



# A Medium- and Long-Term Plan to Address the Central American Refugee Situation

By Daniel Restrepo and Silva Mathema May 2016

Center for American Progress



# A Medium- and Long-Term Plan to Address the Central American Refugee Situation

---

By Daniel Restrepo and Silva Mathema May 2016

# Contents

- 1 Introduction and summary**
  
- 8 The U.S. response to asylum seekers from Central America**
  
- 10 Medium term: Create a viable regional refugee system**
  
- 21 Long term: Prioritize citizen security rooted in regional change**
  
- 32 Conclusion**
  
- 33 About the authors**
  
- 35 Endnotes**

# Introduction and summary

It is impossible to understand the flow of refugees emanating from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—collectively, known as the Northern Triangle of Central America—without understanding the security and economic conditions in each of the three countries. Despite important differences, the three Northern Triangle countries are among the poorest in the Americas and the most violent in the world.

Based on statistics from the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, or UNODC, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador were three of the five most dangerous countries in the world in 2013—the last year for which U.N. statistics are available.<sup>1</sup> That year, Honduras had the world’s highest per capita homicide rate, at 90.4 homicides per 100,000 people; El Salvador ranked fourth, with a rate of 41.2 homicides per 100,000 people; and Guatemala was fifth, with a rate of 39.9 homicides per 100,000 people.<sup>2</sup>

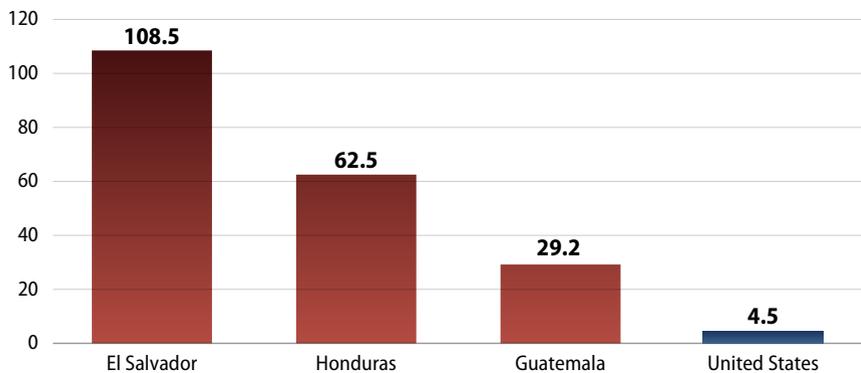
Since then, the situation in El Salvador has dramatically worsened following the 2014 breakdown of a 2012 truce between two of its largest and most powerful street gangs: MS-13 and Barrio 18.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, El Salvador became the most dangerous country in the Western Hemisphere, with a homicide rate of 108.5 per 100,000. This made it 24 times more dangerous than the United States, which had a homicide rate of 4.5 per 100,000 in 2014.<sup>4</sup> The violence in some of these countries’ cities is even worse. For example, San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador, averaged one murder every hour in August 2015—the highest number of murders since the end of the country’s horrific civil war in 1992.<sup>5</sup> The 2015 homicide rates in both Honduras and Guatemala improved to 62.5 and 29.2 homicides per 100,000 people, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

To put these numbers into context, other countries in Central America—such as Costa Rica, at 8.5 homicides per 100,000 people; Nicaragua, at 11.3 homicides per 100,000 people; and Panama, at 17.2 homicides per 100,000 people—all had significantly lower homicide rates in 2013.<sup>7</sup> Nicaragua, for example, is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere,<sup>8</sup> yet it is far safer than all of the Northern Triangle countries.

FIGURE 1

## Homicide rate by country, Northern Triangle and United States

Homicides per 100,000 people\*



\*Note: The most recent data available for the United States are from 2014. Data for the Northern Triangle countries are from 2015.

Source: David Gagne, "InSight Crime's 2015 Latin America Homicide Round-up," Insight Crime, January 14, 2016, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/insight-crime-homicide-round-up-2015-latin-america-caribbean>; Federal Bureau of Investigation, "2014 Crime in the United States," available at <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s./2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/tables/table-1> (last accessed February 2016); World Bank Group, "Health Nutrition and Population Statistics: Population estimates and projections," available at <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspxsource=Health-Nutrition-and-Population-Statistics:-Population-estimates-and-projections> (last accessed February 2016).

These safety differentials help explain why some from the Northern Triangle countries are fleeing not only to the United States but also to neighboring countries.<sup>9</sup> From 2008 to 2014, the United Nations documented a 1,179 percent increase in Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran asylum applications in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize.<sup>10</sup> From the beginning of fiscal year 2014, more than 120,000 unaccompanied children and an additional 120,000 people in family units—generally mothers with children—have come to the United States.<sup>11</sup>

El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala also rank among the top four in terms of femicide rates—the killing of women and girls—globally. Last year, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, released a report revealing that women who fled the Northern Triangle and Mexico for the United States described “being raped, assaulted, extorted, and threatened by members of criminal armed groups, including gangs and drug cartels.”<sup>12</sup>

High homicide and femicide rates are not the only indicator of rampant crime and violence in the Northern Triangle. Extortion, for example, is endemic. It is estimated that residents of these three countries pay a total of at least \$641 million in extortion annually.<sup>13</sup> The latest available statistics also show a sevenfold increase in kidnapping in El Salvador between 2012 and 2013.<sup>14</sup>

These levels of crime and violence across the Northern Triangle did not arise in a vacuum: They are fueled by profound economic insecurity. More than 40 percent of Salvadorans live in poverty—and more than 12.5 percent live in extreme poverty. The economic situation is even worse in Guatemala and Honduras. In Guatemala, 54.8 percent of people live in poverty and 29.1 percent live in extreme poverty, whereas, in Honduras, those figures are 69.2 percent and 45.6 percent, respectively.<sup>15</sup>

Poverty, however, is not the region's only economic challenge. Inequality—a long-standing feature of Central American economies—remains staggering across the Northern Triangle. Based on the latest available comprehensive data from 2011, Honduras and Guatemala rank among the bottom 12 countries in the world in terms of their Gini coefficients—a figure used to measure income and consumption disparity—while El Salvador ranks 30th.<sup>16</sup> The rankings place the Northern Triangle nations among countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the poorest in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as Angola, the Central African Republic, South Africa, Haiti, and Zambia.<sup>17</sup>

The region's economic challenges are exacerbated by a relative lack of global competitiveness. Guatemala, at 78; Honduras, at 88; and El Salvador, at 95, all rank in the bottom half of the 140 countries examined in the 2015 World Economic Forum's "Global Competitiveness Index." Each ranking is weighed down significantly by the business cost of crime and violence, where the countries rank near dead last: Honduras, at 133; El Salvador, at 137; and Guatemala, at 138.<sup>18</sup> Although Central America launched a regional economic integration system in 1993 with the creation of the Central American Economic Integration System, or SICA, effective integration has been hampered by—among other factors—a lack of critical cross-border infrastructure that has held back the region's global competitiveness.

Deeply dysfunctional judiciaries across the Northern Triangle also contribute to the region's run-away levels of crime and violence, as well as its lack of economic development and competitiveness. Impunity is a fact of life in the region: The vast majority of serious crimes go unpunished by judiciaries that are either corrupt, institutionally incapable of effective prosecution, or both.<sup>19</sup> The inability of courts to administer justice and protect basic rights serves as an enormous deterrent to investment in the region, which could drive expanded economic development.<sup>20</sup>

All of these factors—extreme poverty; a lack of opportunity; a dysfunctional justice system; and astonishingly high rates of violence and crime—combine to push children and families out of the region. This report, along with a compan-

ion report focusing on short-term recommendations, lay out a comprehensive approach to the Northern Triangle refugee issue. Given the deep roots of the challenges facing the Northern Triangle countries, there is no simple solution—this crisis will not be solved overnight.

Thus, this report provides two sets of proposals: medium and long term. The medium-term recommendations focus on refugee processing solutions both in the countries of origin and across the region, giving children and families a place to flee in the region without having to make the dangerous journey to the United States. The long-term recommendations, meanwhile, aim to tackle the root causes of violence, poverty, and insecurity facing the Northern Triangle. These focus on integrating U.S. efforts—within the U.S. bureaucracy and across the Northern Triangle—as well as efforts by the United States and Central America to enhance economic development, promote the rule of law, and target illicit networks.

---

## Recommendations for the medium term

### Regional solutions

- The United States should improve the interview and review process under the Central American Minors, or CAM, program<sup>21</sup> to effectively process and resettle children fleeing the Northern Triangle countries. The United States should conduct emergency evacuations for children at risk of immediate harm and should adjudicate their claims for refugee status and/or parole as quickly as possible.
- The United States should continue to fund and work with the UNHCR to assist Mexico and Central American countries in strengthening their capacity to efficiently and fairly register refugees, as well as improve Refugee Status Determination, or RSD, procedures.
- Latin American countries should also partner with the UNHCR to create additional processing centers to assess populations of concern so that more children and families can make it through the system properly and be identified as refugees.
- The United States should also work with governments and nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, in Latin America to raise awareness among those apprehended about their right to apply for asylum, as well as strengthen the Latin American countries' asylum systems.

- The United States and other countries in the region should provide resources to countries of first asylum—typically, the country where an individual is recognized as a refugee and is protected, yet one that may not always provide a durable solution for resettlement—to promote permanent resettlement and successful integration.<sup>22</sup>
- The United States should also increase its resettlement quota for Central America and urge other countries, such as Canada, to do the same.
- The United States and other countries, in partnership with local and international organizations, must support reception and integration efforts for children and families returning to the Northern Triangle. They should also build the capacity of the Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan governments so that they can effectively provide reintegration support for repatriated individuals.<sup>23</sup>

---

## Recommendations for the long term: Promote citizen security rooted in regional change

The United States must recognize that fundamental change across the Northern Triangle requires buy-in from regional governments, elites, and societies and should use all available policy and diplomatic tools in order to encourage these groups to focus on meaningful change that promotes citizen security and sustainable economic development.

