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# COLLABORATIVE MIGRATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

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# Executive Summary

The humanitarian situation in the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) has deteriorated significantly in recent years, prompting an increasing number of people to make the difficult choice to migrate. In addition to the long-standing drivers of migration, including violence, lack of employment opportunities, and corruption, the COVID-19 pandemic, recurrent droughts, and two hurricanes in November 2020 have devastated communities, created crisis-level food insecurity, and placed the Northern Triangle on the map with other global humanitarian emergencies. This situation demands both immediate responses and a new, strategic approach for managing regional migration in the medium- to long-term.

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The United States has strong national security, economic, and humanitarian interests in promoting safe, orderly, and humane migration. Executive Order 14010, *Creating a Comprehensive Regional Framework to Address the Causes of Migration, to Manage Migration Throughout North and Central America, and to Provide Safe and Orderly Processing of Asylum Seekers at the United States Border*, issued February 2, 2021, lays out a four-pronged comprehensive approach that includes addressing the root causes of irregular migration, collaboratively managing migration in the region, expanding lawful pathways for protection and opportunity in the United States, and restoring and enhancing asylum processing at the U.S. Southwest border. The Executive Order directs the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, in coordination with U.S. departments and agencies, to prepare a Root Causes Strategy and a Collaborative Migration Management Strategy (Migration Strategy).

The Migration Strategy identifies and prioritizes actions to strengthen cooperative efforts to manage safe, orderly, and humane migration in North and Central America, in line with our Nation’s highest values, while the Root Causes Strategy addresses the underlying factors leading to migration. Both strategies are driven by the U.S. Government belief that all individuals should be able to find safety and achieve a stable and dignified life within their own countries. When that is not the case, asylum and other legal migration pathways should be readily available to those who need them.

The Migration Strategy aims to address urgent humanitarian needs in the Northern Triangle, promote access to protection, improve secure and humane border management, provide support for returnees, and enhance access to legal pathways for migration. Individuals and families’ internal and international migration decisions are often interlinked with their access to protection, the availability of legal migration pathways, and their ability to live safe and prosperous lives. By enhancing humanitarian support, regional protections, and investing in migration management, the United States will help build a more stable region, strengthen legal pathways for those who choose to or are forced to migrate, and reduce irregular migration.

The U.S. Government consulted with a wide range of stakeholders to inform the Migration Strategy, including governments in the region, Members of Congress and their staff, international organizations, civil society organizations, labor unions, and the private sector.



# Strategic Environment

Over the past decade, millions of people from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have arrived at the U.S. Southwest border in search of protection and opportunity. Some of the primary factors driving this migration include high levels of crime and violence, lack of economic opportunity, weak governance, widespread corruption and impunity, the impacts of climate change, food insecurity, and the desire for family reunification. Since 2015, hundreds of thousands of these individuals submitted asylum claims in the United States, showing the scope of regional challenges and contributing to significant backlogs in the U.S. asylum system.

In recent years, there have been some successes in strengthening regional protection frameworks, recognizing and responding to internal displacement, creating effective labor migration programs, strengthening border security, and scaling returnee reception efforts. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and two devastating hurricanes in Central America in November 2020 strained governments in the region, caused severe economic disruption, and made efforts to institutionalize migration management practices even more challenging.

The United States has strong relationships with a broad range of actors who will be critical partners for implementing the Migration Strategy. The United States will continue to work closely with international organizations that provide support for refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returned migrants, and assist governments with migration management in the region. Civil society organizations will also be critical as they advise governments on protection and migration management and implement programs to fill gaps in government capacity. The private sector will be an important player in expanding and supporting labor migration pathways and has a role in helping governments improve migration management.



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## U.S. Interests

The United States has strong national security, economic, and humanitarian interests in reducing irregular migration and promoting safe, orderly, and humane migration. Irregular migration places a heavy burden on U.S. border security infrastructure and personnel and presents opportunities for criminal actors to exploit vulnerable populations. The United States is seeking to expand U.S. and international efforts to address the humanitarian situation in the Northern Triangle and improve regional collaborative migration management by promoting strong migration management practices, encouraging greater regional responsibility-sharing, and expanding access to legal pathways. The United States believes that all individuals should be able to find safety and achieve a stable and dignified life within their own countries, while ensuring that asylum and other legal migration pathways remain available to those who need them.



