

Adelante

2015-2020

LATIN AMERICA REPORTING INITIATIVE



INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S MEDIA
FOUNDATION



A Note from the Director

The International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) launched its Latin American reporting initiative Adelante in 2015 with a \$5 million-dollar grant from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

The program could not have come at a better – or more critical – time. Over the past five years, our cadre of fellows have passionately and professionally covered some of the most pressing stories of the decade, from family separation at the United States-Mexico border to the impact of local policies like reproductive rights and disaster response across the region. Their work has taken place in a context of escalating violence and political unrest in Latin America.

IWMF fellows traveled to Mexico and its border zones with the US, as well as Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Colombia on 27 unique group trips to report thoughtful, nuanced stories from a region that is often oversimplified and brushed aside in international coverage. Their reporting demanded a new level of accountability not only from Latin American governments and businesses, but also from US officials, whose policies directly affect families and communities south of the U.S. border.

Our 171 international grantees, selected from a pool of more than 1,800 talented applicants along with 85 recipients of year-long fellowships for local journalists, raised the bar for reporting on Latin America.

They used their IWMF experiences, including hostile environment and first aid trainings (HEFAT), new professional connections, and Latin America expertise, to achieve promotions, to win funding for ambitious follow-up projects, to land public-speaking engagements, and to earn coveted awards, including two Pulitzer prizes for reporting on the U.S.-Mexico border by Adelante alums. Their work created waves, in some cases serving as evidence in legal cases as well as pressuring governments or multinational companies to respond.

The IWMF's goal was two-fold. First, to give talented journalists a unique opportunity to safely cover underreported stories in a complex region, and, second, creating a squad of women with in-depth expertise on Latin America. We had the pleasure of watching fellows return to Latin America and team up with Adelante alumni and local journalists for additional reporting. Many say their approach to digital and physical security-planning improved because of their experience working with the IWMF, giving them a new sense of confidence to pitch reporting in the Americas.

The IWMF is the leading provider of women's bylines worldwide. Collectively, our grantees published more than 380 stories, featured in legacy publications like National Geographic, The New York Times, and Spain's El País, as well as leading new media outlets like BuzzFeed and Al Jazeera. Their work not only

generated a more visible presence of women covering the region, but their images and words also produced concrete actions. Our fellows made waves: from the release of a woman imprisoned in El Salvador for allegedly attempting an illegal abortion, to increased government resources fighting deforestation in Mexico, to being used as a resource for US lawyers working on asylum cases.

Adelante was, and is, an empowerment of more women committed to telling stories that have been overlooked and undervalued in Latin America for years. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, there are new challenges for international reporting and on-the-ground coverage. But these hurdles also offer opportunities. The IWMF is uniquely positioned to support and maintain reporting even during the most trying of times. Tapping into our vast network of local and international journalists who always identify creative solutions, we can continue to safely cover the stories that need to be heard.

Elisa Lees Muñoz
Executive Director
International Women's Media Foundation

Introduction

International reporting on Latin America has long relied on an oversimplified trifecta of storylines: drugs, poverty, and violence.

In 2015, the IWMF created the Adelante reporting initiative to move the narrative in Latin America forward, or, Adelante. There are scores of stories – triumphs **over corruption**, battles against **draconian reproductive-rights** policies, success stories around **community organizing**, and models for the use of new technologies – that not only paint a more robust picture of this diverse region, but directly impact neighbors, like the United States.

We supported more, improved, and sustained coverage of Latin America by women journalists around the globe. This program aimed to not only diversify the stories being told, but the voices telling them.

We provided resources and training in physical and digital security so that grantees could dive deep into often overlooked topics in a region known for its escalating conflicts. But beyond the reporting trips themselves, we created a vast network of mentors, allies, and professional resources that enable program participants to continue collaborating and supporting work in the region, bringing the world this much needed coverage.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The IWMF's Adelante reporting initiative was modeled on similar successful models – such as the IWMF reporting in Africa's Great Lakes region and Sub-Saharan Africa – that targeted underreported stories and focused on increasing bylines for women. **We designed a five-year, \$5-million-dollar effort to expand the news lens beyond the tired narratives around drug trafficking and economic migration in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia, and other border zones.**

We put an emphasis on improving safety training, not only better preparing fellows to report in the region but giving them a sense of authority in demanding safe working conditions and protections from media outlets.

Beginning in 2016, the IWMF brought small groups of international women journalists to six countries and border zones in Latin America together with local reporters in the region. The trips were highly competitive: As of January 2020, we received more than 1,800 applications for reporting trips, with an acceptance rate of roughly 7 percent.

This underscores the unique opportunity an IWMF reporting trip offers women journalists in Latin America and around the world. The fact that our application process is conducted in both English and Spanish means we can reach even more talented journalists and ensure a diversity of backgrounds and voices among our fellows.

The trips resulted in award-winning coverage featured in outlets including The Los Angeles Times, Agence France Presse, The Christian Science Monitor, The Washington Post, National Public Radio, Public Radio International, CBS, Univision, TIME, El Universal, The London Times, and The Intercept.

Grantees built lasting networks of women journalists across Latin America and around the world. This network allowed fellows to grow professionally, they recommended each other for jobs, assisted each other in troubleshooting professional challenges, and pitched team projects on follow-up stories. Many consider their experience with the IWMF to be the foundation for future assignments in the region and professional opportunities.

Award-winning coverage featured in outlets including:



About the International Women’s Media Foundation

Founded in 1990, the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) is the only global non-profit organization that offers emergency support, safety training, grants, reporting opportunities and funding avenues offered specifically for women journalists.

We are making more women’s bylines possible and work tirelessly to ensure a greater diversity of voices represented in the news industry worldwide.

Our vision is a world where consumers demand a diversity of voices, stories, and perspectives in news media and regard this as a cornerstone of democracy and free expression.

We’re making progress – and the Adelante Latin America Reporting Initiative has been a cornerstone of our strategy for the past five years.

Adelante Latin America Reporting Initiative Comprehensive Impact Report, 2015-2020



An Tz’utujil Mayan woman living in the town of Santiago, Lake Atitlan, Guatemala poses in 2018. Photograph: Lucía Reinoso

METHODOLOGY

For this report, we conducted in-depth interviews with 34 people who had direct knowledge of the program's impact, including fellows, trainers, fixers, and journalists who participated in the local training programs.

We surveyed the program's alumni, which produced data and feedback from 189 international and local fellows, representing experiences in all six target regions.

BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE IMPACTED

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

171

Number of International Fellowships

36

Number of International Reporting Grants

386

Number of Stories Produced by International Fellows

27

Total Number of Reporting Trips (over 6 regions)

85

Number of Local Fellowships

297

Number of International and Local Journalists Who Completed Hostile Environment and First Aid Training (HEFAT)

1,327

Journalists Who Participated in a Safety Seminar

1,728

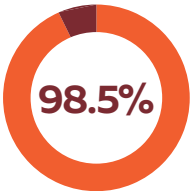
Total Number of People Impacted by Program



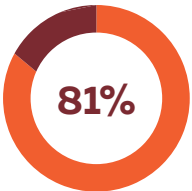
From a 2018 story about rodeo coach María Luisa Botero, working with students at the rodeo school Rancho Apalache in Medellín, Colombia.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDRIA HAUTAMAKI | STORY PUBLISHED IN WESTERN HORSEMAN

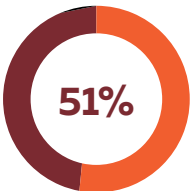
SELF-REPORTED FINDINGS
VIA SURVEY RESPONSES



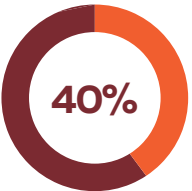
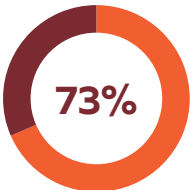
98.5% of respondents found the Hostile Environment and First Aid Training (HEFAT) useful



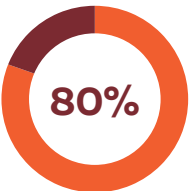
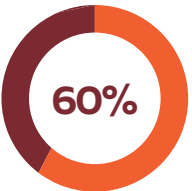
81% of respondents reported that the fellowship boosted their confidence as a journalist



51% of respondents have received awards, promotions, or speaking engagements since their IWMF trip



60% of respondents said it led to new career opportunities or relationships with media outlets



80% of respondents said women-only reporting created a lasting environment of peer support, or a safe space for them

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STORIES FELLOWS TRIPS

Colombia



Colombia has long been featured in international media as home to continual conflict and as the cradle of the modern-day drug trade. In recent years, it has overcome immense cultural, historical, and political hurdles to pass a peace deal, and the government is working to adapt its response to the changing drug market and trafficking routes. While trying to implement a controversial peace plan, Colombia must also address a huge influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, civil unrest in large cities, and campaigns against mega-projects on indigenous land.

