

Unhomed in the Homeland: Post-Deportation Housing Insecurity and Structural Vulnerability in Guatemala

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how forced deportation from the United States exacerbates housing insecurity among Guatemalan returnees, analyzed through Structural Vulnerability Theory. It explores systemic barriers, institutional neglect, and sociocultural exclusion shaping reintegration. The study also investigates how gender, ethnicity, and transnational dynamics influence vulnerability, emphasizing the intersectional nature of structural risks and long-term consequences for families, communities, and social networks.

This research paper utilizes multidisciplinary sources between 2010-2025, including empirical studies, NGO reports, and policy analyses. This research introduces five principle concepts, including insufficient housing and reintegration policies, persistent stigma and social isolation, fragmented governance, overlapping issues, and transnational policy asymmetries. Through a data synthesis between qualitative insights and policy evaluations, the research paper reveals patterns of exclusion and institutional gaps within local, nation, and international contexts.

The findings reveal that housing insecurity is a structural consequence where migration governance, socioeconomic inequality, and state capacity intersect. Guatemala's limited policy response perpetuates cycles of displacement and marginalization. The evidence highlights the compounded impact of intersecting vulnerabilities, revealing that short-term interventions are insufficient to address systemic inequities.

Applying Structural Vulnerability Theory highlights that systemic inequities, rather than personal failings, restrict access to housing and survival. The research emphasizes the necessity for rights-based housing frameworks integrating social protection and community inclusion, and long-term holistic support strategies to achieve sustainable post-deportation reintegration and comprehensive social support. These findings advocate coordinated policy reform, inclusive reintegration programs, and strengthened regional collaboration to mitigate structural vulnerability for deported populations.

Keywords include: Guatemala, deportation, housing insecurity, structural vulnerability, reintegration, human rights, gender, Indigenous populations, migration policy, transnational governance

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

Over the years, forced deportation from the United States has become increasingly more ubiquitous, with these efforts driving the release of inequality across Central America. The action of migration in Guatemala previously symbolized survival, a popular notion frequently found in rural, working-class communities. Now, these ideals have converted into negative perceptions, regenerating vulnerability from deportation. Statistics between 2020 and 2024—when more than 250,000 Guatemalans were deported—highlight these rising vulnerabilities with information showcasing that nearly two percent of the labor force that returned to their homes did not have a form of financial income or savings, no documents, or employment opportunities available for them (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). The vulnerabilities extend to the grave matter of housing insecurity, which remains a priority with glaring figures reinforcing the claim, revealing that a mere 14 percent of returnees receive confirmed shelter, while almost half do not have access to those same resources. Often, these returnees are left unprepared, resulting in the reliance of other sheltering sources—living with relatives or through temporary housing. McIlwaine and Lewis note more vulnerabilities introduced from deportation, including the interference in deportees receiving economic support from relatives abroad, which then go on to strain financial circumstances, worsen poverty, reduce access to services and participation in social activities, and increase exclusion (McIlwaine & Lewis, 2016).

In addition, Guatemala's housing precariousness continues to underscore the cavities in resources from both local and global levels, with urban constraints being implemented as well. These deficiencies are observable in Guatemala City with minimal—fewer than one in ten—residential properties, or subsidized housing developments, providing adequate support to low-income, poverty-stricken families. These troubles become more prominent with inflation when, compared to 2016, there has been a 63 percent increase in rent, which leaves deportees dependent on unauthorized, informal housing. Collectively contributing to one-third of the urban population, deportees who inhabit those settlements are subjected to institutional ostracism, which intensifies stigmatization. The cycle of unhoused deportees is perpetuated with landlords rejecting these returnees, charging unreasonably high, excessive deposits—which only benefit property owners' wealth as they accumulate these superfluous deposits, and interfering in the formal housing markets (World Bank, 2023; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). All together, these recurring motifs subsidize deportation because they convert the transnational displacement into domestic marginalization and social oppression.

Problem Statement and Rationale

Reintegration occurs in an arbitrary manner within governmental and institutional systems, infringing underfunded agencies' abilities to provide sustainable, long-term incentives as they have insufficient

resources, which render intended efforts unsupported. The temporary fixes agencies provide instead of long-term, structural inclusive incentives are exemplified within the following organizations: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Guatemalan Migration Institute, and the Secretariat for Social Works. Other programs such as Plan Retorno al Hogar or IOM operate analogously with a primary focus on support through short-term resources of transport stipends and hygiene kits—which are negligent when considering fundamental entitlements to land control, accessibility credit, and other essential prerequisites. This narrow purview displays transnational migration control regime imbalances, where wealthy states shift the social and economic burdens of migration enforcement onto lower-income countries who, in turn, must shoulder the reintegration responsibilities. Within local communities, deportees settle mainly in urban perimeters, namely zones like El Mezquital or Villa Nueva, that exhibit infrastructural neglect and social stigma, which amplify psychological trauma as returnees disguise deportation backgrounds to avoid discrimination (Hagan et al., 2015). Ultimately, these problems result in the ongoing marginalization that occurs after returning home, rejecting any sense of belonging (Dingeman & Rumbaut, 2010).

Significance and Purpose

Structural Vulnerability Theory assisted, applied alongside this study, to investigate the mechanisms that guide the submergence of discrimination and injustice in political systems through an exploration of power structure dynamics, including the social aspects and systematic failures (Quesada et al., 2011). This is discerned among Guatemalan deportees, whose uncertainties elucidate their racial, gender, income, and institutionalized jeopardy—often concealed and therefore unnoticed. Among these Guatemalan deportees, women in particular experience heightened fears from patriarchal property laws, which create an economically dependent environment (Cantu, 2020), and Indigenous migrants receive systemic inequalities and exclusion from their inability to participate in formal land systems.

