



MANAGING REGIONAL MIGRATION: A BLUEPRINT

The migration-related challenges facing the United States and its neighbors today are not new. Challenges like today's – in more and less acute forms – have arisen multiple times during the last three decades. What must be new, however, is how the United States and its neighbors respond.

It is time for an integrated, regional approach responsive to the myriad factors that compel people to migrate along a corridor that stretches from Panama to Canada creating a de facto migratory system that can and should be managed to: advance U.S. national interests; ensure protections and respect for the rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees; and address the drivers of irregular migration.

This Blueprint lays out just such an approach through recommendations – phased over four years – directed to the United States, other regional governments, and critical international and civil society stakeholders. Firmly grounded in regional political and economic realities, the Blueprint makes detailed, integrated recommendations for the steps necessary to ensure safe, orderly, and humane migration management across four lines of action:

- **U.S.-Mexico Border Management**
- **Regional Solutions** – protection and enhanced complimentary pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration
- **In-region Dynamics** – root causes and reintegration services
- **Preparations for a New Normal**

U.S.-Mexico Border Management. The Blueprint lays out specific steps the United States must take to lead by example on modern border management. It lays out how asylum-seekers, including unaccompanied children, families, and other vulnerable migrants, for example, can be processed inside the United States in a fair, orderly, humane, and timely manner. It also describes how, during the adjudication, all asylum-seekers can have access to counsel and other due process safeguards, and how facilities must be staffed and equipped to ensure the health and safety of all. It delves into the kind of support individuals who are granted asylum must receive to integrate in the United States and the reception and reintegration services that must be provided to those who do not qualify for asylum or other forms of relief as they are quickly and safely returned to their home country. To ensure the United States never again finds itself struggling with the logistical challenges currently unfolding along the U.S.-Mexico border, the Blueprint also lays out how a next generation U.S. border management system must incorporate a well-established emergency preparedness plan to rapidly and humanely scale-up and respond to future influxes.

Regional Solutions. Recognizing both that the crisis in northern Central America is fundamentally a protection crisis and that crossing through multiple countries and approaching an international border is seldom the best way for an individual to secure protection, the Blueprint sets forth how to secure better protection outcomes along the displacement continuum – protection “at home,” protection “en route,” and international protection. It lays out critical steps needed to strengthen and expand safe migration and protection pathways in the hemisphere, including through engage-

ment with regional governments, civil society, international humanitarian actors (IHAs), and others to ensure: (1) internally displaced persons in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras can access quality protection options at home; (2) people forced to flee those countries can do so in safety and dignity; and (3) asylum seekers and refugees, and other migrants in the region have increased access to asylum, resettlement and/or complementary pathways to protection, as well as access to economic opportunities. The Blueprint lays out detailed recommendations so that four years from now – if not sooner – a young person from, for example, San Pedro Sula, Honduras who is under threat may be able to access protection by:

- Registering as an internally displaced person under Honduran law and, with this protected status, receive access to quality support with relocation, integration, and legal recourse.
- Requesting protection in a neighboring country with a functional asylum system, like Mexico or Costa Rica.
- Having access to complementary pathways to protection, including applying for a wide-range of immigrant and non-immigrant visas and parole for admission to the United States or other countries.
- Being able to access a refugee resettlement process from Honduras.
- Requesting asylum at a U.S. port of entry.

In-Region Conditions. Recognizing that individuals have a right to remain in their home country, with conditions sufficient to allow that, the Blueprint lays out recommended actions to begin addressing pandemic-related economic woes, resource scarcity, and climate change, among other factors that, unchecked, will continue to increase insecurity across northern Central America, which will, in turn, grow the ranks of internally displaced persons and those fleeing the region primarily because of violence or the threat of violence. Given the importance of sustained efforts on these fronts, the Blueprint lays out key steps towards long lasting solutions that can be put in place and reinforced over the next four years to ensure the promise of future success. To ensure the safe return of deportees to the region, the Blueprint considers smarter and more humane return and reintegration policies, practices, and programs, beginning in the immediate- and short-term with efforts to shore up extant humanitarian services for deportees in the most vulnerable situations, and work to extend these services as much as possible beyond major cities into deportees' communities, and beyond the first few days following deportees' arrival.

Prepare for a New Normal. It is past time to break the cycle of crisis response in term of managing regional migration. To that end, the Blueprint also lays out actions needed to lay the groundwork for medium- and long-term progress towards solutions. At each stage of implementation, the Blueprint outlines actions needed to lay the groundwork for future agreements, commitments and the implementation of policies and programs. It addresses personnel, authorities, infrastructure, resources, and partnerships, stressing the need to bifurcate policy efforts between two teams, one charged with immediate actions and another dedicated to envisioning and finding a path to a better, long-term solution.

Although it is not an emergency response plan, this Blueprint is an indispensable companion to any emergency response, if, for no other reason, to make certain this emergency response is the last of its kind.



BLUEPRINT FOR REGIONAL MIGRATION

Central America – Mexico – United States – Canada
Public-Facing Policy Recommendations

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Blueprint for Regional Migration was carried out by the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA) and completed in January 2021. This Blueprint is an adaptation of a private-facing document produced for the Biden-Harris transition team. The Blueprint was made possible by innovative thinking from several consultants and generous support and strategic guidance from the Open Society Foundations. CDA continues to work on the policy recommendations with an eye toward long-term solutions, and continued learning and engagement with key stakeholders and the region’s civil society actors.

PREFACE

During the Transition and first 30 days, the Biden-Harris administration took key steps toward resetting the tone in U.S. immigration discourse, and establishing a forward-leaning and protection-sensitive migration management agenda.

On his first day, President Biden sent a draft text of the U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021 to Congress, which charts a roadmap to citizenship for over 10.6 million undocumented persons, including Dreamers, TPS holders, and immigrant farmworkers, in addition to other provisions related to immigrant and refugee integration, border management and addressing root causes of migration.

Furthermore, the Biden-Harris administration issued a series of key executive orders designed to tackle the root causes of migration with an emphasis on regional cooperation; prepare for the safe and orderly processing of asylum seekers at the U.S. Border; rebuild and expand the United States Refugee Admissions Program; consider protections for people displaced by climate change-related impacts; and reunite families separated under the previous administration. These orders were also accompanied by a series of announcements indicating, inter alia, a termination of the Asylum Cooperative Agreements, and suspension of the Migrant Protection Protocols.

The actions taken thus far are some of the fundamental underpinnings of a new approach to safe, regular, and orderly migration, and mirror some of the policy recommendations the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA) and its partners have advocated for and set forth in this document. CDA welcomes these policies and directives and encourages the Biden-Harris administration to consider this Blueprint as it continues to chart the path forward for implementing its vision.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Blueprint for regional migration focuses on recommendations for U.S. policymakers that prioritize North American and regional leadership and cooperation based in regional political and economic realities and that take into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as Hurricanes Eta and Iota. It puts forward a new approach to regional migration policy whereby North and Central American leaders work together to create new, better, and expanded options for would-be migrants, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, while aligning development, protection, and migration management initiatives along the Mesoamerican migratory chain to those ends.

The vision is one of regional cooperation that results in improved migration management, as well as protections and respect for the rights of people on the move. The Blueprint envisions North American leaders coordinating and refocusing their humanitarian and strategic engagement in the region; it recommends a focus on El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, improving conditions and protections at home for those who need it; and it envisions supporting Costa Rica and Panama to further strengthen their migration and protection systems so that they can continue to expand their participation in regional migration solutions.

The Blueprint outlines an integrated and sequenced approach to address regional migration in an orderly, efficient, and humane manner, and proposes taking coordinated actions in four critical lanes:

- (1) U.S.-Mexico border management**
- (2) Regional solutions: protection, and enhanced pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration, including complementary pathways to protection for refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations**
- (3) Root causes of migration**
- (4) Preparations for a new normal**

In the **First 100 Days**, the Administration should roll out a new policy framework and announce executive actions to address immediate challenges at the U.S.-Mexico border. This should begin a sustained process of engaging key stakeholders, including Congress and civil society actors.

Key personnel decisions such as the appointment of a White House coordinator for the Central-North America migration corridor and a Senior Advisor to the Deputy Secretary of State are critical to managing migration in a safe and orderly way to guide an effective policymaking structure with robust interagency participation. Border management operations should quickly stand up capacity to process increasing numbers of asylum seekers per day at ports of entry (POEs), while working with Mexican authorities and international humanitarian agencies (IHAs) to provide humanitarian assistance and coordinate child protection services, and work with U.S. civil society to stand up shelter operations and case management services. While dealing with short-term challenges at the border, policymakers should lay the groundwork for a long-term approach. The U.S. should also press for a convening of North American and regional leaders (Canada, U.S., Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama) to discuss regional solutions, make public commitments, and work toward early wins. Early U.S. efforts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras should address humanitarian needs and cultivate hope. All the while, U.S. policymakers should put in place the building blocks of a long-term, sustainable approach, capitalizing on the

moment to lay the foundation for a long-term vision of a border management system and regional cooperation.

Within the **First Year**, the policy focus should start to shift towards long-term, sustainable solutions. Momentum from a successful regional leaders' summit should carry into the Summit of the Americas, where countries can showcase early actions and successes. Regional migration solutions should be in-focus in multilateral fora. Governments should cooperate with humanitarian actors – UN agencies, INGOs, and civil society working in humanitarian and human rights spheres, to name a few – to increase, expand, and improve protection options throughout the region. These include protection for IDPs, different avenues to asylum and resettlement in the region, and complementary pathways to protection. The U.S. should re-establish strong binational coordination with Mexico that aids in border management and the expansion of protection solutions, and efforts to address root causes in Mexico and NTCA countries, including continued humanitarian relief, and long-term interventions to enhance democratic governance, spur economic growth, reduce insecurity and violence, and address the climate crisis.

Finally, the Blueprint envisions that in **four years' time**, sustainable border management solutions that adhere to U.S. values and demonstrate U.S. leadership on protection will be in place; regional collaboration through bilateral and multilateral channels on regional migration solutions have advanced; effective interventions to address root causes of migration are underway; and protection solutions for migrants and refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have expanded throughout the region—from Panama to Canada—, with the collaboration of a strengthened and respected civil society. There will also be more opportunities for would-be migrants to participate in temporary dignified work arrangements in the U.S., Costa Rica, Panama, Canada, and Mexico.