Our fellows worked across the country – from the Venezuelan border to rural towns at the heart of the nation's civil war – to help paint a more complex picture of the Andean nation in international news media. The women journalists on our five reporting trips published stories about the history of the LGBT community in Colombia's civil war, the growing role of women in politics and business, demobilized guerrillas trying to start anew, Venezuelan women crossing the border to give birth in Colombia, and the role of drought and extreme weather on indigenous communities.

For Marta Martinez, a freelance reporter who traveled to Cúcuta in October 2019, the IWMF's support – from security training to a solid network of women reporters and collaborators – was key to her reporting reaching an international audience.

"I felt supported at all times. Not only in terms of access to a driver and local fixers, but the GPS (security) tracker....and knowing there are people around looking out for me and keeping an eye on me," said Martinez, whose reporting took her to communities with high rates of crime and violence on the Colombia-Venezuela border.

For example, she was reporting in a community on the outskirts of Cúcuta where many Venezuelans are now living alongside Colombians displaced by years of civil war. "It was really dangerous, and I needed a lot of security going in," Martinez recalls. "Jeff [the IWMF's security director] was there, he checked with the Cúcuta police to make sure we were ok to go in, I would not have been able to do that reporting safely by myself," she says matter of factly. Just a few days later, a reporter was held up at gunpoint in the same neighborhood. For many, it was the presence of local fixers that helped make complex and nuanced reporting possible.



Pakistani and Indian migrants arrive in Capurganá, Colombia on a smuggler's boat from Turbo, Colombia in 2017.
PHOTOGRAPH: LISETTE POOLE
| STORY PUBLISHED in TIME



Laura Dixon interviews Antonio Pinto, a leader of Colombia's Wiwa, in the Sierra Nevada, for her 2016 story about indigenous groups taking the lead on conservation efforts.
PHOTOGRAPH: HANNAH STONEBRAKER | STORY PUBLISHED IN [MONGABAY](#)

"I can't overstate how fruitful it was to work with local Colombian journalists on this trip."

– Nidia Bautista

"I can't overstate how fruitful it was to work with local Colombian journalists on the trip," said Nidia Bautista, a 2019 reporting fellow in Medellín. "I feel I became a better team player thanks to the IWMF."

The experience in Colombia also opened fellows' eyes to the global role of the journalist. ***Jean Friedman-Rudovsky***, part of the inaugural 2016 trip to Colombia, wrote about a critical experiment in land restitution in the aftermath of Colombia's decades-long conflict. Special teams are deployed to rural areas, where land deeds have long been destroyed or perhaps never existed, in an effort to right decades of forced displacement by rebels and paramilitaries alike.

Friedman-Rudovsky said her reporting trip reminded her "of the privilege and responsibility of this job. It's never about being a 'voice for the voiceless.' Everyone in this world has his or her own voice. Journalism is simply a mechanism for amplifying what those voices have to say," she said. "The question, for all of us, is: do we want to listen?"

SIDE BAR: LIKE A MOTHER

The IWMF advocates for inclusive practices in journalism that move women into leadership.

One subset of women who are often pushed out of the industry due to poor or non-existent policies are mothers. The Adelante program helped remove stereotypes and barriers for mothers, fellows say. **Our trips included new mothers returning from leave, mothers of multiple children juggling interviews with mealtime and Skype calls, and expectant mothers meeting (and sometimes outpacing) their peers.** The result was open conversations about a topic that’s often brushed aside: Is it possible to continue in this rigorous, often unforgiving field while also having a family?

“On my trip, three separate reporters offered to take me out to dinner because they were thinking about having children but scared off because they didn’t know if they could continue to do things like international reporting,” said Deepa Fernandes, a fellow on an El Salvador trip and mother of two.

“Women should be able to have a baby and not lose out on their profession,” she said. “There’s really no support out there for mothers who are journalists, that’s the hardest part I’ve found.”

A recent Nieman report *put it bluntly*: “In the conversation about how to create more diversity and gender balance in newsrooms, one group has been routinely ignored: mothers.”

The opportunity to see motherhood normalized in journalism is incredibly valuable for reporters, sources, and editors.

“She definitely made pregnancy and working [at the same time] feel more normal,” said Monica Wise of a fellow on her trip to El Salvador and Guatemala.

The IWMF “has helped me keep working on foreign reportage as a mum of two young children,” said Laura Dixon, a Colombia-trip participant. “I think this is often a point in which female foreign reporters drop out of the field, because of childcare commitments, the precariousness of freelance work, and the dangers of the work. These grants have enabled me to plan my reporting trips – which works better for childcare reasons – and means I’ve not dropped off the radar for international editors.”

A fellow from the United States recalls a colleague from the Dominican Republic pulling her aside on the last night of their reporting trip. “She told me she’d always been taught that pregnant women have to sit on the couch, they can’t do anything,” she recalls. “It actually really empowered me to hear from her that my decision to report internationally while pregnant made her rethink her own future. It somehow made me more confident that I could manage to keep doing this work, even with small children to care for.”

But, as Fernandes notes, the industry isn’t built for mothers, and rarely considers childcare costs in grant budgets.

“IWMF is perfectly situated to help with this,” she said. “I know so many more journalists who are mothers now. I just feel like we are a growing force and if we could unite we’d really see some change.”



TOP IMAGE: Throughout Mexico, mothers in jail can keep their children with them until age three or four. A prisoner walks back to her cell after an art workshop where her daughter played by her side in Chihuahua, Mexico in 2017. PHOTOGRAPH: MELISSA LYTTLE | PUBLISHED IN [HUFFPOST](#)

BOTTOM IMAGE: María Cristina Mendez Hernandez gives birth at the Suchitoto National Hospital in El Salvador. It is illegal to have an abortion and some women who miscarried or had stillbirths were charged with homicide. PHOTOGRAPH: NADIA SHIRA COHEN | PUBLISHED IN THE [CALIFORNIA SUNDAY MAGAZINE](#)

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STORIES FELLOWS TRIPS

El Salvador



El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America – about the size of Massachusetts – and the most densely populated. But there is no shortage of stories. Sugar-cane fields and coffee farms are just a stone's throw away from the bustling capital, which makes it possible to cover wide terrain and diverse topics in a limited amount of time.

El Salvador is also home to some of the deadliest **gang violence** in the region, with sky-high homicide rates. Fellows found new ways to report on the epidemic of violence, whether investigating sexual assault in the police force, what it's like to teach and attend **school in the murder capital** of the world, or a rare town that's largely **escaped climbing death tolls** in recent years.

The relationship between the United States and El Salvador is also deeply significant – and often obscured. Even the country's gang origins can be traced back to the U.S., experts say. An estimated half-a-million people, or roughly 25 percent of the Salvadoran population, fled during a 13-year civil war that ended in 1992, with the majority **migrating to, or seeking asylum** in, the U.S. Today, **families, the economy**, and tourism straddle both **countries** in one way or another.

Our El Salvador reporting trips focused on a wide range of topics from **rural land development** to **reproductive rights, family separations** via U.S. **immigration policies** to literally being on the frontlines of Covid-19 lockdown

efforts. Our final trip in March 2020 was cancelled midway through, after El Salvador's new, young president announced the region's earliest, and arguably one of the strictest, quarantines in Latin America. The government barred entry of all foreigners except diplomats and legal residents.

But that wasn't the first time a reporting trip to El Salvador coincided with breaking international news. In June 2018, our fellows were in the country when news broke of the U.S. policy separating children from their parents crossing into the U.S. without documentation.

"We met a **dad separated from his daughter** before anyone knew what was going on" with family separations, recalls Sarah Kinoshian, a freelancer at the time, now working for Reuters in Venezuela. There aren't many international reporters based in Central America and having boots on the ground at that moment gave fellows the invaluable chance to write breaking news stories with a unique firsthand vantage. Kinoshian said her relationship with The Guardian, where her stories on family separation ran, changed after her IWMF trip. "This reinvigorated my relationship with them," she said. "My ability to write [*All I hear is my daughter, crying: a Salvadoran father's plight after separation at border* published in The Guardian] before their competitors did solidified their confidence in me. They started to pay my expenses [on future reporting assignments]," she said.



Primary school students climb near the windows of a school in Yalambojoch, Guatemala in 2019. PHOTOGRAPH: NATALIE KEYSSAR | PUBLISHED IN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



A woman poses for a photo at a protest against the total ban on abortions in El Salvador in 2017. PHOTOGRAPH: MONICA WISE



Documentary filmmaker and video journalist Monica Wise at a 2017 anti-abortion protest in San Salvador. PHOTOGRAPH: JUAN CARLOS

Victoria Bouloubasis, a 2017 fellow said her trip changed her professional life as well. “I published a story that **marked my career**,” she said. Bouloubasis was working at INDY Week, an independent weekly newspaper in North Carolina at the time, and she came to El Salvador to follow the story of a young man deported from his community after a high-profile activist campaign tried to keep him in the U.S.

