predominantly boys, representing 95.7 percent, and mature adolescents, with 82.6 percent. However, in the case of the minors indicating violence as a unique motive, thus excluding economic motives, we do not see a substantial proportion of girls or of young children — quite the contrary. Close to 90 percent of the minors mentioning violence as their only motive for migrating were boys, and close to 80 percent were mature adolescents. This slightly unexpected result can be explained by the fact that much of the violence linked to criminal groups in the Northern Triangle, particularly the *maras*, is directed toward male adolescents and young men, often for resisting recruitment or attempting to leave these groups (Rodríguez Serna 2016). Nevertheless, as mentioned before, it is possible that some younger children might not be fully aware of all the reasons for migrating, particularly regarding violence, since an adult family member often makes the decision and the child may not always be given a full explanation. In addition, as indicated before, some small children might conflate voluntary and forced reasons for migrating into the general idea of searching for a better life, or may simply avoid indicating motives that are distressing for them.

Still, the similarity in the gender and age group profiles of minors migrating because of economic or educational motives and because of violence, or both at the same time, should be underscored. This provides another rationale to the idea that forced and voluntary migrants may not be easily distinguished, at least within this subgroup of unaccompanied minors from the Northern Triangle. In all three cases — namely minors fleeing violence, minors searching for better opportunities, and minors migrating for both motives — the clear majority were mature male adolescents. In fact, the minors who mentioned both violence and the search for better opportunities represent the group with the largest proportion of boys and mature adolescents, even more so than the “pure” economic migrants.

Discussion

The data analyzed in this paper represents straightforward evidence that, in many cases, it is very difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between forced and voluntary migrants. Indeed, we observed that a considerable proportion of the child migrants of the CONAPO-DIF survey had mixed motives, both forced and voluntary. We also noted that mixed motives were more common in the case of Honduran and especially Salvadoran minors, compared to Guatemalans. Another interesting finding is that violence was the motive that mixed the most with other motivations. This explains why mixed motives were more significant in the case of Honduras and especially Salvadoran minors, since violence was mentioned as a motive for migrating by around 10 percent of Guatemalan children, compared to around 30 percent of Hondurans and over a third of Salvadorans.

Moreover, we observed that the basic demographic characteristics of the minors fleeing violence, of those searching for better opportunities, and of those indicating both motives at the same time, were largely indistinguishable, since the overwhelming majority were male adolescents aged 15 or older. In contrast, the minors who indicated family reunification as their sole motive were mainly girls and younger children.

The difficulty in making a clear-cut distinction between forced and voluntary migrants is relevant at the theoretical and conceptual level, but it also has significant practical implications. It is important to point out that migration theory has centered almost exclusively on the voluntary drivers of migration, such as wage differentials between countries, the demand for low-skilled workers in developed countries, and migrant networks, whereas the forced motives of migration have been largely ignored (Castles 2003, 17). However, forced motivations may be an essential trigger that sets migratory flows into motion, especially through a mix of motives and enabling factors. Indeed, the economic and family reunification motives underlying child migration from the Northern Triangle existed much before the 2014 “surge” of unaccompanied minors. However, it was not until indicators of violence started increasing, first in Honduras, and then in El Salvador, that several spikes in the migration of minors from the Northern Triangle were registered, starting in 2014.¹⁹

On the other hand, mixed motives tell us that forced and voluntary factors are often inextricably linked, not only at a structural level — countries experiencing violence and conflict usually also suffer from high inequality and lack of opportunities — but also at a more individual and day-to-day level. As mentioned above, people fleeing violence may still need to provide for themselves, their families, and pay off debts incurred. People fleeing economic extortion will most likely also be trying to find better economic opportunities. Children fleeing gang harassment in schools will probably also be seeking educational opportunities. Finally, reunification with parents or other family members in the United States may be one of the only ways to evade gang threats and violence.

At a more practical level, mixed-motive migration is important because it calls into question the clear-cut, zero-sum determination of whether someone is worthy of humanitarian protection or not. The problem is that when asylum or refugee applicants fail to fit into

¹⁹ For instance, intentional homicide rates in Honduras increased from around 70 (per 100,000) in 2009 to over 90 in 2011 and 2012, and in El Salvador, they rose from just over 40 in 2013 to over 100 in 2015 (Villalobos 2017).

the established categories that represent particular types of suffering or persecution, their applications become suspect and can be rejected (Ordóñez 2015, 102). It is evident that people describing an assemblage of motives will not fit neatly into established, clear-cut categories of suffering or persecution.