### Integrate efforts in Central America and in the United States

- The United States must ensure that all departments and agencies supporting citizen security efforts in the Northern Triangle do so in an integrated fashion. Adopting an enhanced version of the Partnership for Growth, or PFG, launched with El Salvador in March 2011 would facilitate such integration.<sup>24</sup>
- In addition to bridging bureaucratic divisions, U.S. efforts across the three Northern Triangle countries require greater coordination. The president should formally designate a senior-level special presidential coordinator for the Northern Triangle to accomplish this coordination.

- The U.S. should also sustain balanced investment in regional efforts to enhance citizen security through the development of robust rule-of-law institutions and equitable economic development.

### Bolster effective rule-of-law institutions

- International actors, including the United States, can and should assist in creating and fortifying the professional police forces, credible judiciaries, and effective penal institutions needed to establish accountability and the rule of law in the Northern Triangle countries. To that end:
  - Northern Triangle countries need to ensure that sufficient resources are available for rule-of-law institutions by first redirecting resources currently diverted to private security to the state.
  - Police reform efforts must focus on building police forces rooted in communities from the bottom up.
  - Judiciaries should outsource their most vexing prosecutions through extradition and supranational support for national rule-of-law institutions, at least in the short term.
  - With prisons across the region filled beyond capacity, the United States must work with other international actors—particularly the European Union and the United Nations—that have the resources and capacity to engage on prison reform and management issues in the region.
- Too often, femicides and domestic violence go unpunished in the Northern Triangle countries. These nations must prioritize the prosecution of these crimes in order to make the countries safe for women and girls.
- The United States and other nations should help to strengthen civil-society oversight capacity as a means to monitor and hold accountable security, justice, and penal systems.

### Target illicit networks

- The time has come for the United States to designate for sanctions additional criminal organizations that are responsible for the crime and violence across the region, as well as the wide-scale human trafficking they engage in across the region and into the United States.

- The United States must also target bulk cash—the life blood of many transnational criminal organizations, or TCOs. The U.S. government should, at a minimum, radically reduce—if not altogether eliminate—high-denomination bills.

### Leverage partnerships

- The Obama administration should continue to leverage security cooperation with Colombia and Mexico to benefit countries in the Northern Triangle.
- Given the importance of the economic development component to a comprehensive approach to enhancing citizen security, the United States must also continue to leverage the Inter-American Development Bank—where it is the largest shareholder—as a source of funding for development projects.

Tackling the root causes of violence and structural poverty throughout the Northern Triangle cannot happen overnight. Creating a viable refugee processing solution in the countries of origin and in the region; bolstering the rule of law and citizen security in the Northern Triangle; and targeting TCOs, however, are important places to start. With time—and with a sustained commitment from the Northern Triangle countries, as well as from the United States and other partners throughout the Western Hemisphere—these root causes can be ameliorated. Doing so would give children and families the safety and security needed to avoid attempting the dangerous journey to the United States.

With time ... these  
root causes can  
be ameliorated.

# The U.S. response to asylum seekers from Central America

The U.S. government's initial international response to the increased flows of migrants from the Northern Triangle countries was threefold. First, the United States launched an aggressive public information campaign in the summer and fall of 2014 across the countries of the Northern Triangle to underscore the dangers and unpredictability associated with the perilous journey through Mexico to the United States.<sup>25</sup> Second, it encouraged Mexico to take a number of steps to stem the tide of individuals transiting the country en route to the United States. For example, it successfully urged Mexico to temporarily halt “La Bestia”—a freight rail train that traversed Mexico from south to north and served as a particularly dangerous means of transportation for northbound migrants and asylum seekers who rode on top of it—and to increase enforcement along the route to stop people from riding on it once it resumed.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the Obama administration also ramped up existing efforts to support Mexico's border enforcement on its southern border with Guatemala.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, the United States sought to significantly expand existing programs under the Central American Regional Security Initiative, or CARSI—a U.S. assistance program launched in 2008 to improve citizen security across Northern Triangle. The Obama administration also pushed El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to develop a joint plan to address the root causes of insecurity wracking their countries. The resulting “Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle” laid out in broad terms a region-wide integrated plan to address the crisis's root causes. It identified four strategic lines of action—stimulating economic production; enhancing human capital and its utilization; improving public safety and access to justice; and strengthening institutions to enhance people's trust in government—as well as initial steps toward implementation.<sup>28</sup>

After Congress rejected an initial Obama administration request for an emergency \$1 billion supplemental appropriation to support its efforts relating to the 2014 influx of Northern Triangle migrants in FY 2015, the administration sought \$1 billion in its FY 2016 budget to support the “Alliance for Prosperity.”<sup>29</sup> Congress

appropriated 75 percent of the administration's FY 2016 request, or \$750 million. While this funding is intended to tackle the root causes of violence and poverty, Congress attached some important conditions to the release of these funds, requiring certain actions by the governments of the Northern Triangle countries.

Twenty-five percent of the funds appropriated, for example, cannot be spent until the U.S. secretary of state certifies and reports to Congress that those governments:

- Inform their citizens of the dangers of the journey to the southwest border of the United States
- Combat human smuggling and trafficking
- Improve border security
- Facilitate the safe return, repatriation, and reintegration of unauthorized migrants<sup>30</sup>

An additional 50 percent of the funding cannot be spent until the Northern Triangle countries:

- Combat corruption and strengthen public institutions
- Improve civilian jurisdiction and counter activities of criminal organizations
- Protect human rights
- Support programs to promote equitable growth
- Implement effective civil society consultations
- Increase government revenues<sup>31</sup>

In its FY 2017 budget, the administration is seeking an additional \$750 million for the region.

Ultimately, lasting solutions to the Central American refugee situation will arise

# Medium term: Create a viable regional refugee system

through tackling the root causes of violence and structural poverty in the region. But in the interim, the United States and other countries in the region can work to build up a viable refugee-processing program in Mexico and Central America. This should include strengthening the existing Central American Minors program in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, as well as bolstering the capacity of other countries in the region to house, integrate, and process prospective refugees.

---

## Regional solutions

### Refugee processing in countries-of-origin

In the fall of 2014, the Obama administration announced a new “in-country” refugee processing program called the CAM program.<sup>32</sup> While people usually have to be outside of their country of origin to qualify for refugee protections, this initiative allows certain vulnerable children in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to apply for asylum without having to first leave their home country, giving children a legal pathway to obtain protection without being forced to expose themselves to additional danger on the journey north. While CAM recipients are generally eligible to enter the United States as refugees, the program also allows some children who do not meet the strict requirements for refugee status to nonetheless enter the United States temporarily through a grant of humanitarian or significant public benefit parole from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, or USCIS.<sup>33</sup> Such a grant is permitted by statute and would allow children, on a case-by-case basis, to come to the United States if they would otherwise be in danger in their home country and meet a number of other criteria.<sup>34</sup>

Under the terms of the program, only children who have a lawfully present parent in the United States are eligible to apply for CAM. As a result, there are close to 1.5 million unauthorized immigrants from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador living in the United States today whose children would not be eligible for CAM.<sup>35</sup> One additional limitation on the ability of Guatemalan children to access the program in particular is that, while 212,000 people from El Salvador and 64,000 people from Honduras living in the United States have received Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, and could, as such, qualify as eligible parents under CAM, Guatemala has never had a TPS designation.<sup>36</sup>

The CAM program opened for applications on December 1, 2014, and in just over a year, close to 6,500 people applied, the vast majority of them from El Salvador.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, given the lengthy requirements—including interviews first with the International Organization for Migration, DNA testing to confirm the child’s relationship to their parent, background and security checks, interviews with the Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, refugee corps, and medical screenings, all before being allowed to come to the United States—only six children had made it through the program in roughly its first year of operation, and merely 90 had even been interviewed by the DHS.<sup>38</sup> Although the U.S. State Department cautioned from the beginning that only “a relatively small number of children” would make it through the process in the first year, advocates have expressed concern at just how slowly the program is operating.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the *Los Angeles Times* reported in April that some parents, stymied by the glacial pace of the program, have instead sent their children with smugglers—among the outcomes CAM was supposed to protect against.<sup>40</sup>

### The strained capacity of Latin American countries’ asylum systems

Neighboring countries—Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama—have received unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle countries over the past few years. From 2008 to 2014, these countries collectively witnessed a 1,179 percent increase in asylum seekers fleeing from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.<sup>41</sup> This increase has overwhelmed the countries’ asylum systems, which have neither the infrastructure nor the resources to respond to refugees and asylum seekers of this magnitude.

Mexico, in particular, has become a major corridor for people fleeing violence in the Northern Triangle countries. Many people either come to Mexico seeking protection or to pass through on their way to the United States.<sup>42</sup> In 2014, Mexico and Central American countries recognized only 8.5 percent of the applicants from the Northern Triangle as refugees.<sup>43</sup> While there have been efforts to address this humanitarian crisis by the UNHCR, governments in the region, and NGOs, there is no organized regional plan to clearly guide the response of the United States and other countries in the region.

In Mexico, for example, the UNHCR points out that the surge of children and families entering the country has put significant logistical and financial pressure on their asylum system.<sup>44</sup> The Mexican government's current policy, in part adopted due to pressure from the United States to control the flow of Central Americans, has been focused more on interdiction—stopping asylum seekers who are transiting through Mexico as a means to reach the United States—and enforcement rather than responding to the surge as a refugee crisis.<sup>45</sup> As a result, Mexico has been spending its resources on detaining and deporting large numbers of individuals instead of investing in its refugee screening and integration programs.<sup>46</sup>

In 2015, Mexico deported 150,170 individuals to the Northern Triangle—an increase of 44 percent from 2014.<sup>47</sup> A 2015 study by the Washington Office on Latin America reported that the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees, or COMAR—which adjudicates refugee protection claims and manages the refugee assistance and integration programs—lacked the staff and funding necessary to handle the increasing number of refugees. In fact, COMAR only had 15 staff members in the entirety of Mexico qualified to conduct interviews with asylum seekers.<sup>48</sup> The increase in asylum seekers, coupled with a lack of resources to process them, leaves at-risk children and families fleeing violence in the Northern Triangle without a chance to obtain refugee status.

