

## The Journey to the United States

To get to the United States, Guatemalans must travel over 2500 miles, through deserts, mountains, and jungles, or on small boats along the coasts.

### They face terrible difficulties in trying to get to the United States

- “Rape has become rampant, almost routine,” for the women, and they take contraceptive measures as part of preparation for the journey. Women have also been the victims of forced recruitment and trafficking as sex slaves.<sup>1</sup>
- *Paying guides, “coyotes,”* to bring them across the border costs over \$2,000. And often these guides abandon their charges in the desert after taking their money, or request sexual favors from the women or their daughters.<sup>2</sup>
- Those who cannot pay a coyote, may try to get to the U.S. by *riding trains* on the tops of box cars. This is very dangerous: More than 100 refugees and migrants have fallen while riding atop these trains, commonly known as “La Bestia” or “The Beast,” in recent years.<sup>3</sup>
- *Many are children unaccompanied* by their parents. In the first six months of 2016, almost 26,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the U.S. border, and another 16,000 were apprehended in Mexico. When sent back home, they are often killed by the gangs they sought to escape.<sup>4</sup>
- Migrants are sometimes *kidnapped* for ransom or for sex trafficking. Estimates of the numbers of kidnappings vary from hundreds to thousands a year.<sup>5</sup>

### If caught, of course, the migrants are deported back to Guatemala:

- The total number of Guatemalans deported from the United States increased from 1,763 in 1995 to 4,543 in 2000, and reached a record 30,313 in 2011, according to INS and DHS statistics.
- Many arrive in Guatemala on U.S. planes in chains, a visible symbol of humiliation.
- Unlike (e.g.) Mexico or El Salvador, the Guatemalan government has virtually no programs reintegrate deportees. They are often just “dumped off,” and left to fend for themselves. This is especially difficult for children who have spent years in the U.S. and may not even speak or read Spanish.

### Voices of Guatemalans:<sup>6</sup>

*Jeremy, 17, says his family is so poor that “sometimes there is no food in the kitchen.” He is convinced that if he manages to make his way to the United States he’ll be able to earn enough money to lift his parents out of poverty. He recently attempted the journey, walking and hitching rides for eight days, when Mexican police detained him. He says he spent three weeks in detention before being sent back to Guatemala.*

*Maria de la Paz Lopez, who runs a center for deported refugee and migrant children in Guatemala, says she has heard many horrendous stories. Rape is so common that “girls take measures so as not to get pregnant. Girls aged 12, 13, 14,” she says.*

*A Guatemalan woman in her early 20s had become a target of her well-connected abusive boyfriend. “I came [to the United States] because my parents were receiving death threats. My boyfriend was really, really abusive and he had friends in high places. My parents were really worried because he threatened everyone. I moved several times to get away from him, but it never worked.” She fled to save her life and those of her family.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/guatemalan-migration-times-civil-war-and-post-war-challenges>

<sup>2</sup> <http://immigrationtounitedstates.org/533-guatemalan-immigrants.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/888441/download>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/888441/download>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/888441/download>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/888441/download>