

## SUMMARY

### *Shelter from the Storm: Policy Options to Address Climate Induced Displacement from the Northern Triangle*

The planet is experiencing intense climate change. In fact, the most recent decade has been the warmest ever recorded. This climate crisis has exacerbated widespread migration by affected communities, and some experts estimate that it could displace over 200 million people by 2050.

The Northern Triangle — the area that includes Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras — is one of the world's regions most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Last year, Hurricanes Iota and Eta ravaged the Northern Triangle, causing massive flooding and rain. The convergence of the hurricanes' impact, the COVID-19 pandemic, and pre-existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities are expected to exacerbate the already deteriorating environmental situation that is driving people from their homes into urban centers and towards the United States. ***Experts project that climate change will displace up to 3.9 million people across Mexico and Central America by 2050.***

As one of the world's greatest emitters of greenhouse gases, the United States has contributed to the world's climate crisis. In light of this, as well as the country's role in contributing to the political instability in the region, the United States must improve and strengthen its current immigration policies to ensure that those who are forced to migrate can do so with security and dignity.

This white paper examines the large-scale migration of residents from the Northern Triangle. It analyzes the impacts of climate change on migration and its relationship to current and future migration flows. The paper addresses the increasing recognition of the relevance of refugee protection and charts a course forward, recommending legislative and administrative measures in seven areas that, if adopted, would ensure greater protection for those who flee environmental disaster:

- 1. Reconceptualize Environmental Crises to Include Slow-Onset Weather Events:** Countries are devastated not only by rapid weather events, but also by ***slow-moving environmental crises***, such as droughts and coastal erosion. The Biden Administration should consider making programs such as Temporary Protected Status, Deferred Enforced Departure, and Humanitarian Parole available also to those facing slow-onset events as both urgent and worthy of special attention.
- 2. Expand Temporary Emergency Programs to Individuals Outside the United States:** The protections the United States affords those displaced by environmental disasters already in the country should be extended to those outside the United States as well.
- 3. Create a New Climate Visa:** Climate displacement visas could be granted for a specific number of years and renewed if the conditions resulting in displacement continue; such visas could offer a path to permanent residency and citizenship.

4. **Broaden the Definition of the Public/National Interest** By broadening the definition of public or national interest to encompass the climate-migration nexus, U.S. policies and laws granting migratory relief could better address the humanitarian needs arising from future migration flows.

5. **Integrate climate change in the current asylum framework:** The Biden Administration, in consultation with NGOs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, should issue guidelines for considering climate change displacement, where appropriate, in the current asylum framework.

6. **Restore and strengthen the asylum system in the United States:** The Biden Administration should rescind regulations from the prior administration that undermined decades of asylum jurisprudence and disregarded U.S. obligations under the Refugee Convention and Protocol and international law.

7. **Increase Research on Climate Migration:** While research on climate migration generally is no doubt useful, there should be a special focus on migration from Northern Triangle countries into the United States, given the complex historical and political relationship between the United States and countries in the region.