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## Desired End State

This Strategy does not seek to end migration. To the contrary – human mobility is part of the fabric and tradition of Central and North America. Instead, the Migration Strategy envisions that migration within and through Mexico and Central America would be by choice, and that fewer people would feel compelled to make that choice. It envisions more legal pathways available for those who choose to leave. If individuals must flee, they would have options to seek protection within their own countries, within the region, or in the United States.



## Strategic Objectives

Our strategic objectives are to: stabilize populations facing acute needs; strengthen international and in-country protections throughout North and Central America so individuals seeking safety have access to protection and services within their countries of origin or in the region; support third country labor migration programs that facilitate equitable access to work opportunities that ensure and expand worker protections; increase reception and reintegration of returned migrants or IDPs to allow them to find safety and support in their countries of origin; support secure and humane border practices that allow regional governments to regulate the movement of people into and out of their territory and respond to large-scale migration events; coordinate migration messaging campaigns to share accurate and timely information about migration laws and policies and counter mis- and disinformation; and expand lawful pathways for protection and opportunity in the United States.

As a part of our work, we will:

***Consult and Coordinate:*** The U.S. Government will continue to consult with Congress, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, labor unions, and governments inside and outside the region. We will listen, learn the lessons from past efforts, create an approach that draws on input from across sectors, and develop a broad base of support that advances efforts across the Migration Strategy.

***Communicate:*** We will create a robust communications plan, leveraging independent and social media, to convey our efforts to improve migration cooperation, build support for our approach, and instill hope in the region.

***Assess:*** Throughout implementation, we will build in assessment points to ensure our efforts are producing the desired results, strengthening where needed, adjusting course where warranted, and discontinuing as required.



# Lines of Action

To achieve the strategic objectives set out above, the Migration Strategy sets out concrete lines of effort the United States will pursue to support regional programs to stabilize populations with acute needs; expand access to international protection; strengthen access to protection in countries of origin; expand access to third country labor migration programs that ensure and improve worker protections; assist and reintegrate returned persons; promote secure and humane border management; strengthen regional public messaging on migration, and expand access to lawful pathways for protection and opportunity in the United States. The Migration Strategy will also help guide U.S. diplomatic engagements with governments in the region and outside the Western Hemisphere, including through multilateral fora and platforms, such as the Regional Conference on Migration and the Comprehensive Regional Protections and Solutions Framework (MIRPS).

## 1. Stabilize Populations with Acute Needs

The United States will provide and mobilize assistance to address the increased humanitarian needs in the Northern Triangle given the COVID-19 pandemic, November 2020 hurricanes, and prolonged droughts.

- **Surge U.S. assistance.** The United States will provide increased assistance to address food insecurity and malnutrition, support the agricultural sector to mitigate the effects of droughts and increasingly unpredictable weather and build resilience to future shocks, provide materials to support the rebuilding of shelter and schools, and address the immediate safety and protection needs of refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and other vulnerable populations in the region.
- **Work multilaterally.** The United States will work with the United Nations to mobilize a Humanitarian Response Plan to galvanize international support for the deteriorating situation in the Northern Triangle and coordinate activities under one system.

## 2. Expand Access to International Protection

A critical element of this strategy is expanding access to international protections for refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrants within the region, including new mechanisms for protection referrals. These efforts will be complemented by expanding efforts to integrate refugees into their new communities and specialized programming and support for the most at-risk groups.

- **Build and improve national asylum systems.** The United States will support regional government efforts to strengthen and expand their asylum systems to provide vulnerable individuals with protection closer to home. These systems have historically been limited, but with U.S. support, there is potential to offer protections to tens of thousands of people within

the region. For example, since 2016, the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance has expanded dramatically with U.S. support, opening new field offices and tripling its annual case processing capacity. The United States will continue to work with Mexico to build on this success and with other regional governments to help expand their asylum systems.

