

# Central American Migrant Crisis

“WELCOMED AND PROTECTED”<sup>1</sup>:  
THE US MUST GO FURTHER TO  
ADDRESS THE MIGRANT CRISIS  
IN CENTRAL AMERICA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The crisis of migrants fleeing Central America came to a head in 2014, when an unprecedented 68,000 young people crossed the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>2</sup> Fleeing gang violence and drug cartels that pervaded Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras (known as the “Northern Triangle”), these youth sought the protection due them, yet were met with political maneuvering, increased securing of borders and immigration enforcement. The additional underlying causes for flight including poverty, failed harvests due to environmental degradation and climate change, and a lack of livelihood opportunities contribute to the ongoing “push factors” for why people continue to flee.

With a clear need to respond to the ongoing situation, the U.S. government opened refugee processing, with slow results. Increased detention and deportation effectively shifted the problem to the Mexican government. In September 2014, the governments of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala formulated the “Plan of the Alliance of Prosperity in the Northern Triangle of Central America,” a \$22 billion plan spanning 5 years, meant to address the underlying institutional, economic and societal issues that plague the Northern Triangle.

Migrants fleeing Central America



In 2014, 68,000 young people from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras crossed the U.S.-Mexico border fleeing violence in their own countries.

1 Papal message on the occasion of “Mexico Holy See colloquium on human migration and development” Mexico City, 14 July 2014.  
2 Customs and Border Patrol. “Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children.” Accessed on September 1, 2015 at <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children>

Congress authorized \$750 million to go towards the Plan for Fiscal Year 2016, and the Administration requested a similar amount for Fiscal Year 2017, including \$357.3 million in development assistance.

Catholic Relief Services serves 85 million people in 101 countries, focusing on the most poor and vulnerable among them. Working in Latin America since the 1960s, CRS operates under the following Catholic teachings around migration and development:

- People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.
- People have a right not to migrate; that is, to meet their needs where they are.
- A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.
- A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Catholic principles and our experience working in the Northern Triangle countries, CRS provides the following recommendations to the U.S. government to address the migrant crisis in Central America:

### 1. Concentrate on the process.

Successfully implementing the “Plan for Prosperity” will require coordination, accountability and oversight. **Full engagement of the intended beneficiaries will ensure that development spending is fitting to their needs.** Addressing corruption will also be important. **Funding should be provided to government, international organizations and local institutions according to which institutions will spend the resources most effectively.**

### 2. Address root causes.

With large swaths of each country facing poverty, violence, social inequality and environmental degradation, funding should support programs that address these root causes. **Funding should focus on the poor and marginalized in each country** to reduce social inequality and provide broad opportunities for economic growth. **Programs should help revitalize rural areas, and include conflict analysis** to ensure programs are conflict sensitive. **Increased investment in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation** activities are also needed.

With high rates of youth unemployment, **programs for youth education and employment must be scaled up and expanded.** Education must also be improved to expand opportunities for young people in the Northern Triangle countries. Initiatives including **micro-enterprise, rural credit and micro-insurance mechanisms should also be expanded and integrated** into programming.



***Education must also be improved to expand opportunities for young people in the Northern Triangle countries.***



**Addressing violence** is an important aspect of any funding proposal, and can be accomplished through stand-alone projects or integrated into existing or new projects. In addition, **child protection systems in Northern Triangle countries need strengthening.**

**3. Adequately protect and provide solutions to those seeking asylum in the U.S., and provide robust assistance to those who are repatriated.**

The U.S. must **urgently halt deportations of asylum-seekers**, and **provide more legal venues for refugees and asylum-seekers to find protection in the U.S.**, including through the **Central American Minors program**. The **needs of those who are turned back home are great, and need to be prioritized and met.**

Many have been displaced internally by violence and need better support. **Money should be channeled to organizations that understand how to respond to these needs, and a strategic plan should be put in place to meet the needs of the internally displaced.**

**4. Take an integrated and comprehensive approach.**

The underlying factors for migration in the Northern Triangle are inter-related and inter-dependent, pointing to the **need for a regional approach** to the crisis. **USAID should engage in regional planning, which includes learning and sharing across country programs and projects. Funding and programs need to take an integrated approach over a realistic time frame**, and be implemented by national institutions or civil society depending on political will and capacity. The private sector also has an essential role in creating opportunities for youth and should be engaged in public-private partnerships.

**Donors need to be more creative and expansive in understanding the problem of violence, and address the needs of former gang members and incarcerated individuals**, within the framework of the law.

Projects should integrate psychosocial support to deal with the psychological and social impacts of violence and crime.

Lastly, any **aid package must be continuously reassessed and responsive** to challenges that will undoubtedly continue in the Northern Triangle.



*Drug and gang-related violence in the Northern Triangle countries has grown significantly in the past 5 years...*



## BACKGROUND

While the number of unaccompanied youth crossing the border from Central America has been in steady climb since 2011, the crisis caught national attention in the summer of 2014, when an unprecedented 68,000 young people crossed the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>3</sup> A similar number of young families also came and likewise turned themselves in to border patrol, seeking only protection. Coming from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, known as the “Northern Triangle,” these youth fled unspeakable violence of gangs and drug cartels. The majority of those who fled in 2014 were found by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to have legitimate access to international protection.<sup>3</sup> Beyond fearing for their lives, they struggled with endemic poverty, with few economic prospects in urban or rural areas. In rural areas, agriculturalists faced increasing challenges with drought and plant disease decimating 80% of their crops. Faced with a situation in which schools are no longer safe, gang members outnumber police, and few viable employment opportunities exist, youth who encounter exploitation, rape, and even murder on their journeys, will continue to flee until life at home becomes livable.

## UNDERSTANDING ROOT CAUSES

While significant differences exist between the three Northern Triangle countries, they share similarities that have contributed to the wave of migrants. These include:

**Poverty:** Northern Triangle countries have significant rates of poverty and people have little or no safety net. Basic services are lacking. Honduras, the poorest country in Central America, had a poverty rate of 59% in 2014, with 36% living in extreme poverty. In El Salvador, things have improved slightly from 2008, when the poverty rate was 40%.<sup>4</sup> In 2013, the poverty rate was reported to be less than 30%, with two thirds of those poor living in rural areas.<sup>5</sup> Guatemala’s poverty rate is more than 50%, with the same number of people suffering from chronic malnutrition. “It is not surprising, then, that income inequality and access to government programs is reported by U.S. officials as a principal cause for migration.”<sup>6</sup> Along with poverty, these countries have high rates of income inequality. Guatemala ranks 13th in inequality in the world, and is ranked 2nd in Latin America. There, the richest 10% of the country has 55 times the resources of the poorest 10%.<sup>7</sup>

**Violence and crime:** Drug and gang-related violence in the Northern Triangle countries has grown significantly in the past 5 years—a major factor in migration. In 2012, Honduras’ murder rate was 90 per 100,000—the highest in the world, and in 2011, El Salvador’s was 70



*Young families came and turned themselves in to border patrol, seeking only protection.*



3 Customs and Border Patrol. “Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children.” Accessed on September 1, 2015 at <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children>

4 “Poverty Reduction in El Salvador Shows Positive Trend for 2009-2013.” Council on Hemispheric Affairs.

