

Executive Summary:

On May 28, 2014, Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Sector Intelligence Analysts, Border Patrol Agents-Intelligence, station collateral intelligence agents and detailed Alien Smuggler Identification and Deterrence (ASID) team members conducted interviews of numerous OTM family units and UACs at the McAllen, Rio Grande City and Weslaco stations. The main task objective was to determine the factors compelling the OTMs to migrate to the US, in addition to other migration issues. This report provides information that addresses STC PIR 3.

Details:

On May 28, 2014, Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Sector Intelligence Analysts, Border Patrol Agents-Intelligence, station collateral intelligence agents and detailed Alien Smuggler Identification and Deterrence (ASID) team members conducted interviews of numerous OTM family units and Unaccompanied Alien Children (UACs) at the McAllen, Rio Grande City and Weslaco stations. The main task objective was to determine the factors compelling the OTMs to migrate to the United States, in addition to other migration issues. This report provides information that addresses the STC PIR 3. The breakdown of the interviewed OTMs is as follows:

Honduras: 129 subjects
El Salvador: 598 subjects
Guatemala: 43 subjects

Total number of subjects interviewed: 230 (This total includes several UACs from each country)
(Comments: The interviewed OTM family unit adult members and the UACs will be referred to as "the subjects" within this document; unless, otherwise indicated.)

The responses to the following questions focus on what the majority of the subjects stated during the interviews. Responses provided by only one or two subjects have been omitted, as the focus of the mission was to obtain a general consensus as to why OTM family units and UACs are migrating en masse to the United States via the RGV Sector area of responsibility (AOR).

(Comments: This report updates information previously documented in HSIR-RGV-14-2283152, titled, OTM Travel from Central America to Rio Grande Valley Sector.)

Why did you choose this particular time to make your journey to the United States?

The main reason the subjects chose this particular time to migrate to the United States was to take advantage of the "new" U.S. "Law" that grants a "free pass" or permit (Referred to as "permisos") being issued by the U.S. government to female adult OTMs traveling with minors and to UACs. (Comments: The "permisos" are the Notice to Appear documents issued to undocumented aliens, when they are released on their own recognizance pending a hearing before an immigration judge.) This information is apparently common knowledge in Central America and is spread by word of mouth, and international and local media. A high percentage of the subjects interviewed stated their family members in the U.S. urged them to travel immediately, because the United States government was only issuing immigration "permisos" until the end of June 2014. (Comments: Several mentioned they had heard the "permisos" would only be issued until the end of May 2014.) The issue of "permisos" was the main reason provided by 95% (+/-) of the interviewed subjects.

The second reason was related to the increased gang-related violence in Central America that authorities are unable to contain. Many subjects stated gang members were extorting them, if they had a small business, or forcing their minor children to join their gang. They felt they were in danger if they remained in their country and decided to migrate.

Lastly, many subjects stated they had only recently secured sufficient funds to make the journey to the United States. The money was obtained, for the most part, from relatives or friends already in the US, or by saving over a long period of time, for a combination of both.

(Comments: In many cases the subjects mentioned more than one reason for migrating to the United States at this particular time,)

What factor(s) influenced your decision to migrate to the United States?

As previously stated, the interviewed subjects overwhelmingly indicated to have traveled to the United States due to fact "permisos" were being issued to family units and UACs by the US government. Although economic and security concerns also influenced their decision to travel to the US, the issuance of "permisos" to family units was the primary reason for leaving their countries. The subjects also indicated that "everyone" in their home countries is aware that "permisos" are being issued to family units in south Texas. The news of these "permisos" is spread by word of mouth and international and local media. Some of the news outlets mentioned were Univision, Primer Impacto, Al Rojo Vivo, TN5-Honduras, Channel 6-Honduras, Channel 7-Mexico and HCH-Honduras. The majority of the subjects interviewed left their country en route to the United States within 30 days of becoming aware of the "permisos." (Comments: It appears that most news broadcasts referencing the issue of "permisos" are information/normal reporting, and not a promotional campaign to encourage citizens to migrate. There may, of course, be some exceptions.)

Another factor influencing the decision to migrate to the US was the extreme poverty, sky-high unemployment, poor living conditions, and below par education in Central America. The majority of the subjects stated that stable employment was difficult to obtain. Many subjects stated that when they were able to find a job, the wages they earned were not sufficient to purchase basic necessities. Several subjects mentioned recent increases in the minimum wage in their countries had been offset dramatically by an increase in the cost of basic food staples.

Another reason is the ever-increasing gang-related violence in Central American countries. Authorities in Central America seem powerless to curb gang-related crime and violence that impacts the lives of all citizens. Assaults, murders, extortion, kidnappings, and the forced recruitment of minors to join the gangs were mentioned as factors influencing migration to the US.