Objectives

This research paper is led by the research question: ***How do structural vulnerabilities shape housing insecurity among Guatemalan deportees during their first year after return?*** This study, utilizing empirical evidence and policy analysis, expects to expose the discrepancies that arise from reintegration structures in order to accentuate the need for housing access that prioritize rights- and justice- based, sustainable pathways. Resolving these issues requires implementing the rights-based pathway surrounding migration governance, as well as offering a more stable social community for Guatemala.

Scope and Limitations

Derived from the time frame of 2010-2025, this study centers on Guatemalan returnees and their experience with housing insecurity. The limitations include an inconsistent reportage of data across the provided time frame and potential predisposition in institutional reporting. Initially, the author hoped to receive first-hand experiences and primary sources to support a quantitative method, conducting interviews on real-life Guatemalan deportees. However, given project time constraints and limited access

to local partner organizations during the research window, conducting direct interviews was not feasible. As such, this paper relies on a systematic review and qualitative synthesis of secondary data sources. When exploring the topic deeper in the future, incorporating direct interviews will be a priority to gather a more accurate depiction and expand the analysis of lived experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Structural Vulnerability Theory (SVT), first conceptualized by Quesada, Hart, and Bourgois (2011) within clinical anthropology, provides a critical lens for understanding how socio-political and economic structures—including social hierarchies, institutional neglect, and systemic inequalities—create and reinforce vulnerability among marginalized communities. With a deep-seated foundation in the broader traditions of political economy and critical medical anthropology, SVT posits that individual suffering, health disparities, and precarity are not the result of personal failings or behavioral decisions. On the contrary, it positions hardship as socially and politically constructed through factors such as class exploitation, racialized exclusion, institutional neglect, and state policy, which systematically restrict access to resources for basic needs (Bourgois et al., 2017; Holmes, 2013).

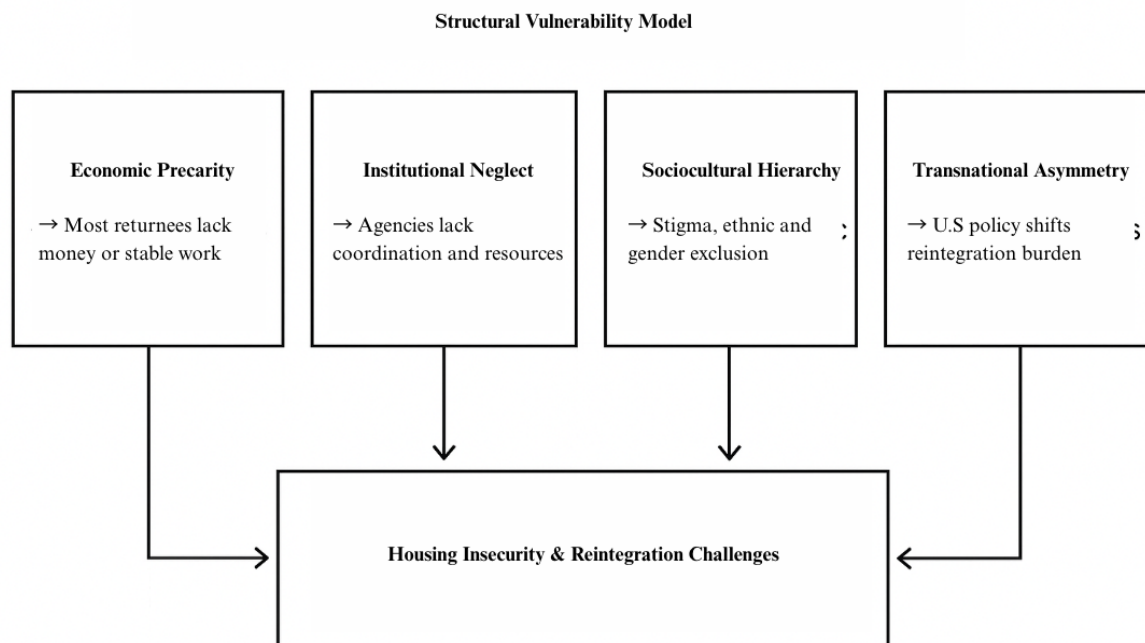
The evolution of SVT has emerged through its transition from healthcare settings to migration studies, human geography, and post-displacement research (Castañeda, 2019; Quesada et al., 2011). As international migration governance became increasingly developed, with growing dependence on detention, border enforcement, and forced deportation regimes, SVT was adopted by scholars to examine how post-deportation dynamics reproduce vulnerability across borders (Carballo & Menjívar, 2020; Hagan et al., 2022). In post-deportation contexts, structural vulnerability functions through neglect by state-level institutions and their interaction with local social hierarchies, leaving returnees stranded in environments that lack social safety nets, formal credit access, and secure housing (Coutin, 2020).

Applying SVT to this paper is particularly relevant because housing insecurity among Guatemalan deportees cannot simply be explained by individual financial choices or localized housing shortages. Rather, housing precarity stems from multiple intersecting structural pressures, including transnational policy asymmetries, municipal governance failures, socio-cultural stigmatization, and gendered or ethnic land exclusions. By utilizing SVT to frame post-deportation housing, this study shifts the focus away from individual-deficit models and demonstrates how systemic state and market failures produce chronic homelessness and marginalization among Guatemalan returnees.

Figure 1, titled the Structural Vulnerability Model, demonstrates a system composed of 4 elements: economic precarity, institutional neglect, sociocultural hierarchy, and transnational asymmetry, which ultimately all lead to the principle discussion: Housing Insecurity and Reintegration Challenge merge to produce housing insecurity and reintegration challenges for Guatemalan deportees.