Furthermore, mixed motives greatly complicate asylum and refugee screening. Substantial time and effort are needed not only to appropriately differentiate migrants who need humanitarian protection from other migrants, but also to disentangle the many reasons each migrant may have for leaving his or her country of origin. In addition, when two or more motives overlap, violence and persecution might not always be among the first motives indicated by migrants, especially by minors and other vulnerable populations who do not have a clear understanding of refugee and asylum systems or the standards for protection eligibility. Indeed, migrants with mixed motives often conflate violence, economic hardships, and other motives into the general idea of “searching for a better life” (Ordóñez 2015). Some young children might not even be fully aware of all the reasons underlying their migration decision, particularly regarding violence. In many cases, the decision is made by adult family members who may not always give their children a full explanation. Other children may simply avoid indicating those motives that are distressing for them.

There is still much research to be done to determine how and to what extent mixed motives lead to the rejection of asylum petitions, and even to not filing asylum petitions. Nevertheless, two important policy implications are clear. The first is the need to have in-depth, attentive, and individual asylum screening, as well as the need for immigration officials and asylum adjudicators to recognize that motives may be interconnected (Schmidt 2017, 76). Mixed motives imply that a forced reason may be hidden behind a seemingly voluntary motive for migrating. Thus, a detailed account and interview may be needed to get to the root of the motives for migrating. The second implication is the need for a more flexible policy approach to properly address mixed-motive migration (Van Hear 2012, 2). In this sense, future research should address how immigration systems could be adapted to become more inclusive of migrants with mixed motives. Points-based systems may be particularly well-suited to capture multiple motives, both forced and voluntary, although in practice they have tended to be used to select high-skilled migrants.

Finally, a broader implication of mixed-motive migration concerns the formulation of policies to prevent migration flows, both by the countries of origin and of destination. By recognizing that the migration of minors from the Northern Triangle has diverse and often overlapping causes, the policy responses aimed at stemming migration by this vulnerable population must also be diverse and multilayered, dealing simultaneously and interrelatedly with the goals of reducing violence, providing better economic and educational opportunities in the countries of origin, and minimizing family separation, for instance by facilitating circular migration. While recognizing the need for diverse and multilayered responses, the different motives and mixes of motives by nationality suggest that certain dimensions should be prioritized in each country, particularly violence in Honduras and El Salvador; education and the facilitation of circular migration in El Salvador; and the creation of economic opportunities in all three countries, but especially in Guatemala and Honduras.

REFERENCES

- Anastario, Michael, Kelle Barrick, Deborah Gibbs, Wayne Pitts, Rose Werth, and Pamela K. Lattimore. 2015. "Factors driving Salvadoran youth migration: A formative assessment focused on Salvadoran repatriation facilities." *Children and Youth Services Review* 59: 97-104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2015.10.019>.
- Appleby, Kevin, Leonir Chiarello, and Donald Kerwin. 2016. "The Central American Humanitarian Crisis and US Policy Responses." Center for Migration Studies (CMS)-Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN) Report. New York: CMS and SIMN. <https://doi.org/10.14240/cmsrpt0617n2>.
- Betts, Alexander. 2010. "Survival Migration: A New Protection Framework." *International Migration* 16(3): 361-82.
- Carlson, Elizabeth, and Anna Marie Gallagher. 2015. "Humanitarian Protection for Children Fleeing Gang-Based Violence in the Americas." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 3(2): 129-58. <https://doi.org/10.14240/jmhs.v3i2.47>.
- Castles, Stephen. 2003. "Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social Transformation." *Sociology* 37(1): 13-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038503037001384>.
- . 2007. "The Migration-Asylum Nexus and Regional Approaches". In *New Regionalism and Asylum Seekers: Challenges Ahead*, edited by Susan Kneebone and Felicity Rawlings-Sanaei, 25-42. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- CMS and Cristosal. 2017. "Point of No Return: The Fear and Criminalization of Central American Refugees." CMS-Cristosal Report, June. New York and San Salvador: CMS and Cristosal. <https://doi.org/10.14240/cmsrpt0916>.
- Chishti, Muzaffar, and Faye Hipsman. 2014. "Dramatic Surge in the Arrival of Unaccompanied Children Has Deep Roots and No Simple Solutions." Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/dramatic-surge-arrival-unaccompanied-children-has-deep-roots-and-no-simple-solutions>.
- . 2016. "Increased Central American Migration to the United States May Prove an Enduring Phenomenon." Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/increased-central-american-migration-united-states-may-prove-enduring-phenomenon>.
- Clemens, Michael. 2017. "Violence, Development, and Migration Waves: Evidence from Central American Child Migrant Apprehensions." Center for Global Development Working Paper 459, July. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/violence-development-and-migration-waves-evidence-central-american-child-migrant.pdf>.
- CONAPO and DIF Nacional (Consejo Nacional y Población and Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia). 2016. *Encuesta a niñas, niños y adolescentes migrantes no acompañados en albergues y módulos del DIF, Junio de 2016*. Mexico City: CONAPO and DIF Nacional.