Lastly, many adult females mentioned domestic abuse as a reason for leaving their countries. Additionally, their legal or common-law husbands are either unable or unwilling to support the family unit. (Comment: In many cases, the subjects mentioned more than one reason for migrating to the United States.)

Most UACs stated they were going to join parent(s) already in the US or other family members, i.e. uncles, aunts, cousins, etc. Others were traveling alone, as there was not sufficient money for the parent(s) to also make the journey. The UACs stated they wanted to take advantage of the "permiso" being issued by the US government to minors traveling alone. Many were leaving due to the high crime

in their countries and the forced recruitment into gangs. Other mentioned the availability of better education in the United States as a factor for migrating.

Why did you elect to enter the US via the RGV Sector AOR?

Most of the subjects stated the decision to enter the US via the RGV sector AOR was made by the smugglers, whether they were recruited in their home countries, while traveling through Mexico, or after arrival at the border region. Some of these smugglers had successfully smuggled the subjects' relatives or friends into the US via RGV Sector, and subjects felt confident they would also be successful.

Another reason is that this region is the closest border point to enter the US if traveling from Central America. Additionally, people from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras are aware, either by word of mouth or public announcements, about the high probability of obtaining a "permiso" if you enter via the RGV Sector AOR.

Many subjects also mentioned they had heard it is "easier" and "safer" to enter the US via the RGV Sector AOR. In particular, they mentioned not having to walk long distances through remote, desert terrain in extreme weather conditions.

Lastly, several subjects mentioned they did not have an entry location identified when they left home, and that they met other OTMs along the way who were planning to enter via this sector. They merely decided to tag along with these other individuals. After successfully entering the US, many of the subjects stated they merely waited (sometimes for period of 2 hours +) for Border Patrol agents to apprehend them. When the agents did not arrive, they started walking through the brush. Some of the subjects stated they walked for as long as 7 hours until border patrol agents arrived.

Do you have family/friends in the United States?

All of the interviewed subjects stated they had family members or, to a lesser extent, friends already living in the US. The final destinations were associated with where these relatives or friends were residing. Many of the relatives and friends are undocumented aliens, who have been living in the US for periods ranging from several months to 10+ years.

What is your final destination in the US?

The interviewed subjects mentioned the following locations as their final destinations: New York, Houston, Austin, Chicago, Nevada, Nebraska, Los Angeles, South Carolina, North Carolina, Atlanta, Virginia, Indiana, New Jersey, Miami, Michigan, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, New Orleans, Arizona and Massachusetts.

Why did you not attempt to enter through a port of entry (POE)?

When asked why they did not surrender at a POE, most of the subjects stated they had been told by others, to include the smugglers, that officials at the POEs would not issue them a "permiso" and they would be sent back home. Others stated they had heard of incidents where some OTMs had been turned back at a POE. (Comments: This information has not been confirmed.) Others stated entry via a POE was not an option, as the smugglers would not allow this. Others mentioned they were taken

directly from the bus terminal in Reynosa to the river bank, where they made immediate entry into the US.

Gulf Cartel associates and alien smugglers are also “discouraging” the use of POEs by family units, as it would result in loss income. Rumors indicate there are “lookouts” on the bridges that identify OTMs family units, which are forced into stash houses. These family units are forced to pay for smuggling services, which amount to nothing more than being taken to the river bank and crossed into the US> Prior to crossing, many of the family units are robbed of any money they have on their person. (Comments: This information has not been confirmed; but appears plausible.)

Do you have knowledge of the Honduran Foreign Ministry providing condoms or other forms of contraceptives to female Hondurans migrating to the US?

Most Honduran females stated the Honduran government routinely provides free condoms and other forms of contraceptives at very low cost. They were unaware of these items being issued specifically to females making the journey to the US.

Several female Hondurans stated that they had heard through word of mouth that the Honduran government had been handing out contraceptives to females along the Honduran border, so they could carry with them during their travel to the US. This was to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies, in case they are sexually assaulted along their trip. (Comments: This information was never confirmed through any official channels.)

Conclusion:

Predictive Analysis: If the collected information is true, RGV Sector will continue to experience increased family units from Central America, at least through June 2014. Traditionally, undocumented alien traffic decreases during the June-July timeframe; however, this year will be an exception. It may also be a matter of time until the OTM family units and UACs attempt en masse surrenders at the POEs, however, the success of this will depend on how much control the criminals can maintain on the bridges (south side) and POE procedures/facilities for handling large numbers of family units. If any more rumors concerning the issuance of “permisos” surface, or if there is a change in US policy or in the processing of family units and UACs , the flow may change, either to the upside or downside. (NFI)