5 These figures are from 2010. “Rural poverty in El Salvador.” Accessed August 1, 2015 at <http://www.ruralpoverty.org>

6 “Our Communities in Crisis: A faithful look at the root causes of Central American forced displacement and the repatriation of children and families after the Summer of 2014.” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, May 2015.

7 Baldizión, Manuel. “Pobreza o Desigualdad,” *El Periódico*, September 16, 2013.

per 100,000.<sup>8</sup> In 2010, Guatemala's was 41 per 100,000 compared with the U.S. rate of less than 5,<sup>9</sup> and 10 in Afghanistan during the ongoing insurgency.<sup>10</sup> Gangs use extortion, kidnapping and sexual assault to control territories, and gang rivalries and revenge killings are commonplace.<sup>11</sup> Violence has become normalized. High rates of domestic abuse and sexual violence, and weak family and community structures cause young people to flee to gangs. Alarming, Salvadorians say that their country is now more violent than during the armed conflict of 1980 to 1992.<sup>12</sup>

Police and other law enforcement officials are unable to control the violence, and high levels of corruption make the situation worse. Ninety five percent of crime goes unpunished.<sup>13</sup> And in some instances, drug cartels have co-opted local governments, providing basic services such as health care, education, security and infrastructure.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, distrust between youth and police has heightened. For example, in El Salvador young people are singled out and accused by police of participating in gang activity.<sup>15</sup>

Such violence has economic as well as human costs. According to the World Bank, in El Salvador the cost of crime was \$2.01 billion, or 10.8% of the country's annual GDP.<sup>16</sup> The figures are similar in Honduras (10% of GDP),<sup>17</sup> and Guatemala (\$2.3 billion).<sup>18</sup>

**Environmental degradation:** The Northern Triangle countries are also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change, and El Salvador and Guatemala occupy the top positions in the World Risk Index for disasters associated with natural hazards and climate change. In Honduras, more than 50% of the population lives in areas at risk.<sup>19</sup> El Salvador is one of the most vulnerable countries to extreme weather events, particularly drought, which results in heavy losses for small agricultural producers. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate



***In Guatemala, stark inequalities in land ownership force the rural poor to deforest hillsides and mountainsides to plant food.***

**Porfirio Gómez Martínez, 31 is forced to find work away from his farm. Two years ago he lost 30% of his crop to climate change induced drought. The second year, 2014, he lost 70%. For the past two years he hasn't been able to rent extra land for corn production because he hasn't had enough money. Photo by Phillip Laubner/CRS**

8 Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana, Jens Manual Krogstad and Mark Hugo Lopez. "DHS: Violence, poverty, is driving children to flee Central America to U.S.," Pew Research Center, July 1, 2014.

9 Shifter, Michael. "Countering Criminal Violence in Central America," Council on Foreign Relations, April 2012.

10 Wainer, Andrew. "Worse than war: El Salvador's youth caught in web of violence," The Hill, August 3, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2015.

11 "Crime and Violence in Central America's Northern Triangle: How U.S. Policy Responses are Helping, Hurting, and Can be Improved." Woodrow Wilson Center Reports on the Americas, No. 34, 2015.

12 Wainer, 2015.

13 Woodrow Wilson Center Reports on the Americas, 2015.

14 Espach, Ralph, Javier Meléndez Quiñonez, Daniel Haering, and Miguel Castillo Girón, "Criminal Organizations and Illicit Trafficking in Guatemala's Border Communities," Center for Naval Analysis, December 2011.

15 Interview with Erica Dahl-Bredine, CRS Country Representative in El Salvador.

16 ruralpoverty.org.

17 Honduras Overview. World Bank website, accessed August 27, 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/honduras/overview>

18 United Nations Development Program "Informe estadístico de la violencia en Guatemala" UNDP, December 2007.

19 "Position regarding the 'Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle' Central America." Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales, March 2015.

Change, rising temperatures will reduce the country's yields from main crops by 30% in 2050.<sup>20</sup>

In Guatemala, stark inequalities in land ownership force the rural poor to deforest hillsides and mountainsides to plant food. This worsens the effects of natural disasters, and increases the impacts of these shocks, exacerbating food security and malnutrition.

In 2014, extreme drought due to climate change in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala resulted in widespread hunger, affecting 2.8 million people.<sup>21</sup> Now, in the second year of El Niño, rural populations will increasingly migrate to seek other livelihoods.

**Segmentation of the population:** *Young people* in these countries comprise large segments of the population, yet they have few prospects for engaging in the economy. In Guatemala, 70% of the 15 million inhabitants are youth. They face malnutrition, illiteracy or low levels of education, unemployment or informal employment, and lack documentation.<sup>22</sup> These factors prohibit them from exercising their rights as citizens, and often cause them to migrate or participate in violent activities. Only 12.5% of high school graduates are able to find formal employment.<sup>23</sup> In Honduras, 25.4% of young Hondurans neither work nor study, and do not have the option to participate in vocational training.<sup>24</sup> Youth unemployment in Honduras is five times the rate for adults.<sup>25</sup> In El Salvador, young people also face a startlingly high murder rate: 27 per 100,000, compared with 4 per 100,000 among youth in Iraq.<sup>26</sup>

Approximately 51% of Guatemala's population lives in rural areas, and the **rural population** accounts for a large majority of the country's poor.<sup>27</sup> The story is similar in Honduras, where the national rate of extreme poverty is 36% compared with 50% in rural areas.<sup>28</sup> In El Salvador, 61% of the country's poor and 67% of the extreme poor live in rural areas.<sup>29</sup> The rural poor rely primarily on agriculture to survive.

It is important to address the issues facing these two populations—youth and the rural poor—simultaneously. Young people living in rural areas are overwhelmingly poor, and particularly vulnerable, as they have few prospects for livelihood and employment. They face difficulties entering the educational system

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Many migrants are victims of robbers, or fall off the train, losing limbs or even their lives. Photo by Christian Meléndez-López/CRS

20 Rural poverty in El Salvador, ruralpoverty.org.

21 Palencia, Gustavo. "Drought Leaves up to 2.8 Million Hungry in Central America." Scientific American, September 4, 2014.

22 "UNDP warns that poverty, exclusion, violence are destroying Guatemalan youth, UNDP website, July 24, 2012.

23 "Tackling Violence in Guatemala City through Equal Access to Education and Employment," Council on Hemispheric Affairs, September 16, 2013.