- **Establish Migration Resource Centers (MRCs).** The United States will work with international organizations and in coordination with governments to support the establishment of MRCs throughout the region. These facilities will focus on protection screening, services for people in need of protection, and referrals to protection or other lawful migration pathways. MRCs will also have referral mechanisms for existing labor migration and reintegration programs for people who do not have protection needs. Fixed location and mobile MRCs will be strategically located to benefit communities at risk of displacement, those with high levels of emigration, and in major transit hubs.
- **Increase efforts to integrate refugees in the region.** Once people receive protection within the region, they still face the challenge of integrating into new communities. The United States will support inclusion and integration programs that ensure individuals can access livelihood opportunities, services, healthcare, and education, and can develop roots in their new communities. The United States will look to expand successful ongoing integration efforts, such as a program that relocates protection recipients from southern Mexico to industrial belt municipalities in Mexico with labor needs.
- **Support assistance for asylum seekers and refugees.** The United States will increase shelters and other safe space networks for asylum seekers, refugees, and other vulnerable migrants within the region. This assistance also includes, but is not limited to, assisting asylum seekers with access to accurate information, legal representation, education, livelihood opportunities, cash and **voucher** assistance, and health care. The United States will also respond to and support the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) needs for refugees and asylum seekers across the region.
- **Scale up protection efforts for at-risk groups.** While all displaced individuals are vulnerable, some face heightened risks, including women, children, families, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, indigenous peoples, and racial minorities. The United States will support protections for these groups by funding international organizations for targeted programming, encouraging governments to pass and implement legislation that protects these groups, and providing technical assistance to regional government agencies that interact with these populations. Additionally, the United States will work with regional governments to develop human rights violation early warning systems and prevent and respond to human rights violations and abuses against migrants.
- **Enhance efforts to resettle refugees from the region.** In recent years, countries including Australia, Brazil, Canada, and Uruguay have resettled small numbers of refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The United States will continue to work with these countries, particularly Canada, to resettle larger numbers of refugees and encourage other governments to do the same.

### 3. Expand Access to Protection in Countries of Origin

Individuals seeking protection in a third country have often been previously forcibly displaced at least once within their countries of origin before crossing an international border. By strengthening protection, assistance, and solutions for IDPs and encouraging governments to find durable solutions, the United States can help people obtain safety and sustainable livelihoods within countries of origin and reduce international forced displacement.

- **Improve protections for IDPs.** IDPs are often unrecognized or marginalized in their countries of origin, making it a significant humanitarian, human rights, and governance issue. The United States will encourage governments to pass legislation and implement laws recognizing and providing services for IDPs, and fund additional research on internal displacement within the region to better understand the needs of IDPs.
- **Support humanitarian assistance and integration for IDPs.** The United States will continue to increase shelters and other safe space networks for IDPs. The United States will support programs offering solutions for these populations, such as relocation and integration support to help them reestablish their lives in their new homes. This support includes, but is not limited to, assisting IDPs with access to protection services, prevention and response to gender-based violence, education, livelihood opportunities, cash and voucher assistance, health care and WASH needs.
- **Include IDPs and affected communities in development programs.** The United States will include and prioritize IDPs in development programs that aim to combat insecurity and gender-based violence, reduce poverty, increase opportunities to access permanent housing, improve health outcomes, increase access to justice, and strengthen access to education.

### 4. Expand Third Country Labor Migration Programs While Improving Worker Protections

The United States aims to enhance coordination with third countries on labor migration programs and worker protections. Third country labor migration programs allow individuals to find work opportunities and provide support for their families through formalized migration channels. These programs also provide critical labor to economies, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in reduced inter-regional travel.

- **Expand access to third country labor migration programs with worker protections.** The United States will support efforts to develop and expand labor migration programs that protect workers' rights and allow equitable access for individuals in the region to find meaningful economic opportunities in a third country while improving worker protections. Some successful regional labor programs could be expanded or replicated in line with local conditions. For example, in 2020, a successful pilot program connected workers from Panama with the seasonal coffee harvest in Costa Rica. This program then expanded to

include temporary workers from Nicaragua. The United States will support countries with labor needs in developing or expanding similar programs that match regional workers with labor demands, such as Canada and Mexico's temporary worker programs. The United States will also continue to build the capacity of governments in the region to better assist their populations in identifying temporary labor opportunities and eliminating discriminatory or exploitative labor practices.