- DIF Nacional. 2016. *Anuarios Estadísticos de la Estrategia de Prevención y Atención a Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes Migrantes y Repatriados No Acompañados del DIF Nacional*. Mexico City: DIF Nacional.
- Donato, Katharine, and Blake Sisk. 2015. "Children's Migration to the United States from Mexico and Central America: Evidence from the Mexican and Latin American Migration Projects." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 3(1): 58-79. <https://doi.org/10.14240/jmhs.v3i1.43>.
- ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). 2017. "CEPALSTAT Bases de Datos y Publicaciones Estadísticas." http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/WEB_CEPALSTAT/Portada.asp
- InSight Crime. 2017. "Guatemala Profile." *InSight Crime*, March 9th. <http://www.insightcrime.org/guatemala-organized-crime-news/guatemala>.
- Kennedy, Elizabeth. 2014. *No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children Are Fleeing Their Homes*. Washington, DC: American Immigration Council.
- Lorenzen, Matthew. 2016. *Migración de niñas, niños y adolescentes: Antecedentes y análisis de información de la Red de módulos y albergues de los Sistemas DIF, 2007-2016*. Mexico City: CONAPO and DIF Nacional.
- Meyer, Peter, Rhoda Margesson, Clare Ribando Seelke, and Maureen Taft-Morales. 2016. *Unaccompanied Children from Central America: Foreign Policy Considerations*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
- Morokvasic, Mirjana. 2016. "Migration and Gender." In *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, edited by Anna Triandafyllidou, 54-63. New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- Ordóñez, Juan Thomas. 2015. "Some Sort of Help for the Poor: Blurred Perspectives on Asylum." *International Migration* 53(3): 100-10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12175>.
- Richmond, Anthony H. 1988. "Sociological Theories of International Migration: The Case of Refugees." *Current Sociology* 36(2): 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001139288036002004>.
- . 1994. *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism and the New World Order*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rodríguez Serna, Nicolás. 2016. "Fleeing Cartels and Maras: International Protection Considerations and Profiles from the Northern Triangle." *International Journal of Refugee Law* 28(1): 25-54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eev061>.
- Rosenblum, Marc. 2015. *Unaccompanied Child Migration to the United States: The Tension between Protection and Prevention*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

The Mixed Motives of Unaccompanied Child Migrants

- Schmidt, Susan. 2017. "‘They Need to Give Us a Voice’: Lessons from Listening to Unaccompanied Central American and Mexican Children on Helping Children Like Themselves." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 5(1): 57-81. <https://doi.org/10.14240/jmhs.v5i1.74>.
- Suro, Roberto. Forthcoming. "A Migration Becomes an Emergency: The Flight of Women and Children from the Northern Triangle and Its Antecedents."
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). 2014. *Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection*. Washington, DC: UNHCR.
- UNHCR-Mexico. 2014. *Arrancados de Raíz*. Mexico City: UNHCR.
- UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). 2017. "UNODC Statistics." <https://data.unodc.org/>
- US Senate. 2015. *Stronger Neighbors—Stronger Borders: Addressing the Root Causes of the Migration Surge from Central America*. Washington, DC: US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.
- UPM (Unidad de Política Migratoria). 2017. "Series Históricas." http://www.politicamigratoria.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/Series_Historicas
- Van Hear, Nicholas. 1998. *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- . 2012. "Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges." *Policy Primer, The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford*. http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PolicyPrimer-Mixed_Migration.pdf.
- Van Hear, Nicholas, Rebecca Brubaker, and Thais Bessa. 2009. "Managing Mobility for Human Development: The Growing Salience of Mixed Migration." Research Paper 2009/20, June, Human Development Reports. New York: UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).
- Villalobos, Hazel. 2017. "Tasa de homicidios en Centroamérica del 2006 al 2016: balance de una década." *Pensando desde Centroamérica*. <https://pensandodesdecentroamerica.wordpress.com/2017/01/19/tasas-de-homicidios-en-centroamerica-del-2006-al-2016-balance-de-una-decada/>.