24 Human Development Report Honduras 2008/2009: From social exclusion to a youth citizenship, UNDP, 2009

25 Ibid.

26 Wainer, 2015.

27 Rural poverty in Guatemala, ruralpoverty.org.

28 Rural Poverty in Honduras, ruralpoverty.org.

29 "El Salvador: The Challenge of Poverty Alleviation," World Bank.

and the formal labor market, and they lack the productive and financial assets needed to launch sustainable ventures. As a result, many choose to migrate to urban centers, or to the United States.

Urban inhabitants face different types of challenges, particularly the poor. Guatemala City, Guatemala, the capital, has the highest rate of unemployment in the country, and many families are forced to send their children to work. Children and youth younger than 16 make up 6.9% of the labor force in Guatemala City.<sup>30</sup> In El Salvador, lack of economic opportunities has pushed many people to move to urban areas. More than half of the country's poor now live in informal settlements around cities, socially excluded and with limited or no services such as health care, education, utilities or sanitation.<sup>31</sup>

**Indigenous communities** in Guatemala comprise more than 40% of the population. The poverty rate of this group is stark—around 70%. They have traditionally been excluded from the social, economic and political mainstream. In Honduras, the indigenous population is only 6.5% of the population, yet their poverty rate is a staggering 71%.<sup>32</sup>

## U.S. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The U.S. government's 2014 response to migration fell into its usual pattern of enforcement and deterrence, exporting border security, bolstering funding to the Central American Regional Security Initiative<sup>33</sup> and adjudicating immigration through the court system, rather than addressing the great humanitarian needs.<sup>34</sup> When vast numbers of children began to arrive in the summer of 2014, the Administration struggled to house them. Congress engaged in a debate regarding whether or not the U.S. should halt due process rights afforded to the unaccompanied youth through legislation.

The Obama Administration has begun to provide legal pathways to protection, but these efforts must be accelerated and expanded. Despite more than 5,400 children applying for the Central American Minors program established in December, 2014, the Department of Homeland Security only interviewed 90 of them by Nov, 2015.<sup>ii</sup> As of January 2016, the program has granted refugee status to 30% of the Salvadoran children interviewed.<sup>iii</sup>

Secretary of State Kerry announced on January 13, 2016 that the Administration would begin working with the UNHCR to process refugees from the Northern Triangle and to protect them during processing. The Administration has earmarked 3,000 refugee slots for Central America for Fiscal Year 2016, yet it remains unclear how many additional refugees will be accepted by the U.S. Rumors indicate it will be relatively few.

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Most children that are deported from the United States come from Honduras. Increasing desperation has led many families, young people and children to the inevitable conclusion that they have no choice but to flee. They are primarily fleeing violence. *Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS*

30 "Tackling Violence in Guatemala City through Equal Access to Education and Employment," Council on Hemispheric Affairs, September 16, 2013.

31 "Poverty and Social Exclusion." Foundation Cristosal website. Accessed August 1, 2015. <http://cristosal.org/el-salvador/poverty-and-social-exclusion/>

32 Rural poverty in Honduras, [ruralpoverty.org](http://ruralpoverty.org)

33 The U.S. government has spent a total \$642 million on the Central American Regional Security Initiative since 2008.

34 \$175 million in 2003 to \$304 million in 2013, Marc Rosenblum, "Unaccompanied Child Migration to the United States," Migration Policy Institute, April 2015, p. 14.

Increased security along the U.S.-Mexico and Mexico-Guatemala borders, accompanied by increased detention and deportation within Mexico,<sup>35</sup> has effectively shifted the problem to the Mexican government. Yet despite its strong laws for protection, the government of Mexico has failed to meet its obligations to children, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. Moreover, institutional corruption has enabled narco-traffickers and gangs, and often inhibits adequate protection. Figures show that people continue to flee and the underlying reasons for their flight continue to be unaddressed.

In September 2014, the governments of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala formulated the “Plan of the Alliance of Prosperity in the Northern Triangle of Central America.” Developed with technical assistance from the Inter-American Development Bank, the \$22 billion plan spans 5 years. The objective is to address the underlying institutional, economic and societal issues that plague the Northern Triangle, prevent adequate growth, and cause flight north. While the plan focuses on stimulating the productive sector, developing opportunities for people, improving public safety, and strengthening institutions,<sup>36</sup> it is unclear whether the plan will adequately invest in those most affected by the conflict to sufficiently achieve the change sought. The plan also lacks adequate emphasis on rural revitalization, development benchmarks and goals, civil society participation, investment in youth and family strengthening.

In 2016, the Obama Administration endorsed the region’s Alliance for Prosperity and requested \$1 billion to be appropriated for it. After significant investment on the part of Vice President Biden, Congress ultimately awarded \$750 million of that request, including conditions. Among those, CRS successfully argued for the inclusion of language to ensure an independent oversight body in each country; and the participation of affected population in decisions affecting them. The administration rightly argues that “[w]ithout significant progress, the region will continue to face extreme violence, severe economic inequality, social exclusion, and widespread corruption and poverty, thus compelling many Central Americans to flee their homes each year.”<sup>37</sup> The Administration requested a similar amount for Fiscal Year 2017, including \$357.3 million in development assistance (see Annex II).

Modeled after Plan Colombia, which cost \$9 billion, the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America aims to foster democratic societies, create economic opportunities, build transparent and accountable institutions, and create safe environments for citizens.<sup>38</sup> Specific development programming would reduce poverty, promote education and workforce development, increase resilience, and increase the role of civil society. In addition, both Republicans and Democrats in



Portrait of Ángel Umanzor Hernández, 21, from El Pino Community, Santa Tecla, El Salvador. Angel graduated from CRS’ “Jovenes Constructores” (Youth Builders) program in 2013.

“I have now worked at this, my first, job for 1 year and four months. I started as a salesman and I got promoted a month ago to cashier. My message to youth is to not be discouraged. I attended the workshops for a year, and looking back, I cannot believe how far I’ve come. I used to be in the streets, I robbed people. But I could talk decently. The program teaches you about responsibility. They got me this job. I never had a proper, legal job. I think this project gives Salvadorean youth hope. My life has changed so much- my family is proud of me. In one word, I am “happy.”  
*Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS*

35 From October 2014 to April 2015, Mexico apprehended almost 93,000 Central Americans, almost doubling the number apprehended the year before. Furthermore, deportations occur so quickly after detention in Mexico that many believe individuals are not able to receive the international protection they deserve under the law.

36 Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle: A Road Map, September 2014, p. 1.

37 Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, February 2, 2015, p. 91.