Although directed primarily to the new U.S. administration, the approach and policies called for in the Blueprint will only be possible with the active involvement of the U.S. Congress as well as governments and civil society in all countries in the Central America-North America migratory system. The U.S. Congress, in particular, will play a critical role both in providing funding for a number of the activities to reshape the United States' approach to migration at home and throughout the region and for efforts to address the drivers of irregular migration, as well in holding the new administration – and governments throughout the region – to account.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE PROJECT	1
PREFACE	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
CHALLENGE	7
OPPORTUNITIES	10
THE BLUEPRINT	11
VISION	13
Vision by area of focus	13
<i>RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	<i>16</i>
TIME PERIOD: FIRST 100 DAYS	16
TIME PERIOD: YEAR 1	25
TIME PERIOD: OVER FOUR YEARS	34

INTRODUCTION

The Blueprint for regional migration puts forward a new approach to regional migration policy whereby North and Central American leaders work together to create new, better, and expanded options for would-be migrants, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, while aligning development, protection, and migration management initiatives along the Mesoamerican migratory chain to those ends.

The Blueprint proposes a series of protection solutions across the region that include efforts to strengthen asylum procedures in countries of refuge and expand access to resettlement and other safe and legal pathways to protection; the Blueprint also proposes migration options, such as legal labor pathways for example, that account for the changing needs of the migrant population and destination countries. All protection efforts should comply with international human rights and refugee law, as well as international protection standards. The Blueprint proposes actions for U.S. policymakers, including changes to U.S. policy, bilateral actions, engagement with international humanitarian and civil society actors, as well as U.S. engagement and leadership through already-established regional mechanisms. Considering the U.S. retreat from the region in recent years, particularly in the protection arena, the Blueprint, at its core, is rooted in restoring relationships, promoting cooperation with humility, leading by example, and providing the requisite support, while demanding accountability and good governance.

To ensure progress, the Blueprint proposes specific goals and actions for the First 100 Days, Year 1, and Over Four Years, to achieve immediate-, medium-, and long-term solutions. It urges the U.S. Administration to avoid getting stuck solely on crisis response and recommends that it stand up two centrally managed regional migration teams who coordinate with each other: one charged with crisis response and the other with envisioning and laying the groundwork for a better, longer-term approach.

A Protection and Humanitarian Emergency: The U.S. Government (USG) should pursue lasting solutions that address regional migration pressures, including adopting a new approach to the protection crisis in the region. Rising insecurity, corruption, poverty, inequality, unemployment, and climate change-induced drought and food insecurity in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras continue to yield internally displaced persons (IDPs), dramatically increasing pressures on populations to move *across* borders in search of safety and stability. In addition, several other factors have significantly compounded regional migration pressures. These include four years of Trump policy initiatives to slow down and outright block migrant and refugee flows into the U.S.; the public health, economic, and humanitarian crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will continue to impact regional migration flows and remain a key challenge to policy solutions and progress in 2021 and 2022; and the recent devastation caused by Hurricanes Eta and Iota.

A Regional Approach: The U.S. must lead a robust multi-year regional effort to adopt a new approach to migration. This approach must acknowledge that these are transnational societies with a long history of circulation and migration, and lay the groundwork for the development of refugee and migration solutions throughout the region that provide a new horizon of hope for people who might otherwise be forced to leave their homes and cross borders in search of safety and stability.

The Biden-Harris administration should work hand in glove with Mexico and Canada to immediately plan a North American Leaders Summit (NALS) to develop such solutions and, closely on its heels, a summit with participation of leaders from Canada, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama, and begin to identify areas for joint commitments.

The Blueprint fully recognizes that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are not monolithic, and each have unique environmental, governance, and security challenges which complicate the context as well as prospects for cooperation. It also recognizes that effective regional cooperation and/or integration across sectors has proven elusive throughout the Central America-North America corridor. However, the Blueprint assumes that a reset can occur with stronger regional ties borne of migration pressures, economic necessity, and joint health cooperation.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

CHALLENGE

When it comes to managing migration, it is difficult to overstate the challenge the United States faces in 2021. It must re-engage internationally in a highly politicized space in which it has lost considerable moral authority; carefully unwind, deconstruct, and reverse damaging policies of the previous Administration; and take immediate measures to try to manage pent-up regional migration pressures that have grown exponentially in the past four years. It will have to re-establish asylum processes on the U.S.-Mexico border; marshal a regional response to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects across the region; engage in standing up regional protection mechanisms for those forced to be on the move; support displacement prevention and response efforts along with services for those it has deported; reimagine U.S. efforts to address root causes of migration; and reset its relationship with partners to earnestly collaborate on regional migration *solutions*, as opposed to only prevention.

Meeting these challenges with urgency is not only the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. First, the absence of protection options is fueling a cycle of displacement and onward migration: today's IDPs will become tomorrow's asylum seekers and refugees. Second, deportees face the same security risks as those who never left El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras – forced recruitment, extortion, threats of violence, and rape – as well as unique security challenges. If they fled due to violence, the reasons for their flight likely remain pertinent. One could argue that those deportees who have resided outside of their country of origin for many years face greater risks because they lack the knowledge of gang-related violence and insecurity dynamics. These deportees – particularly those from the United States – are likely to become targets of extortion as criminal elements assume they had the opportunity to earn income while abroad. Third, the circular pattern of migration leads to “repeat offenders;” in other words, persons who feel they have no option but to embark on the migratory route again.

Failures in democratic governance – which redound in states' inability to fulfill citizens' aspirations and needs, protect and realize their rights, and tackle the mounting effects of the climate crisis – lie at the heart of drivers and root causes of migration. In 2019 alone, 387,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were forced to leave their homes in search of protection. Killings and death threats, extortion, forced recruitment into gangs, intimate partner violence, and sexual violence are some of the reasons many decide to flee. Women are at a higher risk of femicide than any other region in the world, and LGBTQI+ individuals are particularly targeted.¹ Though recent years have seen a decline, the homicide rates in all three countries remain among the world's highest. According to the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, such is the environment of fear and insecurity that many describe the scenario and its impacts as a situation similar to armed conflicts.²

¹ *Protection and Solutions in the North of Central America and Mexico: An Appeal to Canada* (Ottawa: UNHCR Canada, 2019), 1. https://www.unhcr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/mirps-asks-for-Canada_Dec2018.pdf

² *A Regional Humanitarian Response Plan for an Intensifying Humanitarian Crisis in the North of Central America* (Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2019), 1. <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/position-papers/north-of-central-america/a-regional-humanitarian-response-plan-for-the-nca.pdf>

The governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have generally failed to provide protection to their nationals who have had to displace internally, contributing to onward migration. IDPs reside within their national borders, and as such, the primary responsibility for meeting their protection and assistance needs lies with that state. However, until very recently, El Salvador refused to even acknowledge the existence of an internal displacement phenomenon; Guatemala still does not; and Honduras has yet to adopt legislation on the matter. For those on the run in El Salvador and Honduras, there are few places to hide, there are few state-sponsored options, and shelters run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have limited capacity. The provision of humanitarian aid and protection services is effectively outsourced to civil society. Government agencies that are mandated to provide protection have minimal budgets and often call on NGOs to provide support. In fact, the lack of funding, technical capacity, and coordination protocols across the El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras government agencies with protection responsibilities have led to what some civil society members call a game of “ping pong” in which people in need of protection are referred back and forth across agencies, without actually receiving services. The lack of protection options and assistance drives IDPs across borders.³

Protection options for those who flee across borders can also be elusive. There are significant barriers to identifying people in need of protection amongst mixed migration flows, and there are limited protection options on offer. The asylum system in Costa Rica has fallen under great strain due to incoming migration flows from Nicaragua, Venezuela, and beyond. The Mexican asylum system is affording ever-greater protections to refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, but the needs far outweigh Mexico’s current capacity. Meanwhile, the U.S. has not only been largely absent from the protection sphere, it has done significant damage to the integrity of its asylum system, as well as the global asylum and protection space. Canada has been a champion of refugee protection, but it has prioritized attention to other global protection crises. Lastly, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has further restricted protection options as some countries seen as destinations for asylum seekers, such as Costa Rica, shut borders, and others have had to reassign protection staff to COVID-19-related duties.

For residents of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, economic opportunity at home is also difficult to come by. Every year in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, about 700,000 young people come of working age. Guatemala’s and Honduras’s youth surges are entering the workforce amid massive inequality and sluggish economies to find the majority of jobs are in the informal economy. The unemployment rate among young people in El Salvador and Honduras is around 15 percent, and it is about half that, although still high, in Guatemala. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras rank among the most impoverished and unequal countries in the Western Hemisphere, and much of the region’s workforce – 32 percent in Honduras and 29 percent in Guatemala – works in the agricultural sector, which is vulnerable to climate insecurity. Mexico will likely create migration pressures for the U.S. as well. The country is facing rising levels of violence, an economic crisis exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and an uncertain path to

³ Francisca Vigaud-Walsh, Eric Schwartz, and Gabriela Dehesa-Azuara, *Putting Lives at Risk: Protection Failures Affecting Hondurans and Salvadorans Deported from the United States and Mexico* (Washington: Refugees International, 2018), 19.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/506c8ea1e4b01d9450dd53f5/t/5a849f81c830250842098d87/1518641035445/Northern+Triangle+-+Refugees+International.pdf>

recovery. Mexico’s GDP is predicted to contract by 9 percent in 2021. In 2020, COVID-19 shrank economies in the region by an average of 5.9 percent, further worsening this landscape.

Migratory flows in the Western Hemisphere are here to stay. Protection needs will persist, and given that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are flanked by countries with relative economic stability and labor opportunities, so too will economic drivers of migration. It is in North and Central America’s best interest to expand and strengthen options for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Doing so is more humane, orderly, and safe, and will serve to curb irregular migration and stand up protection systems that will work for the countries of the region.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

OPPORTUNITIES

If the United States adheres to the values and commitments it espouses and wishes to restore order at its southwest border and in its asylum system, it has no choice but to lean into the migration and protection challenges facing the region. Although the challenge faced by the Biden-Harris administration is exacerbated by the wreckage left behind by its predecessor, the total dismantling of systems in the last four years creates a unique opportunity to reimagine the U.S. approach and build a framework that meaningfully addresses systemic challenges in a comprehensive way.

Both the need and opportunity to do so is also driven by the systemic challenge created by COVID-19 and its implications for movement along the Mesoamerican migratory chain. By its very nature, effective management of a pandemic requires enhanced international cooperation. This is particularly true when the pandemic's health and economic effects add additional fuel to the drivers of irregular migration.

Two things will be critical to seizing this opportunity. First, the U.S. should embrace humility in its attempts to lead, and place considerable focus on its own affairs, specifically on improving U.S. border management practices and domestic immigration policies. Second, it will require the ability to balance crisis-response efforts with efforts to build a longer-term system to manage migration and not again fall into the trap of past insufficient efforts to address migration and protection challenges as short-term ones.