Even countries such as Costa Rica, which previously welcomed refugees, temporarily stopped taking asylum applications around October 2014. This halt was largely in response to the changing demography of the asylum population, which stemmed from significant jumps in applications from people fleeing violence in Central America.<sup>49</sup> While Colombians and Cubans are the largest refugee groups in Costa Rica, applications from El Salvador increased by nearly 500 percent from 2010 to 2014, leading to a need to recalibrate its asylum systems.<sup>50</sup>

## Asylum seekers often do not know their rights

Although the number of people seeking asylum in Mexico and other countries is skyrocketing, many individuals who are apprehended may not apply for asylum for a variety of reasons. Sin Fronteras, a nonprofit organization, visited several detention centers in Mexico and found that many detainees did not know about their right to request asylum; they also discovered instances in which COMAR officials failed to provide detainees with adequate information about asylum procedures.<sup>51</sup> And even in cases when detainees were aware of their rights, many did not want to apply for asylum because that would mean staying in the detention centers until their case was resolved. Mexico's requirement that asylum seekers apply for asylum within 30 working days of entering the country poses an additional barrier to accessing the system due to the tight deadline.<sup>52</sup>

In 2015, Mexico apprehended an estimated 170,323 immigrants from the Northern Triangle region and deported most of them.<sup>53</sup> In the same year, only 3,423 migrants applied for asylum in Mexico, 929 of which were recognized as refugees.<sup>54</sup> Concerted efforts in Central American countries to inform asylum seekers about their rights, options, and the processes involved will increase access to the asylum system and the protection it provides.

## A limited number of regional refugee settlement allotments and locations

While resettlement is the most durable solution for refugees, the UNHCR reports that less than 1 percent of the global refugee population were resettled in a third country in 2014, and only 26 countries participated in the UNHCR's refugee program.<sup>55</sup> In FY 2016, out of the 85,000 refugees from around the world that the United States plans on resettling, only 3,000 slots have been allocated for refugees from Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>56</sup> Refugee admissions data shows that, in FY 2015, the United States admitted only 2,050 refugees from Latin American and the Caribbean, falling slightly short of its even more modest target of 2,300 admissions for the year.<sup>57</sup> The relatively small number of refugee slots allotted for Latin America and the Caribbean does not reflect the violent reality in the Northern Triangle and the increasing number of people fleeing the region.

Despite these limitations, the United States has historically resettled the largest number of refugees from around the world each year—and more than all other resettlement nations combined.<sup>58</sup> From 2013 to 2015, for example, the United States admitted nearly 70,000 refugees annually from more than 60 countries.<sup>59</sup> Canada took in about 24,000 refugees on average from 2010 to 2014.<sup>60</sup>

The global challenge presented by the enormous number of Syrian refugees now in need of resettlement introduces a new dimension to the conversation of refugee resettlement. While the United States has pledged to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in FY 2016, the country is on pace to fall short of that goal. In fact, only 1,300 Syrian refugees were resettled in the United States in the first half of FY 2016.<sup>61</sup>

Notably, Canada’s new government welcomed 25,000 Syrian refugees in just under four months—a monumental signal to the rest of the world to do more.<sup>62</sup> Since 2013, other countries—such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and Norway—have also stepped up and pledged to resettle more Syrian refugees.<sup>63</sup>

Given the scale of the Central American refugee situation, current levels of regional participation and allotments appear to be insufficient. Both the United States and Canada, along with other resettlement countries, should increase their yearly allotments for Central American refugees.

Both the United States and Canada, along with other resettlement countries, should increase their yearly allotments for Central American refugees.

### Protection for repatriated children in the Northern Triangle

The shift in U.S. and Mexican immigration policy toward stricter enforcement and deterrence resulted in the countries deporting a combined 226,244 people from the Northern Triangle in 2014, 19,898 of whom were children and adolescents.<sup>64</sup> Children and adolescents who are repatriated to their home countries need support, counseling, protection, access to health and psychological services, as well as other post-deportation services in order to ensure safety.<sup>65</sup> The Center for Gender and Refugee Studies published a report in 2015 revealing that children and adolescents who are repatriated to the Northern Triangle—in El Salvador, for example—often face the same violence and deprivation that they escaped.<sup>66</sup> In Honduras, the Institute for Children and the Family—the national agency responsible for children’s welfare—is weak and underfunded. The agency is unable to protect many repatriated Honduran children, a number of whom are approached by smugglers and traffickers at bus stations as soon as they arrive.<sup>67</sup>

When officials are able to return repatriated children to their families in the Northern Triangle, many times there are no follow-up visits for the child or their families in order to ensure their continued health and safety.<sup>68</sup> When children and adolescents are not claimed by their families in Guatemala, they are often placed in overcrowded state-run shelters that lack medical and other supportive services.<sup>69</sup> In 2013, a delegation from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops visited the Northern Triangle and found that, although there are a patchwork of programs to support children, there are no comprehensive programs to provide reintegration services tailored to the needs of repatriated children and adolescents.<sup>70</sup>

## The Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and other regional efforts to support refugees

The Cartagena Declaration on Refugees of 1984 is a nonbinding landmark agreement that has been adopted by 15 Latin American countries, including Mexico, Honduras, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.<sup>71</sup> The fundamental objectives of the Cartagena Declaration are to provide a common regional framework to reflect the changes in the refugee flows from Central America in the 1980s and to lay the groundwork to establish a harmonized national legislation on refugees among the countries and create programs that view refugees as the responsibility of the entire region.<sup>72</sup> The declaration broadens the definition of refugee beyond the standard set out in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the United Nations' 1967 protocol.<sup>73</sup> The declaration expanded the definition of refugee to include persons fleeing from "generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violations of human rights and other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order."<sup>74</sup> The declaration also features other objectives, such as reiterating a person's right to asylum; nonrefoulement, or protecting refugees against return to a country where they fear persecution; family reunification; voluntary repatriation; and integration of refugees into countries of asylum.<sup>75</sup>

Adopted in 2004, the Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action, or MPA, was a significant regional effort based on the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees and was adopted by 20 states, including Costa Rica and Panama.<sup>76</sup> Created in response to the rising refugee flows from Colombia, the MPA has three main programs for durable solutions: Borders of Solidarity, Solidarity Cities, and Solidarity Resettlement.<sup>77</sup> While the first pillar focuses on improving the capacity of border areas so that they can handle refugees, the second promotes integration programs that increase self-sufficiency among refugees, who predominantly settle in urban areas. The third pillar follows the framework of responsibility-sharing and invites other Latin American countries to open their doors to refugees.

The Cartagena Declaration provides guidance for Latin American countries on ways to correctly identify refugees among the current flow of migrants in the region. The MPA highlights the importance of regional solidarity and provides a framework for establishing a strong hemispheric response to the current refugee crisis.

---

## Recommendations

### Improve the CAM program

Given that children qualifying for CAM are, by definition, ones who have a fear of persecution, harm, or even death in their home countries, the United States should improve the interview and review process so that children are processed and resettled in an efficient and effective manner. And since children have to stay in the same dangerous conditions in their home countries while they wait for their cases to be adjudicated, the DHS and the State Department should create a mechanism to expedite the parole and/or refugee process for children in imminent danger.

Such a mechanism would not mean that any of the security or background checks would be waived. Instead, it would take into account the individual circumstances of the child in question. And for children who would otherwise qualify for CAM and who are in explicit danger, the Obama administration should consider evacuating them from their countries of origin while they await their paperwork to be processed.

### Strengthen regional refugee processing capacity

The United States and other countries should continue to work with the UNHCR to strengthen the capacity of Mexico and the Central American nations to efficiently and fairly carry out refugee screenings, as well as to ensure that potential asylum seekers are referred to the asylum system and not deported before making their claim.<sup>78</sup> The UNHCR is currently working with COMAR to improve the Refugee Status Determination, or RSD, decision-making processes in Mexico, as well as supporting NGOs that provide legal representation to asylum seekers during refugee status determination procedures.<sup>79</sup>

The United States can play an important role in ensuring that Mexico and Central American countries such as Belize, Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua—which receive large numbers of asylum applications—have ample resources to process these applicants. Furthermore, the UNHCR is providing personnel and other resources to reduce RSD backlogs reported in countries such as Costa Rica.<sup>80</sup> The UNHCR itself reported backlogs in processing RSD applications, which reached an all-time high of 252,800 in 2013.<sup>81</sup> Large backlogs create longer wait periods for people who may be in extremely vulnerable circumstances.

In order to increase capacity, Central American countries should work with the UNHCR to create additional processing centers to assess populations of concern, allowing more of them to make it through the system properly and be identified as refugees. In Mexico, in addition to the COMAR's three offices, the UNHCR has offices in Tapachula, Mexico City, and Tenosique, Tabasco.<sup>82</sup> And according to the UNHCR, 40 percent of the asylum applications filed in Mexico come from the UNHCR's Tapachula office.<sup>83</sup> The UNHCR's recently opened an office in Tenosique—which is an important corridor for people fleeing Honduras—and better serves the increased flow of Central American asylum seekers, as well as increases the capacity of Mexican officials to process refugees.<sup>84</sup> The UNHCR, in partnership with the Central American countries, should open additional processing centers in other strategic locations in both Mexico and other front-line countries such as Belize and Costa Rica as a means to help them efficiently process the asylum seekers.

### Raise awareness of the right to apply for asylum

In addition to helping the Central American countries to increase their capacities and streamline their methods of recognizing individuals as refugees, the United States should work with governments and NGOs to inform migrants of their right to apply for asylum. The United States and national governments should partner with local NGOs and the UNHCR to give regular “know your rights” presentations at detention centers to inform apprehended individuals about their legal rights; the availability of pro bono legal representation where available; and procedures to seek asylum or appeal a decision.<sup>85</sup> Increased information among individuals who are fleeing violence will give them a fair chance to advocate their case.