38 U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, p. 2.

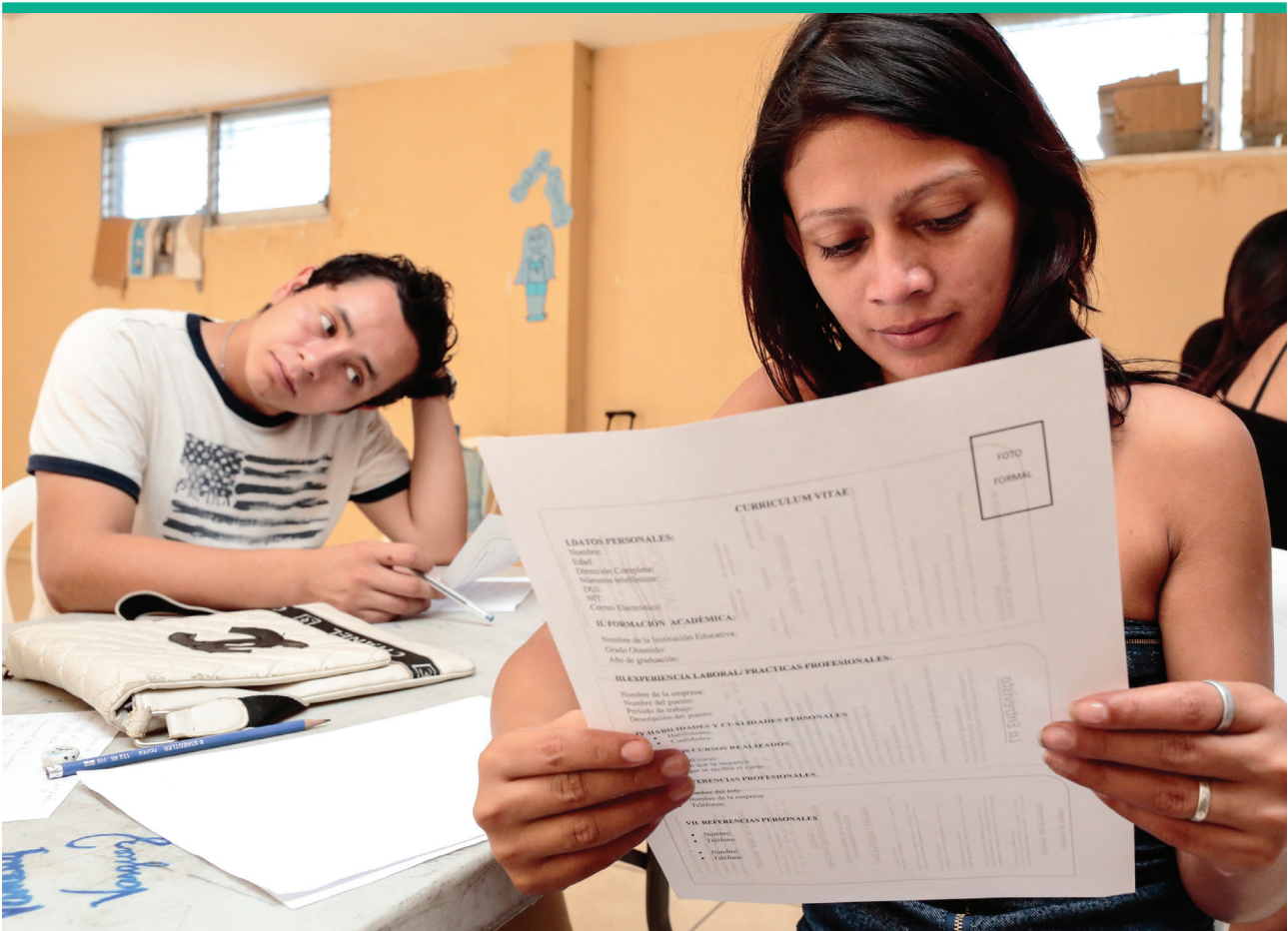


Congress are concerned about the stability, transparency and capacity of the partner governments to oversee and administer any aid to harness economic growth effectively and efficiently. In particular, they point to corruption by officials and impunity for their criminal acts. The escape of Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman in July of 2015 reinforced the importance of strong security measures to eliminate drug trafficking and organized crime throughout the region. Some members of Congress want to limit funding to security and governance-related initiatives such as the Central American Regional Security Initiative, or CARSI,<sup>39</sup> and the Mérida Initiative.<sup>40</sup>

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES  
SERVES

85million

PEOPLE IN 101 COUNTRIES



Youths members of “Jóvenes Constructores” (Youth Builders) attend a workshop on how to make themselves more attractive to employers at “Centro de Convivencia Pedro Pablo Castillo”, in San Salvador, El Salvador. CRS supports this program which works with at-risk youth, giving them workshops, seed capital to start their own business, and connecting them with employers. 80% of the youths participating in Jovenes Constructores get a job or return to complete their studies. *Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS*

<sup>39</sup> The U.S. has spent \$642 million on assistance to CARSI since 2008, to support the Central American countries of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama in the areas of law enforcement and security forces, to confront narcotics and arms trafficking, gangs, organized crime, and border security deficiencies, as well as to disrupt criminal infrastructure, routes, and networks. CARSI also works to advance community policing, gang prevention, and economic and social programming for at-risk youth and communities disproportionately affected by crime.

<sup>40</sup> The Merida Initiative is a partnership between the United States and Mexico to fight organized crime and associated violence while furthering respect for human rights and the rule of law. The U.S. Congress has appropriated \$2.8 billion for this initiative since 2008.

## THE WORK OF CRS

As the international relief and development agency of the Catholic community in the United States, Catholic Relief Services serves 85 million people in 101 countries. Focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the world, CRS provides resources and expertise to strengthen the capacity of individuals, families and communities to overcome challenges and build their future. Since the 1960s, we have worked in Latin America to help people meet basic needs and address the structural factors that lead to chronic poverty.

The Catholic Church has a long and social teaching on migration, refugees, and authentic development, including the following tenets:

1. People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.
2. People have a right not to migrate; that is, to meet their needs where they are.
3. A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.
4. A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Catholic principles regarding migration and our experience working in the Northern Triangle, CRS provides the following recommendations to address the migrant crisis in Central America:

### 1. CONCENTRATE ON THE PROCESS.

The Plan for Prosperity, the \$1 billion proposed by the Obama administration and any other monies appropriated for Central America will require coordination, accountability and oversight. Plans for how the money is spent will also require engagement of civil society to ensure that the existing culture of corruption does not divert funding from those who need it most, and that the money goes toward addressing the pervasive inequality in the Northern Triangle countries.

Civil society engagement has been largely neglected in creating the Plan for Prosperity. While the plan allocates large portions toward “developing opportunities for our people” in jobs, education and services, there is concern that the large scale investments will not only fail to benefit the most in need, but that the sectors that will receive investment, such as textiles and mining, will actually further displace vulnerable people.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, ***engaging the intended beneficiaries will ensure that spending is fitting to their needs.***

Accountability will also be essential to ensure that funding is used appropriately to reach people who need it most. The International Commission on Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, provides a model for holding governments accountable and effectively weeding out impunity. This model should be extended to Honduras, where corruption and impunity continue. In El Salvador, civil society groups

<sup>41</sup> “Final report, International Verification Mission on the Human Rights Situation of Honduran Migrants and their Right to International Protection,” Latin American Working Group, September 2015.



should be strengthened, and they should **work with the judicial and police systems to reduce corruption**, which is pervasive.