Figure 1. Structural Vulnerability Model: Post-Deportation Housing in Guatemala

Source: Derived from Quesada et al. (2011), Carballo & Menjívar (2020), Castañeda (2021), World Bank (2023), UN-Habitat (2023), Coutin (2020), Hagan et al. (2022), UNHCR (2023), Human Rights Watch (2023), Orozco (2022), and Carling (2021). Model synthesized and formatted by Lauren Gonzalez-Perez.



Methodology Overview

This paper approached the methodology with a qualitative systematic literature review to coalesce academic, policy, and organizational sources. Housing Insecurity and Reintegration Challenge are cultivated by transnational migration messaging, which reinforce precarity among Guatemalan deportees.

The methodology employed will allow the holistic examination of different aspects, such as the structural, social, and political determinants, that explain post-deportation housing insecurity, and the thematic findings that can be acquired from it.

METHODOLOGY

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Research Design

This study implements a qualitative systematic literature review to analyze reintegration after deportation and housing instability in Guatemala, while also integrating research and academic, policy, and institutional sources that address reintegration and housing instability among deportees. Exercising different fields of knowledge such as migration studies, geography and development policies allows for the development of full understanding of the structural, social, and political conditions that affect deportees' lives. Quantitative measures alone fail to capture the full essence of the complex dynamics because a considerable number of them are not registered or documented, and statistical data on returnees often does not reflect the informal and vulnerable populations. The qualitative synthesis enables a newfound perspective essential towards investigating housing instability and the vulnerabilities that are forged through structural, institutional, and socio-cultural conditions.

This study gathers a collection of data revealing the stark statistics surrounding deportation flows between the United States and Guatemala during 2018 and 2024—compiled in Table I, exposing the urgency requiring greater, improved and more effective reintegration services, as well as exploring the extent of structural tension on returnees.

Participants/Sample

The study conducted did not involve human participants; therefore, no primary clinical or human subject trials were conducted. Instead, the sample for this study consists of secondary qualitative and quantitative data sources, evaluated using a systematic selection process. Carefully selected sources were derived based on their profundity, analytical depth, scientific accuracy, methodological rigor, and relevance to reintegration in Central America. The initial database search yielded a preliminary corpus of 86 candidate texts. Through a multi-stage screening process, 63 texts were discarded during the initial screening. These sources were excluded primarily because they discussed Central American migration broadly without engaging with housing or land access, focused exclusively on other Central American nations, such as El Salvador or Honduras, without disaggregated Guatemalan data, were published prior to 2010, or lacked methodological transparency. The literature review concluded with 23 selected references from a collection of 86 possible texts through a selection process that ensured the sources offered discernment into both policy frameworks and the lived experiences of deportees. Therefore, the final sample provides a balanced representation of theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence.

Data Collection

Academic databases and institutional archives were prioritized when conducting extensive, in-depth research and compiling the data collection. These sources included Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, IOM archives, UNHCR, the World Bank, UNDP, and Guatemala's Instituto Guatemalteco de Migración (IGM).

Keywords used to guide the research included “Guatemala deportation,” “reintegration,” “housing policy,” “post-deportation inequality,” and terms emphasizing Guatemala or Central America. An initial sample of 86 potential sources was identified, from which 23 were selected for comprehensive analysis based on their substantive contributions to Central American reintegration research and methodological rigor. To extract the final 23 references from the initially identified sources, a four-tier inclusion threshold was applied. To be included in the final synthesis, sources had to directly address the socioeconomic or physical housing conditions of Guatemalan returnees, be published within the 2010–2025 temporal boundary, demonstrate analytical depth by engaging with structural determinants rather than individual failings, and maintain verifiable data reliability through peer-reviewed journals or accredited international agencies. This screening process facilitated a more profound exploration of policy, governance structures, and the lived experiences of deportees while maintaining a balanced integration of theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence.

Variables and Measurements

The methodical practice encompassed a structured data representation, monopolizing the selected literature to accomplish systematic coding in relation to the common, recurring scales of vulnerability. These vulnerabilities take shape in the following themes: structural barriers’ impediments towards housing possibilities, social stigma contribution to exclusion, gendered discrimination, governance fragmentation from unorganized frameworks, overlapping, intersecting crises, and political, transnational imbalances.

Procedure

In order to establish the research discoveries, comparative thematic reviews were required from NGO reports, administrative materials, document records, and peer-reviews, which elucidated and identified observed tendencies, systematic relationships, and critical inconsistencies between policy language and the realities, noted in Table I. The procedure underscored the structural vulnerabilities that result from interconnected determinants, including gender, ethnicity, and legal status, identifying the complex nature of housing insecurity that presents more than a single challenge.

Data Analysis

Consistent, concrete empirical- and policy- related conclusions guided the data triangulation conducted, apparent in both qualitative and quantitative sources as a method of verifying credibility and reliability—particularly from the cross-referenced deportation statistics in the IOM in Table I, Guatemalan government records, and UNDP data. This triangulation continued to promote the discoveries’ credibility through reinforcing the heavy correlation structural components have in post-deportation reintegration, as well as Guatemalan returnees’ systemic barriers. Combining Structural Vulnerability Theory and the systematic literature synthesis serves as an analytical approach

that—regardless of the constraints—enables the configured, diverse studies to develop a coherent framework comprising of political ecology of deportation, while simultaneously depicting the perpetuating cycle of exclusion and marginalization triggered by policies’ objectives to promote reintegration, reflecting a robust foundation for subsequent thematic and policy-centered analysis.