U.S. support in expanding access to existing asylum systems in the region, breaking down the information barrier, and increasing the capacity of responsible institutions to process refugees would likely result in the deportation of fewer individuals who qualify for international protection, lessening the chance of returning them to dangerous places where they fear persecution.<sup>86</sup>

### Strengthen countries of first asylum

The United States and the international community—particularly, more capable partners in the Western Hemisphere such as Canada, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil—need to provide resources to countries of first asylum in order to permanently resettle and integrate larger numbers of asylum seekers. For asylum

applicants, the country that recognizes them as a refugee and provides them protection is typically their country of first asylum.<sup>87</sup> But many times, these refugees end up moving to a third country due to the absence of durable resettlement solutions, resources, and protection in that country—which is why supporting these countries to integrate refugees is necessary.

Integrating refugees means giving them rights—starting with a status that permits them to eventually seek permanent residency—and allowing them to work legally, which would provide them an opportunity to use their skills to flourish in their new country.<sup>88</sup> Besides removing the legal barriers to live and work freely, refugee programs in the first country of asylum should also incorporate services tailored to the needs of their refugee population, such as special health services, housing, employment, and training services, as well as income or in-kind support.

Countries across the Americas, including the United States, have a regional interest in making sure that these refugee programs in first-asylum countries are durable and that refugees integrate successfully into their communities. Because countries of first asylum are already stretched thin from the arrival of thousands of asylum seekers, the United States and others should enhance those nations' capacity to support additional arrivals.

Recently, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the United States will bolster its Central American refugee program. The State Department plans to work with the UNHCR to screen individuals from the Northern Triangle in order to identify refugees and will also rely on local organizations for referrals. These new efforts give the United States an opportunity to partner with local NGOs who are already working closely with at-risk populations, such as internally displaced persons, LGBT individuals, children, and sexual- and gender-based violence survivors. NGOs will be valuable in identifying and referring individuals who may be in the most urgent need of resettlement.<sup>89</sup>

The details of the program are not yet public, but this program should also be available to, among others, unaccompanied children—regardless of family ties in the United States. Local organizations could identify and refer vulnerable children for resettlement and thus create an additional orderly process for their resettlement. This is consistent with the administration's increased commitment to prevent at-risk individuals from making the arduous journey.

## Increase resettlement from the region

To facilitate the success of the newly announced expansion of the Central American refugee program, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and others in the Americas must increase the number of refugee they resettle from the Northern Triangle. In FY 2016, the United States raised the cap for Latin America and Caribbean from 2,300 to 3,000.<sup>90</sup> To meaningfully address the current Central American refugee crisis, the United States should not only meet this allocation but also work toward increasing it.

In addition to the 3,000 slots allocated for refugees from Latin America and the Caribbean, there are currently 6,000 unallocated slots held in reserve in accordance with section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, or INA.<sup>91</sup> Increasing refugee admissions from the Northern Triangle in FY 2016 by utilizing some of those unallocated slots would, of course, limit U.S. capacity to use those slots to admit larger numbers of refugees from other locations—including those from Syria. Instead, the president could recognize that the unabated increase in refugees fleeing the Northern Triangle countries constitutes an emergency refugee situation of grave humanitarian concern under section 207(b) of the INA. This would allow the Obama administration to add to the number of refugees admitted without taking them from elsewhere or from the unallocated reserve.<sup>92</sup> The presidential determination that sets the levels of refugee admissions for FY 2017 should also take into account these needs and increase both the total number of refugees to be resettled in the next FY and the number to be resettled from Latin American countries.

## Support reception and reintegration of children and families who are returned to the Northern Triangle

Finally, Northern Triangle countries must respond to the needs of children and families who are returned to their home countries in the Northern Triangle and support reception and reintegration efforts in order to ensure that children have a safe place to return to and easily reintegrate.<sup>93</sup> The United States should provide resources and support local and international nonprofit organizations working on the ground to receive deported children and families, keep track of their welfare, and establish targeted integration programs. The UNHCR has, for example,

partnered with other international and local organizations in El Edén, Honduras, to establish and operate a temporary reception center for deported Honduran children and is in the process of identifying the needs of deported Salvadoran children in partnership with local NGOs.

These reception centers, while necessary, are only temporary measures. Returned individuals need a more permanent solution for reintegration into the community. Kids in Need of Defense—a nonprofit based in the United States—launched a pilot project in Guatemala in 2010 that helps children who are returning from the United States through deportation or voluntary departure return and reintegrate safely and sustainably. This replicable model provides services, including family reunification, educational support, and skills training.<sup>94</sup>

Both temporary and permanent solutions are needed to provide children and adolescents with adequate protection, care, and other services upon return to their country of origin. The United States and the Northern Triangle countries should support the efforts of the UNHCR and nonprofit organizations working to establish proper reception centers and reintegration programs for the repatriated children while building over time the capacity of Northern Triangle countries to assume responsibility for reintegration.

# Long term: Prioritize citizen security rooted in regional change

Although the insecurity ravaging the Northern Triangle appears insurmountable, recent experience in the Americas suggests there is a path—albeit a long and complex one—to reverse the dynamics fueling the region’s refugee and migration crisis. The United States, working with other interested countries and international stakeholders, must play a key role.

Colombia and its recent history provide important lessons for efforts to build security and promote economic opportunity in the Northern Triangle. Over the past 15 years, Colombia has transformed from a state teetering on collapse—with record levels of violence comparable to those now found in the Northern Triangle—to a country that is both a key regional security exporter and Latin America’s third largest economy. Colombia’s experience demonstrates that countries can come back from the brink and that U.S. assistance—in the case of Colombia, approximately \$10 billion over 15 years—can play a catalytic role in such a process. But properly understood, Colombia’s efforts also show that solutions take time and that sustainable solutions stem not from plans derived in Washington but instead from a national commitment to promote lasting security and development.<sup>95</sup>

The Northern Triangle countries can learn key lessons from Colombia’s experience. Economic elites, for example, must invest in state capacity across the Northern Triangle and abandon their attempts to go it alone when it comes to security. In large measure, Colombia’s advances in security and economic development came only after Colombia’s private sector largely abandoned a go-it-alone security approach in favor of supporting robust state security institutions by paying what was known as a “war tax.”<sup>96</sup> That is, Colombia’s elites agreed to pay more in taxes to the central government to fund the state’s security efforts.

Political leaders across the Northern Triangle, for their part, also need to set aside national rivalries and distrust and instead focus on cross-border cooperation against threats that do not respect national borders. Too often, Central American

... recent experience in the Americas suggests there is a path ... to reverse the dynamics fueling the region’s refugee and migration crisis.

governments pay lip service to regional cooperation while privately championing bilateral assistance flows—over which they can exercise more individual control—from the United States and other donors. That needs to stop.

Recent years have seen incremental progress on these fronts across the Northern Triangle, especially as generational change occurs among elites, but these governments must expand their efforts.

While the United States has attempted—most notably in El Salvador—to play an informal mediating role in bridging historic divides, real change can only come from within. Governments and private sector leaders, regardless of ideology, need to stop viewing one another with suspicion and start working to right what ails their countries.

---

### A comprehensive approach to citizen security

While no level of U.S. assistance can guarantee success absent a society-wide commitment to address the fundamental causes of insecurity across the Northern Triangle, enhancing citizen security and economic development across the Northern Triangle region must be a bedrock of the U.S. approach in the Americas.

Achieving greater security requires a recognition that individuals cannot be secure in their communities without meaningful economic opportunities. U.S. security policy in the Americas has historically not adopted such a view. Instead, it has focused on combatting illicit flows, particularly drug trafficking. Under President Barack Obama's leadership, however, U.S. policy has shifted toward an integrated approach to citizen security in the Northern Triangle countries. That integrated approach must be sustained.

---

### Recommendations

In addition to recognizing the inextricable tie between economic development and security, implementing a comprehensive approach to citizen security requires integrating efforts, both across the Northern Triangle and across the U.S. government; sustaining balanced U.S. investment that is outweighed by significant investment from the Northern Triangle countries themselves; bolstering key rule-of-law institutions; targeting the illicit networks behind much of the region's violence and instability; and leveraging partnerships.

## Integrate efforts in Central America and the United States

The security and development challenges in the Northern Triangle stretch across multiple national borders, various social and class lines, and numerous divisions within U.S. bureaucracy. To succeed, a comprehensive approach to citizen security and economic development will require an explicit focus on integration.

Absent regional cooperation, none of the Northern Triangle countries can solve their considerable challenges. In its programs, policies, and diplomacy, the United States must continue to encourage these nations to work together to formulate and execute regional approaches to regional problems. The Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle represents a positive step toward establishing a regional approach to the challenge. As political administrations change across the Northern Triangle and in Washington, the United States must remain steadfast in urging a cooperative, regional approach—both through its rhetoric and through its program funding decisions.

The formulation and implementation of effective U.S. policy in Central America has also been hampered by two divides rooted in U.S. bureaucratic structures. First, because no single U.S. department or agency has access to all the policy tools needed to implement a comprehensive citizen security and economic development strategy, there is a lack of coordination across the U.S. government. To succeed, policymakers focused on security must work hand in hand with their counterparts focused on development; matters of trade and investment; and domestic policy, such as immigration enforcement. Second, a comprehensive approach that needs to be implemented across three countries—and through three U.S. embassies and their respective country teams—requires an effective, empowered, coordinator.

A basic blueprint exists for the integration of effort, on a per country basis, in the form of the Partnership for Growth, launched with El Salvador in March 2011.<sup>97</sup> Although imperfect, the PFG model forced greater coordination and cooperation among U.S. government departments and agencies engaged in development-related activities in El Salvador. It also centered on working in true partnership with El Salvador by establishing a joint mechanism between the two governments to identify the key impediments to economic growth and devise joint strategies to address them.

Going forward, the PFG model should be enhanced in two ways. First, a PFG-like approach should be extended to the other countries of the Northern Triangle. Second, it should coordinate the efforts of all U.S. departments and agencies whose actions affect citizen security and economic development in the Northern Triangle—even those who do so indirectly. For example, the U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Southern Command need to be part of an enhanced-PFG approach. So, too, does the DHS, whose immigration enforcement policies affect Northern Triangle countries.