Lastly, the U.S. Senate language providing for additional funding to the region is contingent upon national governments addressing corruption charges. Although institutional measures to counter corruption are important, placing conditions on funding that should be channeled to the most vulnerable will only harm those who most need assistance. Therefore, **funding should be provided to government, international organizations and local institutions according to which institutions will spend the resources most effectively**. In instances where government corruption is being investigated, funding should go directly to INGOs and local institutions so that services are duly provided to the most in need, without interruption.

## 2. ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES.

With large swaths of each country facing poverty, violence, social inequality and environmental degradation, funding should support programs that address these root causes if they are to change the underlying factors that lead people to migrate.

The plan should focus on the daily lives of the majorities of the populations, rather than only paving the way for foreign investment and private sector companies that benefit only a few. **Funding should focus on the poor and marginalized in each country to reduce social inequality and provide broad opportunities for economic growth**.

Often, individuals who can no longer make it in rural parts of Central America head first to cities, and often thereafter north. Any plan for economic growth must address the **revitalization of rural areas**, so that farmers can move beyond subsistence living to sustainable livelihoods. **Projects that have successfully linked poor farm families to markets should be scaled up**. For example, the CRS ACORDAR project, working with 67,000 farm families throughout Central America, increased their annual coffee revenue by an average 268% through investments in smarter inputs, improved technology and training, which are the core of the program's success. **USAID should increasingly focus on high-value crops, like coffee, cocoa, and vanilla, so that the poor can progress out of subsistence farming, and adapt their agricultural practices to a changed climate**.

Further, violence is being displaced to rural areas, as police and law enforcement increase enforcement in urban areas. El Salvador's coastal areas where CRS operates, are now encountering the greatest level of violence outside of cities. Conflict analysis is an important precursor to the success of all projects, as it can provide a better understanding of the dynamics of extortion, and how people can respond to it constructively. Therefore, **programs that promote economic development in rural areas must be conflict sensitive and provide wraparound violence mitigation components as necessary**.

Funding must also address environmental degradation and the increasing risk of shocks and disasters in rural areas due to climate change. **Increased investment in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation** activities are needed, focusing on areas of particular risk. Introducing new technologies like drought resistant



## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: YOUTH BUILDERS IN EL SALVADOR

### *“I would have been in jail, and who knows for how long?”*

Jorge\* had spent the previous night in jail. He was released only because he had an ID card from his job—a job he had gotten because of the Catholic Relief Services' Youth Builders program.

Unlike Jorge, one in four Salvadoran youth ages 15 to 24 don't work or attend school. It's one of the world's most dangerous countries, with territorial disputes between rival gangs that fuel a culture of crime and violence. Police in El Salvador sometimes conduct raids to deter gang activity, and young adults may be picked up because of how they look, or their family's or peers' associations with gangs, rather than for anything they've done wrong.

That was apparently the case for Jorge. He says the police arrested him at his home as he was preparing dinner. He told them he had been at work all day, but they took him to a local jail, questioned him and held him overnight.

A family member was able to show Jorge's job ID and prove he was employed. He was released at 6 a.m. the next day and arrived on time to his job later that morning.

Jorge says he was led to Youth Builders—which ultimately helped him get the job—by his uncle, who had associated with gang leaders but wanted a better life for his nephew.

The program involves youth and young adults, like Jorge, in solving problems. It specifically invites those who are out of school or out of work in some of El Salvador's toughest neighborhoods to participate. Based on an approach that originated in Harlem, New York, in the 1960s, Youth Builders provides life, job skills and entrepreneurship training; school re-entry; job placement; and social services for boys and girls. Participants in the 6-month program graduate with a stronger sense of self-worth.

Youth Builders has reached more than 5,000 young people in 4 years. 80% of graduates have either found work, gone back to school, or both. Jorge is one of these success stories. He works at a clothing store to provide for his wife and child.

CRS is expanding Youth Builders to Honduras.



Participants in CRS' Youth Builders project in El Salvador are learning job skills while improving their communities.

*Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS*

seeds and new irrigation techniques can protect livelihoods and prevent rural populations from having to migrate to survive. Further, these activities need to be coordinated with the existing policies and programs of the national governments.

In urban areas, youth unemployment has been a major driver of gang recruitment. With youth comprising a large proportion of Central Americans, and so many youth unemployed, **programs for youth education and employment must be scaled up and expanded.** CRS has successfully implemented innovative programs for young people at risk—from reducing child labor and helping street children attend school, to providing essential life and job skills to young people in some of the toughest neighborhoods.

Education also must be improved to expand opportunities for young people in the Northern Triangle countries. Poor families find it difficult to keep their children in school. Therefore, **projects that make increase the likelihood that families will send their children to school, and that improve education quality should be expanded.** The McGovern-Dole Food for Education program, for example, helped keep 54,000 children in classes in more than 1,000 schools in Intibucá, Honduras, a remote area with low development and literacy rates. The program achieved exceptional rates of retention and improved education quality. The Government has asked CRS to replicate this program elsewhere.

Initiatives including micro-enterprise, rural credit and micro-insurance mechanisms should be expanded and integrated into programming, specifically targeted to vulnerable groups, including youth, women and indigenous populations. With very limited formal employment opportunities in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, small enterprises can provide livelihoods for vulnerable groups. Particular to youth, engaging in livelihood activities, along with life skills components can reduce risk factors and increase protective factors that can help change the direction of youth lives and that of their communities.

**Addressing violence** is an important aspect of any funding proposal, and can be accomplished through stand-alone projects or integrated into existing or new projects, but must be tailored to the relevant context. For example, CRS' success with Youth Builders in El Salvador has prompted us to explore a similar model of violence prevention and youth employment in Guatemala. The project there will focus on crime prevention by creating alternatives that will attract youth, with support from their families and communities

The **child protection systems in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala must be strengthened.** Schools must be established as safe zones, and their quality must be increased. Law enforcement personnel should be



Members of Catholic Relief Services supported program “Jóvenes Constructores”, (Youth Builders) hold hands together.  
Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

better paid and better trained. Robust child welfare services, including foster-care, family reunification and family reintegration services must be established.

Lastly, families are being torn apart by violence, poverty, and migration and they have few support systems. Programs to help families communicate effectively, manage conflict without violence, and bond can reduce the incidence of domestic violence and help prevent children from eventually looking to gang life for answers. Community centers, day care, and other family support programs can keep families together and provide opportunity. CRS has adapted a program from the University of Iowa for this purpose, and is now adapting it for indigenous populations.

### 3. ADEQUATELY PROTECT AND PROVIDE SOLUTIONS TO THOSE SEEKING ASYLUM IN THE U.S., AND PROVIDE ROBUST ASSISTANCE TO THOSE WHO ARE REPATRIATED.