Table I. Cumulative Deportations from the U.S. to Guatemala (2018–2024)

Source: Data compiled from International Organization for Migration (2020–2024) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Table prepared by Lauren Gonzalez-Perez.

Year	Deportees Received	% Change	Source
2018	51,376	–	U.S. ICE
2019	54,599	+6.3 %	IOM (2020)
2020	40,590	–25.6 % (COVID Halt)	IOM (2021)
2021	78,720	+93.9 %	IOM (2022)
2022	97,092	+23.3 %	IOM (2023)
2023	103,264	+6.4 %	IOM (2024)
2024	107,110	+3.7 %	IOM (2024)

RESULTS

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Housing insecurity among deported Guatemalans stems from the classification of structural, social, and institutional forces that precede migration itself. The literature addresses the synergetic network surrounding the systemic inequalities observed in the prevalent economic, gender, and ethnic marginalization, ineffective institutional governances, and non-interventionism from the transnational political frameworks—altogether forming the post-deportation complex structure that continues to emphasize vulnerabilities, insecurities, and lack of resources. Contingent with acute, fragile housing instabilities contributing towards homelessness or overcrowding, statistics reinforce the shared, normalized experiences that more than 60 percent of returnees encounter within months of arrival (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). These challenges are further exacerbated in Guatemala's current housing shortages, which surpasses an estimated 1.8 million units, conjoined with the startling data that exposes the lack of formal settlements, revealing that 75 percent of urban poor individuals do not have those opportunities accessible, deficient in adequate services and basic amenities (UN-Habitat, 2023). The process of reintegration, as well as deep-rooted, pre-existing disparities, and their complicated natures are increased when many deportees return to urban and rural areas influenced heavily through speculative development, environmental degradation, and spatial inequality.

Structural Barriers to Reintegration

Uninterrupted, continual inequalities within habitats contribute to the impediments that control the unbalanced distribution of economic development across the geographical scope. For centuries, this has been apparent with concentrated landownership that stimulated the problem, which has been further increased by neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, negatively impacting rural returnees and their incapacity to purchase or legally claim land (World Bank, 2023). Consequently, returnees were forced to concede and become dependent on relatives for shelter, perpetuating overcrowding and affecting relationships that lead to domestic conflict (Dingeman & Rumbaut, 2010). Returnees' vulnerabilities are heightened when they experience employment insecurities because of precarious labor backgrounds that prohibit their eligibility for support and resources, including programs with credit or housing assistance like FOPAVI, reinforcing exclusion from official housing markets (Orozco, 2022). These exclusion barriers are not limited to shelter—in fact, in 2023, Guatemala's GDP reported an 18% reduction from financial aid cessation that prevented stable household finances, income, housing investment resource opportunities, long-lasting reintegration, and services that guide returnees with a sustainable life, even after the first month. The emphasized recurrent structural inequality contradicts the reason individuals migrated in the first place and because humanitarian programs do not offer long-term incentives, they only do so with temporary aid. Contrary to the common notion that vulnerabilities are shaped by individual responsibility, it is proved that the marginalization encountered in the financial and social impediments are amplified from already-existing economic and spatial disadvantageous conditions.

Social Exclusion, Stigma, and Gendered Vulnerability

Social exclusion and stigma emerge as escalating factors that drive economic and spatial obstacles, depicting stereotypes that present deportees in negative manners, which are then perpetuated by U.S. deportation narratives that recount stories of forced removal and render deportees as moral or criminal failures (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). These impressions leave returnees confronting further marginalization in social situations. For example, they could encounter less house openings because landlords would not offer leases to them. In the same manner, employment opportunities could plummet because employers could withhold work due to deportation history. These situations serve as stimulants that incite returnees to conceal their deportation status, simultaneously promoting perspectives of alienation, thus reducing social inclusivity (Hagan et al., 2015). Reintegration challenges persist in social exclusion, in particular within family relations because the unexpected deportation from the U.S., which previously served as a form of income to provide remittances—valued high in foreign household recipients—can negatively impact domestic stability by contributing to tensions and disappointment (McIlwaine & Lewis, 2016). These tensions fuel gender pressures because the roles males are subjected to enforce provider identities, and so are threatened when financial instability surfaces from unemployment stirred by social exclusion. As for women who live in male-centered property systems, there is difficulty in maneuvering these patriarchal property norms because of prohibitive access to independent housing and limited gender-sensitive programming, leading to precarious, dangerous domestic settings (Cantu, 2020; ReliefWeb, 2021). Indigenous returnees' social exclusion experiences are emphasized with other barriers, like those pertaining to diverse languages, bureaucratic systems, and linguistics, that offer rare translation services for Mayan languages. This results in returnees finding housing and reintegration documents difficult to comprehend, impeding access to formal registration and credit (UNHCR, 2023). The complex nature of post-deportation exclusion stems from the combination of these social and economic marginalization experiences, which induces vulnerability and establishes—contrary to individual behavior—the embedded institutional factors that stimulate the problems.

Governance Failures and Institutional Fragmentation

Guatemala's model discusses the complex, fragmented nature of reintegration that augment the precariousness found in structural and social areas, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CONAMIGUA, and the Migration Institute that manage separate programs who appear with minimal collaboration reinforce organizational disunity as there are no shared databases, budgets, or strategic coordinations. In addition, the country's overreliance on international donors rather than government funds creates an unsteady financial system, in particular for housing with less than one percent of total migration budgets being allocated to the domestic needs. The division of these responsibilities disperses frameworks, instilling fragmentation while centralizing symbolic bureaucracy, describing the country's performative administrative action, instead of logistical reintegration that effectively functions—together enforcing temporary support over long-term solutions. This symbolic bureaucracy is notable in the prioritization of political patronage rather than qualification factors, with patterns of clientelist behaviors being implemented at a local level of housing allocation, identified from audits in 2020–2022. Ultimately, the cycle of exclusion will persist unless the impediments in reintegration systems that remain ignorant to

deportee necessities and support are reformed in a manner that doesn't intensify systemic inequalities or privilege elites.