She said her final story, *Pedro Salmeron Was Deported From North Carolina in 2016. We Went to El Salvador to See What His Life’s Like Now*, changed the conversation and preconceptions around immigration in her community: “I think it gave people perspective and helped them understand better the nuance of being a family with mixed [immigration] status in the U.S. It put a face on a crisis that a lot of people believe stopped and started [on the border].” High school teachers and lawyers wrote to tell her they use her story in their work.

Coverage by our fellows in El Salvador not only provided opportunities for professional advancement but helped change the country’s human rights landscape. El Salvador has one of the **strictest abortion laws** in the region, with dozens of women imprisoned or suffering from the draconian consequences of a **total ban on abortion**, even when the mother’s life is at risk. Our fellows not only brought the **realities of these laws** and the stories of women affected by them to broad international audiences, they helped change the narrative.

“Reproductive rights [as a topic] is more on the agenda or radar of a lot of international outlets, and that has a lot to do with the IWMF and their fellows’ coverage,” said Anna-Catherine Brigida, who reporters from El Salvador and also participated on an IWMF trip to Honduras. She attributes the IWMF for the uptick in coverage and women’s bylines coming out of El Salvador and the region as a whole over the past five years.

A few of those stories include: ***The perils of pregnancy in a country where abortion is a crime – in pictures*** published in The Guardian, ***Salvadoran Women Imprisoned for Abortion Speak Out Against Their Country’s Draconian Laws*** published in ***Jezebel*** and ***On the Front Lines of El Salvador’s Underground Abortion Economy*** published in ***Foreign Policy***.

Along with fellow Jessica Weiss, Andrea Patiño Contreras filed a story for Univision about a woman who was imprisoned when a judge ruled that her stillborn child was actually an abortion: She was sentenced to 30 years in prison after her baby died during childbirth: now her case goes back to trial in El Salvador. Contreras said that, along with the reports of her IWMF peers, her story, helped build **international pressure** around these cases. Our article, “helped add pressure and international awareness to the issue. Teodora [the subject of her story] was released a few months” after her story ran, said Contreras.

“We met a dad separated from his daughter before anyone [in the world] knew what was going on.”

– Sarah Kinosian

RIGHT IMAGE:
Ximena Natera takes a portrait in El Salvador in 2017 for a radio series about the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala and the long road toward peace. PHOTOGRAPH: JUAN CARLOS | STORY PUBLISHED IN *Radio Nacional de Colombia*

BOTTOM IMAGE:
An ex-gang member prays at Ebenezer Baptist church in El Salvador in 2018. His head is tattooed with a reference to his Barrio 18 gang affiliation. Often people’s only alternative to joining a gang—or getting out of one—is to become an evangelical Christian. PHOTOGRAPH: ALICIA VERA | PUBLISHED IN *NPR*.



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STORIES FELLOWS TRIPS

Guatemala

Despite having one of the highest GDPs in Central America, large numbers of Guatemalans suffer from extreme poverty and malnutrition, exacerbated by increasingly common severe weather events. These are reasons why Guatemala sends more migrants to the United States than any other country in Central America. Many rural, indigenous families traveling from Guatemala endured some of the most protracted family separations at the U.S. border in recent years.

But, like so many other small global nations, Guatemala is so much more than its headlines. It's home to one of the world's most highly praised experiments in quashing corruption, a project that was abruptly shuttered last year after launching successful investigations into a former president and other high-profile politicians. Guatemala has a rich history of community organizing and midwifery, not to mention its acclaimed recycling of retired U.S. school busses into public transportation along with a growing tech industry – all subjects of compelling stories reported by our fellows over the past five years.

In addition to the stories told, the professional development opportunities, new bylines, and better safety protocols, IWMF reporting trips created new networks of professional support. In a field that often values individualism over teamwork and where freelancers are frequently expected to navigate challenges on their own, the lasting collaborations that come out of our two-week reporting initiatives are life changing.

"It's super important to have this network of women journalists, especially when reporting on Latin America," said Eileen Guo, a 2019 Guatemala grantee. "There are so many issues that have to do with women's lives that women should be telling. But there are also risks unique to women working there," she said. "The IWMF fosters this incredible community of women who are putting out great reporting and leaning on one another, and after a while it starts to feel like that's the norm," said Guo. "Then you step back and realize this is not the norm. But the IWMF can be a model for the rest of the industry in terms of diverse voices."



Drought and hunger are two push-factors driving migration from Guatemala. A woman and her children in Plan de Jocote, Chiquimula, part of Guatemala's dry corridor in 2018. PHOTOGRAPH: GENA STEFFENS | STORY PUBLISHED IN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

“The IWMMF fosters this incredible community of women... and after a while it starts to feel like that’s the norm [in journalism.]”

– Eileen Guo

Volunteer activist and educator, Gustavo Cabrera sifts through trash—including medical waste—washed up on a beach in Omoa, Honduras in 2018. The Motagua River flows through Guatemala before emptying into the Caribbean, carrying with it a daily freight of trash from overcrowded city dumps and unofficial landfills hundreds of miles upstream.

PHOTOGRAPH: AMELIA URRY | STORY PUBLISHED IN *Buzzfeed*

SECTION I: COUNTRY REPORTS

Guo published her first ever investigation, *The fight to protect the world's most trafficked wild commodity*, for National Geographic as an IWMF grantee, a look at how China's demand for rosewood is ***fueling illegal logging*** in Guatemalan forests. "I wouldn't have been able to do the National Geographic story if not for the IWMF," she says, noting that her expenses, covered by the IWMF, were nearly triple the payment she received for the story itself.

"I don't know that they would have assigned the story because it was very travel-heavy and I was an unknown" to them.

For some grantees, relationships built during their trip went beyond the other journalists in the group. "I would say the biggest impact of my IWMF experience has been the expansion of my networks in Central America," said Cora Currier, who ***wrote Trump Administration's Limits on Asylum For Domestic Violence Put Guatemalan Women In Peril***.

This story, published in The Intercept, explained how US asylum changes were affecting women fleeing domestic violence in Guatemala, which has one of the highest rates of femicide in the world. Curriers connected with other reporters but also with fixers, sources, and drivers meant she returned to Guatemala twice in the year following her fellowship for more reporting and new assignments. These connections are even more important now that COVID-19 has so severely limited international travel. "My contacts with local sources there have continued to be fruitful in terms of my own reporting, and bringing collaborative projects to The Intercept," where she's now an editor.



International demand for rosewood is fueling a crisis in Guatemala's forests. In 2018, a man strikes at a tree with his machete in Uaxactún in the Guatemalan department of Petén. PHOTOGRAPH: GENA STEFFENS

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STORIES FELLOWS TRIPS

Honduras

Honduras gained international notoriety recently as thousands of citizens fled the country in search of opportunity and basic survival elsewhere. Despite the attention 2018 and 2019 migrant caravans attracted from the international press, which originated in Honduras and traveled across Central America and Mexico, there's scant coverage of the realities that continue to drive many people to leave. The four trips we conducted touched on the root causes behind these large movements out of Honduras, including extreme weather events, femicide and gang violence, archaic public health systems, a lagging economy, the deadly targeting of social activists and environmentalists with violence, and ubiquitous corruption.

In 2009, Honduras suffered a coup that pushed the democratically-elected president out of office and paved the way for conservative successors to swoop in. Soon after, the government began cracking down on NGOs, activists, independent journalists, and others who spoke out against the new ruling party and its agenda. These deep divisions still exist today. Impunity has reached alarming levels and Honduras' press is considered "not free" by Freedom House. Recent scandals, including the internationally contested 2017 reelection of President Juan Orlando Hernandez, U.S. investigations into his role in drug trafficking and money laundering, and efforts to nationalize education and healthcare have led to greater discontent and nationwide protests.

All of these factors and more compel Hondurans to look for stability and security abroad. In 2018, photojournalist Francesca Volpi looked at how violence

and repression in Honduras diminish opportunity and leads to desperation. Her photo essay published on Yahoo! News captures the many complex issues driving migration. These root causes include gang recruitment in public schools, government back mega-projects which force Afro-descendent Garifuna people and environmental activists out of their communities, and overt discrimination against LGBT community members who struggle to find employment. One subjects of Volpi's photos, used the photos as evidence of the human rights abuses against him, eventually receiving asylum in Europe.

While violence and discrimination put pressure on Honduran citizens to flee, poverty also plays a part. More than 75 percent of the country's population said their family income wasn't enough to live on, according to a recent Vanderbilt University survey. The majority of Hondurans reported feeling that the economy had deteriorated during the past year, which obviously drove them to migrate. We dedicated an entire trip to labor and migration, with fellows shining a light on injustices in industries largely designed to serve foreign markets, from clothing factories to harvesting bananas.