In the effort to build durable, long-term solutions, among other efforts, the United States would be well advised to engage with and build upon a relatively new platform for regional action and responsibility-sharing with which the U.S. could further engage in the region. In October 2017, Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama presented a regional Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. The framework, called MIRPS in Spanish, reflects a collective effort to address forced displacement by linking countries of origin, transit, and destination. MIRPS aims to: (1) Improve mechanisms for reception and admission; (2) Respond to immediate and persistent humanitarian and protection needs; (3) Support host countries and communities; and (4) Enhance opportunities for durable solutions. Each country has developed a national action plan with commitments to meet those four objectives. While the mechanism has many challenges, it provides an avenue for action-oriented multilateralism and it remains the mechanism for implementing regional solutions.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

THE BLUEPRINT

The Blueprint proposes recommendations for U.S. policymakers that prioritize North American and regional leadership and cooperation, are based in regional political and economic realities, and consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as Hurricanes Eta and Iota. The Blueprint does not ignore extra continental flows or flows from sub-regions other than Central America and Mexico, but it focuses on migration from Central America and Mexico. It offers a new approach to regional migration that:

- Restores U.S. values;
- Acknowledges the continual nature of migration flows in the region;
- Affords protections for and respects the rights of would-be migrants, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, as well as provides access to new economic opportunities;
- Champions U.S. and North American leadership;
- Promotes North and Central American cooperation on regional solutions;
- Takes steps to enhance safe options in source countries and normalize flows in ways that will meet the rights of migrants and refugees, as well as the commitments and needs of the U.S. and other regional actors; and
- Stresses the importance of medium- and long-term engagement in the region to tackle the root causes of migration, including violence and insecurity, lack of economic opportunities, failures in democratic governance, and the climate crisis.

The Blueprint's recommendations draw on information gleaned during extensive consultations with over 100 U.S. and regional issue-area experts over the six-month period June-November of 2020. It has also benefited from several recent policy projects by other institutions. It incorporates, prioritizes, and sequences some of the recommendations included in the Emerson Collective's Northern Triangle Project, the Immigration Hub and America's Voice Big Book, the National Security Action's FP2021 project, the Center for American Progress First 100 Days report, the Penn Biden Center's Refugee Admissions Project, and others where appropriate, while building them out based on our extensive consultations. The Blueprint was made possible by innovative thinking from several consultants and generous support and strategic guidance from the Open Society Foundations.

Blueprint structure: The Blueprint outlines an integrated and sequenced approach to addressing regional migration in an orderly, efficient, and humane manner, and proposes taking coordinated actions in four critical lanes: (1) **U.S.-Mexico border management** (2) **Regional solutions: protection, and enhanced pathways for safe, orderly, and regular migration, including complementary pathways to protection for refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations;** (3) **Root causes of migration;** and (4) **Preparations for a new normal.** The vision for each of these areas is below.

The overall document is divided into specific time periods:

- First 100 Days
- Year 1
- Over Four Years

The plan is not a short-term, crisis response plan. Nor is it a purely aspirational document. The Blueprint aims to connect the dots between the two by walking policymakers through the next four years and coming as close to the aspirational as possible. Each time period contains our assumptions, goals, and specific proposed actions.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

VISION

The vision is one of regional cooperation across North and Central America that results in policies that offer improved migration management and protections for – and respects the rights of – would-be migrants, asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees. The Blueprint envisions North American leaders coordinating and refocusing their humanitarian and strategic engagement in the region; El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras improving conditions and protections at home for those who need it; and Costa Rica and Panama - though presently limited by emerging challenges and capacity constraints - strengthening systems so they can continue to engage more broadly in regional migration solutions.

Four years from now, the USG will have made substantial progress in fully re-establishing its leadership and commitment to humanitarian values, marshaled robust regional engagement in and commitment to regional solutions, and put in place a sustainable policy infrastructure. It will have revitalized its relationships with the region to address the push factors of migration in source countries. While root causes are being tackled, the Blueprint acknowledges that migration pressures, including climate displacement; political, economic and social pulls and flows; protection needs; and now COVID-19, will continue. Significantly addressing root causes, including climate change mitigation, will take long-term engagement. The U.S. will work together with regional leaders to dramatically expand and improve options for would-be migrants, migrants, and refugees as well as for asylum seekers who have no option but to flee across borders in search of safety. Four years from now, there will also be more opportunities for potential migrants to participate in temporary dignified work arrangements in the U.S., Costa Rica, Panama, Canada, and Mexico.

Vision by area of focus

U.S.-Mexico border management: To restore order, rule of law, and values to U.S. border management; address humanitarian and protection needs; and improve migrant processing and protection, even in the context of COVID-19 response.

The vision is that asylum-seekers - including unaccompanied children, families, and other vulnerable migrants who approach the U.S.-Mexico border - will be processed inside the U.S. in a fair, orderly, humane, and timely manner, and be able to make a protection claim. During the adjudication process, all asylum-seekers will have access to counsel and other due process safeguards, and facilities will be appropriately staffed and equipped to ensure the health and safety of all. Individuals who are granted asylum will receive support to integrate in the U.S. Those who do not qualify for asylum or other options for legal entry in the U.S. will be quickly and safely returned to their home country where they will, upon arrival, be provided access to reception and reintegration services, including meaningful protection as needed. A better U.S. border management system includes a well-established emergency preparedness plan to rapidly and humanely scale-up and respond to future influxes, taking stock of lessons learned from the last ten years.

Regional solutions: Protection, and enhanced pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration, including complementary pathways to protection for refugees and migrants in vulnerable

situations: To strengthen and expand safe migration and protection pathways in the hemisphere, including through engagement with regional governments, humanitarian actors, and others.

The Blueprint sets out a roadmap whereby:

- Internally displaced persons in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras can access quality protection options at home;
- People who are forced to flee El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras do so in safety and dignity; and
- Asylum seekers and refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and other migrants in the region, have increased access to asylum, resettlement and/or complementary pathways to protection, as well as access to economic opportunities throughout the region.

The Blueprint sets forth a vision to secure better protection outcomes by addressing protection challenges through the displacement continuum – **protection “at home”**, **protection “en route”** and **international protection**. It is premised on an understanding that the crisis in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras is fundamentally a protection one that (1) requires an injection of resources aimed at mitigating risk and humanitarian need; and that (2) safe, orderly, and regular migration can only be achieved by putting in place protection safeguards at every stage, and expanding protection-oriented solutions.

Crossing through multiple countries and approaching an international border is not always a safe way for a vulnerable person to secure protection. To curtail the risks in transit, safe and more predictable avenues to safety should also be provided. These should include an expanded menu of protection options “at home” for IDPs and deportees; services along the way that ensure safety and dignity for people forced to flee across borders; and increased access for migrants and refugees to apply for asylum, resettlement, and/or complementary pathways to protection from their home countries.

Four years from now, a young person from San Pedro Sula, Honduras⁴ whose life is under threat will have a broad menu of options for quickly accessing protection, including:

- Registering as an IDP under the national law of their home country and, with this protected status, receiving access to quality support with relocation, integration, and legal recourse.
- Requesting protection in a neighboring country with a functional asylum system, like Mexico, Costa Rica, and Canada.
- Having access to complementary pathways to protection, including applying for a wide-range of immigrant and non-immigrant visas and parole for admission to the U.S. or other countries.
- Being able to access a refugee resettlement process from one’s home country.
- Requesting asylum at a U.S. port of entry.

⁴ In 2018 and 2019, more Hondurans requested asylum at the U.S. Southern border than any other nationality. Honduras has also been the top nationality requesting asylum in Mexico in recent years.

Some of the options described above already exist, but they are small-scale and not well-known in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, especially among marginalized communities.

Root Causes: To address the root causes of migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, which are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Hurricanes Eta and Iota, to bolster the ability and right of individuals to find safety at home and not have to migrate.

Individuals have a right to remain in their home country, with conditions sufficient to allow for that. The Blueprint envisions improved security, economic, climate, and governance conditions, including successful efforts to combat corruption and impunity in source countries. However, it recognizes that the amount of improvement possible across some of these indicators over a four-year time horizon is challenged by pandemic-related economic woes, resource scarcity, and the climate crisis, among other concerns. These challenges could continue to raise levels of insecurity across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, which in turn, will grow the ranks of IDPs and those fleeing the region primarily because of violence or the threat thereof.

To ensure the safe return of deportees, the Blueprint envisions smarter and more humane return and reintegration policies, practices, and programs. In the immediate- and short-term, efforts to grow reintegration initiatives in the region—focused primarily on engineering job opportunities for deportees—will be severely hampered by the COVID-19 economic crisis and therefore will not be sufficient to meaningfully address deportees’ needs. Return and reintegration initiatives will instead have to fall back to shoring up extant humanitarian services for deportees in the most vulnerable situations, and work to extend these services as much as possible beyond major cities into deportees’ communities, and beyond the first few days following deportees’ arrival.

Addressing the forces that drive emigration will take decades of sustained coordination, support and pressure from regional actors to help the region transform in myriad ways. As such, any major initiatives begun in the first months and years will not fully come to fruition for several years. The Blueprint envisions sustained bipartisan support over time that will assure the adequate levels of federal foreign assistance appropriations for meaningful impact on the ground. However, this does not negate the importance and urgency of early and sustained action. The Blueprint lays out key steps towards long lasting solutions that can be put in place and reinforced over the next four years to ensure the promise of future success.

Prepare for a new normal: Actions to lay the groundwork for medium- and long-term progress towards solutions.

At each stage of implementation, the Blueprint outlines actions needed to lay the groundwork for future agreements, commitments and the implementation of policies and programs. It considers personnel, authorities, infrastructure, resources, and partnerships.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

TIME PERIOD: FIRST 100 DAYS

Goals:

- (1) Key Actors Engaged: Key personnel appointed; Congress and stakeholders engaged on regional migration policy plans; and bureaucratic systems and processes established.*
- (2) Steps Taken to Reestablishing (or Restore) the Immigration and Asylum Space.*
- (3) Border Management: Refining a short-term policy approach; groundwork is laid for a medium-term approach; and pivot has been initiated.*
- (4) Regional Solutions: Calls to regional leaders have reestablished and set the tone for relationships, kick-started a reset in North American and regional relations, and laid the foundation for progress towards a comprehensive and multinational regional approach. Successful regional convenings have yielded agreements on an initial set of actions and investments to address factors driving migration and a commitment to urgently work together on regional solutions. Regional processes to support a) enhanced protection for people in need, including complementary pathways to protection; and b) economic pathways for migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, have been initiated.*
- (5) Root Causes: Humanitarian needs in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have begun to be addressed; the U.S. is working with humanitarian actors to address humanitarian needs in Mexico.*
- (6) New Policy Approach: Policymakers are putting in place the building blocks of a long-term, sustainable approach, capitalizing on the moment to lay the foundation for a long-term vision of a border management system and regional cooperation.*

Proposed Actions:

First 100 Goal 1: Key Actors Engaged: Key personnel appointed; Congress and stakeholders engaged on regional migration policy plans; and bureaucratic systems and processes established. The Administration should:

Action 1: Appoint a White House (WH) coordinator for Central America-North America migration and staff, with domestic and foreign policy experts, to sit on two teams; (1) crisis response and (2) long-term solutions. Designating a team to focus on long-term solutions would facilitate a considered exit from crisis response mode. The Coordinator's staff should consist of appointees to Departments and Agencies who are detailed to the NSC.