The Administration must urgently **halt deportations of asylum-seekers**. As a recent letter from the Senate notes, “We are deeply concerned that in its eagerness to deter additional arrivals from this region, the [Administration] is returning vulnerable individuals with valid protection claims to life-threatening violence. Moreover, we do not accept the argument that removing these individuals will deter additional children and families from fleeing the Northern Triangle. That argument relies on the false premise that most of these people are not fleeing extraordinary danger.”



Youths members of “Jóvenes Constructores” (Youth Builders). Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

Secondly, the U.S. government must **provide more legal venues for refugees and asylum-seekers to find protection in the U.S.** The processing of additional refugees with UNHCR is an important step in the right direction and the regional strategy will help to ensure that those in need of protection can obtain it safely. While CRS applauds its creation, the **Central American Minors program must be accelerated and expanded**. The Administration should develop additional venues for humanitarian protection, such as temporary protected status.

Despite fewer numbers of Central Americans reaching the U.S. border, the population fleeing Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador continues to grow. Mexico deported 79% more migrants in the first 4 months of 2015 than in the whole of 2014.<sup>42</sup> The **needs of those who are turned back home are great, and need to be prioritized and met**. Those deported from Mexico face increased risks of exploitation and harm on their

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42 “Deportations in Mexico up 79% in first four months of 2015,” The Guardian, July 11, 2015.

journey, and the government-led process of repatriation is rife with human rights abuses. Therefore, the United States should support national governments in providing more resources and capacity to improve the process of returning migrants and—at the very least—to comply with basic human rights standards. The protection of women and children on this journey must be a priority.

For those who have returned to their countries, national and local institutions should be provided with sufficient resources to administer longer-term programs that help youth reintegrate into their communities. Child welfare services, foster care and family reunification and reintegration services in the origin countries are virtually non-existent and need to be developed to respond to the needs of these groups.<sup>43</sup> Funding should assist governments and community-based programs to address the needs of these groups at all levels.

Lastly, many have been displaced by internal violence. Although they have remained in their countries, they have numerous needs. More than 40,000 are internally displaced in Honduras, and 124,000 in El Salvador.<sup>44</sup> The United States has provided \$7 million to the International Organization on Migration to respond; IOM should be transparent in how it is channeling this funding. ***Money should be channeled to organizations that understand how to respond to these needs, and a strategic plan should be put in place to meet the needs of the internally displaced.***

#### 4. TAKE AN INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH.

USAID currently has country Development Cooperation Strategies in each of the Northern Triangle countries. These should be reassessed and updated to address the needs of youth and other vulnerable groups. Further, while each country faces its own particular circumstances, the movement of people across borders, and the relationship of gangs and drugs to the underlying context for migration in each of the countries points to the ***need for a regional approach*** to the crisis. Projects that have been successful in one country may provide methodologies applicable in the other countries. Therefore, ***USAID should engage in regional planning, which includes learning and sharing across country programs and projects.***

The problems these young people face were created over years and decades, and require long-term solutions. Breaking the cycle of violence in a household—and a society—can take a generation or more. Therefore, ***funding geared toward tackling the root causes of the crisis needs to take an integrated approach over a realistic time frame.*** Plans should be in place for long-term investment by national institutions, but should be immediately implemented by civil society where governments do not have the capacity or will to execute.

Programs should target segments of the population at risk. Currently, programs focus on youth in age groups where they have already chosen a life in a gang or not. Now a younger segment of the population, as young as 10 to 14, is being targeted for gang recruitment. Therefore ***programs need to target a younger age range to provide alternatives in education and livelihoods*** to stem the flow of youth into gangs before it is too late.

Many of the disaffected youth are or have been involved in gang activity, yet are excluded from participating in programs due to donor preference. As a public health issue, prevention *and* treatment are necessary to properly tackle the problem. While many programs currently address prevention, little is being done to support gang intervention and violence interruption. In El Salvador, with a failed truce and continued violence, more gang leaders are open to their members pursuing a different pathway, as they realize they do not want the same life for the next generation.<sup>45</sup> ***Donors need to be more creative and expansive in understanding the problem of violence, and address the needs of former gang members and incarcerated individuals,*** within the framework of the law. U.S. approaches to public health strategies could be applied to the situation in Central America.

Further, the problem of violence is not one centered on individuals, but rather takes place in families and communities. Therefore programs should address violence in homes and communities to stop the cycle of violence through a public health perspective. In addition to CRS' *Strong Family* program, stakeholders should broaden the scope of this work to focus on strengthening community institutions, including schools,

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43 "Mission to Central America: The Flight of Unaccompanied Children to the United States: Report of the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops," November 2013.

44 "The Tragic Link between Gang Violence and Displacement in Central America." Refugees International blog, June 2015. Accessed September 15, 2015 at <http://www.refintl.org/blog/tragic-link-between-violence-and-displacement-central-america>

45 Interview with Erica Dahl-Bredine, CRS.

hospitals and health posts, so they can take a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to prevent violence and intervene accordingly. **Developing metrics and accountability mechanisms for this end is also an important part of showing the impact of violence prevention activities.**

The psychological and social impacts of violence and crime are also important to address. Projects should **integrate psychosocial support** to deal with these aspects of their experience, so the cycle of violence does not continue.

The private sector in these countries has an essential role in creating opportunities for youth. Currently, the private sector in these countries is wary to work with young people for fear they have some gang affiliation. Therefore, **public-private partnerships and other creative collaborations should be created** to ensure that those most in need can benefit. Public job training programs should link with private sector employers and industries with jobs, to ensure that opportunities are available to prevent young people from returning to criminal activity.

Lastly, any **aid package must be continuously reassessed and responsive** to challenges that will undoubtedly continue in the Northern Triangle. Government institutions in the three countries will have varying levels of political will to carry out these activities, and therefore, funding must reflect and respond to these instances.<sup>46</sup> Robust external independent evaluation must be undertaken to ensure that decision making is evidence based. For this reason, CRS will seek once again to ensure civil-society involvement in any new funds appropriated for the region in Fiscal Year 2017.



Ofelia Ben'tez V'squez, 13, cuts coffee grains at Abel Mendez Bejarano's coffee farm in San Juan Intibucá Honduras. Abel receives technical support from CRS through the Blue Harvest Project. Blue Harvest Project is coordinated by Catholic Relief Services expands the Global Water Initiative in Central America to manage water resources through funding from Keurig Green Mountain. The project will focus on restoring and managing water resources in coffee producing areas in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The goal of the project is sustainable management of water resources for people in coffee growing areas of Central America. *Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS*

<sup>46</sup> Haugaard, Lisa. "Plan Colombia Is Not a Model for U.S. Policy towards Central America Today," Latin America Working Group, August 2014.



