

Asset Factsheet

Skills Certification of Returned Migrants in Guatemala



Migrant returnee Hugo Herrera certified his skills in floor installation (2024).

Towards an inclusive approach to skills certification in Guatemala

The project New Opportunities in Guatemala aimed at assessing and certifying skills of migrants who have returned from the United States, a process also known as recognition of prior learning. The focus of the project was on recognition of skills in construction and the hospitality industry.

To achieve this, the project raised awareness and provided support to certifying entities at national and municipal levels. This support helped them providing professional services, facilities, and to adapt their certification processes to meet the needs of returned migrants. This adaptation was crucial because the profile of a returned migrant requires personalized attention aimed at closing theoretical and practical knowledge gaps, and certifying the skills acquired abroad.

CONTEXT

Irregular migration between Guatemala and the United States reveals a diverse group of migrants. Many indigenous people, particularly those from the Mam, Quiché and Kaqchiquel regions, have been forced to migrate often due to the loss of sustainable livelihoods from monocultures, agricultural decline in rural areas and climate change. Consequently, irregular migration to countries in the North has increased as people seek to improve their and their family's quality of life. Data from the Guatemalan Migration Institute (IGM) shows five territories located in the northwest of the country with the highest rate of returnees, namely Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Quiché, Quetzaltenango and Guatemala.

Target Group

The project adopted the definition of "returned migrant" as a person who has migrated regularly or irregularly (regardless of the cause of their migration) to another country and has returned in a forced, voluntary or assisted manner (regardless of the cause of their return). The target group of the project were adult returnees with a minimum of two years of residence in their destination country, skilled in the construction or hospitality sectors.

Partners

The public Technical Institute for Training and Productivity (INTECAP) in Guatemala, Coatepeque and Quetzaltenango: INTECAP is responsible for providing training, technical assistance, and certification for individuals and businesses across all economic sectors and job levels, with the goal of enhancing individuals' employability and the country's productivity.

PROJECT NAME

New Opportunities

SHORT DESCRIPTION

The project aims to support the creation of a consolidated network of public and private service providers in Guatemala to facilitate the productive reintegration of returnees, validating their entrepreneurial skills acquired abroad and supporting their integration into the labor market in Guatemala.

PROJECT DURATION

2021-2024 in Guatemala

IMPLEMENTER

Swisscontact

FUNDING PARTNERS

Green Leaves Education Foundation, and Däster-Schild Foundation, among other donors. The project is part of the Swisscontact Development Programme, which is co-financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

LOCATION

Guatemala City, municipalities of Coatepeque and Quetzaltenango.

CHALLENGES

For returned migrants, the return process is usually complex. They face obstacles related to their status as migrants and other challenges, such as poverty in their communities. Certifying organizations need to shift from traditional approaches where migrants are only seen as needing to meet requirements. Instead, they should be viewed as valuable contributors to their communities and as assets to the companies that hire them or to their own businesses, especially given their immigration experiences.

For Swisscontact, the main challenge was helping partners identify and profile returned migrants. This process depends not only on the competencies and skills that people acquired abroad but also on external factors such as their deportation status, educational and socioeconomic background, family relationships and ethnic origin. The profiling process required investments in technical and human resources and a focus on raising awareness and creating strategic alliances with local actors, such as municipalities and training centers.

Why is certification of skills important?

Returned migrants, when returning to their countries of origin, often lack documentation that certifies their skills and competencies, including those acquired abroad. On a personal level, this might lead to the mismatch or loss of employment opportunities and, on a larger scale, a decrease in economic productivity of a country. Obtaining recognized certification, combined with short-term training in entrepreneurship, which was the focus of the project, can allow returnees to start a business and help them reintegrate in their communities.

How does skills certification work?

Skills certification, as supported by the project, aims to formally recognize and validate work-related abilities by referencing the needs of various productive sectors, individual competencies, and INTECAP's established standards. This initiative also encouraged the development of new certification criteria. The certification process, which follows a structured evaluation, is divided into four phases:

1. **Participant orientation:** Participants are briefed on the content, areas of expertise required, and sectors involved, as well as the outcomes of the certification. Any questions or concerns are also addressed during this phase.
2. **Diagnostic evaluation:** A written assessment, that evaluates the participant's general knowledge related to the skill in question, is conducted.
3. **Theoretical evaluation:** A written assessment, focused on specific situations, processes, and sub-processes relevant to the participant's work experience, is conducted.
4. **Practical evaluation:** Participants must demonstrate the competencies acquired, showing that they have the skills, experience, and knowledge to perform the job. Depending on the specific standard being evaluated, this phase can last between 4 and 25 hours.