Action 2: Appoint a Senior Advisor in the office of the Deputy Secretary of State to manage migration policy and restore the leadership of the Department of State.

Action 3: Establish a robust interagency coordinating structure to coordinate the implementation of the regional strategy, with a focus on restoring U.S. values, championing regional solutions, acknowledging the continual nature of migration flows in the region, and taking steps to initiate, expand, and regularize channels that meet the needs of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, and of other regional actors.

Action 4: Consolidate support for urgent redirection of funds, emergency appropriations and foreign assistance appropriations for regional migration solutions, and key immigration reform related components.

First 100 Goal 2: Steps Taken to Reestablishing (or Restore) the Immigration and Asylum Space.

Action 1: First 100-Day policy actions should include:⁵

- Rescinding the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) on Day 1;
- Rescinding and replacing the Trump administration March 20, 2020 CDC Order suspending the right to introduce certain persons into the U.S. from countries where a quarantinable communicable disease exists (42 USC § 265) on Day 1.
- Temporarily halting deportations;
- Forming a task force⁶ to reunite children separated from their families;
- Terminating the Asylum Cooperative Agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; and
- Re-engaging in efforts to combat root causes of migration, including by providing additional humanitarian aid in the wake of Hurricanes Eta and Iota.

First 100 Goal 3: Border management: Refining a short-term policy approach; groundwork is laid for a medium-term approach; and pivot has been initiated.

Action 1: On Day 1 institute new protocols at the U.S. southern border and enable implementation with immediately available re-directed federal funds.

Action 1a: Rescind and replace the CDC Order.

Action 1b: Personnel: Begin standing up a process to surge Asylum Officers (AOs) to the designated POEs. Telephonic screenings may provide an immediate-term mechanism for screening, but the priority should be the placement of AOs on the ground at designated ports to conduct in-person interviews.

Action 1c: Orderly processing: Asylum seekers who were placed in MPP or metering will begin to be granted entry into the U.S. at the maximum processing capacity per port per day until the backlog is resolved. With support from UNHCR, the USG could allow for orderly processing of asylum seekers, prioritized according to arrival order, allowing for discretion such that those who are particularly vulnerable are expedited. In addition to UNHCR, the USG will need hand-in-glove coordination with humanitarian actors – in particular civil society – and the Government of Mexico (GOM) at the state and local level, to set up and ensure adequate protections for asylum seekers while waiting in Mexico, including temporary legal status that prevents them from being deported, adequate services on the ground in Mexico, arrange for a health screening – conducted by humanitarian actors – in Mexico prior to entry into the U.S., manage quarantine spaces in Mexico, and help

⁵ Since the original document was privately shared with the Biden-Harris transition teams, some policy actions proposed here have already been implemented or are in the process of implementation.

⁶ The task force should include WRC, KIND, Justice in Motion, and the firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP.

coordinate the daily arrivals to ports through an appointments system. In order to avoid differentiated treatment for asylum seekers vs. the local population in Mexico's border communities, the USG should coordinate with the GOM and humanitarian actors to provide the necessary COVID-19 testing resources for the local population of border communities in Mexico as well as asylum seekers. When requesting assistance from the GOM, the USG should offer strong assurances that the U.S. asylum system will be restored in full.

Action 1d: MPP: Those who have been waiting in MPP (estimated 25,000 active cases)⁷ will need to be either paroled in at the POE where their appointment is pending or other ports. Persons deemed particularly vulnerable, and those who were subject to the Trump administration's metering policy (estimated 15,000 individuals), can also be paroled in or otherwise processed in an expedited fashion, contingent on resources, and consistent with their individual circumstances at these same ports. Some may need assistance from humanitarian actors to travel safely through Mexico to a designated POE to incentivize entry at and not between ports. The USG should coordinate with UNHCR, UNICEF and local specialized agencies and NGOs to ensure the safe entry of unaccompanied children. To alleviate pressure at the border, the USG could also consider processing individuals with pending MPP applications who are residing in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras at U.S. consulates.

Action 1e: Case management: To avoid backup in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities, the USG should guarantee the protection and humane treatment of all asylum seekers, especially children, at CBP facilities, consistent with protections prescribed in law. Unaccompanied children must be transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody within the time limit required by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA). Public-private partnerships will be needed to support releases of other asylum seekers from CBP sites, especially in the first months of the new Administration when resources are in the process of being surged to the border, and to help with case compliance, access to services and other support in locations of destination.

Action 2: Refine the Day 1 crisis response:

Action 2a: Convene the experts early. The WH Coordinator should enlist USG and non-USG experts early on, to develop an effective and nimble emergency response plan at the U.S. southern border, Mexico's northern border, and Mexico's southern border. U.S. civil society and other migration and protection experts should also be closely involved in the design and in considering the most effective implementation of the Joint Processing Center Model, described below (F100/G3 Action 2). Experts should include:

- Within the USG: The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), working closely with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); the Department of Health and Human Services' ORR; and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

⁷ *DHS Announces Process to Address Individuals in Mexico with Active MPP Cases* (Washington: Department of Homeland Security, 2021). <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2021/02/11/dhs-announces-process-address-individuals-mexico-active-mpp-cases>

- Outside the USG: The UN refugee and migration agencies (UNHCR and IOM, respectively), as well as civil society organizations, including those specialized in child welfare, protection, and humanitarian aid distribution.

Action 2b: Convene a task force of public health and protection experts to develop a practical plan for the complicated problem set of facilitating access to asylum at POEs during COVID-19. There are existing task forces that could be leveraged, such as the U.S.-Mexico Unit (USMU) of the CDC’s Division of Global Migration and Quarantine and the Border Health Working Group, which could advise on this process. Address with urgency; convene task force within the first 30 days.

Action 2c: Deepen U.S.-Mexico cooperation on COVID-19 with a focus on border states. Early-stage U.S.-Mexico collaboration will almost certainly focus on public health measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and should focus on Mexico’s northern border states. Broad testing capacity is going to be needed to ensure that there is not an obvious disparity of care and services between the local and migrant populations in these states. These efforts will require significant USG engagement and resources.

Action 2d: Request that the U.S. Supreme Court dismiss *Pekoske v. Innovation Law Lab*, which attempts to determine the legality of MPP, because MPP has been rescinded.⁸

Action 2e: Make a plan to rescind *in full* any measures suspending the right to introduce certain persons into the U.S. from countries where a quarantinable communicable disease exists (CDC Order). Fully eliminate metering and develop a flexible plan to adjust border capacity and response on the U.S. side to meet future crisis thresholds; define crisis threshold.

Action 2f: Expand cross-border coordination on humanitarian response, migrant crossings, and asylum processing. There has been a significant increase in cross-border coordination between humanitarian actors in the U.S. and Mexico in recent years. This is largely in reaction to the humanitarian consequences of the caravan crisis in 2018, the roll-out of MPP in 2019, the CDC Order issued in 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic. U.S. and Mexican government liaisons should be in close communication with civil society networks to facilitate information flow and, where appropriate, collaboration.

Action 2g: Leverage the U.S. border shelter network as a frontline response to increased arrivals. There is an established network of at least 18 shelters across the U.S.-Mexico border that coordinate regularly on resource mobilization, data management and most recently, on public health protocols related to COVID-19. Capacities will vary by shelter.

Action 3: Initiate work to standup several Joint Processing Centers (JPCs) at key border locations to allow the USG to receive asylum seekers in a more orderly, efficient, and humane manner. To address long-standing capacity challenges at POEs and CBP stations, all asylum-seekers that come into CBP custody should be immediately transferred to reception centers at key border locations for processing. In refugee and migrant responses around the world, reception is a central part of

⁸ “Pekoske v. Innovation Law Lab,” SCOTUSblog, 2020, <https://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/pekoske-v-innovation-law-lab/>.

the response.⁹ This has been in a gap in the U.S. and has arguably contributed to the chaotic response to past large-scale arrivals.

Action 3a: Establish partnerships with local NGO actors and invite their collaboration. A centerpiece of this model is the co-location of both governmental and non-governmental actors – including child welfare experts and legal service providers – involved in the care, custody, and processing of migrants and asylum-seekers, thereby reducing costs, custody transfers and processing times while at the same time addressing the urgent public health, legal, and humanitarian needs of the population. Ongoing cooperation with NGO shelters along the border and case management programs is necessary.

Action 3b: Determine USG resource and personnel needs for hiring, training, and accountability, for all wrap-around services. Staff up quickly. The reception center model has also proven to provide an efficient way to process large-scale arrivals, while also ensuring access to legal representation and other basic humanitarian and medical services. The public health crisis creates an additional compelling justification for prioritizing reception. At a minimum, these centers can be used to screen for COVID-19 in less confined settings than POEs or detention centers and provide medical care and isolation space for infected individuals prior to release or removal to one's home country.

Action 3c: Invest in local integration programs, including the Family Case Management Program, to ensure those released are able to integrate into U.S. communities and have support with additional steps in their asylum or immigration cases. Such programs have been met with success in Europe as well as Canada and Mexico, and there is a proof of concept in the US.¹⁰

Action 4: Mainstream public health screening at POEs and Border Patrol stations across the entire U.S.-Mexico border with the goal of improved medical and mental health care at these facilities.

Action 5: Rescind the National Emergency Declaration.

Action 5a: Rescind EO 1391950 ordering some reservists to active duty and immediately end military deployments to the southern U.S. border;

Action 5b: Revoke EO 1376751 which the Trump administration used to strengthen enforcement at the border, increase deportations, and build the border wall.

First 100 Goal 4: Regional Solutions: Calls to regional leaders have reestablished and set the tone for relationships, kick-started a reset in North American and regional relations, and laid the foundation for progress towards a comprehensive and multinational regional approach.

⁹ Reception refers to the “measures adopted by a host country in order to meet the immediate needs of new arrivals. These measures are provided to all persons, regardless of status, in order to ensure their welfare until their referral to appropriate processes and procedures.” *Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration: The 10-Point Plan in Action, 2016 Update*, (UNHCR, 2016), 98. <http://www.refworld.org/10pointplaninaction2016update.html>

¹⁰ DHS piloted a family case management program (FCMP) under the Obama Administration that demonstrated the effectiveness of this model as an alternative to detention. Of the nearly 1,000 families in the pilot, over 99 percent appeared for their ICE appointments and immigration hearings. The program also proved less expensive than detention. See Backgrounder: *Family Case Management Program*, (Women's Refugee Commission, 2020). <https://s333660.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Backgrounder-FCMP.pdf>

Successful regional convenings have yielded agreements on an initial set of actions and investments to address factors driving migration and a commitment to urgently work together on regional solutions. Regional processes to support a) enhanced protection for people in need, including complementary pathways to protection; and b) economic pathways for migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, have been initiated.