Overlapping Crises and Feedback Loops

Corresponding natural disasters, such as pandemics, hurricanes, and climate shocks, exacerbate any pre-existing structural vulnerabilities. For example, there were simultaneous events concurring between 2020 and 2022 in relation to the high levels of deportation, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricanes Eta and Iota, and consolidating drought cycles. The pandemic interfered with financial income when it disrupted remittance flows, as well as the informal employment market opportunities, leaving deportees with economic instability that could not sustain proper housing, and so proved difficult for approximately half of deportees to quarantine safely (IOM, 2021). At the same time, infrastructure and basic necessities became more endangered with the storms of 2020 that emerged and led to the destruction of more than 20,000 homes in Alta Verapaz and Izabal, rendering already impoverished regions worsened within their humanitarian situations (ReliefWeb, 2021). Consequently, instability was prevalent amongst returnees and their communities with environmental and economic crises further destabilizing living conditions. When this polycrisis occurs, systemic neglect fails to manage sudden external emergencies, creating a cycle where vulnerability, insecurity, and cyclical displacement are increased from self-reinforcing feedback loops. Minimal, limited reconstruction efforts emphasized systemic neglect when displaced returnees had fewer than 1,500 government-assisted homes built for them. With the displacement of climate-related effects—and migration in general, deportees seek stability to avoid further problems, which prompts them to relocate north. However, this forms more feedback loops that perpetuate renewed migration, stirred by economic disparities (UNDP, 2022). In Table II, these processes are observable with the collective, negative impact overlapping crises of COVID-19, hurricanes, inflation, and drought cycles have on hundreds of thousands of families that increase structural challenges and cycles of housing insecurity.

Table II. Intersecting Crises Affecting Returnees (2020-2024)

Source: Compiled from International Organization for Migration (2021), ReliefWeb (2021), World Bank (2023), and United Nations Development Programme (2022); table design by Lauren Gonzalez-Perez.

Crisis Type	Affected Families	Primary Impact	Source
COVID-19	560,000	Job loss & overcrowding	IOM (2021)
Hurricanes Eta/Iota	310,000	Housing destruction	ReliefWeb (2021)

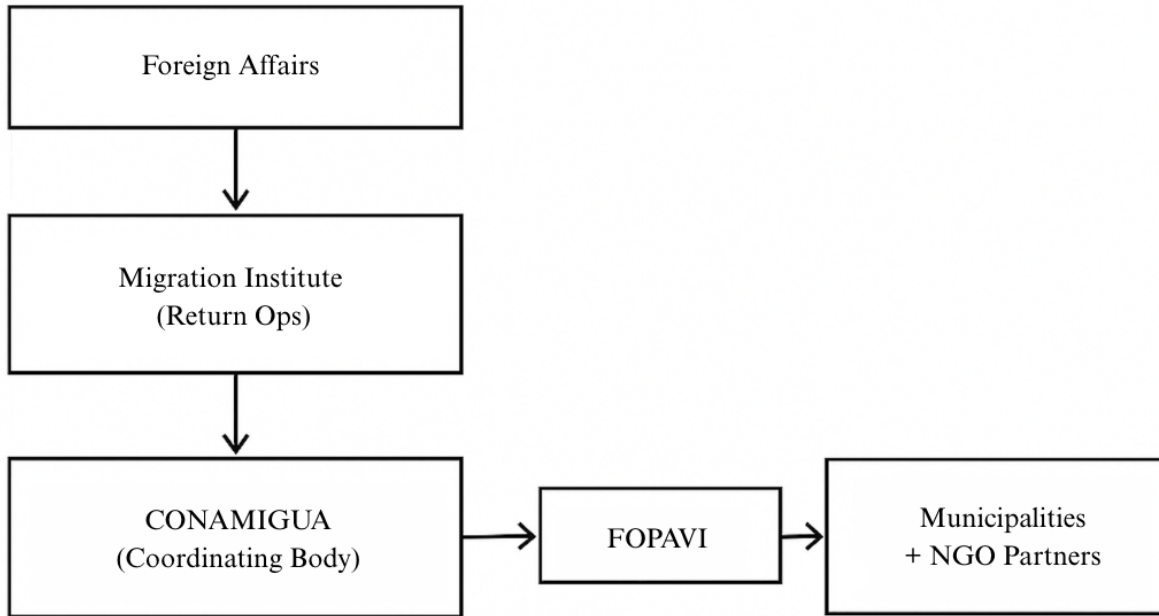
Inflation 2022-23	—	20 % rent increase	World Bank (2023)
Drought Cycles	270,000	Agrarian displacement	UNDP (2022)

In order to highlight Table II's data, intersecting events, such as COVID-19, Hurricanes Eta/Iota, inflation, and drought cycles, and their negative effects must be reiterated, primarily because a large number of households were severely impacted. Furthermore, these events magnify cycles of housing insecurity and structural challenges. The pandemic highlights housing insecurity when 560,000 families encountered acute unemployment and congestion (IOM, 2021). Similarly, hurricanes triggered structural vulnerabilities among 310,000 families who have lost their homes as a result of the natural disasters (Bourgois et al., 2017). Housing insecurity continues to emerge with inflation, prominent in 2022–23, when there was a 20 percent increase in rent payments (World Bank, 2023), and structural challenges are deepened by drought cycles, reflected with the displacement of 270,000 rural residents (UNDP, 2022). These overlapping crises demonstrate how systemic vulnerabilities are cumulative and self-reinforcing, connecting local housing issues to broader environmental and economic pressures.