These stories also underscore the unique narratives of women in the region, narratives that are so frequently overlooked. In 2018, Clare Fieseler published a photo essay in The Lily about women working on tilapia farms and factories. It was promoted as one of that outlet's best photo essays of the year. The story focused on the nearly 70 percent of workers at one factory who are women.



Honduras is one of the largest suppliers of bananas to the United States. Some companies face accusations of labor exploitation. An aerial photo of a banana plantation in Honduras in 2018. PHOTOGRAPH: ANNA CLARE SPELMAN | PUBLISHED IN Univision



The friend of a murder victim pays her respects at his 2016 funeral in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCESCA VOLPI | PUBLISHED IN *L'Espresso*



Boys play during recess in the La Rivera Hernández neighborhood in San Pedro Sula, Honduras in 2018. PHOTOGRAPH: DANIELLE VILLASANA | PUBLISHED IN *THE ATLANTIC*

They told Fieseler that their workplace was an oasis of gender empowerment, with decent wages and trainings on gender equality. But gender violence outside of work hours was constant, putting their lives at risk. Many of these women employees were paid more than the men in their villages or families, which created additional safety risks and caused street harassment and domestic violence, Fieseler found.

That same year, another fellow, Emily Kinskey, published a *photo essay in BuzzFeed* about the working conditions in factories that make clothes

for international brands typically exported to the U.S. Her subjects described harsh working conditions, little pay, and a limited choice of profession. Kinskey's coverage spread widely on social media. Honduran companies, that had initially denied any wrongdoing, felt pressured by the attention, she said, and "the social media action taken by readers prompted one of these companies [to issue a statement]."

Looking back, Kinskey said she could not have taken on this ambitious project without the IWMF. "On a very basic level, reporting from the region isn't going to happen if there's not an opportunity

like Adelante, and it's one of the only programs like this that exist," she said, mentioning access to fixers, transportation, and other resources. "I've never done anything in my career that's offered me anything close to this experience."

Security support from the IWMF makes this reporting possible. When investigating their story on what awaits minors deported back home due to heightened border patrol efforts in Mexico and the US, Danielle Mackey and Danielle Villasana encountered a potentially life-threatening situation. While *interviewing a source* in San Pedro Sula, they were approached by gang

members. Jean-François "Jeff" Belzil, the IWMF's in-house security director, was with the reporters, saw the armed gang members walking their way, and was able to extract the reporters from the situation before tensions escalated.

"To be honest there were many moments like that in our reporting. It was really difficult," said Mackey about their field reporting which took place in a community known for the presence of at least six competing gangs. Having a car and security advice made a big difference, she said. "It was vreally nice to not have to be on guard in a way that you would if you were alone."

"I've never done anything in my career that's offered me anything close to this experience."

– Emily Kinskey

54 35 5
STORIES FELLOWS TRIPS

Mexico

Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States,” is the famous quote attributed to former dictator Porfirio Diaz. Mexico’s proximity to the powerful, expansionist U.S. and the implications for its culture, economy, crime, and reputation is still relevant today. Importantly, our Mexico reporting trip strayed far away from the U.S. border. We traveled to Mexico’s second-biggest city and the nation’s tech capital, Guadalajara, to the car-producing and bread-basket central state of Guanajuato, and down to the lush, rural, and harshly tropical southern region. The vast geographic reach of our Mexico reporting trips allowed our fellows to share stories less commonly commissioned by international and certainly U.S. news media.

Our trips also positioned fellows to report on breaking news, like Mexico City’s 2017 earthquake, which injured thousands of people and killed hundreds. A group of fellows arrived in Mexico City for their four-day HEFAT on Sept. 19, the day of the historic quake. Mexico was meant to be a pit-stop before traveling to the El Salvador – Guatemala border, but **many of our journalists jumped into action**, reporting on the tragedy for outlets back home. IWMF staff on the ground in Mexico and also in Washington pivoted to make sure fellows were safe by establishing communications, coordinating transportation, and arranging lodging for fellows who were spread across the megacity at the time of the temblor.

Fellow Cora Currier said witnessing this tragedy right before diving into the group’s first aid training made that material all the more relevant: “As we practiced first aid

and how to dive and roll under fire, I thought how useless I’d felt in the evening of the earthquake,” she said. “Would I be better prepared for the next one, as a journalist and as a human?”

Gabriela Martínez has spent her entire professional career working on the U.S.-Mexico border. Based in Tijuana, the Mexican reporter and fixer has seen it all when it comes to migration to the U.S. – or so she thought. She had the opportunity to join the IWMF as a fellow on Mexico’s **southern border** in 2016 and said the perspective she gained was life-changing.

“Before and after my fellowship was like a parting of the waters,” she said. “I realized I only had a piece of the migratory picture. I had been covering the consequences, but I lacked this entire process of the travel people were carrying out to get to the US-Mexico border,” she recalls. It enriched her reporting.

Our fellows surveyed the country telling stories like:

- Meet Christus, the US Catholic Health Chain **Restricting Access to Reproductive Care** in Mexico
- En la guarida de los zapatistas about a **Zapatista day care**
- An unlikely **feud between beekeepers and Mennonites** simmers in Mexico
- Surge of **African migrants** brave Latin America jungle trek for U.S. dream



Photojournalist Ali Baskerville with migrants crossing the Suchiate River between Guatemala and Mexico in 2016. PHOTOGRAPH: JUANITA ISLAS.

“This might sound glib, but my IWMF trip helped me figure out that I didn’t need anyone’s permission to chase the stories I thought were really important and that I should see my gender as an asset, not a liability,” said Molly O’Toole, a 2016 fellow who was inspired to take the leap into freelance journalism following her trip. As an IWMF fellow, she wrote a number of stories including Lidio Javier’s Long Journey Home, a heart-wrenching feature following Javier’s body as it traveled home to be buried. The story, published in Foreign Policy, shed light on **new US** migrant policies which, rather than deterring migrants, would likely result in more deaths.

“I needed IWMF to get there,” said O’Toole who was awarded a 2020 Pulitzer Prize for her reporting on the U.S.-border for NPR’s This American Life.

Nadia Shira Cohen, credits the IWMF for the award she received for her story about the **tensions between Mennonite soy farmers and Mayan beekeepers** in Campech, An unlikely feud between beekeepers and Mennonites simmers in Mexico. Cohen says she’d been pitching the story for over a year, and “it was the IWMF funding” that convinced editors to sign on. “I wouldn’t have gotten the World Press Award without the IWMF’s initial support.”

Fellow Erica Hellerstein adds, “If you don’t have the financial ability to move to a foreign country then your options for reporting internationally are really limited.” As a freelancer, she found the IWMF to be unique in what it offers. “This experience expanded my portfolio so much. It was genuinely the first time I had a professional experience that was affirming. It’s an organization that allowed me to do the aspirational reporting I always wanted to do,” she said. One of her stories was **Credible Fear**, Trump’s calls for a border wall won’t make it harder for domestic violence survivors to find refuge in the U.S. – a new ruling is already doing that. This story focused on the new challenges women fleeing domestic abuse face in seeking asylum in the US. The reporting that came out of my IWMF trip “helped me get my current job, which is actually my dream job,” said Hellerstein. “There’s really no other organization doing what IWMF does.”



Journalist Erika Aguilar recording a Mariachi band in Tijuana, Mexico in 2017. PHOTOGRAPH: ALEXIA WEBSTER.

“[M]y IWMF trip helped me figure out that I didn’t need anyone’s permission to chase the stories I thought were really important.”

– Molly O’Toole

99 26 5
STORIES FELLOWS TRIPS



U.S.-Mexico Border

The U.S.-Mexico border has long been considered **unique; neither completely Mexican nor American in culture, rich with contradictions, and deeply connected.**