Action 1: Engage regional leaders via formal dialogues.

Action 1a: NALS:

- Quickly schedule/invite for NALS, to be held within the first 100 days.
- A successful U.S.-Mexico-Canada meeting will see the leaders coincide on a strategy to champion North American cooperation and leadership on regional solutions, acknowledge the continual nature of migration flows in the region, and take steps to expand, normalize, and improve channels that meet the needs of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, and of other regional actors.
- Identify USG commitments in the areas of refugee resettlement from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; protection; and addressing root causes.
- Work through NALS to encourage the Government of Canada (GOC) to explore the possibility of resettling an increased number of Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran refugees to Canada.
- Signal USG intention to play a more active role in MIRPS, and work with other countries on harmonizing and sequencing contributions to regional protection.

Action 1b: Regional summit with North and Central American Leaders yield agreements on an initial set of actions and investments to address factors driving migration and a commitment to urgently work together on regional solutions.

- Commit to help combat COVID-19. Express USG support for Canada, Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras national efforts to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine. Signal commitment to assisting these countries' nationals in the U.S.
- A new approach to regional migration management and protection is a top priority.
- Additional humanitarian and development assistance to help communities rebuild from Hurricanes Eta and Iota.
- Increased refugee admissions from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras through various legal pathways.
- Outline priorities for discussion at future regional meetings including the upcoming Summit of the Americas.

Action 1c: Summit of the Americas (SOA): Establish refugee and migrant protection as a priority agenda item for the Ninth SOA. The Administration should task an interagency working group to launch consultations and prepare the agenda to include: a review of the Quito Process and lessons learned from the South American response to Venezuelan migration, with a view to informing action on regional protection mechanisms for safe, legal, and orderly migration along the Central America - North America corridor. Consider also protections for climate refugees.

Action 2: U.S. Legal Pathways to Employment:

Action 2a: Announce an expansion of H2B visas for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to respond to increased U.S. demand for labor created by U.S. economic recovery.¹¹ Adopt appropriate COVID-19 protocols that allow the immediate lifting of the suspension of temporary work visas for workers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; provide greater incentives for U.S. companies to recruit out of areas in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras with high levels of outward migration; commit to assist U.S. companies and El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to increase the competitiveness of workers for H2A and H2B temporary work visas; adjust the H2B visa cap to meet economic demand; and, earmark a greater number of these visas for Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans living in regions with high outward migration.

Action 2b: Commit to strong protection safeguards for workers, including at recruitment. Permit workers the flexibility to move between designated employers. Establish a USG coordinator position to improve recruitment, efficiencies, and protections.

Action 3: Stand up rapid response logistics in the region to respond to the humanitarian and protection needs of migrants and possible refugees along the route. This should be personnel and materials, and agreements with civil society.

Action 4: Support protections at home and expand pathways for refugee resettlement.

Action 4a: Strengthen and expand the Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA), re-establish the Central American Minors program (CAM),¹² and expand resettlement. While establishing new immigrant and non-immigrant visa options in the region will take time, expanding resettlement processing can be achieved rather quickly. Resettlement processing is already taking place on a small scale in several countries in Central America. Include placements for Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans within the U.S. refugee cap.

Action 4b: USG should encourage implementation of IDP legislation in El Salvador and encourage the development, adoption, and implementation of an IDP protection framework in Guatemala and Honduras. Similarly, the USG should consider that Mexico is also moving forward with federal-level legislation to protect IDPs, and could benefit from financial and technical support as it moves toward implementation.

¹¹ H2B visas—which are non-agricultural (hospitality, cruise ships, etc.) are capped at 66,000 a year worldwide, with a soft requirement for 10,000 to be issued for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

¹² The Protection Transfer Arrangement program has worked well in Costa Rica and other countries and has been well received by the Costa Rican government. Expanding its coverage and promoting its implementation in other countries could bring about valuable outcomes for both program recipients and participating countries. The U.S. should also consider re-instating and expanding the scope of its Central American Minors program, which at one point provided children in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras with a safe and orderly alternative to the dangerous journey to reach the U.S. Under this program, a lawfully-present parent within the U.S. may request refugee status for their children located in either the Northern Triangle, Costa Rica, or Panama. While the requirements of the program could be further reviewed and modified, in the past the following additional categories of applicants could also be considered under this program: sons and daughters of a U.S.-based lawfully-present parent who are over 21 years old; the in-country biological parent of the qualified children; caregivers of qualified children who are also related to the U.S.-based lawfully present parents. Reinstating the Central American Minors program would further demonstrate that the US is committed to protecting Central Americans at risk and expanding resettlement opportunities in the region.

Action 5: Start coordination with Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico to support their participation in regional solutions to be implemented starting Year 1. Renegotiate cooperation with the Mexican government to privilege investments in rule-based, professional enforcement, enhanced asylum system, expanded internal relocation system and local integration efforts for migrants and refugees in Mexico.

First 100 Goal 5: Root Causes: To address humanitarian needs in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; to work with humanitarian actors to address humanitarian needs in Mexico.

Action 1: Address humanitarian needs.

Action 1a: Assess hurricane recovery efforts in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico and recalibrate assistance as necessary.

Action 1b: Assess other urgent humanitarian needs (food aid in the Guatemalan highlands, for example), and direct pipeline resources to address those needs.

Action 1c: Work with humanitarian agencies to address humanitarian needs in Mexico, with a particular focus on communities hosting migrants and refugees.

Action 2: Economic recovery.

Action 2a: Explore nearshoring promotion initiatives. Specifically, nearshoring firms in a coalition of regional businesses of textiles, agriculture (foodstuffs), and electronics – the main exports under the agreements – which have ample opportunity to expand and grow current goods in these sectors using established transportation routes and logistics. Exports to the U.S. market can benefit from even greater supply chain resilience derived from advantages in strategic geographic proximity to the North American trading bloc. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have much to win from such a nearshoring investment that can generate new jobs, with multiplier effects in formalizing employment, stabilizing the economy, and reducing migration. Economic incentives can be built into conversations about enhancing democratic governance in these countries.

Action 2b: Align protection, return, and reintegration programs with economic recovery efforts. The U.S. should channel bilateral assistance through USAID, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), and PRM to fund locally based reintegration programs for deportees and returnees to assist host communities. Long-term reconstruction must include the strengthening of local governments to define and attend to the protection needs of communities, including especially vulnerable groups such as returning migrants and internally displaced people.

Action 3: Anti-corruption. From the highest levels of the USG possible, ratchet up an anti-corruption and anti-impunity campaign in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

First 100 Goal 6: Prepare for a new normal.

Action 1: Return and reintegration –prep for renewed efforts toward humane and effective return and reintegration programs for those who are removed from the U.S.

Action 2: Private conversations and public convenings with civil society leaders in the U.S. and the region to build collaboration required to succeed in achieving a shared long-term vision.

Action 3: To ensure long-term sustainability and success, work to enlist the support of international organizations, such as the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Organization of American States, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, that already have efforts in place on anti-corruption and other key challenges in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Action 4: Diagnose the population flow and prescribe the right flexible response plan. This diagnostic step is critical to implementing the most appropriate and effective response plan to restore order, uphold legal protections, and plan for the future. To that end, consider revisiting the narrowed USCIS interpretation of the refugee definition and undo legal limitations that have upended access to asylum, including on the basis of belonging to a particular social group. Look to the Cartagena refugee definition for guidance on international standards.

Action 5: Focus efforts on strengthening the asylum and immigration court infrastructure.

Action 5a: Immigration judges must be allowed to manage their dockets without interference from the Administration.

Action 5b: Rescind the rule¹³ allowing the Director of the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) to decide which appeals should be heard and other measures that have curtailed judicial independence.

Action 5c: Undertake a comprehensive review of immigration court personnel, especially immigration judges, to restore integrity to the judicial process. Many veteran immigration judges have left the court during the Trump administration. These vacancies, along with a significant increase in funding for new hires, has dramatically changed the composition of the immigration court. More than 60% of current immigration judges were hired since 2017.¹⁴ Many of these new judges are not only inexperienced, but have received questionable training designed to instill bias toward asylum seekers appearing before them.

Action 5d: Revise hiring practices, review new hires, re-train appointed judges and rescind performance standards designed to achieve ideological goals.

Action 5e: Direct funding to increase hiring of court support staff and interpreters.

Action 6: Ensure re-training, robust oversight, and accountability measures for CBP personnel. CBP must immediately overhaul its training content and protocols through a stakeholder consultation process involving robust civil society participation. The objective should be to develop a curriculum that trains its Officers and Agents on humanitarian protection practices. Hire CBP staff with expertise and training on how to interact with vulnerable populations. Institute transformational culture change at CBP to create a welcoming, dignified environment at its facilities and throughout CBP. This must happen immediately.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

¹³ A Rule by the Executive Office for Immigration Review, “Organization of the Executive Office for Immigration Review” *Federal Register* 84, no. 165 (August 26, 2019): 44537, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-08-26/pdf/2019-18196.pdf>

¹⁴ See [More Immigration Judges Leaving the Bench](#)

TIME PERIOD: YEAR 1

Goals:

- (1) *Border management practices are COVID-19 safe, effective, orderly, and humane; and the policy focus is starting to shift towards long-term, sustainable solutions.*
- (2) *Mexico: Reestablished strong binational coordination with Mexico aids in initial improvement of border management and the expansion of protection solutions.*
- (3) *Regional solutions: Momentum from successful regional summits carries specific ideas to be incorporated for discussion at the SOA. At the SOA, civil society and governmental actors work in partnership to set goals and erect accountability mechanisms. Regional migration solutions, such as regional processing, are in-focus in multilateral fora.*
- (4) *Protection pathways: Governments, humanitarian actors, and civil society are working together to support regional processes to a) enhance protection for people in need, including complementary pathways to protection; and b) support economic pathways for migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.*
- (5) *Root causes: COVID-19 vaccine is starting to become widely available; anti-impunity focus and humanitarian efforts continue. Governance, security, and economic growth investments begin to be rolled out.*
- (6) *Continue preparing for a new normal.*

Proposed Actions:

Year 1 Goal 1 Border management practices are COVID-19 safe, effective, orderly, and humane; and the policy focus is starting to shift to long-term, sustainable solutions.

Action 1: Set up regular/standing local-level roundtables with humanitarian actors, in particular local NGOs and other members of civil society, so as to regularly assess efforts, identify problems, and collaborate on solutions.