Figure 2. Institutional Network of Reintegration Governance (2024)

***Source:** Network schematic synthesized from Guatemala Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CONAMIGUA, IOM (2024), and Carballo & Menjivar (2020), and author's visualization.*

Institutional Network of Reintegration Governance (2024)



Referring to Figure 2's fragmented structure, representing Guatemala's reintegration framework, alters what should be a functional logistical system into a largely symbolic bureaucratic exercise instead. Returnee support programs generally only supply interim support, avoiding prolonged, durable fixes, and institutional integrity is undermined by corruption. According to audit results from 2020 to 2022, which exhibited clientelism in local housing allocation, plots were bestowed as political patronage instead of being based on eligibility or need. As a result, reintegration initiatives frequently perpetuate cycles of exclusion by privileging elites, abandoning deportees with a lack of support, which continues the pre-existing inequalities.

As previously mentioned, overlapping crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricanes Eta and Iota, and increasing drought cycles between 2020 and 2022, exacerbate these systemic vulnerabilities. The pandemic's severe interruption of financial transactions and heavy reduction of informal work opportunities left around half of the deportees lacking suitable accommodation to safely quarantine (IOM, 2021). Furthermore, over 20,000 homes in Alta Verapaz and Izabal were demolished concurrently by the 2020 storms, aggravating humanitarian concerns in areas already associated with poverty and inadequate infrastructure (ReliefWeb, 2021). These environmental disasters and economic problems that destabilize areas release emotions of anxiety and fear because returnees do not see stable communities, and so the interactions between the systemic neglect and external catastrophes further entrench vulnerability. The institutional neglect is accentuated with minimal reconstruction efforts from government-assisted

residential when fewer than 1,500 were built for displaced returnees. Additional issues surface from migration and climate-related impact, propelling deportees to resettle north for stability, which reveals that unstable environmental conditions contribute to a feedback cycle of migration (UNDP, 2022).

International relational components, and any difficulties that arise, compound vulnerability. This is the case with Guatemala and its relationship with the United States, where there are ongoing bilateral agreements regarding the centralized focus on enforcement rather than rehabilitation. The government allocates minimal financing that would support migrants; they do not contain sustainable housing programs that enable stable living; on the contrary, it invests in and enforces policies such as the 2019 Asylum Cooperative Agreement and ongoing ICE–IGM collaboration that manage deportation flows, making it occur regularly and reliably (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The U.S. shifts its assistance prioritizing surveillance, policing, deterrence operations, and preventing migration instead of employing support that addresses the long-term social and financial consequences that arise from deportation. As a result, Guatemalan institutions must withstand the outcome of economic reintegration in order to aid deportees. Remittance-dependent financial systems perpetuate these processes with families translating vulnerability on construction loans or abandoned homes because the lack of economic sustainability the government offers in combination with deportees' loss of access to income streams contribute to these unfinished buildings. The exploitative labor abroad conveys harm that is expressed in the return to their home as domestic housing insecurity or instability (Orozco, 2022). Implementing an intermixed approach that merge microcredit with social support in housing efforts can be effective, as seen in other countries, such as in the Philippines with the Somos Mexicanos program in Mexico and the Balik Probinsya program. Comparably, in Guatemala, its current programs that are donor-driven prove to be insufficient and deficient in sustainable, long-term attempts (Chishti & Hipsman, 2021).

Altogether, these results situate housing insecurity as not simply a personal problem, but the nexus of a global challenge where inequality is more pronounced, with deportation shaping migratory management and control policies into a system that actively displaces these populations through structural dispossession. These injustices, and other previous reflected situations, prove that administrative flaws are not the only cause of reintegration failures. Structural vulnerability annexes the reintegration conditions deportees experience upon their return to Guatemalan society and their homes. When considering all the interrelated elements, deportation isn't a simple process that seamlessly integrates returnees to their communities; it is a complex system that lacks fundamental adequacy, supplementing social exclusion and other imbalances.

DISCUSSION

Restatement of Key Findings

Housing insecurity isn't defined by a singular factor, it is derived from a multitude of complex layers in post-deportation Guatemala, including transnational governance, economic environments, government policies, culture, and societal standards. The data underscores the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon

when understanding that housing insecurity is not merely the absence of physical shelter; it delves into the profoundly embedded disparities found in Guatemala's structure, including the credit markets, property tenure regimes, and urban development policies. The contingency of structural barriers is apparent in different groups of returnees, and rural and urban areas are no exception. On one hand, enduring, persistent colonial and neoliberal reforms serve as underlying determinants of chronic land concentration that render rural returnees incapable of securing or purchasing housing. On the other hand, speculative development, inflated, exorbitant rents, as well as administrative, bureaucratic impediments—all these components—restrict urban migrants from obtaining formal lease agreements. The troubles resurface in the unforeseen halt of remittances, amplifying difficulties experienced from the discontinued revenue streams in home development and repair. Deportation produces negative outcomes that exceed preconceived understandings, extending beyond simply repatriating migrants to familiar homeland in their native country; it conflicts with sustained households' social and economic systems, destabilizing the networks that previously secured structural support. Informal employment and family overcrowding perpetuate these returnees' vulnerability, which fuel patterns of cyclical poverty, revealing that it is not episodically produced, it is structurally inscribed. Governmental responses to these challenges consist of chronic underfunding and fragmentation. Reintegration persists with merely short-term support in programs like Plan Retorno al Hogar that exhibit temporary, symbolic strategies rather than long-term shelter that enable structural access. International donors occupy an essential part in domestic policy, and yearly housing grants have decreased in real terms, accounting for fewer than one percent of all expenditures related to migration. Administrative overlap between agencies results in confusion and inefficiency, causing deportees to be redirected among consulates, migration offices, and local municipalities. As discussed earlier, the efficacy of policies is impaired by corruption and patronage; audits conducted between 2020 and 2022 exposed clientelism in the distribution of housing lots, when lots were given as political favors. Even well-intended NGO projects are affected by donor fatigue and budgetary uncertainty, producing regional gaps and insufficient coverage for the most vulnerable communities.