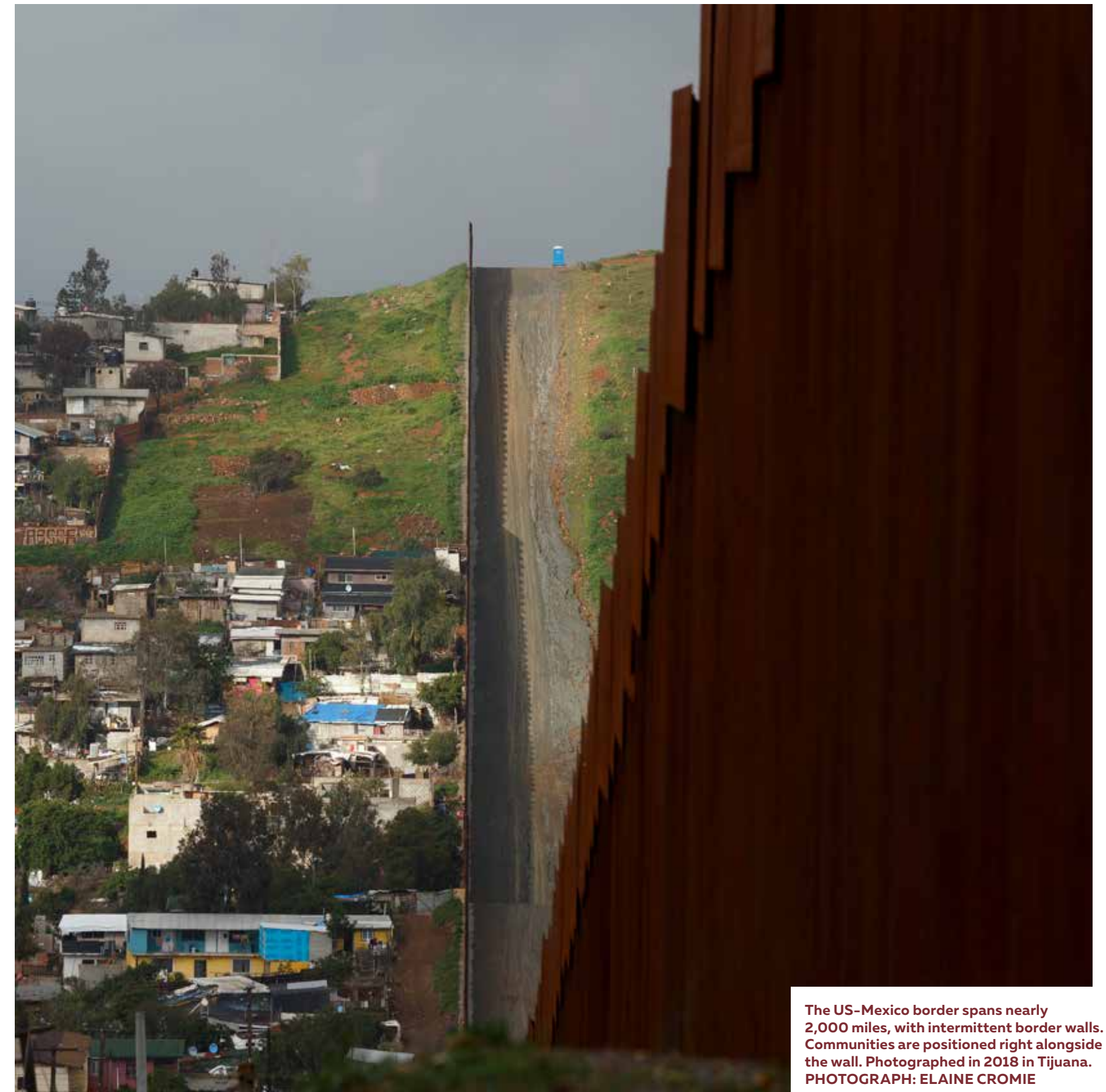
From Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass to Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, stories along this nearly 2,000-mile expanse exploded during the course of the IWMF's five years traversing the border. Our fellows spoke with farmers, toured smuggling tunnels, waited alongside long lines of migrants and refugees, and traveled the vast landscape of the Rio Grande river.

In April 2016, on our first trip, the idea of an expanded border wall was top of mind but still felt rhetorical. The trip to Tijuana, Brownsville, and McAllen was an opportunity to talk to the people impacted most by walls already in place – in one case, literally ***inches from an interviewee's back door***. But by 2018, the idea of a “big, beautiful wall” changed dramatically, no longer just a physical border fence, but a wall constructed out of ***immigration policies*** that separated families, forced asylum-seekers to ***risk their lives*** waiting in Mexico for U.S. legal proceedings, and led to limiting the number of refugees and immigrants allowed to speak to U.S. officials at the border each day.

Despite the high-stakes politics affecting the U.S.-Mexico border, the region contains countless underreported stories that go far beyond northbound migration.

IWMF stories brought new voices, greater depth and context to immigration stories, while lifting a curtain on previously underreported topics along the border, including:

- Inside Mexico's ghost unions about ***“ghost” labor unions*** that block transnational factory workers from organizing for their rights
- He Served in the U.S. Military, But that Didn't Stop ***His Deportation***
- Babies behind bars: ***Children serve time*** with mothers in Mexico's prisons
- Tijuana looks inward, not northward, to spark cultural revival about the long history behind Tijuana's draw as a destination for ***unique eats***,
- When families are divided by the US-Mexico border, deportation about ***Mexican parents separated*** from their American children by deportation
- The Mexican Doctor Rehydrating the Dead about a Mexican doctor who ***rehydrates corpses*** in order to help identify them
- This cheer squad is caught between two worlds – divided by a border about a high school ***cheerleading squad*** that traverses the border each day.



The US-Mexico border spans nearly 2,000 miles, with intermittent border walls. Communities are positioned right alongside the wall. Photographed in 2018 in Tijuana. PHOTOGRAPH: ELAINE CROMIE



TOP LEFT IMAGE:
Luis German Ruiz and his son sit on their bed at a shelter in Piedras Negras, Mexico in 2018. They left Honduras to escape the violence that had already taken three family members with hopes of finding asylum in the U.S.

PHOTOGRAPH: TAMARA MERINO |
PUBLISHED IN [NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC](#)

BOTTOM GRAPHIC:
Design by Angie Caballero for the IWMF



“It opened up the whole region to me.”

– Jika Gonzalez

The coverage earned IWMF reporters awards and speaking opportunities. Erika Schultz and Corinne Chin were recognized by the Online Journalism Awards in 2020, where they were winners in the Feature category and finalists in the category of Excellence and Innovation in Visual Digital Storytelling for their story **“Disappearing Daughters,”** reported in Juárez and published in the Seattle Times. Through a combination of poetry, written by Washington State’s Poet Laureate, testimonials from mothers who lost their daughters to femicide, and reporting on the history of violence against women and police accountability in the Mexican border city of Juárez, this multimedia piece stands out for its unique approach and deep impact.

Many fellows, like Jika Gonzalez, say the IWMF border reporting trip was an introduction to a complex region, which allowed them to return with the contacts and confidence to report more stories. “It allowed me to be brave,” said Gonzalez of her first Adelante reporting trip to the U.S.-Mexico border. She was a freelancer at the time and went on to become a staff documentary and video producer at Vice News. The trip “gave me confidence and I found myself saying, ‘I can do this. I can come back to Tijuana by myself and I’ll be fine,’” she recalls. “It opened up the whole region to me,” which surprised her since she’s a dual U.S.-Mexican citizen, fluent in both English and Spanish. The IWMF’s all-star team of local journalists, fellow grantees with varied backgrounds and experience-levels serving as informal mentors, and a sense of community in an often-isolated profession, “gave me the permission to push my reporting in Latin America forward,” she said.

Fixers like Gabriela Martinez – who later participated in a reporting trip as a fellow – were a vital part of each trip’s success. Fellows reported staying in touch with fixers long after their trips ended to dig up contacts from a distance

or plan further reporting projects. “I still use the network of fixers and drivers today,” said Molly O’Toole.

The IWMF helped boost her confidence. “I needed an experience like IWMF to get there. It wasn’t just the experience alone, but the tools I took with me and applied to every project I’ve worked on since.”

Sara Mojtehdzadeh, a 2016 fellow, reported *Extortion, threats, kidnapping: Workers the hidden casualty of Mexico’s violence*, published in the Toronto Star, about the labor rights of **Mexican workers** in Canadian-owned factories. “Journalists can’t thrive or improve without challenges,” said Mojtehdzadeh. “This fellowship pushed me to sharpen my reporting, second-guess my prejudices, and expand my horizons – all the while being supported by the intelligence, leadership, and kindness of IWMF facilitators, fixers, and fellow journalists.” She adds that the entire experience is “a rare luxury” in the field of journalism. “It is absolutely invaluable to have been connected to a network of strong, independent, and fiercely smart women whose combined experiences and talents are second to none.”

Reporting on the border came with its own unique challenges. Whether reporting in migrant shelters or nature preserves, it’s common for reporters to be watched while doing their work, whether by pre-teen lookouts working for local gangs or full-fledged cartel members. Fellows Tamara Merino and Luján Agusti experienced this first-hand while reporting their National Geographic story titled **Scenes From A Migration Crisis – On Both Sides of the Border.** While interviewing families in Nuevo Laredo near the Rio Grande, they found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time: a team of human traffickers and about 8 others turned a corner of the river in black innertubes right where the women were conducting interviews and taking photos. The IWMF’s security director was present and helped deescalate the situation, speaking with an alleged cartel chief on the phone who demanded all footage be erased, while the reporters and local fixer hurried to safety with the nearby IWMF driver. They were able to cross the border back into the US without further incident.



LEFT IMAGE:
Personal items abandoned in 2019 in Tecate, near the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico where smugglers are known to bring people into the country.