The “U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America”<sup>98</sup> provides high-level guidance for such an approach, but such coordination must be more effectively hard-wired into the bureaucracy. Integration across departments and agencies, as well as across the Northern Triangle countries, requires central coordination of the enhanced PFG efforts. To that end, the president should formally designate a senior-level special presidential coordinator for the Northern Triangle. For the past two years, Vice President Joe Biden has provided invaluable political leadership for the U.S. efforts in support of the Northern Triangle countries. However, there needs to be an empowered individual to guide the day-to-day implementation of U.S. support for the Northern Triangle who can balance regional and bilateral considerations, as well as competing department and agency interests on a continual basis. Neither a U.S. ambassador in any given country nor those officials with hemisphere-wide portfolios in the U.S. government have the time or institutional capacity to do so.

### Sustain balanced U.S. investment

As noted, the FY 2016 funds appropriated by Congress provide balanced support for citizen security efforts across the Northern Triangle. They do not fall into the traditional pattern of overemphasizing traditional security assistance while under-resourcing economic development efforts.<sup>99</sup> Of the 2016 funding, 40 percent will be dedicated to development assistance, 24 percent to economic support funds, and 30 percent to security initiatives.<sup>100</sup>

By contrast, more than 70 percent of funding was reserved for security assistance in the early years of Plan Colombia—a joint U.S.-Colombia initiative that was key to bringing Colombia back from the brink of being a failed state.<sup>101</sup> This balanced approach, with at least the additional \$750 million of U.S. support that was requested by the Obama administration in FY 2017, must continue. Future

administrations must sustain the U.S. commitment to support a comprehensive approach to citizen security—that is, ensuring that individuals are safe in their communities and in their daily lives—across the Northern Triangle while ensuring that U.S. investment evolves to meet changing realities on the ground.

As was the case in Colombia—where Colombia has provided 95 percent of the funds used to implement Plan Colombia—sustained U.S. investment is necessary but by no means sufficient to bring lasting change to the Northern Triangle countries. The countries themselves must continue down a path of fiscal reforms that increases their ability to levy and collect taxes and use additional funds for investments in citizen security and economic development. Both U.S. funds and those of its Central American partners should target, in particular, young people across the Northern Triangle by bolstering child welfare systems and by focusing on education, skills training, and empowerment programs. A wide range of religious and civil society organizations in the region have demonstrated success through these programs; U.S. assistance could help bring them to scale.<sup>102</sup>

### Bolster effective rule-of-law institutions

Residents of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras rank last among Latin American populaces when it comes to believing their respective governments can both adequately address crime and solve the problem of corruption.<sup>103</sup> Their skepticism is entirely justified.

Simply stated, the countries of the Northern Triangle lack the professional police forces, credible judiciaries, and effective penal institutions needed to establish and preserve citizen security. International actors, including the United States, can and should assist in creating and fortifying these institutions. Sexual- and gender-based violence often go unpunished in the region. In fact, in Guatemala, only 1 percent to 2 percent of perpetrators of femicides are convicted.<sup>104</sup> The Northern Triangle countries must do more to protect women and girls, as well as to prevent such violence from occurring in the first place.<sup>105</sup>

There is, however, a condition precedent for establishing meaningful rule-of-law institutions—a commitment across society to building and maintaining such institutions. To date, the region’s elites have failed to make such a commitment. Instead, they have long taken on a go-it-alone approach to security. In Guatemala, for example, private security forces outnumber public security forces by at least

... the countries of the Northern Triangle lack the professional police forces, credible judiciaries, and effective penal institutions needed to establish and preserve citizen security.

4-to-1.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, Guatemala spent an abysmal \$179 per capita on social programs and \$48 per capita on security in 2013. These public investments are far below regional norms: Latin American countries spent an average of \$777 per capita on social programs, while Central American countries spent \$101 per capita on security.<sup>107</sup> Meaningful citizen security will not reach street corners in the most violent parts of the Northern Triangle until more resources are devoted to the task, beginning with redirecting those resources diverted to private security to the state.

Additional resources, however, also need to be effectively targeted. Fortunately, recent experiences provide guideposts for building effective police forces across the Northern Triangle. Although efforts need to be sustained by Northern Triangle countries—with U.S. support—to keep the top echelons of police leadership free from corruption through regular vetting, effective police forces, for the most part, need to be built from the bottom up. Across the Northern Triangle, the U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, and the State Department have used a combination of community-based prevention and policing and model precincts to drive police reform efforts at the municipal level. The approach seeks to build out a local police force that members of the community trust. These police forces then serve their communities by emphasizing community engagement and crime prevention through the use of intelligence gathering, targeted investigations, and community involvement.

This approach has been met with success—albeit success that has not yet reached a sufficient number of communities across the Northern Triangle.<sup>108</sup> With U.S. support, Northern Triangle countries need to expand these efforts to additional communities, placing a premium on targeting the most violent communities and those that are generating the highest number of individuals fleeing the Northern Triangle.

Effective police forces, however, can only operate as a part of broader rule-of-law institutions. Police will only be as incorruptible or effective as the courts and penal systems into which they convey law breakers.

In the Americas and around the world, effective judicial reform has proven more difficult than police reform for myriad reasons. Entrenched economic interests, for example, often resist judicial reform, viewing courts that protect a full host of rights—consumer, property, intellectual, and commercial—as a threat to their privileged status. This short-sighted calculus restrains the economic potential of many countries and poses a major hurdle to equitable development. Judicial reform is also hampered by the ability of transnational criminal organizations, as well as national gangs or cartels, to bribe, threaten, or otherwise influence judiciaries.

A key tool in facilitating judicial reform may be what amounts to the short-term outsourcing of a country's most vexing prosecutions. This can happen in at least one of two ways: extradition and supranational support for national rule-of-law institutions. Each allows governments to send a message to their populace that even the most powerful figures are not above the law and relieves pressure on local judiciaries, allowing them to focus on lower-level crime where the possibility of corruption and intimidation is somewhat lessened. The United States and its international partners should facilitate the use of both approaches in addressing the insecurity crisis across the Northern Triangle while also ensuring that these mechanisms do not become long-term substitutes for effective national judicial institutions.

In recent years, the countries of the Northern Triangle have opened the way to extraditions of their nationals to the United States. The extradition of high-profile criminals to the United States can be an important tool to indirectly support rule-of-law reform, particularly to the extent that it disrupts historic patterns of impunity. The United States should also use its criminal laws and immigration authority to vigorously pursue prominent private-sector actors who have aligned themselves with criminal enterprises and remained beyond the reach of local authorities. For example, the U.S. criminal charges against Jaime Rosenthal—a former vice president of Honduras and a prominent business man—as well as his two of his sons for money laundering charges are a welcome step in the right direction.<sup>109</sup> The U.S. Department of Justice should intensify such efforts across the region.

International efforts, such as the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, are also important tools for both rooting out systemic corruption and empowering rule-of-law reform efforts. The CICIG's investigations and prosecutions, coupled with massive civil society protests, have sent an unmistakable message that a culture of corruption at the highest-levels of the Guatemalan government is no longer acceptable. In so doing, it has become Guatemala's most trusted institution, edging out both the Catholic and evangelical churches.<sup>110</sup>

The challenge for the CICIG is to ensure that its work can continue even after it is disbanded—that is, to facilitate the strengthening of Guatemalan institutions rather than act as a substitute for them. That the CICIG works within the context of the Guatemalan judicial system is vital, but in that regard, much work remains to be done—both at a technical level and a reputational one—as CICIG's favorability, at 66 percent, far outpaces that of Guatemala's judiciary, at 25 percent.<sup>111</sup>

Honduras, with support from the Organization of American States, is embarking on a similar effort to bolster anti-impunity efforts with help from the international community.<sup>112</sup> Because the Support Mission Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, or MACCIH, does not exactly mirror CICIG—it is a technical support mission for Honduran anti-corruption institutions and not an independent or quasi-independent investigative body—some have questioned its independence and potential effectiveness.<sup>113</sup> If MACCIH is aggressive in exercising its mandate, it could provide the kind of supranational support necessary in confronting entrenched interests.

Although it has been more reluctant to establish a CICIG—or even MACCIH-like structure—El Salvador recently announced a U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, or UNODC, initiative with U.S. and U.N. backing that seeks to root out corruption and impunity.<sup>114</sup> Bolstered by congressional conditions that require the existence of such an effort before a country can receive much of the recently appropriated \$750 million for the Northern Triangle countries, the Obama administration should continue to encourage El Salvador to create a meaningful internationally bolstered anti-impunity and anti-corruption mechanism akin to CICIG.

The United States and other nations should also help to strengthen civil society oversight in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as to increase their capacity to monitor, oversee, and hold the justice and security systems accountable.

Finally, prison systems across the Northern Triangle are overwhelmed with occupancy rates that exceed 189 percent of official capacity in Honduras; 270 percent in Guatemala; and 325 percent in El Salvador.<sup>115</sup> As the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights observed in the case of Honduras' overcrowded jails, "the State has *de facto* ceded basic aspects of prison administration to the prisoners themselves."<sup>116</sup> Prison reform is, however, an area that the United States probably has little to offer its Central American partners, given systemic shortcomings in the U.S. penal system. Instead, the United States must work with other international actors—particularly the European Union and the United Nations—who have the resources and capacity to engage on prison reform and management issues.

## Target illicit networks

The Obama administration wields a broad range of tools that it should continue to use to dismantle the TCOs behind much of the most egregious crime and violence in the Northern Triangle. In July 2011, the Obama administration issued a national strategy supported by an executive order for countering transnational organized crime.<sup>117</sup> That strategy authorizes the use of financial sanctions, among other measures, against TCOs that adversely affect the national security interests of the United States. At the time the strategy was issued, a handful of TCOs were designated for targeted financial sanctions.