Participants who do not demonstrate the required skills can opt to take a 20-hour refresher course before re-entering the certification process.

REPLICATION POTENTIAL

Development of new standards: While working with the returned migrant population, it was observed that they possessed additional job-related skills. This led INTECAP to create new certification standards in the construction and hospitality sectors.

Process digitalization: At the start of the project, INTECAP was still issuing certificates manually. With the support of the project, issuing and delivery of certificates is now digitalized. Certificates are now delivered digitally with an electronic signature, reducing the delivery time from 6 months to just 20 days.

Guidelines for assisting migrants: The project facilitated the integration of migration governance in regions like San Marcos by introducing a services protocol that outlines guidelines for assisting migrants. This protocol defines the roles of local actors throughout the process, ensuring a coordinated and efficient approach. Best practices from this initiative are detailed in the *Coaching for Reintegration (C4R)* training document, which also provides a historical context for the development of these tools in the region.

APPROACHES

Ecosystem analysis and partner selection: At the start of the project, an ecosystem analysis was conducted to select partners that can certify returned migrants.

Recruitment strategy: A targeted recruitment strategy was developed for returned migrants with potential for certification.

Partner engagement: A strategy was developed and implemented for approaching and selecting partners within the territory.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Access to Certification: 216 returned migrants, (11% female), received recognized certifications. These certifications were predominantly in plaster and false ceiling installation, gastronomy, gardening, and floor and tile installation.

LESSONS LEARNT

One of the main challenges was the lack of awareness among training institutions' staff about the profile of forcibly returned migrants, which differs from that of voluntary returnees. In addition to addressing this lack of awareness, the project also worked to change negative perceptions that affect the reintegration of returned migrants. These include stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion simply because they are returnees. This was done through awareness and information campaigns targeting municipalities, community leaders, businesses and families of returned migrants, through workshops, talks and awareness campaigns in local media.

Certification service providers need spaces for dialogue. In Guatemala, there are two certifying entities, namely INTECAP and the Ministry of Education. The Ministry's bureaucratic certification processes hinder immediate reintegration needs. In contrast, INTECAP provides a broad range of certifications that are recognized by the private sector, offering accessibility and national coverage. Through exchange, several key lessons could be established. First, it is important to address the economic sector's demand first, highlighting the necessity of engaging with them. Secondly, initiating a dialogue with the Ministry of Education to reengineer their certification processes is essential for making them more effective and efficient.

Choosing local personnel for the project team is essential for building trust in reintegration services. These individuals are known within the community, speak the same language, and are therefore more readily accepted by the beneficiaries.

BENEFICIARY STORY

"We all think that irregular migration is the solution to our problems, but it takes us away from our families."

Ludwing's Journey of Resilience and Reintegration

Ludwing Rene Galindo Gramajom native of Coatepeque, lived in the United States in Las Vegas for four and a half years. He left Guatemala due to economic problems; his income was not enough to support his family. During the time he lived in the United States he worked in various fields, being his last job in construction where he stayed for a year and a half, acquiring experience in installation of ceilings for housing, plasterboard and false ceilings.

He returned to Guatemala just at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with no opportunity to subsist due to the closure of activities within the country. To survive, he relied on small repair jobs for those close to him.

Upon his return to Guatemala, his ambition was to start his own business, but he was unable to do so. After the restrictions to move were lifted, he heard of the New Opportunities project through the Municipality of Coatepeque, On October 7, 2021, he became certified in plasterboard and false ceiling installation, hoping to finally materialize his dream of supporting him and his family, as well as to improve his life plan.

Ludwing considers himself as a person willing to take risks and perseverant, that is why during the certification phase Ludwing saw an opportunity to excel. Actively seeking jobs, he received several offers for various construction projects. Knowing the quality of skills certification, he hired people who had also completed skills certification. Today, he has six returned migrants as part of his team and hires additional workers as needed for larger projects. Currently, he has been hired by organizations and companies such as "Puma Gas station", "Industrial Bank" and "Worker's Recreation Institute (IRTRA)", among others. With his determination, Ludwing continues to build not just structure, but also a brighter future for himself and his team.



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