- **Expand support for migrant worker protections, including ethical recruitment.** Ensuring protections for migrant workers are a critical component to sustainable and ethical work programs. The United States will enhance our programming to ensure recruitment and treatment of migrant workers is fair and humane throughout the region by engaging with the private sector, labor unions, governments, and civil society. The United States will also increase awareness and access to resources to combat labor trafficking.

## 5. Assist and Reintegrate Returned Persons

Governments have limited capacity to receive their nationals from other countries. Individuals who are returned to their countries of origin may have spent significant time living abroad and may have limited knowledge on how to obtain documentation, access information, find work, or receive support. Returned minors may require support to re-enroll in the education system, and they and their families may benefit from psychosocial and other support to increase resilience and overall well-being. Targeted development assistance programming to reintegrate returned persons into their communities helps them create safe and prosperous lives in the region.

- **Expand reception centers.** The United States will continue to expand the capacity of governments to develop and sustain reception centers for individuals returning to their countries of origin. This includes expanding existing centers and adding reception centers. These centers will allow governments to provide specialized services, conduct interviews, connect individuals to reintegration opportunities, and provide medical, counseling, and protection services.
- **Build out reintegration services.** The United States will work with governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to create and expand reintegration programs that match returnees with jobs that capitalize on skills learned abroad, such as English language proficiency, IT skills, and training in the hospitality sector, among others. These services will also assist returnees with integration in their host communities through job placement and skills training, and will address the different needs of returnees, including women, minors, and indigenous people. To support these populations, the United States will work with regional governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations to include and prioritize returnees in development programs and community initiatives.
- **Assist with reintegration policies and frameworks.** The United States will work with regional governments to develop and implement policies that enable individuals to overcome structural challenges associated with being returned after living overseas. Programs will facilitate validation of school and work certifications, financial inclusion, nationality status

and identity card issuance, and access to social programs. The United States will also engage in outreach campaigns to help prevent discrimination.

- **Support Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR).** The United States will continue to support efforts by regional governments and international organizations to offer individuals the opportunity for AVR should they choose to return to their countries of origin. These AVR opportunities will provide these individuals with a safe, humane, and dignified way to return home.

## 6. Foster Secure and Humane Management of Borders

Securing borders with humane border management policies and practices is essential to reducing irregular migration and collaboratively managing migration within the region. Making advances in these areas requires improving institutional governance and regulation within the region, encouraging collaborative migration and border management approaches, providing equipment to modernize and improve border infrastructure and technology, and taking a comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting migrant smuggling and human trafficking investigations and enforcement.

- **Provide institutional capacity building, training, technical assistance, and support equipment needs for national migration authorities in the region.** The United States will work with governments to build the region's migration-focused departments and agencies to develop institutional capacity; establish comprehensive training programs and dedicated professional units, consistent with international law and standards; ensure the development and implementation of humane migration practices; screen for protection needs; institute transparency and internal accountability mechanisms; and secure the necessary resources to fulfill their missions. The United States will also consider support to regional governments to improve their ability to identify, process, detain, and repatriate individuals without legal standing in a safe and humane manner that is consistent with international law.
- **Support for border infrastructure and technology.** The United States will provide support for the modernization of border infrastructure and technology. Improved technology allows regional border officials to monitor trends, identify persons of interest, share information with regional government partners, and use resources more efficiently. Such efforts can help enhance economic growth and reduce corruption in the region by professionalizing ports of entry and customs authorities and processes. The United States will also support deploying technologies to increase electronic processing of people and goods, implementing of the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Act, and promoting best practices in professional responsibility.
- **Enhance migrant-smuggling and human-trafficking investigations and prosecutions.** The United States, in partnership with regional governments, will expand and strengthen efforts to hold individuals involved in migrant smuggling, human trafficking, and other crimes against migrants accountable, whether through prosecutions, or, where appropriate, additional financial or other penalties. For example, in April 2021, the United

States announced Operation Sentinel, a new counter-network targeting operation focused on transnational criminal organizations involved in migrant smuggling.