**PHOTOGRAPH: ERIKA SCHULTZ |
PUBLISHED IN THE SEATTLE TIMES**

BOTTOM LEFT IMAGE:
Nogales police officers give fellows a tour of underground tunnels that connect Mexico and the United States in January 2017.
PHOTOGRAPH: JUANITA ISLAS

BOTTOM RIGHT IMAGE:
Journalist Claudia Bellante walks along the US-Mexico border wall in Tijuana in 2017.
PHOTOGRAPH: ALEXIA WEBSTER



SIDEBAR: INTERNATIONAL-LOCAL COLLABORATIONS

There’s consistent praise among Adelante fellows for the teams of talented local journalists that work with our foreign reporters to help them produce robust, textured stories across the region. With a reckoning over the role of fixers in international reporting recently, the IWMF is poised to serve as an example for moving the model of collaboration between local and international reporters forward – even more so with the arrival of COVID-19.

Julia Gavarrete first worked with the IWMF as a fixer in El Salvador in 2016, after about five years as a local journalist. Through the relationships she built with international fellows on these trips, she found opportunities to collaborate and report for international news outlets.

She and fellow Heather Geis teamed up for an ambitious story, *Honduran Teen Fled Gangs at Home Only to be Murdered While Stranded at the U.S.-Mexico Border* that followed one of the biggest news stories from the past several years from start to tragic finish: Children and teens migrating to the U.S. from Central America. They reported across the region, from San Pedro Sula to Tijuana, retracing the steps of a young boy who was kidnapped and killed while waiting to cross into the U.S.

After the story was published in the Intercept, Gavarrete said her reputation changed among fellow reporters and editors in El Salvador.

“Media here was able to identify me by name, I wasn’t just any reporter, I was Julia Gavarrete,” she said. “I was seen as a person who could find stories, do investigations, and show that big themes like migration can be told in deeper ways.”

With COVID-19 changing how newsrooms approach international news coverage, fellows say they hope future reporting grants and opportunities through the IWMF will focus on pairing international

and local reporters. Danielle Mackey, a U.S. freelance journalist based in El Salvador, has seen relationships between local fixers and international fellows grow immeasurable and sees great opportunity for future collaborations and growth.

“There needs to be more openness in U.S. media to hiring folks who are based somewhere instead of this insistence of sending people from newsrooms,” she said. Mackey sees countless talented Latin American reporters who move into public relations because they can’t find work, or because local journalism pays so poorly. “It’s important to empower those voices already in the region. The [COVID-19] virus presents an extra reason to do that because those folks are here and others can’t travel internationally as easily.”

Gabriela Martínez worked as a local reporter and fixer in Tijuana for two years – including for the IWMF – when she participated as a reporting fellow on the Mexico-Guatemala border.

“It was so enriching to learn from women from around the world and watch their reporting processes,” she said. It’s influenced how Martínez approaches local stories in Tijuana and has also given her the confidence to speak up about the importance of local reporters writing in international news.

“High-quality journalism exists among Latin American women, and we are sometimes the first ones reporting the stories that later show up in The Guardian or The New York Times,” said Martínez. “We just need help elevating our names and our work. Working on collaborative stories with international journalists is a great way to do this and the IWMF is the perfect organization with the sources and contacts to help make that possible.”



Reporters Greta Rico and Morena Pérez Joachin set up their shot in a Garifuna community in Honduras in 2018. Pérez Joachin previously worked with the IWMF as a local journalist assisting fellows in Guatemala. PHOTOGRAPH: CATHERINE CALDERÓN

SAFETY & SECURITY

Latin America is one of the most dangerous regions in the world to practice journalism. In fact, in 2019, it was declared the deadliest region in the world for journalists. Mexico registered 10 reporters murdered for doing their work, according to the International Federation of Journalists, followed by Honduras with three. The threats facing journalists in Latin America differ greatly from other parts of the world. Yet, most Hostile Environment and First Aid Training (HEFAT) programs in the U.S. and Europe focus on scenarios intended for reporting in the Middle East or North Africa. They're also largely designed with male participants in mind.

The IWMF created a program specifically tailored to women journalists reporting in the unique and varied environments across Latin America. Each IWMF reporting trip began with a four-day HEFAT course in a rural enclave outside of Mexico City. These simulation exercises are based on the real-life landscape of violence and crime in Latin America, and the lectures and classroom discussions are tailored to the specific country where fellows will be traveling and reporting. Within the past five years, 275 journalists participated in the IWMF's Adelante HEFAT programming, giving them a foundation of physical and digital security preparation and an opportunity to learn from the experiences of their peers. All of this before their reporting fellowship began.

HEFATs are designed to help journalists plan ahead, report safely, gain situational awareness, and practice self-defense and first aid in an increasingly complex world. IWMF trainings are led by our in-house security advisor Jean-François "Jeff" Belzil and a female security consultant, Cath Mossom. The trainings include:

- Emergency first aid (for self and colleagues)
- Digital security
- Self-defense
- Situational awareness
- Hotel and personal security
- Civil unrest/demonstrations/road traffic accidents
- Kidnapping/escape and navigation/reacting to gunfire
- Response to high-risk/stressful situations
- Emotional selfcare

The goal of the trainings is to better prepare journalists to face the kinds of threats they're likely to encounter while carrying out their work. It is vitally important for a reporter to know before an emergency occurs if her knee-jerk reaction is fight or flight, if she tends to shut down or overshare, and what happens when her adrenaline is racing.

The simulations give reporters a chance to take stock of these reactions and realities before their safety is on the line. The trainings also include a focus on self-care, incorporating yoga sessions into the course curriculum and dedicating time to processing trauma and difficult reporting topics. Fellows delve into warning signs of trauma and are encouraged to create action plans and support networks to deal with the consequences of reporting in today's media climate.

This video compilation shows highlights of the training experience: [\(link\)](#)



“It’s allowed me to talk about security [with editors] and not doubt my instincts.”

PHOTOGRAPH: KATIE FALKENBERG



Fellows participate in a kidnapping simulation during the Hostile Environment and Emergency First Aid Training outside of Mexico City.



PHOTOGRAPH: MEGHAN DHALIWAL

**– Natalie Keyssar,
US-Mexico border 2016**

MAKING SAFETY A PRIORITY

Our HEFATs have evolved since our first Adelante reporting trip in the spring of 2016. Research on the operating practices of criminal groups and government attitudes toward reporters is now expressly tailored for each reporting destination. Kidnapping simulations are more intricate, with Belzil conducting background on fellows, underscoring the importance of online security that goes far beyond safe passwords. Trainings now raise awareness of how journalists choose to share information in a media environment where personal details, photos, and tweets are the key to building a journalist's brand or audience. There's also an emphasis on the need to plan ahead. Whether staffers or freelancers, reporters need points of contact, safe-words, and lists of emergency contacts who know what to do if the moment of need arises.

In our initial proposal to the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, our aim was to put every fellow through a HEFAT. By tapping into the unique skill sets of Belzil and Mossom, we were able to take that goal to the next level. Belzil served in the Canadian Army for more than a decade, including four years as an advisor to the Afghan National Army. He helped design our Africa Great Lakes HEFAT program and was able to customize his skill set in medical support, logistics, combat operations, intelligence, and communications to fit the needs of these woman journalists working in some of Latin America's most difficult environments. Belzil doesn't only focus on the HEFATs but conducts pre-trip risk evaluations and advises fellows on how to safely carry out their work which sometimes means

cancelling interviews or site visits. Cath Mossom also worked with us on the Great Lakes program and is an integral part of the HEFAT team. She leads all of our first aid coursework and training and brings the vital perspective of a woman who has worked in dangerous environments. Mossom is a British security consultant and trainer with more than two decades working with the United Kingdom's military, including 10 years with the Special Forces.

MAKING SAFETY ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE

For the five years of this project, our HEFAT course received continual praise across 27 diverse reporting trips. The journalism industry increasingly relies on freelancers to take on personal costs – and risks – in reporting abroad. Institutionalized security protocols for staff reporters are rare, and the opportunity to learn lifesaving first aid and security strategy is invaluable.

Fellows say they have put these skills to use in diverse situations far beyond Adelante reporting trips, including safely extracting themselves from a crowd of angry protesters at a Trump political rally in the U.S., responding to a car accident in rural Mexico, or assessing file-storage so a street robbery in Bogotá didn't result in lost work. But security isn't just physical. Fellows say they are more aware of pre-trip planning, always carry first aid kits, regularly refresh their knowledge on basics like CPR, and ensure their reporting and notes are safe from digital breaches or equipment searches by government officials.

For some, the takeaways weren't challenging to implement, but in a field with such widespread penny-pinching, they felt revolutionary. "I am more conscious about the decisions I make," said Laura Dixon, a Colombia fellow. "Who will be my driver, who recommended them," for example.

"I did the HEFAT twice in the span of a year," explains Nadia Shira Cohen, a fellow in Honduras and El Salvador. "That might seem like too much, but it was incredibly helpful in reinforcing these skills and deepening my understanding of things that hadn't clicked the first time around."

"Now I stay in known/secure hotels rather than trying to save a few dollars in risky areas," she adds.