## ANNEX 1: TIMELINE

- FY14—57,478 unaccompanied minors apprehended at the border.<sup>47</sup>
- July 2014—President Obama meets with Northern Triangle (NT) leaders (Otto Pérez Molina of Guatemala, Juan Orlando Hernández of Honduras, and Sánchez Cerén of El Salvador).
- July 16, 2014—CRS' Rick Jones testifies in front of Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs.
- September 2014—Secretary of State Kerry meets with NT foreign ministers at UN General Assembly
- September 2014—NT writes the Plan of The Alliance of Prosperity in the Northern Triangle with technical assistance from the Inter-American Development Bank.
- November 14, 2014—U.S. announces Central American Minors Refugee/Parole Program (CAM), an in-country refugee processing program in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, to go into effect on December 1, 2014.<sup>48</sup>
- November 2014—Vice President Biden meets with NT leaders.
- March 2015—Vice President Biden visits Guatemala to meet with NT leaders to discuss The Alliance.
- Early 2015—U.S. Government issues the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America.
- January 29, 2015—President Obama releases FY16 Budget Request, which includes \$1 billion for U.S. Strategy to support Alliance for Prosperity.
- April 10, 2015—President Obama meets with leaders of the Central American Integration System (SICA) member states at Summit of the Americas to express commitment to the region.
- June 2, 2015—The House of Representatives releases State, Foreign Operations Appropriations (SFOPs). They fund the Central American Regional Security Initiative, do not fund the U.S. Strategy, and include a Suspension of Aid clause.
- June 11, 2015—CRS staff attend White House Briefing on Central America with members of the National Security Council, State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development.
- June 24, 2015—Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson releases statement on Family Detention Centers.<sup>49</sup>
- FY15—26,685 unaccompanied minors apprehended at the border, a drop of 54% from the previous year.<sup>50</sup>
- July 6-10, 2015—U.S. Delegation to Northern Triangle to follow up 2014-15 meetings.
- July 7, 2015—Senate releases SFOPs.
- General Statistics—
  - 50% of the population of Central America lives in poverty.
  - 30%-40% of the population is underemployed.
  - 63% of the 43 million people in the region are under 30.
  - \$642 million appropriated by the U.S. government to security initiatives in the region since 2008.
  - \$850 million appropriated by the U.S. government to the Millennium Challenge Corporation since 2005.<sup>51</sup>
  - 677 homicides occurred in El Salvador in June, the most violent month since the country's civil war.<sup>52</sup>
  - 58% of migrant children from the region qualify for international protection, according to UNHCR.<sup>53</sup>
  - 1,200% increase in asylum seekers in Mexico and Central America from 2008 to 2014.

47 "United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016. U.S. Customs and Border Patrol website." <http://goo.gl/OZ82Wa>.

48 "In-Country Refugee/Parole Processing for Minors in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala (Central American Minors - CAM). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website." <http://goo.gl/SiHo6H>.

49 "Statement By Secretary Jeh C. Johnson On Family Residential Centers, June 24, 2015. U.S. Department of Homeland Security website." <http://goo.gl/y3raVP>.

50 "United States Border Patrol Southwest Family Unit Subject and Unaccompanied Alien Children Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2016." <http://goo.gl/OZ82Wa>.

51 U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America, pp. 1-2, <https://goo.gl/rarLK0>.

52 Rocheleau, Matt. "This is how bad El Salvador's murder rate is," The Boston Globe, July 9, 2015.

53 "Children on the Run." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Office for the United States and the Caribbean, p. 6.

## ANNEX II: FISCAL YEAR 2017 BUDGET REQUEST FOR CENTRAL AMERICA

State/USAID—(\$750.6M)      Trade and Development Agency—\$3M      DHS—\$10M  
 Other Function 150 (\$26.6M)      Treasury—\$14.6M      DoD—Counter narcotics—\$49.2M  
 OPIC—\$2M      Other Agencies (\$107.9M)      USDA—\$40.7M  
 Inter-American Foundation—\$7M      DOL—\$8M

<b>CENTRAL AMERICA STATE/USAID FUNDING</b>	<b>750.6</b>
<i>Subtotal Northern Tier</i>	<b>338.7</b>
<b>EL SALVADOR</b>	<b>88.0</b>
Development Assistance	85.3
Economic Support Fund	—
Foreign Military Financing	1.9
International Military Education and Training	0.8
<b>GUATEMALA</b>	<b>145.1</b>
Development Assistance	124.6
Economic Support Fund	—
Food for Peace Title II	5.0
Foreign Military Financing	1.7
Global Health Programs—USAID	13.0
International Military Education and Training	0.8
<b>HONDURAS</b>	<b>105.7</b>
Development Assistance	100.4
Economic Support Fund	—
Foreign Military Financing	4.5
International Military Education and Training	0.8
<b>STATE WESTERN HEMISPHERE REGIONAL</b>	<b>57.8</b>
Economic Support Fund	15.3
Development Assistance	32.5
Foreign Military Financing	10.0
Overseas Private Investment Cooperation	—
<b>STATE OCEANS &amp; INTERN'L ENVIR. AND SCI. AFFAIRS</b>	<b>28.0</b>
Economic Support Fund/Smart Climate Food Security/CCRIF-CA	28.0
<b>TOTAL FOR BELIZE, COSTA RICA, NICARAGUA, AND PANAMA</b>	<b>21.1</b>
<b>BELIZE</b>	<b>1.3</b>
Foreign Military Financing	1.0
International Military Education and Training	0.3
<b>COSTA RICA</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Foreign Military Financing	1.4
International Military Education and Training	0.4
<b>NICARAGUA</b>	<b>14.8</b>
Development Assistance	14.5
Economic Support Fund	—
International Military Education and Training	0.3
<b>PANAMA</b>	<b>3.2</b>
Foreign Military Financing	2.0
International Military Education and Training	0.7
Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs	0.5
<b>CARSI</b>	<b>305.0</b>
Economic Support Fund	100.0
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement	205.0
<b>ACCOUNT TOTALS</b>	<b>750.6</b>
Development Assistance	357.3
Economic Support Fund	143.3
Food for Peace, Title II	5.0
Foreign Military Financing	22.5
Global Health Programs - USAID	13.0
International Military Education and Training	4.0
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement	205.0
Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs	0.5
International Organizations & Programs—Climate Smart Food Security	—

## ANNEX III: FUNDING PROVIDED FOR NORTHERN TRIANGLE IN FY 16 OMNIBUS

[Budget authority in thousands of dollars]