Initially, in the Western Hemisphere, only Los Zetas—Mexico’s most violent and notorious drug cartel—was designated by the U.S. Treasury Department for financial sanctions.<sup>118</sup> The Central American gang Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, was subsequently added,<sup>119</sup> as were a handful of individuals.<sup>120</sup> The time has come to designate for financial sanctions additional criminal organizations responsible for the crime and violence across the region, as well as the wide-scale human trafficking they engage in across the region and into the United States.

Turning designations into realities, of course, requires resources. A linchpin in such targeting efforts is the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, or OFAC. Given the sheer amount of sanctions work spanning a wide range of global flashpoints, OFAC is overburdened and needs additional funding from Congress. Absent additional resources, however, steps should be taken—at least temporarily—to redirect OFAC’s Western Hemisphere resources toward cracking down on human traffickers who prey on despair in the Northern Triangle. No other potential target more directly affects U.S. security interests: These traffickers should be a top priority.

Designations and other efforts to isolate TCOs and freeze their finances are only as effective as the ability of the United States to work with affected partners. U.S. designations of Colombian TCO-related figures, for example, became far more effective when Colombian authorities gained the know-how and political will to simultaneously target TCO assets in Colombia’s financial system.<sup>121</sup> The same needs to happen across the Northern Triangle, as well as with authorities in neighboring countries, such as Mexico and Panama, whose financial systems may be implicated.

It is also vital to target bulk cash—the life blood of many TCOs. To do so, the U.S. government should, at a minimum radically reduce—if not altogether eliminate—high-denomination bills. Peter Sands of Harvard’s Kennedy School of

The Obama administration wields a broad range of tools that it should continue to use to dismantle the TCOs behind much of the most egregious crime and violence in the Northern Triangle.

Business has argued, “[w]ithout being able to use high denomination notes, those engaged in illicit activities ... would face higher costs and greater risk of detection. Eliminating high denomination notes would disrupt their ‘business model.’”<sup>122</sup> Having fewer high-denomination bills in circulation would force TCOs to use more bills to move the same value of currency as bulk cash, making it harder to do business, as more bills weigh more and are harder to conceal. As Sands notes:

*To get a sense of why this might matter to criminals, tax evaders or terrorists, consider what it would take to transport US\$1m in cash. In US\$20 bills, US\$1m in cash weighs roughly 110lbs and would fill 4 normal briefcases. One courier could not do this. In US\$100 bills, the same amount would weigh roughly 22lbs and take only one briefcase. A single person could certainly do this, but it would not be that discrete.*<sup>123</sup>

## Leverage partnerships

In addition to working in partnership with the Northern Triangle countries, the United States must remain focused on leveraging partnerships with other countries and multilateral institutions to help address the refugee and migration crisis emanating from the Northern Triangle.

During the past 15 and seven years, respectively, the United States has invested significantly in bolstering security institutions in Colombia and Mexico. The United States should continue leveraging those investments for the benefit of Northern Triangle countries. For example, Colombia’s National Police have training facilities and programs originally created with U.S. funds that can be used to train Central American police forces at a lower cost than creating new programs and facilities in the region.

To a lesser extent, U.S. investments in bolstering the operational capability of elite Mexican security forces have created relationships and capabilities that can be used to confront the TCOs at the heart of the current dynamics. Deeper transnational law enforcement cooperation is an important element in targeting and dismantling TCOs. Canada’s renewed interest in playing an active role in Latin America and the Caribbean under the leadership of its new prime minister, Justin Trudeau, also provides an opportunity to encourage greater Canadian support for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Given the importance of economic development to enhancing citizen security, the United States must also continue to leverage the Inter-American Development Bank—of which it is the largest shareholder—as a source of funding for development projects. It should also encourage the Northern Triangle countries to turn to other multilateral lending institutions, such as CAF—The Development Bank of Latin America, where the United States is not a member. Although it should be as broad-based as possible, multilateral lending can be particularly useful in financing large-scale regional infrastructure integration, which is a key to unlocking the economic potential of the Northern Triangle.

# Conclusion

Children and families are fleeing the Northern Triangle of Central America to escape extreme violence and crushing poverty. Changing those realities requires a long-term commitment from political and economic elites in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to build robust rule-of-law institutions and promote equitable economic growth. Such a commitment can and should be supported by balanced and sustained U.S. investment, which recognizes that in order to be secure in their communities, people across the Northern Triangle need meaningful economic opportunities coupled with institutions they can trust.

Changing the underlying dynamics across the Northern Triangle, however, will take time. In the interim, the Northern Triangle countries, their immediate neighbors, and the United States should take measures to properly identify and protect refugees in the region. Managing the immediate consequences of this crisis also means the United States must improve how it handles those asylum seekers that do make the perilous journey to the United States.

In a companion report, the Center for American Progress lays out a set of recommendations for ensuring due process protections for asylum seekers in the United States. These include, among other provisions, providing additional information about the asylum and immigration court process to children and families upon arrival and ensuring that all children and other vulnerable immigrants receive counsel in their immigration proceedings. They also require fully resourcing the immigration courts so that each individual can have a fair shot at making a claim for protection.

Taken together, not only would the recommendations in these two reports help manage the short-term aspects of the crisis facing the Northern Triangle, but they would also alleviate the violence and poverty that lead individuals to flee the region, as well as enhance U.S. economic and security interests.

---

## About the authors

**Dan Restrepo** is a Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress. For nearly six years and through two presidential campaigns, Restrepo served as the principal advisor to President Barack Obama on issues related to Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada, serving as special assistant to the president and senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the National Security Council from March 2009 to July 2012 and as an advisor to and surrogate for Obama for America during the 2008 and 2012 campaigns. Previously, Restrepo created and directed The Americas Project—focused on Latin America and on the role of Hispanics in the United States, their future, and the implications for public policy—at the Center for American Progress. First joining the Center shortly after it was established, Restrepo also helped stand up its government and external relations department and served as deputy counsel. Restrepo worked as an associate at the law firm of Williams & Connolly, LLP, and served as a judicial clerk to the Honorable Anthony J. Scirica of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. Restrepo also worked for Rep. Lee H. Hamilton on the staff of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the mid-1990s. Restrepo is a graduate of the University of Virginia and the University of Pennsylvania School of Law.

**Silva Mathema** is a Senior Policy Analyst on the Immigration Policy team at the Center, where she has helped to lead an effort to analyze the economic impact of U.S. immigration policies. Her research focuses on pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant state and local policies, the processes of immigrant integration, and most recently, refugee issues. Prior to joining CAP, she worked as a research associate for the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, where she studied the intersections between race and ethnicity issues and policies regarding affordable housing and education. Mathema earned her Ph.D. in Public Policy from University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where her dissertation focused on the impact of a federal immigration enforcement program on the integration of Hispanic immigrants in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. She received her B.A. in economics from Salem College. She is originally from Kathmandu, Nepal.

---

## Acknowledgements

The authors thank Philip E. Wolgin and Tom Jawetz of the Center for American Progress, as well as interns Kayla Lee and Cesar Hernandez Estrada; Wendy Young, Megan McKenna, Cory Smith, Alex Pender, and Lisa Frydman of Kids in Need of Defense; Michelle Brané, Jennifer Podkul, and Katharina Obser of the Women’s Refugee Commission; Kerri Talbot of the VENG Group; Kevin Appleby of the Center for Migration Studies of New York; and Jessica Jones of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service for their assistance in drafting this report.

---

## Endnotes

- 1 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Global Study on Homicide 2013" (2014), available at [http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014\\_GLOBAL\\_HOMICIDE\\_BOOK\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 In March 2016 the two gangs once again announced a cease-fire—but a fragile one. It is too early to tell if it will stick, and if it will decrease the violence. See, Joshua Partlow and Sarah Esther Maslin, "El Salvador's gangs call a cease-fire, but many doubt it will hold," *The Washington Post*, April 3, 2016, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/el-salvadors-gangs-call-a-cess-fire-but-many-doubt-it-will-hold/2016/04/02/79222748-f5c2-11e5-958d-d038dac6e718\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/el-salvadors-gangs-call-a-cess-fire-but-many-doubt-it-will-hold/2016/04/02/79222748-f5c2-11e5-958d-d038dac6e718_story.html).
- 4 Silva Mathema, "They Are Refugees: An Increasing Number of People Are Fleeing Violence in the Northern Triangle" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2016/02/24/131645/they-are-refugees-an-increasing-number-of-people-are-fleeing-violence-in-the-northern-triangle/>.
- 5 *The Guardian*, "El Salvador gang violence pushes murder rate to postwar record," September 2, 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/el-salvador-gang-violence-murder-rate-record>.
- 6 Mathema, "They Are Refugees."
- 7 U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, "Global Study on Homicide 2013."
- 8 BBC News, "Nicaragua country profile," April 1, 2016, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19735631>.
- 9 InSight Crime found 2015 annual homicide rates in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama to be 11, eight, and 11 homicides per 100,000 people, respectively. See David Gagne, "InSight Crime's 2015 Latin America Homicide Round-up," InSight Crime, January 14, 2016, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/insight-crime-homicide-round-up-2015-latin-america-caribbean>.
- 10 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Population Statistics: Asylum-seekers (Refugee Status Determination)," available at [http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/asylum\\_seekers](http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/asylum_seekers) (last accessed February 2016); U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Unaccompanied Minors: Humanitarian Situation at US Border," available at <http://unhcrwashington.org/children> (last accessed April 2016).
- 11 U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016," available at <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016> (last accessed March 2016); U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children FY 2014," available at <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2014> (last accessed March 2016).
- 12 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Women on the Run: First-Hand Accounts of Refugees Fleeing El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico" (2015) available at <http://www.unhcr.org/5630f24c6.html>.
- 13 Steven Dudley and Michael Lohmuller, "Northern Triangle is World's Extortion Hotspot," InSight Crime, July 1, 2015, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/northern-triangle-world-extortion-hotspot>.
- 14 Organization of American States, "OAS Observatory on Citizen Security – Data Repository," available at <http://www.oas.org/dsp/Observatorio/database/indicadores-details.aspx?lang=en&indicator=28> (last accessed February 2016).
- 15 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "Social Panorama of Latin America" (2014), available at [http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/37627/S1420728\\_en.pdf?sequence=4](http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/37627/S1420728_en.pdf?sequence=4).
- 16 The World Bank, "GINI index (World Bank estimate)," available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI> (last accessed February 2016).
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 World Economic Forum, "Competitiveness Rankings" available at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/competitiveness-rankings/> (last accessed February 2016).
- 19 U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015" (2015), available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>.
- 20 World Economic Forum, "Competitiveness Rankings."
- 21 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "In-Country Refugee/Parole Processing for Minors in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala (Central American Minors – CAM)," available at <https://www.uscis.gov/CAM> (last accessed April 2016).
- 22 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Improving Asylum Procedures: Comparative Analysis and Recommendations for Law and Practice: Detailed Research on Key Asylum Procedures Directive Provisions" (2010), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4c7b71039.pdf>.
- 23 Adriana Beltrán, "Protecting Children Fleeing Violence: Examining the Southern Border Humanitarian Crisis," Testimony before the Congressional Progressive Caucus, July 29, 2014, available at [http://www.wola.org/commentary/wolas\\_adriana\\_beltran\\_testimony\\_before\\_the\\_congressional\\_progressive\\_caucus](http://www.wola.org/commentary/wolas_adriana_beltran_testimony_before_the_congressional_progressive_caucus).
- 24 Embassy of the United States, San Salvador, El Salvador, "Partnership for Growth," available at <http://salsalvador.usembassy.gov/partnership-growth.html> (last accessed February 2016).
- 25 Muzzafar Chishty and Faye Hipsman, "Increased Central American Migration to the United States May Prove an Enduring Phenomenon," Migration Policy Institute, February 18, 2016, available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/increased-central-american-migration-united-states-may-prove-enduring-phenomenon>.
- 26 Tracy Wilkinson, "Mexico crackdown keeps migrants off trains known as 'La Bestia,'" *The Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 2014, available at <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-migrants-crackdown-20140907-story.html>.
- 27 Chishty and Hipsman, "Increased Central American Migration to the United States May Prove an Enduring Phenomenon."