- **Promote collaborative migration and border management approaches.** The United States will facilitate and encourage regional approaches to address migration, including improving or establishing legal frameworks; promoting border security, migration management, and migration enforcement best practices and standards; and enhancing coordination and information sharing. The United States will also continue to support regional coordination to address large coordinated migration movements.
- **Increase information sharing with and among regional partners.** The United States will continue to develop and expand efforts to share information with and among regional partners on humane border management best practices, migrant smuggling and human trafficking efforts, and data sharing and transparency. This includes replicating and enhancing support for programs that facilitate greater information sharing and coordination among local and regional law enforcement, and with U.S. law enforcement partners related to migrant smuggling, human trafficking, other crimes against migrants, and gang activity.

## 7. Strengthen Regional Public Messaging on Migration

Effective regional communications and messaging allow the United States and other governments to share factual information about their migration policies, counter disinformation, and discourage irregular migration. Partnerships with international organizations and other stakeholders can amplify these messages and provide complementary messaging.

- **Support regional messaging campaigns.** The United States will expand its work with regional governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders to share information on regional migration policies and ensure consistent messaging that discourages irregular migration and promotes safe, orderly, and humane migration.

## 8. Expand Access to Lawful Pathways for Protection and Opportunity in the United States

The United States is committed to enhancing access to protection and opportunity in the United States. The United States is taking a number of steps to increase access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for Northern Triangle nationals. The United States is also examining parole options for Northern Triangle nationals, as recommended by Executive Order 14010. In addition, the United States is evaluating options to enhance access for Northern Triangle nationals to immigrant and non-immigrant visas to the United States, as appropriate and consistent with the law.

- **Restart and expand the Central American Minors (CAM) program.** The CAM program provides certain minors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras the opportunity to be considered for refugee resettlement in the United States. Individuals who are determined to be ineligible for refugee status are considered for the possibility of entering the United States under parole. In March 2021, the United States announced that the CAM program would reopen and process cases that were closed when the program was paused in 2018. In June 2021, the United States announced the expansion of the program to increase the categories of eligible U.S.-based relatives who can petition for their children in the Northern Triangle. The United States will continue to consider ways to expand the program.
- **Expand refugee processing in the region.** The United States is seeking to enhance the capacity of international organizations and civil society to identify and refer more individuals with urgent protection needs. The Costa Rican government paused implementation of the Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA) in September 2020 due to COVID-19. With support from the United States, Costa Rica resumed PTA transfers in early April 2021. In addition, the United States is working to increase USRAP processing capacity in the region during the COVID-19 pandemic, including by implementing and exploring new processes and technologies to support remote case processing. The United States will also continue to explore additional ways to enhance and expand refugee processing in the region.
- **Increase access to nonimmigrant work visas while ensuring worker protections.** Expanding legal pathways for Northern Triangle nationals seeking to provide for their families is an important component of a comprehensive regional migration response. It must also address the vulnerability of workers to abusive labor practices. The United States will undertake efforts to significantly increase the number of Northern Triangle agricultural workers who receive an H-2A visa in FY 2022, paying particular attention to improving recruitment practices in the Northern Triangle and labor conditions in the United States. The United States will enhance outreach and engagement with U.S. employers; work with Northern Triangle governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to develop a more robust pipeline of Northern Triangle nationals who can meet the needs of U.S. employers when there are insufficient U.S. workers who are qualified and available to perform the work; assist the Northern Triangle governments with registering and vetting workers; connect workers with U.S. employers; and engage with labor unions and worker rights organizations to identify ways to improve transparency in the recruitment process and overall worker protections. The United States also made 6,000 supplemental H-2B temporary non-agricultural visas available for Northern Triangle nationals in FY 2021.
- **Reduce immigrant visa backlogs.** The United States aims to reduce the backlog of immigrant visa applications for Northern Triangle nationals as quickly as possible.