Many felt the trainings gave them the knowledge and understanding to make demands of editors, even if working from the delicate position of a freelancer.

"A lot of times things come together last minute. You want to please the client, you don't want to be annoying," said Natalie Keyssar, a freelance photographer who participated in a U.S.-Mexico border trip and El Salvador program. "But there's not the same structure for check-ins in place that there might be with a staff member. All that stuff means that it's triple important when you're on the ground in a high-risk environment to be able to say 'no' to your editor, to say 'that idea won't work for these reasons,'" she said.



Fellows participate in an active shooter simulation during the Hostile Environment and Emergency First Aid Training outside of Mexico City. PHOTOGRAPH: MEGHAN DHALIWAL

SECTION 2: SAFETY AND SECURITY

Keyssar now approaches editors assigning her stories in high-risk countries with specific exit plans, back up plans, and with suggestions for safer approaches to stories. “It’s allowed me to talk about security and not doubt my instincts,” she said.

Prioritizing safety is not a common practice among non-profit organizations supporting journalists with fellowships and reporting grants.

An informal survey by the A CULTURE OF SAFETY (ACOS) Alliance in 2018 sought to better understand the safety and security protocols currently in place from the primary grant-makers that journalists turn to for reporting projects. They found that across the industry, there was a huge inconsistency in the way organizations approach safety for their journalists on assignment.

Though the majority self-reported having a process in place – either formal or informal – to address risk in advance of assignments, nearly 75 percent did not require their grantees to have completed an appropriate HEFAT course, though more than 60 percent indicated that they had or would provide financial support for a grantee to obtain the training, if desired.

About half of respondents said that there were simply certain countries – including the types of conflict zones the IWMF works in regularly – where they would not send journalists.

In fact, many who already focused on the region or covered related topics found the HEFAT to fill an important gap in their professional toolbox. “It [the HEFAT] was so concrete,” said Danielle Mackey, who is based in Central America, adding that “It provided new and exciting and really useful skills.” So useful, that she’s organizing with other freelancers in an effort to demand of editors a basic list of security needs.

“I have a very strong list because of the IWMF’s HEFAT training; things I had no awareness of before, even living in the region where I’m constantly exposed to these security risks and challenges.”

Molly O’Toole said HEFAT training is something she’d always wanted, but “the organizations I worked with always painted it as too expensive, or as something they weren’t responsible for providing,” she said. The HEFAT was one of the highlights of her IWMF experience, but it wasn’t just the hard skills in self-defense and first-aid that resonated but “the digital security trainings and the briefings on the cartel map of Mexico were so educational,” she said, “especially covering immigration and foreign policy.”

Digital security is an increasing risk for journalists – particularly freelancers who may use the same devices for work and in their personal lives. From phishing, to texting with sources, to government searches upon entering or exiting a country, journalists have to think about the digital safety of their work more than ever before. Their own protection, and the safety of those they work with, depend on it.

“I’ve used the digital security measures we learned more than anything else,” said Milli Legrain.

Digital security and physical security are taking on renewed importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. How to responsibly report – for one’s own safety and the safety of sources – amid a pandemic is now a part of our training curriculum. In fall 2020 our trainings included strategies such as reporting in crowded, protest situations, carrying out first aid, and other personal protection steps like building one’s own personal protective equipment and cleaning gear.



Jeff Belzil leads a training on kidnapping avoidance and hostage survival during the Hostile Environment and Emergency First Aid Training outside of Mexico City. PHOTOGRAPH: MEGHAN DHALI WAL

TRAINING LOCAL JOURNALISTS

A key component of the Adelante initiative was in-country training for local journalists. The year-long initiative, extended and adapted due to COVID-19, focused on reporters in the six countries and regions where our international fellows traveled: Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and the US-Mexico border. The goal was not only to provide professional development, impart HEFAT learnings, and strengthen independent reporting amid government influence, but to create a network of support and solidarity among journalists nationally and across Latin America.

The local trainings included year-long fellowships, and the curricula were tailored to each country by experienced, local journalists who tapped into their own networks of guest speakers and resources. The trainings included modules on online and personal security, investigative journalism, and ethics, among other focus areas.

Although the program launched in person, a vast portion of programming was completed online due to COVID-19 public health restrictions. This change provided an unexpected opportunity to connect even more journalists across the region, as the online trainings brought together local

“The network that has come out of these trainings is invaluable. I can now talk to [reporters] across the region to compare notes and share support, whether it’s a hurricane or the next migrant caravan.”

– Karla Patricia Arévalo Mancía,
El Salvador

journalists from each country to learn as one international cohort. Bringing all the local journalists together online was actually an advantage at a time when so many stories – whether organized crime, migration, corruption, or extreme weather events – are interconnected and transcend regional borders. The ability to report on these topics efficiently across borders, especially when travel is less feasible during the pandemic, is vital.

“These trainings have motivated [local] journalists to keep doing journalism,” said Lourdes Ramirez, who coordinated the trainings for fellows in Honduras and El Salvador. Whether due to low pay, high risk, or more recently burn-out from the pressures of the coronavirus, retaining and professionalizing journalism in the region is an ongoing challenge.

“Through this program, many realized they aren’t alone inside their country facing risks,” said Ramirez. “Suddenly, there are no borders, there aren’t limitations. I think journalism is changing: Reporters can adapt through working together.”

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

NUMBER OF LOCAL FELLOWS TRAINED

85

GENDER BREAKDOWN



CAPITAL CITY/ OUTSIDE CAPITAL CITY



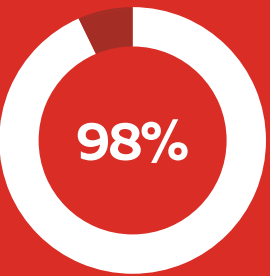
SELF-REPORTED FINDINGS VIA SURVEY RESPONSES



100% found the training had a positive professional impact



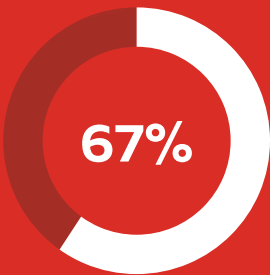
100% reported using new investigative tools and techniques in their work since beginning the training



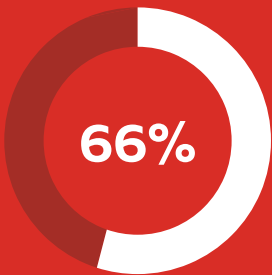
98% changed how they take into consideration their personal security or the security of their colleagues



92% say they've incorporated learnings from their HEFAT training into their daily work



67% reported benefitting from new support networks or safe spaces through the IWMF training



66% say they now undertake security risk evaluations before embarking on assignments



72% reported feeling an economic impact from COVID-19

STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

The in-country trainings were structured to not only meet the diverse backgrounds of local reporters, but to allow participants to gain knowledge tailored to their unique location. Local coordinators were invested in the country or countries where participants work, and each brought more than a decade of hands-on, award-winning journalism experience. They included two IWMF Courage in Journalism Award winners, Claudia Julieta Duque in Colombia and Lourdes Ramírez in Honduras, as well as the internationally recognized investigative journalist Marcela Turati in Mexico.

The courses were designed based on in-depth needs-assessments, and included guest speakers and outside experts to supplement the core curriculum. Of the participants selected from each country or region, the majority were women. The gender and geographic diversity of fellows created a unique, welcoming learning environment.

“IWMF is an organization that has truly generated a lot of movement for women journalists,” said Alicia Fernandez, a reporter in Ciudad Juárez who served as an IWMF fixer in 2016 and participated in the local training program in Mexico. “It’s huge to create these connections. It helps us as women, as professionals, and helps us advance our work.”

The local training program, which paused in March 2020 and moved entirely online in September last year, culminated in an opportunity for participants to put their new skills to work. The IWMF opened an application process to fund a collaborative investigation in the region, made up of teams of local reporters who completed the year-long program. More than 20 teams, or roughly 60 people, applied with well-researched, thoughtful pitches that traversed borders and touched on topics

that are often overlooked in local media – whether due to safety concerns or lack of public information. We awarded grants to 12 teams, the majority of which are made up of journalists from different countries who will work together to publish region-wide coverage of single topics. Their team reporting will cover issues like the effect of COVID-19 on school dropout rates in El Salvador; forced migration among environmental defenders across Latin America (including in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina); and, investigating underreported coronavirus death tolls in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The fellows were able to meet and collaborate when our local trainings merged and moved online.

This element of the program gives local reporters a chance to not only practice their new skills – from security protocols to conceptualizing big-picture, long-term projects – but also to publish high-profile work at home and internationally.

LASTING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The professional background of the local trainees varied; some applicants came with internationally published work, while others worked on small teams at hyper-local digital news sites or with national media franchises. Of the more than 60 individuals who responded to the final evaluation survey, the workshops, speakers, and especially the opportunity to build relationships with other reporters in the region, were tangible benefits.