- 28 President Salvador Sanchez Ceren, President Otto Perez, Molina, and President Juan Orlando Hernandez, "Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle: A Road Map" (2014), available at <http://fdbdocs.iadb.org/wdsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=39224238>.
- 29 Heidi Przybyla and Erik Wasson, "Senate Democrats Cut \$1 Billion From Obama Border Funds," Bloomberg, July 22, 2014, available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-07-22/border-crisis-plan-unlikely-before-august-lawmakers-say>.
- 30 The White House, "FACT SHEET: The United States and Central America: Honoring Our Commitments," Press release, January 14, 2016, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/01/15/fact-sheet-united-states-and-central-america-honoring-our-commitments>.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "In-Country Refugee/Parole Processing for Minors in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala (Central American Minors – CAM)."
- 33 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Humanitarian Parole."
- 34 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, "In-Country Refugee/Parole Processing for Minors in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras With Parents Lawfully Present in the United States," available at <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/factsheets/2014/234067.htm> (last accessed April 2016).
- 35 Robert Warren, "US Undocumented Population Drops Below 11 Million in 2014, with Continued Declines in the Mexican Undocumented Population" (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2016), available at <http://jmhs.cmsny.org/index.php/jmhs/article/view/58>.
- 36 TPS is a statutorily authorized presidential designation for people in the United States from a country experiencing circumstances that do not allow people to safely return, such as armed conflict, a major earthquake, a hurricane, or another disaster. See, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Temporary Protected Status," available at <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status> (last accessed April 2016); Madeline Messick and Claire Bergeron, "Temporary Protected Status in the United States: A Grant of Humanitarian Relief that Is Less than Permanent," Migration Policy Institute, July 2, 2014, available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/temporary-protected-status-united-states-grant-humanitarian-relief-less-permanent>.
- 37 The Official Website of Senator John McCain, "Senators McCain, Johnson & Lankford Urge DHS to Clarify Expansion of Resettlement Program for Central American Refugees," Press release, February 8, 2016, available at <http://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/2/senators-mccain-johnson-lankford-urge-dhs-to-clarify-expansion-of-resettlement-program-for-central-american-refugees>.
- 38 Fox News Latino, "First six teens arrive in U.S. legally under Central American Minors program," November 17, 2015, available at <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2015/11/17/first-six-teens-arrive-in-us-legally-under-central-american-minors-program/>.
- 39 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, "In-Country Refugee/Parole Processing"; Michael D. Shear, "Red Tape Slows U.S. Help for Children Fleeing Central America," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/06/us/politics/red-tape-slows-us-help-for-children-fleeing-central-america.html>.
- 40 Molly Hennessey-Fiske, "Frustrated by new U.S. Program to take in migrants, Central American parents turn to smugglers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 2016, available at <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-central-american-migrants-20160420-story.html>.
- 41 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Population Statistics."
- 42 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Central America and Mexico: UNHCR Operational Update" (2015), available at <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Central%20America%20%20Mexico%20Operational%20Update%20-%20April%202015.pdf>.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Central America and Mexico."
- 45 Adam Isacson, Maureen Mayer, and Hannah Smith, "Increased Enforcement at Mexico's Southern Border: An Update on Security, Migration, and U.S. Assistance" (Washington: Washington Office on Latin America, 2015), available at [http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/WOLA%20Report\\_Increased%20Enforcement%20at%20Mexico%E2%80%99s%20Southern%20Border\\_Nov%202015.pdf](http://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/WOLA%20Report_Increased%20Enforcement%20at%20Mexico%E2%80%99s%20Southern%20Border_Nov%202015.pdf).
- 46 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Central America and Mexico."
- 47 Secretaría de Gobernación, "Boletines Estadísticos: 2016 Boletín estadístico mensual," available at [http://www.gobernacion.gob.mx/es\\_mx/SEGOB/Boletines\\_Estadisticos](http://www.gobernacion.gob.mx/es_mx/SEGOB/Boletines_Estadisticos).
- 48 Isacson, Mayer, and Smith, "Increased Enforcement at Mexico's Southern Border."
- 49 Zach Dyer, "Costa Rica sees spike in refugees driven by Northern Triangle violence," *The Tico Times*, June 17, 2015, available at <http://www.ticotimes.net/2015/06/17/costa-rica-sees-spike-refugees-driven-northern-triangle-violence>.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Clay Boggs, Carolina Carreño, and Diana Martinez, "New Data Show that Mexico Has Intensified Its Immigration Operations Without Building an Adequate Refugee Protection System," Washington Office on Latin America, June 24, 2015, available at [http://www.wola.org/commentary/new\\_data\\_show\\_that\\_mexico\\_has\\_intensified\\_its\\_immigration\\_operations\\_without\\_building\\_an\\_](http://www.wola.org/commentary/new_data_show_that_mexico_has_intensified_its_immigration_operations_without_building_an_).
- 52 Karina Sarmiento and Jessica Soley, "Refugee Status Determination in Latin America: Regional Challenges & Opportunities" (Arlington, VA; Oakland, CA: U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants; Asylum Access, 2013), available at <http://asylumaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/refugeestatus.pdf>.
- 53 Secretaría de Gobernación, "Boletines Estadísticos."
- 54 Secretaría de Gobernación, "Estadísticas COMAR," available at [http://www.comar.gob.mx/es/COMAR/Estadisticas\\_COMAR](http://www.comar.gob.mx/es/COMAR/Estadisticas_COMAR) (last accessed March 2016).

