



LATIN AMERICA
WORKING GROUP
EDUCATION FUND

Recommendations for U.S. Engagement to Address Migration from and Displacement within the Northern Triangle of Central America

The Trump Administration's announcement that it would abruptly withhold all assistance from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, if implemented, will likely increase migration from those countries. It ends programs specifically designed to address the roots of forced migration.

And it sends exactly the wrong message. It presumes that governments can physically prevent their citizens from fleeing or migrating, which is simply not possible and violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹ And it fails to put targeted pressure on specific central governments—in Guatemala and Honduras—mired in corruption. Instead, the U.S. government should support programs and policies that help reduce the violence, corruption, and poverty that are leading people to flee.

The Latin America Working Group Education Fund along with Alianza Americas, CARECEN, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), Oxfam, and the Washington Office on Latin America developed this comprehensive set of recommendations (lawg.org/CentAmRecs19) for U.S. policy towards the Northern Triangle of Central America

U.S. policy should address the factors that compel forced migration from the Northern Triangle of Central America. Immigration policies should respect international law and recognize that what is facing the Northern Triangle is, to a considerable extent, a refugee crisis. Encouraging Northern Triangle governments to take the steps they should protect the rights and wellbeing of their citizens is the best step the United States government can take to address the roots of this refugee crisis.

The U.S. government should:

- **Use principled and strong diplomacy to urge governments to address rampant corruption and to spur improvements in protecting human rights and strengthening the rule of law.** This should include enforcing human rights and anti-corruption conditions on aid as well as levying sanctions on corrupt officials. It may mean aid to specific central governments—in this case, Honduras and Guatemala—should be held up due to failure to meet those conditions. But it should never entail sanctions on humanitarian assistance, anti-corruption programs, and civil society organizations.
- **Visibly support activists** working to challenge corruption and human rights abuses.
- **Ensure transparency and accountability in U.S. assistance** and actively consult with a diverse group of civil society actors in the design and implementation of aid initiatives.

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country. Article 14. (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

U.S. assistance should help address the roots of migration. The following are priority areas for well-targeted assistance, many of which are currently included in USAID and other programs:

- Expand support to **community-based violence prevention programs** to reduce crime and violence, with an emphasis on youth at risk. This includes resources and technical assistance to allow youth to successfully leave the influence of gangs and reconcile with their families and communities. Expand support to **address sexual and gender-based violence** against women, girls, and LGBTI persons.
- Support functioning **national efforts and international mechanisms to reduce corruption and impunity**, including the CICIG, MACCIH and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights offices and programs in each country. Provide assistance and use diplomacy to encourage the strengthening of judicial independence and transparent processes for selection of prosecutors and judges. Offer assistance and use diplomacy to protect human rights defenders and journalists.
- Support the **expansion of small-scale farming and access to markets**, in particular for youth and women, to address rural poverty and the impact of climate change.
- Urge governments to **investigate and prosecute security force abuses and end a military role in policing**, and do not provide any assistance for abusive security forces or militarized policing.

Practices such as turning potential refugees and migrants back to Mexico, separating families and deporting parents without their children, and denying individuals access to protection or to full and fair due process violate U.S. and international law, increase vulnerability, and do nothing to deter future forced migration. Instead, the U.S. should focus on:

- Passing a **permanent solution that includes a pathway to citizenship for TPS beneficiaries and Dreamers**.
- Ensuring **due process and access to protection for asylum seekers** at the U.S.-Mexico border without returning them to harm.
- **Strengthening Mexico's refugee system** by providing assistance to international and civil society organizations, in order to strengthen Mexico's capacity to process asylum claims.
- **Building safe and comprehensive reintegration initiatives** with governments and civil society in the region to ensure that individuals who want to stay can do so safely in their communities while avoiding the repatriation of individuals in need of international protection.
- **Restoring in-country processing and expand third-country processing for resettlement** for at-risk Central Americans. Refugee resettlement should be instituted not as a replacement for ensuring access to asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border, but rather in addition to it.

See this comprehensive set of recommendations (lawg.org/CentAmRecs19) for U.S. policy towards the Northern Triangle of Central America.

Contact:

Lisa Haugaard, lisah@lawg.org

Daniella Burgi-Palomino, dburgipalomino@lawg.org

Publication Date: 2019