Action 2: Prioritize, scale-up, and diversify post-release case management programs for asylum-seekers and other vulnerable groups who should not be subject to detention or prolonged stays in JPCs. These programs, ideally set up in cities of destination throughout the U.S., will ensure continued access to legal orientation and representation and mental health support for those in immigration proceedings. They will also provide support with securing employment when appropriate, registering children in schools, language acquisition, and other local integration services, similar to the programs traditionally available for resettled refugees. These programs are proven to be less expensive than detention.¹⁵

Action 3: Establish processing protocols and reforms to the asylum system that ensure due process while speeding up adjudication times. Ensure access to counsel for all asylum-seekers.

¹⁵ See *Backgrounder: Family Case Management Program*, Women’s Refugee Commission, available at: <https://s333660.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Backgrounder-FCMP.pdf>.

Action 4: Develop a crisis response plan for the situation in which arrivals exceed processing capacity.

Action 5: Improve access to asylum throughout the region. The U.S. should work to equip and expand asylum capacity in other destination countries for asylum-seekers in the region.

Year 1 Goal 2 Mexico: Reestablished strong binational coordination with Mexico aids in initial improvement of border management and the expansion of protection solutions.

Action 1: Prioritize support for actors participating in reception and access to asylum and other forms of protection in Mexico.

Action 1a: Support Mexico's efforts with integration and protection solutions by: (1) targeting financing and engagement efforts of local governments, humanitarian actors, and others supporting integration of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees, including in those states in central Mexico which are participating in UNHCR's effort to relocate asylum seekers and refugees within Mexico; (2) efforts to connect asylum applicants in Mexico with legal counsel; and (3) significantly strengthening and expanding Mexico's asylum system and supporting the implementation of Mexico's new IDP law.

Action 1b: Focus on Mexico's southern border. Explore: (1) investments to support reception and migration enforcement at the Mexico-Guatemala border.

Action 2: Setting up a limited, small and low profile resettlement program from southern Mexico, focused on specific categories of people registered by COMAR, including LGBTQI+, women at risk, and UACs with family in the U.S.

Action 3: Expanding U.S.-Mexico protocols to transfer custody of certain unaccompanied children at U.S. POEs.

Action 4: Continue to deepen U.S.-Mexico cooperation on COVID-19 with a focus on border states.

Year 1 Goal 3 Regional solutions: Take ideas from regional summits and incorporate them into the SOA. At the SOA, civil society and governmental actors work in partnership to set goals and erect accountability mechanisms. Regional solutions, such as regional processing for resettlement, are in-focus in multilateral fora and fundraising efforts.

Action 1: Take early action on the commitments made at NALS and in the subsequent North America and Central America summit.

Action 2: Foster collaboration between civil society and governmental actors from the region to set goals and erect accountability mechanisms.

Action 3: UNGA: At a high-level global migration meeting on the margins of UNGA in September 2021, the North American leaders should demonstrate their joint commitments to regional migration solutions.

Action 4: Take actions to strengthen the humanitarian and protection response to forced displacement in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico and support MIRPS objectives in these countries, including:

Action 4a: Work with the GOC to support its position and influence as the next Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform to help address forced displacement in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Canada could lead a dialogue among MIRPS members on complementary pathways.

Action 4b: Buttress MIRPS commitments to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras through other bilateral actions. Key steps include:

- **Executive Action:** USG needs to elevate the purpose, commitment, and demands of MIRPS to the head of state level in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. A quadripartite series of convenings among the four Presidents to signal the priority and the demand for executive action from the leaders of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras should be scheduled.
- **Finance protection:** USAID and PRM should increase financing of protection activities within El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. IDPs and deportees – and the infrastructure meant to support them – remain in need of an urgent injection of political, financial, and technical support.
- The U.S. should lend its political and financial support for a coordinated regional humanitarian response. Support civil society’s recommendation for a formal UN Regional Humanitarian Response Plan.¹⁶ The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should develop a detailed Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in March 2020, to build an evidence base of need and for coordinated humanitarian action.¹⁷
- **Invest in Innovation.** The USG should fund the myriad pilot and established IDP and deportee protection programs in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras that, with the right support, can show what works and be brought to scale. These include, for example, the Cristosal community-based models for deportee reintegration and IDP relocation. These programs focus on strengthening community organization and leadership capabilities, and leveraging existing social and economic capital to build IDP resilience, support their integration into the new community, and access services.
- **Voice and Accountability:** The USG should propose chairing the MIRPS Support Platform after Canada. It should use the leadership role to engage civil society and cede them space to have a voice in MIRPS processes. Focus should also be placed on incorporating the active participation of migrants, refugees, and IDPs in MIRPS

¹⁶ *A Regional Humanitarian Response Plan for an Intensifying Humanitarian Crisis in the North of Central America* (Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2019). <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/position-papers/north-of-central-america/a-regional-humanitarian-response-plan-for-the-nca.pdf>

¹⁷ The HNO found that 9.6 million people are affected by intersecting crises (violence, natural disasters, climate change, etc.), of whom 5.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Of that number, more than 3.5 million are acutely food-insecure in crisis or emergency conditions requiring urgent assistance, and 1.8 million are in need of protection assistance due to chronic violence. In May 2020, an HNO addendum was issued to account for the impact of COVID-19 in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Apart from health needs, it emphasizes the ways the pandemic is delaying progress toward protection and solutions for IDPs.

decision-making progresses and on ensuring ongoing monitoring and dialogue with states at the national and regional levels.¹⁸

Year 1 Goal 4 Protection pathways: Governments and humanitarian actors, including civil society, are working together to support regional processes to a) enhance protection for people in need, including complementary pathways to protection; and b) support economic pathways for migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Action 1: Strengthen protections at home.

Action 1a: The USG should continue to press El Salvador to implement; Honduras to finally adopt; and Guatemala to develop and adopt IDP legislation that clearly defines internal displacement, delineates IDP rights, and establishes the state’s responsibilities throughout the displacement cycle, providing a framework from which to design national policy and action plans. Doing so will also help international partners identify what type of international cooperation is required, and provide all interested stakeholders – IDPs, civil society, members of the international community, and others – with an accountability framework.

Action 1b: Similarly, the USG should consider that Mexico is also moving forward with federal-level legislation to protect IDPs, and might be interested in financial and technical support as it moves toward implementation.

Action 1c: Convene a “Friends of [country name]” roundtable as Central American countries move forward with IDP law implementation, to include representatives from donor nations, multilateral organizations, international financial institutions, and civil society to explore options for them to lend financial and technical support to satisfy the needs of a National Action Plan.

Action 1d: In high-level bilateral engagements, message the importance of IDP protections. Place IDP protection progress updates on the permanent agenda for high-level bilateral engagements with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Include monitoring of the IDP legal frameworks’ development and implementation in the U.S. State Department’s annual Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Mexico and El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Action 2: Increase the number of H2A and H2B temporary work visas available to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The Administration should liaise with companies and work to cut logistics costs (not wages) in comparison with other sending countries. Ensure strong labor standards and safeguards, including during recruitment.

Action 3: Protection en route.

Action 3a: Support enhanced protection-sensitive entry systems, reception arrangements, mechanisms for profiling and referral, and differentiated processes and procedures across the sub-region. Migrants and asylum seekers on the move are at risk of a multitude of human rights

¹⁸ It is important to note that civil society – despite being the primary interlocutor between government, UN, and the affected population – have often been sidelined from MIRPS processes. In an attempt to redress this, the Norwegian Refugee Council led an effort to identify how they could dialogue with their respective governments in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and monitor commitments. A proposal for a ‘national dialogue and monitoring platform’ mechanism was developed for each country, as well as a single regional monitoring mechanism. The overall proposal was put forth during the II Annual MIRPS meeting held in Mexico City in December 2019, and civil society platforms have put forth their proposals in their respective countries, but have been met with silence.

violations, including but not limited to extortion, trafficking, and sexual exploitation. They are also at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding their rights and accessing services. Further, asylum seekers may cross borders undetected, may be hidden among mixed movements and not know they are entitled to international protection, and/or may be summarily deported.

Action 3b: Safe spaces: Safe spaces are key entry points along the migratory journey to provide protection, whereby a person in need can access services and the journey onward can be made safer. The U.S. should provide and mobilize funding and technical support to construct and equip these spaces, or modify existing ones (for example, migrant shelters), and staff them appropriately to provide quality services. They should be able to provide information on issues relating to rights, health, and services. This includes the capacity to provide – or refer to the appropriate service provider – legal counsel, GBV response services (psychosocial, legal, medical), and referrals to child protection authorities and service providers as needed. They should also be able to connect to local initiatives led by women, indigenous, and LGBTQI+ groups, among others. The support must be designed alongside (not dictated to) civil society who can calibrate it to Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and Costa Rica and Panama’s operational context.

Action 3c: The U.S. and partners should provide funding and technical support to “digital and virtual safe space” options. This includes free hotlines that can provide information and guidance, as well as digital platforms such as El Jaguar and Cuéntanos that provide information on protection services and options. The U.S. should also support the expansion and regionalization of these efforts.

Action 3d: Protect unaccompanied children on the move. First, the U.S. should model good practices for the treatment of unaccompanied children within the U.S. The U.S. should exercise diplomacy to influence – and provide financial support to – Guatemala and Mexico to improve protections for separated and unaccompanied minors, including to ensure proper protection screening and care at borders along the migrant route by trained child welfare experts, especially at the Guatemala-Mexico and U.S.-Mexico borders. This includes:

- Technical and capacity building support to state child welfare authorities, including Mexico’s National System for Integral Family Development (DIF in Spanish), in child protection and gender-based violence cases.
- Operational support to expand alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied children and support Mexico’s commitment not to detain children.
- Support for integral integration services in the receiving country, or – for those who are sent home to their countries of origin – procedures for safe return and reception, as well as assistance and reintegration services.
- The U.S. should formalize and expand pilot cooperation initiatives between its authorities (specifically, individual CBP sectors, the ORR, and U.S. consular officers) Mexican child protection authorities to provide international protection to unaccompanied Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan children in need of relocation from Mexico to be reunited with family in the US, in coordination with UN specialized agencies and local NGOs.

Action 4: Refugee resettlement. USG actions should demonstrate it is moving from burden dumping to burden sharing.

Action 4a: Expand refugee resettlement to the U.S.: The U.S. will need to restore and expand the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), and increase slots for Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran refugees through USRAP, the PTA and a renewed Central America Minors Program (CAM.)¹⁹ Considering the primary patterns of persecution – gang violence, extortion, and intimate partner violence – and the absence of effective State protection in El Salvador, Honduras, and to lesser extent, Guatemala, USCIS and the DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans must consider a broader interpretation of the U.S. refugee definition under the Immigration & Nationality Act. Many claims related to gang violence, extortion and IPV could be successfully adjudicated for resettlement under political opinion and/or particular social group if the U.S. would align its interpretation of the Convention refugee definition with international standards. Without such changes, an increase in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras refugee slots will only have a marginal impact.