- 55 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Resettlement," available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16b1676.html> (last accessed March 2016).
- 56 U.S. Department of State, "Refugee Resettlement In The United States," available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/pl/249076.htm> (last accessed March 2016).
- 57 U.S. Department of State, "Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016: Report to the Congress," available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/247982.pdf> (last accessed March 2016).
- 58 U.S. Department of State, "Refugee Admissions," available at <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/> (last accessed April 2016).
- 59 Refugee Processing Center, "Refugee Admissions Report 2016\_03\_31," available at <http://www.wrapsnet.org/Reports/AdmissionsArrivals/tabid/211/Default.aspx> (last accessed April 2016).
- 60 Kareem El-Assal, "2016: A Record-Setting Year for Refugee Resettlement in Canada?" (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2016), available at [http://www.conferenceboard.ca/commentaries/immigration/default/16-02-02/2016\\_a\\_record-setting\\_year\\_for\\_refugee\\_resettlement\\_in\\_canada.aspx](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/commentaries/immigration/default/16-02-02/2016_a_record-setting_year_for_refugee_resettlement_in_canada.aspx). Note that the data are not clear about how many of the refugees resettled in Canada came from the Northern Triangle in 2014. Government of Canada, "Facts & Figures 2014: Immigration Overview - Temporary Residents: Refugee claimants by top 50 countries of citizenship," available at [http://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/052642bb-3fd9-4828-b608-c81dff7e539c?\\_ga=1.115134279.1322562823.1461613397](http://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/052642bb-3fd9-4828-b608-c81dff7e539c?_ga=1.115134279.1322562823.1461613397) (last accessed April 2016); Daniel Schwartz, "Canada's refugees by the numbers: the data," CBCNews, October 4, 2015, available at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/canada-s-refugees-by-the-numbers-the-data-1.3240640#arrivals>.
- 61 Laura Koran, "Obama pledge to welcome 10,000 Syrian refugees far behind schedule," CNN, April 1, 2016, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/01/politics/obama-pledge-10000-syrian-refugees-falling-short/>.
- 62 Government of Canada, "#WelcomeRefugees: Canada's plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees," available at <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/index.asp> (last accessed March 2016); U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Resettlement and Other Forms of Legal Admission for Syrian Refugees" (2016), <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=52b2febafc5&query=syrian%20resettlement>.
- 63 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Resettlement and Other Forms of Legal Admission for Syrian Refugees."
- 64 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Central America and Mexico."
- 65 Ibid; U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "In Honduras, unaccompanied children and adolescents continue to migrate," July 20, 2015, available at <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/honduras-unaccompanied-children-and-adolescents-continue-migrate>.
- 66 Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, "Childhood and Migration in Central and North America: Causes, Policies, Practices and Challenges" (2015), available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/54e5c3574.html>.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Mission to Central America: The Flight of Unaccompanied Children to the United States" (2013), available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/upload/Mission-To-Central-America-FINAL-2.pdf>.
- 71 Regional Refugee Instruments & Related, "Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama" (1984), available at [https://www.oas.org/dil/1984\\_Cartagena\\_Declaration\\_on\\_Refugees.pdf](https://www.oas.org/dil/1984_Cartagena_Declaration_on_Refugees.pdf); U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Países que incorporan la definición de refugiado establecida en la Declaración de Cartagena en su legislación nacional," available at <http://www.acnur.org/t3/que-hace/proteccion/declaracion-de-cartagena-sobre-los-refugiados/paises-que-incorporan-la-definicion-de-refugiado-establecida-en-la-declaracion-de-cartagena-en-su-legislacion-nacional/> (last accessed March 2016).
- 72 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Persons covered by the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and by the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (Submitted by the African Group and the Latin American Group)," April 6, 1992, available at [http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68cd214.html#\\_ftn2](http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68cd214.html#_ftn2); U.N. High Commissioner's for Refugees, "Cartegena 30+" (2014), available at [http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=t3/fileadmin/Documentos/Proteccion/Cartagena30/Cartagena30\\_Newsletter\\_Feb\\_2014](http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/scripts/doc.php?file=t3/fileadmin/Documentos/Proteccion/Cartagena30/Cartagena30_Newsletter_Feb_2014).
- 73 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees" (1967), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>.
- 74 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Persons covered by the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and by the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees (Submitted by the African Group and the Latin American Group)."
- 75 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Note on Non-Refoulement (Submitted by the High Commissioner)," August 23, 1977, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68ccd10.html>.
- 76 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Latin America (Mexico Plan of Action)" (2007), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/455443b30.pdf>.
- 77 Regional Refugee Instruments & Related, "Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America" (2004), available at [http://www.oas.org/dil/mexico\\_declaration\\_plan\\_of\\_action\\_16nov2004.pdf](http://www.oas.org/dil/mexico_declaration_plan_of_action_16nov2004.pdf).
- 78 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refugee Status Determination," available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16b1d06.html> (last accessed March 2016).
- 79 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Central America and Mexico."
- 80 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Costa Rica: 2015 UNHCR subregional operations profile - Latin America," available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e492456.html> (last accessed March 2016).
- 81 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refugee Status Determination."
- 82 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Central America and Mexico: UNHCR Operation update."
- 83 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Mixed Migration in the Americas," available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a1d50cd6.html> (last accessed March 2016).

- 84 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Central America and Mexico."
- 85 For U.S. context, see National Immigrant Justice Center, "Know Your Rights: Information Packet About Detention, Deportation, and Defenses Under U.S. Immigration Law" (2011), available at <http://immigrantjustice.org/sites/immigrantjustice.org/files/NJC%20%20KYRs%20Manual%20Feb%202011%20ENG.pdf>; National Immigrant Justice Center, "Immigration and You: Know Your Rights Manual for Children and Youth 2014" (2004), available at <http://immigrantjustice.org/sites/immigrantjustice.org/files/Immigration%20and%20You%202014.pdf>.
- 86 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Note on Non-Refoulement (Submitted by the High Commissioner)."
- 87 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "Improving Asylum Procedures."
- 88 U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, "The Integration of Resettled Refugees: Essentials for Establishing a Resettlement Programme and Fundamentals for Sustainable Resettlement Programmes" (2013), available at <http://www.unhcr.org/52a6d85b6.html>.
- 89 David Smith and Nina Lakhani, "US to expand refugee admissions for Central Americans fleeing violence," *The Guardian*, January 13, 2016, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/13/central-america-refugees-united-states-migrants-admission-john-kerry>.
- 90 U.S. Department of State, "Refugee Resettlement In The United States"; U.S. Department of State, "Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016: Report to the Congress."
- 91 The White House, "Presidential Determination - Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2016," Press release, September 29, 2015, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/29/presidential-determination-presidential-determination-refugee-admissions>.
- 92 *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*, Sec 207(b) 8, U.S. Code § 1157, available at <https://www.uscis.gov/iframe/iink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-29/0-0-0-1625.html>.
- 93 Beltrán, "Protecting Children Fleeing Violence: Examining the Southern Border Humanitarian Crisis."
- 94 Kids in Need of Defense, "Guatemalan Child Return and Reintegration Project," available at <https://supportkind.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/GCRRP-Factsheet-English.pdf> (last accessed March 2016).
- 95 For more on Colombia's resurgence and the role played by the United States therein, see Dan Restrepo and others, "The United States and Colombia: From Security Partners to Global Partners in Peace" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2016/02/02/130251/the-united-states-and-colombia-from-security-partners-to-global-partners-in-peace/>.
- 96 Juan Forero, "Burdened Colombians Back Tax to Fight Rebels," *The New York Times*, September 8, 2002, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/08/world/burdened-colombians-back-tax-to-fight-rebels.html>.
- 97 Embassy of the United States, San Salvador, El Salvador, "Partnership for Growth."
- 98 The White House, "U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America," available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/central\\_america\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/central_america_strategy.pdf) (last accessed April 2016).
- 99 Adriana Beltrán, "U.S. Increases Central America Aid, But It's No Blank Check," Washington Office on Latin America, December 22, 2015 available at [http://www.wola.org/commentary/congress\\_increases\\_central\\_america\\_aid\\_but\\_it\\_s\\_no\\_blank\\_check](http://www.wola.org/commentary/congress_increases_central_america_aid_but_it_s_no_blank_check).
- 100 Ibid.
- 101 Michael Shifter, "Plan Colombia: A Retrospective," *Americas Quarterly*, Summer 2012, available at <http://www.americasquarterly.org/node/3787>; For more on Plan Colombia, see Restrepo and others, "The United States and Colombia."
- 102 See U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Mission to Central America."
- 103 Corporación Latinobarómetro, "Latinobarómetro 2013 Report" (2013).
- 104 U.S. Department of State, *2013 Human Rights Reports: Guatemala* (2014), available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2013/wha/220447.htm>.
- 105 See U.S. Agency for International Development, "Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence," available at <https://www.usaid.gov/gbv> (last accessed March 2016).
- 106 Anna-Claire Bevan, "The rise of the private security industry in Guatemala," *The Tico Times*, September 18, 2013, available at <http://www.ticotimes.net/2013/09/18/the-rise-of-the-private-security-industry-in-guatemala>.
- 107 International Crisis Group, "Crutch or Catalyst? The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala" (2016), available at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/Guatemala/056-crutch-to-catalyst-the-international-commission-against-impunity-in-guatemala.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/latin-america/Guatemala/056-crutch-to-catalyst-the-international-commission-against-impunity-in-guatemala.pdf).
- 108 Susan Berk-Seligson and others, "Impact Evaluation of USAID's Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention Approach in Central America: Regional Report for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama" (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University, 2014), available at [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/carsi/ExecutiveSummary\\_CARSI\\_W\\_121814.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/carsi/ExecutiveSummary_CARSI_W_121814.pdf).
- 109 Tracy Wilkinson, "Honduras likely to extradite former vice president to U.S.," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 2016 available at <http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-honduras-extradition-20160120-story.html>.
- 110 U.N. Department of Political Affairs, "CICIG (International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala)," available at <http://www.un.org/undpa/americas/cicig> (last accessed April 2016); International Crisis Group, "Crutch or Catalyst? The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala."
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Michael Lohmuller, "Honduras OAS-backed Anti-Corruption Body Takes Flight," *InSight Crime*, January 19, 2016, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/honduras-oas-backed-anti-corruption-body-takes-flight>.

- 113 See The Inter-American Dialogue, "Hope & Skepticism Honduras' MACCIH," October 26, 2015, available at <http://www.thedialogue.org/blogs/2015/10/hope-and-skepticism-for-honduras-maccih/>.
- 114 U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, "Fighting Corruption in El Salvador: Prevention, investigation and Prosecuting Corruption," January 25, 2016, available at [https://www.unodc.org/ropan/en/IndexArticles/fighting-corruption-in-el-salvador\\_prevention\\_investigation\\_and\\_prosecuting\\_corruption.html](https://www.unodc.org/ropan/en/IndexArticles/fighting-corruption-in-el-salvador_prevention_investigation_and_prosecuting_corruption.html).
- 115 Institute for Criminal Policy Research, "World Prison Brief," available at <http://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief> (last accessed February 2016).
- 116 Organization of American States and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, "Report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on the Situation of Persons Deprived of Liberty in Honduras," March 18, 2013, available at <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/pdl/docs/pdf/honduras-ppl-2013eng.pdf>.
- 117 The White House, "Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime: Addressing Converging Threats to National Security" (2011), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/2011-strategy-combat-transnational-organized-crime.pdf> (last accessed April 2016).
- 118 The White House, "Executive Order 13581—Blocking Property of Transnational Criminal Organizations," Press release, July 25, 2011, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/07/25/executive-order-blocking-property-transnational-criminal-organizations>.
- 119 U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization," Press release, October 11, 2012, available at <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx>.
- 120 See U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Leadership of Central American Gang MS-13," Press release, April 16, 2015, available at <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl10026.aspx>.
- 121 Office of Foreign Assets Control, *Impact Report: Economic Sanctions Against Colombian Drug Cartels* (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2007), available at [https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/narco\\_impact\\_report\\_05042007.pdf](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/narco_impact_report_05042007.pdf).
- 122 Peter Sands, "Making it Harder for the Bad Guys: The Case for Eliminating High Denomination Notes" (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Kennedy School, 2016), available at <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/content/download/79140/1776759/version/1/file/Eliminating+HDNfinalXYZ.pdf>.
- 123 Ibid.

---

## Our Mission

The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

## Our Values

As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

## Our Approach

We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