“Often, when you’re a local reporter without contacts beyond your beat, it’s hard to suddenly one day publish something with international media,” said Fernandez. “With a program like this, you’re exchanging more experiences and knowledge and really opening up so many new opportunities,”

she said, adding that the network of support that’s come out of the training is one of the most valuable aspects for her professionally. Fernandez found herself informally mentoring others in the program who are already expanding their work to include working as fixers or collaborating with international journalists.

Although many trainees studied journalism and have worked in the field for several years, professional standards vary greatly across medium and country. According to Jairo Antonio Videa, one of the Honduran fellows, the IWMF training grew his independent news project by leaps and bounds.

“I learned everything I know as a journalist—how to design a website, create content—outside of university,” said Videa, a Nicaraguan reporter who fled to Honduras in 2018 in search of asylum following political repression back home. He’s since returned to Nicaragua and said his work Coyuntura, the independent news site he co-founded in 2017, has transformed. “I’m touching on new themes in my work, like reporting on corruption,” he said. “It’s something that’s not reported on enough in my country, and needs to be. I’m flexing a new muscle.” And as a part of the Honduran cohort, Videa now sees the themes that overlap between the two countries, whether corruption or migration, allowing him and his peers to learn from one another.

For Videa, the concrete examples that were given during the training set the IWMF apart. “It went beyond just protocols for safety,” he said. “I learned things like don’t always go to the same café, don’t always wear the same clothes when you report. Use a different cell phone for work. I didn’t do that before; and I do now.”

Fellow Karla Patricia Arévalo Mancía, a staff reporter in El Salvador, says the IWMF stands out among the international journalism trainings she’s attended. “The IWMF training was well-rounded and in-depth,” she said. “It wasn’t the same person talking about various themes: in the case of El Salvador, we met with people who knew certain themes really well who could help us do our work better.” That includes people who review freedom of information paperwork, who were able to outline exactly what makes a successful application, or human rights workers who taught sections on identifying abuses or interviewing victims with sensitivity.

Mancía learned so much, she said, that she’s pitched her editor to let her host a mini training for some colleagues at her national paper, El Diario de Hoy. “I’d love to reinvest the time invested in me to share some of these new skills with my colleagues,” Mancía said.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING AND SELF-CARE

A central focus of the local trainings was on investigative and collaborative journalism. Across Latin America, it’s common for legacy media and small-town papers to be obliged to political parties, government officials, and organized crime. It’s common to find newspapers publishing press releases from the government, or editors blocking stories due to safety concerns – essentially, self-censoring.

Fellows met with experts in migration reporting in Mexico City in November 2019. Guest trainers included Alfredo Corchado, Angela Kocherga, Dudley Althaus, Carrie Kahn and Cecilia Balli.



SECTION 3: TRAINING LOCAL JOURNALISTS



Local fellows participate in a countersurveillance training session in Mexico in February 2020.

PHOTOGRAPH:
KAREN ASTRID
ARELLANO

“I’m grateful for the interest shown in promoting the journalistic work of women, especially in Honduras,” said Sarai Alvarado, a reporter in Honduras. “Opportunities are scarce to practice journalism safely when it comes to journalism that’s not praising the government or state authorities. In-depth and investigative journalism is going through tough times,” she said.

Some of the training modules on investigative work included journalists who performed high-profile, successful investigations in the past, including The New York Times reporting on the Walmart corruption scandal in Mexico. It gave reporters an opportunity to ask about the intimidating investigative process, from story concept to the mechanics of doing the reporting to safety and security to getting the story published.

Participants who were already working in investigative journalism prior to the training say it was hugely beneficial to learn they weren’t deserted in this often-lonely work. María Teresa Montaña Delgado said the IWMF, “gave me support and training at a time when I most needed to feel protected. I have always done investigative journalism and was isolated or isolated myself, given the context of corruption and institutional violence in which I work. I will never stop appreciating this opportunity... it helped raise my self-esteem in a very difficult time.”

100 percent of the survey respondents said they changed how they consider security protocols for themselves and for their colleagues. Many respondents also report implementing new practices, such as identifying someone to check in with

regularly while they’re out working or doing risk assessments before launching a project.

Prior to the training “I understood that I should apply security measures, but it wasn’t clear to me how to do that exactly,” said Patricia Isabel Monreal Vázquez, a participant in the Mexico program, who now carries a first aid kit and completes more digital security measures.

The trainings also included sessions dedicated to self-care. In a region where so many reporters are murdered for their work, sessions on meditation, physical and emotional health, and identifying trauma helped generate conversations about the stress that accompanies so much of reporters’ work in Latin America.

“I became aware of my emotional health, something that I had never thought about before, about the damages or effects that we have without realizing it, or that we try to minimize or block,” said Lucía Irene Mimiaga León, a reporter in Mexico. “I immediately began to apply [the tools] and it is a fundamental part of my professional life today... it really changed my perspective and I really appreciate this gift.”

REPORTING AMID COVID-19

Some programmatic elements that were meant to be conducted in person – such as the HEFAT courses for reporters in Honduras – were moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our security trainer, Jeff Belzil, incorporated sessions on reporting amid the pandemic into his online training, from how to react to tear gas to the mechanics of CPR.

One participant, Karla Patricia Arévalo Mancía, said she put this part of her training to use almost immediately, when she identified her newsroom’s personal protective equipment as inadequate. “I could identify the problem because of Jeff,” she said, adding that she reported it to human resources, potentially saving the news outlet money and keeping her colleagues protected.

The arrival of COVID-19 not only affected how the IWMF carried out the remaining elements of the local trainings, but the economic realities for many across the region. More than 70 percent of respondents in the end-of-program survey said they were financially impacted by COVID-19, from a newspaper in El Salvador lowering staff salaries by 20 percent to a freelancer in Mexico losing all of her assignments virtually overnight, to a reporter in Colombia suddenly serving as the sole breadwinner for her family.

“I think the coronavirus has been the most difficult stage of my journalistic career,” said Gilberto Santisteban, a reporter in the state of Baja California Sur, Mexico, who said he’s considered quitting his job and migrating to another country. “When I hear other people talking about investigative journalism, it excites me,” Santisteban said, but he still feels he has more to learn. The training helped Santisteban expand his perspectives on what journalism is and should be, he said: Instead of just focusing on the pain or suffering of a person or a community, Santisteban left the IWMF training believing that “journalism must give options and proposals for change,” an important takeaway amid such challenging times.



Local trainer Lourdes Ramirez leading a session in El Salvador in July 2019.

PHOTOGRAPH:
CECIBEL ROMERO

PARTICIPANTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“The IWMF came along and totally changed my experiences with journalism from within. The support network that was created and the knowledge gained in just over a year has been invaluable.”

– Astrid Arellano, Mexico



Natassia K. Torres and a young girl share a smile in Cúcuta, Colombia, near the border with Venezuela, in 2018. PHOTOGRAPH: MARIANA VINCENTI.

“And thank you. I wanted to say this because you gave us the opportunity to empower ourselves as women journalists, in knowing that there are women leaders out there, and to believe that we are each leaders in our own communities.”

– Reyna Haydee Ramírez Hernández, Mexico

ADELANTE CULMINATION

Within five years, Adelante participants put a several Latin American nations under a journalistic microscope, resulting in hundreds of diverse stories published internationally. Instead of a quick stop in El Salvador or Colombia, we visited the same countries repeatedly, crafting a body of reporting that touches on some of the most important themes in the region – and the world – from the perspectives of multiple reporters and storytellers.

To demonstrate the visual breadth of reporting accomplished by our fellows, we launched a photo exhibit in collaboration with the PHmuseum showing poignant and important changes documented by our fellows, beginning in 2016. Central themes in the exhibition include human rights, international politics, and migration. The virtually curated show includes 75 photographs taken in Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and the U.S.-Mexico border by 30 IWMMF fellows. The images show shared regional struggles, the tragically universal factors

driving migration, the risk of migratory routes, and the protracted and un-ending wait at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The exhibit, inaugurated in February 2021 and entitled ***El Otro Lado (The Other Side)*** speaks to Adelante's goals, demonstrating the breadth and depth of our fellows' reporting and the changes the region has experienced in such a brief period of time.

"I haven't seen anything out there showing this degree of nuance of the region," said Danielle A. Villasana who traveled with IWMMF as a fellow to Honduras and spearheaded the curation of the photo exhibit. "These are issues that might not be breaking news or headline-grabbing work. But by going deep, focusing on the periphery issues of migration, the exhibit lends more intimate context" to a theme that's extremely important in Latin America, and increasingly across the globe, she said.

"This type of regional program is important, and yes, last year we met journalists from our own countries, but due to the pandemic the virtual classes allowed us to meet even more colleagues from other countries and because of that more ideas and regional projects emerged."

– Thirzia Galeas, Honduras