Action 4b: Regional Processing: Explore Guatemala as a strategic location for staging a larger-scale El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras resettlement processing program. Due to the PTA, and more recently the Asylum Cooperative Agreement, there has already been a significant scale-up in registration, reception, shelter, and refugee status determination that could be leveraged for a new refugee processing program.

PRM should work with – and USG finance – UNHCR in establishing a pilot resettlement processing program for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras refugees out of Guatemala to the U.S. and elsewhere.

Further, PRM and DHS should work with UNHCR to:

- Clearly-identify eligibility and admissibility criteria that reflect an expanded U.S. interpretation of the refugee definition and resettlement criteria.
- Streamline documentation requirements, interviewing processes, and security vetting (across receptor countries).
- Provide support programs for the communities that host refugees awaiting resettlement.
- Negotiate with the government of Guatemala to issue temporary documentation that provides a legal status, access to health services, and work authorizations.
- Invest in protection safeguards for high-risk cases including but not limited to relocation, safe housing, strict case management and security protocols, and cash-based interventions.

Action 4c: Leveraging USG and GOC refugee resettlement commitments at NALS, explore the possibility of Canada, along with the U.S., engaging in a public commitment to resettle an increased number of Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran refugees to Canada.

¹⁹ See A Roadmap to Rebuilding the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for concrete recommendations. Penn Biden Center and the National Conference on Citizenship. <https://global.upenn.edu/penn-biden-center/refugee-admissions-project>. Also see Thwarted Potential: The need to revive and expand the Central American Minors (CAM) Program as a key path to protection for at-risk unaccompanied children. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) <https://supportkind.org/resources/thwarted-potential/>

Action 4d: Develop substantive protection for people in need; and galvanize support and create momentum for new commitments and new partners for expanding complementary pathways to protection, such as education and refugee sponsorship.

Action 5: Partner with Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama to support their participation in regional solutions including:

Action 5a: Strengthen asylum systems in the region. The U.S. must bring out its entire diplomatic and financial toolkit to safeguard existing political will and preserve Costa Rica as a country of asylum and solutions, with robust integration services. The USG should enlist the support of other donors for this effort.

- Begin talks on USG cooperation/coordination with Costa Rica and Panama's governments on migration strategies with the support of IOM.
- USG could support with the development of medium- and long-term strategies for the full economic, social, and cultural integration of migrants in these countries.

Action 5b: PTA: PRM, DHS, UNHCR, IOM, and the government of Costa Rica should work together to identify and address barriers to the PTA serving as an expedited pathway to the U.S. for those who are at extreme risk, as it was originally intended. Following are some needed modifications:

- USCIS must expand its criteria for PTA eligibility. At present the selection criteria does not always respond to the socio-political context of heightened risks in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and therefore it may not serve those people who are most at risk, or even at "heightened risk."
- The criteria, the tools and the processes of the PTA must be revised, and the capacity of partners improved, in order to ensure a more optimal match between the cases that UNHCR partners refer and the final selection by the U.S. (as well as the other resettlement countries). This includes criteria set by all parties, including Costa Rica.
- Provide technical and financial support to UNHCR's partners for handling complex security issues, fraud prevention, and data management and monitoring.
- Interview delays must be minimized. One option is temporarily reassigning refugee officers to circuit rides; consider video conferencing options in light of COVID-19-related travel restrictions.
- Increase financial support to strengthen protection safeguards for refugees processed in-country and those transferred to Costa Rica. This includes relocation, safe houses, cash assistance for families with no mobility, and precautionary measures, among others.

Action 5c: Engage in efforts to bolster systems and mechanisms that support Costa Rica's ability to serve as a destination or safe transit country for Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, and Nicaraguan arrivals, as well as extracontinental migrants transiting the country.

- Through DHS, share best practices for tracking the status of undocumented migrants and share lessons learned on the use of data, family case management programs, and other systems.

- Expand collaboration between the U.S. embassy and Costa Rican institutions on combatting migrant smuggling and human trafficking.
- Work with Costa Rica to guarantee security conditions, healthcare, and assistance for extra continental migrants in Costa Rica. Help facilitate coordination between Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, and the U.S. related to information sharing and coordination on the provision of humanitarian assistance and other services for extra continental migrants. This coordination must go beyond emergency services for migrants in border areas.
- Review CAFTA-DR and the U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreements to ensure that labor practices take into account regional migration patterns. For example, migrants from other CAFTA-DR countries such as the NCA could be accredited with local employment status that enables these workers to be employed by businesses exporting goods to the U.S. under CAFTA-DR or the U.S.-Panama TPA.

Action 5d: Engage in efforts to encourage Panama’s role in regional migration solutions, including increasing its will and enhancing its capacity to provide protection to migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras as well as extracontinental arrivals.

- Implement regular engagements between the U.S. embassy and counterparts in Panama to share lessons and policies that may be relevant for the development of a comprehensive migration policy in Panama;
- Provide support for: efforts to strengthen public institutions and effectiveness, including by: institutionalizing gender sensitive migrant services; employing strategies to improve Panama’s asylum and refugee systems, including actions to improve capacity and response to asylum seekers at the border and respect for the principle of non-refoulement; pursuing actions focused on psychosocial care for the minor population in transit; and developing an inter-agency plan to strengthen the prevention and detection of trafficking of persons in Panama.

Year 1 Goal 5: Root causes: COVID-19 vaccine is starting to become widely available; anti-impunity focus and humanitarian efforts continue. Governance, security, and economic growth investments begin to be rolled out.

Action 1: Root causes:

Action 1a: Immediate and long-term support and investment in rural areas: Target the rural sector by pursuing economic and private sector reform focused on protecting and growing the rural sector (in Honduras and Guatemala) while expanding industrial manufacturing across the region. This would require providing immediate targeted support to the rural sector; promoting rural health care; decentralizing private and public investment away from major urban centers and into second tier cities linked to rural areas; and promoting modern land reform to protect land tenure and assist small and medium scale farmers.

Action 1b: Begin messaging campaign for economic initiatives to help El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico recover from COVID-19 economic downturn, highlighting big ticket items such as:

- Expanded Temporary Visa Programs;
- Nearshoring initiatives targeting El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico that include the strengthening of national labor standards;
- Encourage and take part in convening multisectoral task forces in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to propose policy actions for kickstarting economic recovery;
- Link economic recovery to anti-impunity and pro-transparency strategies.

Action 2: Return and Reintegration:

Action 2a: Support decentralization of return and reintegration centers by locating services directly in major migrant sending communities.

Action 2b: Strengthen the identification system of Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran consulates for children, women and people in vulnerable situations awaiting deportation. Develop referral protocols to identify and assist returned or deported children, prioritizing vulnerable groups, such as survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Action 2c: Deepen financial and logistical support for civil society’s role in reception centers across the region. Their impact is outsized relative to their resources in terms of first contact support with deportees.

Year 1 Goal 6: Continue preparing for a new normal.

Action 1: North American leaders should encourage each country to develop an action plan to combat rising xenophobia, to be deployed individually and collectively throughout the region through a whole of society approach, including:

- Support to host communities;
- Educational awareness campaigns against xenophobia that educate the population on cultural diversity;
- Development of studies to determine the living conditions of migrants and host communities and plans for social integration processes;
- Programs for migrant engagement in local development and mechanisms to ensure migrant engagement at a local level;
- Training processes for the media on strategies to combat xenophobia and reduce journalistic content with information that fosters xenophobia.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

TIME PERIOD: OVER FOUR YEARS

Goals:

- (1) Border management: The policy focus is completely on long-term, sustainable solutions that adhere to U.S. values.*
- (2) Regional solutions: Regional collaboration through bilateral channels, MIRPS, and other forums and mechanisms strengthens existing protection channels, leads to new region-wide solutions.*
- (3) Protection pathways: Governments and humanitarian actors, including civil society, are working together to support regional processes to a) enhance protection for people in need, including complementary pathways to protection; and b) support economic pathways for migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.*
- (4) Asylum systems and integration options are strengthened throughout the region. Mexico and Canada have made strides according to their relative capacities and shared responsibilities towards welcoming Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans in need. Costa Rica has developed infrastructure that enhances programs, laws, and policies relating to migration and refugees.*
- (5) Root causes: Investments in root causes are taking hold. Funding secured and programmatic investments poised for sharp ramp-up of return and reintegration initiatives. Key indicators see improvements; civil society actors are strengthened.*

Over Four Years Goal 1: Border management: The policy focus is completely on long-term, sustainable solutions that adhere to U.S. values.

Action 1: The U.S. should act on lessons learned from the last ten years of consecutive humanitarian crises at the U.S.-Mexico border. By 2024, the 10-year anniversary of the 2014 unaccompanied minors crisis, the U.S. should roll out a bold new strategy for border management. On the operational side, the new strategy should clearly delegate authorities, establish reserve budgets and put in place the necessary infrastructure and personnel to be able to quickly and effectively respond to changes in flows in an orderly, efficient, and humane manner. The U.S. should be able to respond nimbly and humanely to any unexpected or substantial increases in arrivals to the U.S., whether by land or sea.

Over Four Years Goal 2: Regional solutions: Regional collaboration through bilateral channels, MIRPS, and other forums and mechanisms strengthens existing protection channels, leads to new region-wide solutions.

Action 1: In terms of bilateral aid, collaborate with the GOC to leverage its feminist foreign policy orientation and focus foreign aid to the Northern Triangle countries to address root causes of violence against women and harm to families and children. Canada also could target training and funding to assist returnees with their most significant needs.

Action 2: USG should seek to assume leadership of the MIRPS Support Platform with two explicit work objectives: i) to develop concrete complementary pathways to protection with the Support

Platform members and other interested governments; and ii) to establish public-private partnerships. Building off the Obama administration's 2016 Call to Action to the private sector, the WH should reconvene private sector leaders for a renewal and expansion of prior commitments, and a challenge to explore ways in which they can participate in realizing complementary pathways for refugees. The WH should specifically indicate economic mobility to the U.S. as a priority, with a U.S. commitment to addressing regulatory and administrative hurdles to visas, work permits, and other requirements.

Action 3: Develop complementary pathways to protection. The U.S. should champion – leading by example – but also coordinate with regional partners to develop and operationalize complementary pathways that expand protection options for persons needing to leave El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This will entail leading interested countries, through a series of convenings, to:

Action 3a: Identify and expand legal pathways to facilitate entry, reception, and integration mechanisms for people in need. These can include regional visa arrangements, sponsorship programs or university scholarships, and labor mobility schemes.