Implications and Significance

Structural vulnerability contains a heavy emphasis in its correlation between gender and racial components. Women experience double exclusion: patriarchal norms limit property ownership, and migration stigma, or shame, intensifies domestic threats. The disparities from female deportees, which decrease the possibility of obtaining land, inheriting property, or discovering rental housing, often compel them to a forced return to dangerous home environments. Similarly, Indigenous returnees experience stratification because of state limitations in accessing NGO support for linguistic barriers and systemic ethnocentrism. This ostracization reveals the lack of representation in reintegration documents, services, and legal forms, restricting deportees' housing market opportunities and bureaucratic, institutional support networks as there are few Mayan languages available to help them understand those systems. Additional social stigma emphasizes injustices and marginalization when estrangement from family or personal communities occur, spurring psychological factors within deportees that influence negative mindsets pertaining to feelings of alienation and self-perceived failures, which perpetuates reintegration

complications. In conjunction with physical survival and legal components, vulnerability is embedded within social identity and belonging, substantiated by the synergistic consequences consisting of economic deprivation, gendered exclusion, and social discrimination. Structural vulnerability theory reproduces these exclusions with continuous disparities in rights and access.

Humanitarian factors from pandemics, environmental calamities, unexpected, abrupt economic disruptions, and other uncontrollable events augment insecurity among returnees. The COVID-19 pandemic influenced inadequate aliment, financial, and structural resources, with deportees unable to properly nourish themselves while accumulating debt and further neglecting health with half of them deprived of suitable accommodation that was required to follow quarantine precaution, safety protocols. Disaster catastrophes intensify structural vulnerability and overall displacement, exemplified with hurricanes Eta and Iota that affected fragile regions as they severely damaged tens of thousands of homes in rural and urban areas, resulting in the “double displacement” of deportees. Perpetuating migration consists of these contributing cycles of environmental instability where consistent, periodic droughts drive rural returnees to seek refuge in precarious urban settings. These overlapping crises reinforce the compounded and cyclical nature of post-deportation housing insecurity, in relation to structural, social, and environmental forces that reinforce each other rather than being isolated or transient issues, resulting in the short-term challenges listed in Table III.

Guatemala’s post-deportation housing insecurity remains inadequately addressed by the state with the implementation of temporary shelters and foreign funding that only support few. For example, although tens of thousands of homes were destroyed, fewer than 1,500 homes were reconstructed. The vulnerability from the natural disasters that are not sufficiently handled with policies for climate adaptation and disaster preparedness highlight that the byproduct of crises are not the only stimulants as systemic neglect and reactive governance are contributors as well. Understanding regional power dynamics proves to be another essential element that allows for grasping the full extent of the housing insecurity that deportees experience. Guatemalan financial and humanitarian burdens are exacerbated from political relationships, observed in the U.S.-Guatemala bilateral cooperation that has been sustained since 2019, where deportation flow discussions that lead to implemented policies—the Asylum Cooperative Agreement and continued ICE coordination as examples—fail to incorporate reintegration assistance. U.S. aid prioritizes concentration of enforcement, surveillance and monitoring, as well as anti-migration messaging, showcasing the minimal investment in housing, economic inclusion, or community reintegration. Consequently, Guatemala—imposed with responsibilities from the immediate, prolonged effects that the policies produce—is significantly obstructed from developing domestic solutions.

When Guatemalan deportees return to their home, their family’s financial source of income—in the form of remittance flows—is disrupted, producing uneven stability. The families’ dependency on these flows, negatively affected by deportation, then contribute to an accumulation of household debt and unfinished homes—a result from the forfeiture of construction loan contingency, or abandoned housing projects. Labor abuse is initiated, engraining an exploitative system abroad—which arises from the transformation of migration into economic exploitation, perpetuating domestic homelessness and instability. Guatemala’s

donor-driven approach contains gaps in adequate sustainability that foster chronic vulnerability and cyclical remigration, which are emphasized by comparisons with programs in Mexico and the Philippines that incorporate local housing grants and coordinated reintegration.

Connection to Objectives

The study explicitly analyzes the research question by examining the relationship consisting of the structural, social, economic, and transnational vulnerabilities that highlight the chronic housing insecurity that Guatemalan deportees experience.