COUNTRY / PROGRAM	BUDGET AUTHORITY
<b>DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE</b>	
El Salvador	65,000
Gautemala	112,000
Honduras	93,000
Nicaragua	10,000
USAID Central America Regional	19,410
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>299,410</b>
<b>ECONOMIC SUPPORT FUND</b>	
Central America Rgional Security Initiative	126,500
Other Regional—Economic Opportunity	7,000
Other Regional—Prosperity and Governance	50,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>183,500</b>
<b>FOREIGN MILITARY FINANCING PROGRAM</b>	
Belize	1,000
Costa Rica	1,400
El Salvador	1,900
Guatemala	1,740
Honduras	4,500
Panama	2,125
State Western Hemisphere Regional	13,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>25,665</b>
<b>INTERNATIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING</b>	
Belize	250
Costa Rica	425
El Salvador	1,000
Guatemala	775
Honduras	750
Panama	725
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>3,925</b>
<b>GLOBAL HEALTH PROGRAMS—USAID</b>	
Guatemala	13,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>13,000</b>
<b>INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL AND LAW ENFORCEMENT</b>	
Central America Regional Security Initiative	222,000
<i>DNA Forensic Technology</i>	<i>[4,000]</i>
<i>Guatemala Police Sexual Assault Units</i>	<i>[3,000]</i>
<i>International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala</i>	<i>[7,500]</i>
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>222,000</b>
<b>NONPROLIFERATION, ANTI-TERRORISM, DEMINING AND RELATED PROGRAMS</b>	
Panama	500
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>500</b>
<b>OVERSEAS PRIVATE INVESTMENT CORPORATION</b>	
Regional	2,000
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>2,000</b>
<b>TOTAL, UNITED STATES STRATEGY FOR ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL AMERICA</b>	<b>750,000</b>

## ANNEX IV: CONDITIONS ON FUNDING IN FY 16 OMNIBUS

(Language bolded within the text were advocated by CRS.)

### FY2016 OMNIBUS, PROVISIONS AFFECTING THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE<sup>54</sup>

#### WESTERN HEMISPHERE

SEC. 7045. (a) UNITED STATES ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

##### (1) FUNDING.

Subject to the requirements of this subsection, of the funds appropriated under titles III and IV of this Act, up to \$750,000,000 may be made available for assistance for countries in Central America to implement the United States Strategy for Engagement in Central America (the Strategy) in support of the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle of Central America (the Plan): *Provided*, That the Secretary of State and Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) shall prioritize such assistance to address the key factors in such countries contributing to the migration of unaccompanied, undocumented minors to the United States: *Provided further*, That such funds shall be made available to the maximum extent practicable on a cost-matching basis.

##### 2) PRE-OBLIGATION REQUIREMENTS.

Prior to the obligation of funds made available pursuant to paragraph (1), the Secretary of State shall submit to the Committees on Appropriations a multi-year spend plan specifying the proposed uses of such funds in each country and the objectives, indicators to measure progress, and a timeline to implement the Strategy, and the amounts made available from prior Acts making appropriations for the Department of State, foreign operations, and related programs to support such Strategy: *Provided*, That such spend plan shall also include a description of how such assistance will differ from, complement, and leverage funds allocated by each government and other donors, including international financial institutions.

##### (3) ASSISTANCE FOR THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS OF EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, AND HONDURAS.

Of the funds made available pursuant to paragraph (1) that are available for assistance for each of the central governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the following amounts shall be withheld from obligation and may only be made available as follows:

- (A) 25 percent may only be obligated after the Secretary of State certifies and reports to the appropriate congressional committees that such government is taking effective steps to—
  - (i) inform its citizens of the dangers of the journey to the southwest border of the United States;
  - (ii) combat human smuggling and trafficking;
  - (iii) improve border security; and
  - (iv) cooperate with United States Government agencies and other governments in the region to facilitate the return, repatriation, and reintegration of illegal migrants arriving at the southwest border of the United States who do not qualify as refugees, consistent with international law.
- (B) An additional 50 percent may only be obligated after the Secretary of State certifies and reports to the appropriate congressional committees that such government is taking effective steps to—
  - (i) **establish an autonomous, publicly accountable entity to provide oversight of the Plan;**
  - (ii) combat corruption, including investigating and prosecuting government officials credibly alleged to be corrupt;
  - (iii) implement reforms, policies, and programs to improve transparency and strengthen public institutions, including increasing the capacity and independence of the judiciary and the Office of the Attorney General;

<sup>54</sup> Text of House amendment #1 to Senate amendment to H.R. 2029, military construction and veterans affairs and related agencies appropriations act, 2016.

- (iv) **establish and implement a policy that local communities, civil society organizations (including indigenous and other marginalized groups), and local governments are consulted in the design, and participate in the implementation and evaluation of, activities of the Plan that affect such communities, organizations, and governments;**
- (v) counter the activities of criminal gangs, drug traffickers, and organized crime;
- (vi) investigate and prosecute in the civilian justice system members of military and police forces who are credibly alleged to have violated human rights, and ensure that the military and police are cooperating in such cases;
- (vii) cooperate with commissions against impunity, as appropriate, and with regional human rights entities;
- (viii) support programs to reduce poverty, create jobs, and promote equitable economic growth in areas contributing to large numbers of migrants;
- (ix) establish and implement a plan to create a professional, accountable civilian police force and curtail the role of the military in internal policing;
- (x) protect the right of political opposition parties, journalists, trade unionists, human rights defenders, and other civil society activists to operate without interference;
- (xi) increase government revenues, including by implementing tax reforms and strengthening customs agencies; and
- (xii) resolve commercial disputes, including the confiscation of real property, between United States entities and such government.

#### **(4) SUSPENSION OF ASSISTANCE AND PERIODIC REVIEW.**

- (A) The Secretary of State shall periodically review the progress of each of the central governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in meeting the requirements of paragraphs (3)(A) and (3)(B) and shall, not later than September 30, 2016, submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report assessing such progress: *Provided*, That if the Secretary determines that sufficient progress has not been made by a central government, the Secretary shall suspend, in whole or in part, assistance for such government for programs supporting such requirement, and shall notify such committees in writing of such action: *Provided further*, That the Secretary may resume funding for such programs only after the Secretary certifies to such committees that corrective measures have been taken.
- (B) The Secretary of State shall, following a change of national government in El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras, determine and report to the appropriate congressional committees that any new government has committed to take the steps to meet the requirements of paragraphs (3)(A) and (3)(B): *Provided*, That if the Secretary is unable to make such a determination in a timely manner, assistance made available under this subsection for such central government shall be suspended, in whole or in part, until such time as such determination and report can be made.

#### **(5) PROGRAMS AND TRANSFER OF FUNDS.**

- (A) Funds appropriated by this Act for the Central America Regional Security Initiative may be made available, after consultation with, and subject to the regular notification procedures of, the Committees on Appropriations, to support international commissions against impunity in Honduras and El Salvador, if such commissions are established.
- (B) The Department of State and USAID may, following consultation with the Committees on Appropriations, transfer funds made available by this Act under the heading "Development Assistance" to the Inter-American Development Bank and the Inter-American Foundation for technical assistance in support of the Strategy.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 UNHCR, "Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection," 2014, available at <http://unhcrwashington.org/children>.
- 2 Michael D. Shear, "Red Tape Slows U.S. Help for Children Fleeing Central America," New York Times, Nov. 5, 2015. The program allows a two-year temporary entry into the United States for children who do not qualify as refugees. They must apply to renew entry status every two years and are not eligible to pursue American citizenship.
- 3 Senate letter to Obama Administration.

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