Action 3b: Clearly define the eligibility criteria for various programs and design protection-centered and non-discriminatory identification and application/processing mechanisms to ensure fair and equal access.

Action 3c: Identify and resolve the legal, regulatory, and practical obstacles that limit access to complementary pathways to protection and strategies.

Action 3d: Develop an interagency action plan to address obstacles to accessing complementary pathways. This should include relaxing eligibility criteria, financial and documentary requirements; streamlining security and other vetting requirements; and planning to make it easier for those in need of protection to learn of their options, access embassies, and obtain exit when needed. This may also require establishing new visa classifications, such as humanitarian visas, displaced talent visas, or refugee scholarship visas. This will require close collaboration among various agencies, including but not limited to DOS/PRM, DOS/CA, DHS/USCIS, DHS/CBP, DOL, and DOE.

Action 3e: Identify protection safeguards for refugees who successfully access third country solutions. This includes considerations related to: the right to seek asylum and protection against refoulement; legal status and documentation; confidentiality and data protection; access to services; conserving family unity; and – *inter alia* – preventing statelessness (e.g. children born to those who hold temporary visas).

Action 3f: Conceptualize comprehensive integration programs.

Action 4: Establish public-private partnerships:

Action 4a: Building off the Obama administration's 2016 Call to Action to the private sector, the WH should reconvene private sector leaders for a renewal and expansion of prior commitments, and a challenge to explore ways in which they can participate in realizing complementary pathways for refugees.

Action 4b: Encourage Canada to host a dialogue with private agricultural business groups to ascertain demand for foreign workers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and

possibilities for strengthening recruiting networks in these countries, particularly El Salvador and Honduras. Canada should monitor labor rights in these programs.

Over Four Years Goal 3: Protection pathways: Governments, humanitarian actors, including civil society, are working together to support regional processes to a) enhance protection for people in need, including complementary pathways to protection; and b) support economic pathways for migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Action 1: In general, the U.S. should continue to see through commitments that have multi-year plans, such as expanding the USRAP; the monitoring of IDP legislation implementation; support to IDPs and returnees; improved border systems and specialized protections; staged scale-up of asylum systems and resettlement; and the operationalization of complementary pathways to protection. The U.S. should present its progress in supporting regional protection initiatives at the next Global Refugee Forum (2023) and work towards new pledges that may include proving support to other emerging destination countries.

Action 1a: Strive for permanent solutions; embrace temporary options: The ideal is that all complementary pathways to protection, in the U.S. and other countries, be durable. In other words, that each pathway should have a mechanism to allow for long-term solutions and/or permanent regularization of one's status, such as the option to apply for asylum or permanent residency. In the same vein, there should be safeguards to allow for family members to accompany the selected beneficiary of the complementary pathway, and for any children born in the host country to have access to permanent status and services. Each country, as it designs and/or expands its complementary pathways, should strive to include such options for permanent stays. However, where not possible, temporary solutions should be embraced across the region.

- Models exist that can and should be examined, modified, and expanded to provide temporary protections for people with international protection needs, and where possible, with options for permanent stay. The more humane treatment, safeguards, and access to integration and long-term solutions are afforded alongside these complementary pathways, the more likely they will reduce the risk that temporary solutions are used as a vehicle to get to the U.S. The framework already exists for such options in Mexico, such as the aforementioned TVRH, which is effectively a one-year renewable humanitarian visa for those with protection needs, that is accompanied by certain protections such as a work authorization. Mexico also provides similar temporary visas for workers in southern Mexico that could be strengthened and expanded. Further, in November 2020, Costa Rica's National Directorate of Migration and Foreigners created the new Temporary Special Category of Complementary Protection to regularize the stay of Venezuelans, Nicaraguans, and Cubans who were denied asylum.

Action 1c: Clarity and constancy in eligibility, admissibility requirements, and benefits: In leading the process to expand complementary pathways, the development and dissemination of regulatory frameworks is of paramount importance. Lessons to this effect can be drawn from Latin America's response to the Venezuela refugee and migrant crisis. The region is lauded for maintaining (with some exceptions) welcoming policies for millions of Venezuelans, and

for the myriad mechanisms employed to afford them protections. These include the use of existing migration agreements and visa categories, humanitarian visas, as well as new special stay arrangements such as temporary residency, work permits, and access to services. These measures proved to be absolutely invaluable in mitigating some protection risks for Venezuelans on the move, and providing temporary solutions. However, some of them have been riddled with bureaucratic requirements that have defined their purpose, thereby not providing adequate legal protections. Complementary pathways heavily depend on their design – there must be documented clarity and constancy in eligibility, admissibility requirements, and access to benefits, services and protections. Further, they must be clearly communicated to all stakeholders, including migration officials, police, public service providers, refugees and host community members.

Action 2: Focus on IDPs.

Action 2a: Convene an in-country donor working group, including Canada and the EU, for each country (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) that moves forward with IDP law implementation to monitor progress on an agreed set of milestones for the law’s implementation. Such milestones should clearly delineate each state actor’s responsibilities. Tie continued financial support of the law’s implementation to progress toward meeting the identified milestones.

Action 2b: Fund the Human Rights Ombudsperson’s Office – or other independent organization – in each country (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) that moves forward with IDP law implementation to:

- Monitor IDP conditions;
- Design and execute an independent accountability framework that monitors the law’s implementation and impact using both output and impact indicators; and
- Formulate recommendations and annually publish a public shadow report on IDP protection progress to El Salvador’s Ministry of Justice and Public Security; Guatemala’s Judiciary; and Honduras’ Ministry of Human Rights, Justice, Governance and Decentralization.

The accountability framework could be modeled on the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement’s Framework for National Responsibility,¹⁵ which sets out twelve benchmarks for governments to address internal displacement.

Action 2c: Support civil society to help IDPs participate in decision-making around the planning and implementation of policies and programs, with a particular emphasis on the participation of vulnerable and marginalized profiles. Civil society and IDPs should also be supported to participate in monitoring the extent to which the IDP Law is implemented.

Action 3: The Administration should specifically indicate temporary economic mobility to the U.S. as a priority, with a U.S. commitment to address regulatory and administrative hurdles to visas, work permits, and other requirements.

Action 4: Protection en route:

Action 4a: The USG should engage in research and policy development around protection en route.

Action 4b: USG should provide support to IOM and UNHCR, and press governments and sub-national authorities, to take steps to support border entry systems throughout the region that are able to identify new arrivals with international protection needs and provide appropriate and differentiated solutions for them. The UNHCR 10-Point Plan of Action provides a roadmap for such action.

Over Four Years Goal 4: *Asylum systems and integration options are strengthened throughout the region. Mexico and Canada have made strides according to their relative capacities and shared responsibilities towards welcoming Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans in need. Costa Rica has developed infrastructure that enhances programs, laws, and policies relating to migration and refugees.*

Action 1: Support Mexico in its efforts to strengthen its asylum system and initiatives to bolster the integration of migrants and refugees in that country.

Action 2: Enhance Costa Rica and Panama's capacity to provide protection to Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, as well as extracontinental arrivals.

- **Action 2a:** Costa Rica: Support the creation of a Migration Observatory in Costa Rica to inform migration policy and systems. Share best practices regarding protection of migrant human rights.
- Provide further technical assistance to Costa Rica's Social Security Fund through the IDB and the World Bank (WB) that will allow for the provision of health care coverage to qualified asylum seekers and refugees who are at risk for COVID-19 or other health-related maladies.
- Provide assistance for temporary migrant care sites in Costa Rica.

Over Four Years Goal 5: *Root causes: Investments in root causes are taking hold. Funding secured and programmatic investments poised for sharp ramp-up of return and reintegration initiatives. Key indicators see improvements; civil society actors are strengthened.*

Action 1: Encourage good governance across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, providing clear support for government, private sector, and civil society allies in an anti-corruption efforts. Maintain a robust anti-impunity focus through transitions in U.S., Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran electoral cycles.

Action 2: Harness private sector investment to promote economic stability and green job creation in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras by:

Action 2a: Working with multilateral development banks, such as the WB and the IDB; develop infrastructure and promote foreign investment by engaging with the private sector in a cost-effective and competitive manner.

Action 2b: Reducing the barriers to private sector investment. Focus on the rule of law, increased judicial capacity, and improving the competitiveness of the El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras market by modernizing and standardizing customs procedures.

Action 2c: Directing the U.S. Trade Representative and the Commerce and Labor departments to evaluate whether the El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras governments are abiding by their commitments under DR-CAFTA, including ensuring that labor practices do not disadvantage competition and that environmental considerations are taken into account. Maximizing U.S. trade and commercial deals also generates greater economic opportunities for U.S. businesses and investors. The U.S. is the primary source of foreign direct investment in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Action 2d: Bolster microfinance and financial inclusive banking in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras with a priority on programs that empower women. Remittances from family members sending money home constitute a larger share of the GDP in some Northern Triangle countries than foreign direct investment, accounting for more than 10 percent of GDP in Guatemala and approaching 20 percent in El Salvador and Honduras.²⁰

Action 2e: Focus economic development efforts on modernizing and greening El Salvador's, Guatemala's, and Honduras' power grids, ports, and roads, so that local industries can compete globally. In the short-term, look to double the capacity of SIEPAC, the Central American Electrical Interconnection System, to generate electricity for the region.

Action 2f: Push for innovative options for rapid economic expansion in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras by rolling out a plan for creating nearshoring incentives for U.S. companies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras with a push to pivot from China; explore Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran economic integration; support ongoing Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran government efforts to organize and protect informal workers; encourage tax and fiscal reform a key priority in an anti-impunity efforts; encourage the elimination of complex tax schemes that serve as barriers for formalization of small businesses and drive away foreign investment.

Action 2g: Continue targeted assistance to the rural sector focusing on the impact of climate change to begin rollout of initiatives to promote a rural health corps for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras; expand access to weather-based crop insurance; create a government-to-government entity to provide phased-out-over-time price guarantees to farmers/cooperatives transitioning to modern crops; develop innovative agricultural financing; and invest in rural and transportation infrastructure expansion.

Action 3: Security: Build on successes in targeted place-based initiatives to develop security initiatives adapted to El Salvador's, Guatemala's, and Honduras' unique security situations, specifically the two major transnational gangs. Engage in desistance/rehabilitation strategies; implementing integrated, place-based approaches with real coordination and accountability mechanisms. Surge resources/capabilities to school/family-based programs for at-risk youth in communities most likely to be tipped toward remaining in their home countries.

Action 4: Return and reintegration: Continue the expansion of reintegration initiatives linking deportees, the private sector, and government institutions that facilitate training, skill certification, and job placement. Continue to decentralize and diversify return and reintegration services beyond urban center.

²⁰ See *Remittances to Latin America and the Caribbean in 2017*. <https://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Remittances-2017-1.pdf>