Recommendations

Post-deportation housing instability should—instead of employing short-term assistance—prioritize long-term confrontation that contains an organized, structured, and sustainable political framework to adequately address the structural vulnerabilities. As a potential suggestion to provide housing accessibility to returnees and reliable resources to support that reintegration, society should consider efficient fund management at a national level that avoids displaced housing, utilizing local management—by municipal or community-level authorities—and international co-financing. In order to guarantee that women, Indigenous people, and other oppressed groups have access to safe and suitable housing, legal and psychosocial support programs should also be expanded to consider gendered and Indigenous vulnerabilities. Additionally, by combining housing plans with climate adaptation, disaster preparedness, and long-term employment activities, resilience would be strengthened and decrease cyclical displacement. Sustainable, equitable reintegration outcomes can be further supported with donor nations' funding that transnational community discussions and regional, migrant right policies advocate for. Physical and mental health are both key towards enhancing holistic reintegration initiatives, benefitting from trauma education in psychological concepts, as well as inclusive participation and community relations to consider well-being. Employing these measures can support policy interventions in breaking patterns of exclusion, homelessness, and vulnerability, observed in the institutional, social, and structural analyses of Guatemalan deportees.

Limitations

As stated in the Scope and Limitations, this study depends on secondary data sources, which may include incoherent presentations of deportation statistics and institutional biases. Furthermore, because of the time limits imposed by the Lumiere program and restricted access to organizations that conduct such research, the analysis does not include firsthand interviews with Guatemalan deportees. Although triangulation of several sources helps to contextualize and evaluate the results, these limitations may have an impact on the granularity of findings about lived experiences. Future research deploying direct interviews would enhance knowledge of housing insecurity from the viewpoints of returnees themselves.

As summarized in Table III, these overlapping crises and the post-deportation housing insecurity emerge apparent compound and cyclical results, originating from interrelated structural, social, and environmental factors that create the short-term difficulties enumerated below.

Table III. Overlapping Crises and Migrant Housing Security (2020–2024)

Source: Data adapted from International Organization for Migration (2021), ReliefWeb (2021), World Bank (2023), and United Nations Development Programme (2022); table compilation and design by Lauren Gonzalez-Perez.

Crisis Type	Primary Impact on Deportees	Source
COVID-19 Pandemic	Housing loss, debt, joblessness	IOM (2021)
Hurricanes Eta/Iota	Shelter destruction, double displacement	ReliefWeb (2021)
Inflation Crisis	20% rent increase	World Bank (2023)
Drought Cycles	Rural-urban shift, re-migration	UNDP (2022)

Closing Thought

Sustainable housing and reintegration must be recognized as necessary, fundamental rights intrinsic in citizenship and belonging; it cannot rely solely on charitable or donor-driven procedures. Without structural reforms that include unified domestic measures, allocating long-term income strategies, and enforcing justice-related housing systems, the perspective on the “homecoming” of Guatemalan migrants would remain as nothing more than a return to homelessness and marginalization.

CONCLUSION

The thematic literature, discussion, analysis, and overall evidence that the research collected reinforces a striking reality: deported Guatemalan’s acute housing insecurity is neither an anomaly nor the product of

individual behavior; it is inevitable. The unavoidable consequences that reflect this revelation stem from a variety of factors, such as systemic exclusion, institutional fragmentation, uneven structure frameworks, and international indifference. Vulnerability is embedded in the foundational structure of migration and development policies, where deportation reinforces, instead of alleviates, inequality patterns. The difficulties surrounding Guatemala's reintegration expose the inefficiencies of humanitarian relief and short-term, temporary programmatic approaches. Immediate relief in the form of donor-driven responses, emergency assistance, and interim accommodations do not resolve the fundamental issues behind housing instability. Altogether, economic precarity, social stigma, and bureaucratic inefficiencies perpetuate cycles of exclusion and contribute to persistent, acute displacement amongst women, Indigenous populations, and deportees deficient in family, relational support. Transnational dynamics are critical facilitators that deepen vulnerability in Guatemala with enforcement exerted from U.S. authority, disproportionate monetary allocation, and policies that do not account for reintegration, producing long-term social and economic consequences. The universal right to equitable, supportive resources require more than charitable or donor-driven approaches; prerequisites that emphasize long-term, sustainable approaches to addressing housing and reintegration must be prioritized. By implementing unified domestic legislation, lasting expenditures, and equitable housing regimes, structural reforms can transform Guatemalan migrants' negative mindset—associating deportation and returning home as a continuation to the cycle of homelessness and marginalization—into one characterized by stability and security rather than uncertainty.

RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The research conducted an intensive analysis with scholarly, policy-informed sources, however, housing insecurity in Guatemala remains abstract with many unanswered questions yet to be addressed, revealing gaps in the post-deportation reintegration process deportees experience. There are limited longitudinal investigations that explore deportation over several years and its effects on households, which form a narrow view on chronic, cyclical vulnerability, the prolonged consequences of deportation, and the failures of reintegration. This minimal knowledge obscures the comprehension of the affected elements that impede returnees' experiences, including housing trajectories, employment stability, and psychosocial outcomes. Furthermore, few programs and studies consider diversity, with scarce intersectional analysis that examine data about gender-associated backgrounds, Indigenous identity, and individuals that have a LGBTQ+ affiliated status. As a result, established, pre-existing marginalization and exclusion are exacerbated, facilitating the disproportionate vulnerability the communities endure. In addition, comparative, policy-centered research should continue in order to determine the most tangible, viable strategies that can combat the challenges in Guatemala. As such, considering foreign countries' regional interventions—like Mexico and the Philippines who have implemented programs that integrated microcredit initiatives, social housing, and coordinated reintegration strategies—is essential to assess the best practices. This research also outlines the imperative need to weigh evidence and initiate measures to confront those challenges. For example, the discovery that recurrent migration is provoked by external factors, primarily environmental precarity and natural disasters, unveils the prerequisite demand for

interventions that consolidate climate adaptation and environmental resilience within reintegration frameworks—strategies that should be executed, but remain undone. Deportation reintegration should be addressed by employing holistic models that acknowledge required shelter, psychosocial well-being, trauma-sensitive mental health, social inclusion, and community integration support.

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