



November 2018

# CENTRAL AMERICA

## USAID Assists Migrants Returning to their Home Countries, but Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to Be Determined

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-62](#), report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

In 2014, instability driven by insecurity, lack of economic opportunity, and weak governance led to a rapid increase of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras arriving at the U.S. border. In fiscal year 2017, the Department of Homeland Security reported (DHS) apprehending more than 200,000 nationals from these countries and removed nearly 75,000 nationals, including UAC, of these countries from the United States and returned them to their home countries. Current estimates also indicate nearly 350,000 individuals may need to be reintegrated to El Salvador and Honduras over the next few years when their Temporary Protected Status in the United States expires.

GAO was asked to review U.S. efforts to support the reintegration of Central American migrants. This report describes (1) USAID efforts to assist reception and reintegration of migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras into their home countries since fiscal year 2014; and (2) what is known about the effectiveness of these efforts. GAO reviewed agency program documents and funding data; interviewed officials from U.S. government agencies, IOM, and host governments and beneficiaries; and conducted site visits in these countries.

GAO is not making any recommendations in this report. USAID and IAF provided formal comments, which are reproduced in this report, and all agencies provided technical comments, which were incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-19-62](#). For more information, contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or [groverj@gao.gov](mailto:groverj@gao.gov).

November 2018

## CENTRAL AMERICA

# USAID Assists Migrants Returning to their Home Countries, but Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to Be Determined

## What GAO Found

Since fiscal year 2014, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided approximately \$27 million to the International Organization for Migration (IOM)—an intergovernmental organization focusing on migration—for assistance to migrants returning to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Assistance to migrants includes short-term reception services, such as food and transportation, renovating reception centers, and collecting data on returning migrants that are used to support their reintegration. Assistance also includes long-term reintegration efforts, such as counseling services and employment assistance to make it easier for migrants to readjust to and stay in their home countries. These various efforts are in different stages of development.

### Location of Reception Centers and Shelters for Returning Migrants Supported by the International Organization for Migration



Source: GAO analysis based on International Organization for Migration documentation. | GAO-19-62

While reception services for migrants have improved, USAID has not yet assessed the effectiveness of reintegration efforts. USAID monitored and assessed reception services through site visits, meetings, and reports from IOM. IOM's early efforts improved the three host governments' capacity to provide reception services to returning migrants. For example, since fiscal year 2014, IOM renovated the seven reception centers and shelters being used in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Further, with IOM's assistance, the host governments have improved their capacity to collect data about returning migrants. According to USAID and IOM, host governments are using these data to design policies and develop programs to provide reintegration assistance. While USAID has not yet assessed the effectiveness of reintegration efforts, many of these programs are just beginning. USAID expects to sign a new agreement by the end of December 2018 that would involve, among other things, monitoring and evaluating reintegration efforts in the three countries.

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## Abbreviations

ARG	Asociación de Retornados Guatemaltecos
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
IAF	Inter-American Foundation
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NTMI	Northern Triangle Migration Information Initiative
PARA	Post-Arrival and Reception Assistance
PIO	Public International Organization
TPS	Temporary Protected Status
UAC	unaccompanied alien children
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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November 8, 2018

The Honorable Eliot L. Engel  
Ranking Member  
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
Chairman Emeritus  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Paul Cook  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
House of Representatives

In 2014, instability in the Northern Triangle<sup>1</sup> of Central America, driven by insecurity, lack of economic opportunity, and weak governance, led to a rapid increase of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras arriving at the U.S. border.<sup>2</sup> In response, the U.S. government funded activities in these countries that, among other things, created information campaigns about the dangers of the journey and targeted criminal organizations involved in human smuggling.<sup>3</sup> Individuals from these three countries, however, have continued to migrate to the United States, and, when apprehended and removed from the United States, will ultimately need to be reintegrated into their home countries. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported apprehending more than 200,000 migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in fiscal year 2017.<sup>4</sup> In addition, nearly 75,000 nationals

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<sup>1</sup>The Northern Triangle refers to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. law defines an unaccompanied alien child, or UAC, as a child who has no lawful immigration status in the United States; has not attained 18 years of age; and with respect to whom there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States or no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody. 6 U.S.C. §279(g)(2).

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Central America: Improved Evaluation Efforts Could Enhance Agency Programs to Reduce Unaccompanied Child Migration*, [GAO-15-707](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 29, 2015).

<sup>4</sup>Data on DHS apprehensions of foreign nationals in the United States include apprehensions by U.S. Border Patrol and administrative arrests by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. These data do not include individuals encountered and determined to be inadmissible to the United States by U.S. Custom and Border Protection's Office of Field Operations officers at U.S. ports of entry.

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from these countries, including UAC, were removed from the United States by DHS and returned to their countries in fiscal year 2017.<sup>5</sup> In 2018, the Administration made the decision to terminate Temporary Protected Status (TPS)<sup>6</sup> for nationals of El Salvador and Honduras, effective September 9, 2019, and January 5, 2020, respectively. The decision has the potential to raise the number of nationals these countries may need to reintegrate in the next few years by nearly 350,000 adults, including approximately 262,500 Salvadorans and 86,000 Hondurans.<sup>7</sup> Many of these adults also have children who are U.S. citizens and may return with them, according to DHS.

The U.S. government, primarily through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of State (State), and the Inter-American Foundation (IAF),<sup>8</sup> has provided assistance to help address the needs of returning migrants since 2014, including receiving them upon arrival and reintegrating them in their home countries. The U.S. government provides additional assistance to these countries through the

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<sup>5</sup>DHS refers to persons who illegally entered the United States and are sent back to their home country as having been removed from the United States. For the purposes of this report, however, we refer to any migrant coming back to the Northern Triangle whether from the United States or Mexico as a returning migrant. Individuals returned to these countries from the United States may have been apprehended by DHS at any point in time and not necessarily in fiscal year 2017.

<sup>6</sup>The Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a foreign country for TPS due to conditions in the country that temporarily prevent the country's nationals from returning safely, or in certain circumstances, where the country is unable to handle the return of its nationals adequately. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services may grant TPS to eligible nationals of certain countries (or parts of countries) who are already in the United States. As of May 2018, the United States was providing TPS to foreign nationals from 10 countries. On October 3, 2018, in *Ramos, et al v. Nielsen, et al.*, No. 18-cv-01554 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 3, 2018), the United States District Court for the Northern District of California enjoined DHS from implementing and enforcing the decisions to terminate TPS for four countries, including El Salvador, pending further resolution of the case.

<sup>7</sup>Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; Termination of the Designation of El Salvador for Temporary Protected Status, 83 Fed. Reg. 2,654-2,656 (Jan. 18, 2018); and Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; Termination of the Designation of Honduras for Temporary Protected Status, 83 Fed. Reg. 26,074-26,076 (June 5, 2018). The estimates provided in the federal register include eligible individuals without nationality who last habitually resided in El Salvador or Honduras and hold TPS under that country's designation.

<sup>8</sup>IAF, created by Congress in 1969, seeks to complement the work of other U.S. agencies in Central America by investing directly in projects that are designed, led, and implemented by the affected communities. According to IAF, it invests only in the most promising proposals it receives and requires grantee partners to contribute significant resources to their projects—on average, \$1.3 for every \$1 from IAF.

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U.S. Strategy for Central America, including the Central America Regional Security Initiative.<sup>9</sup> These programs focus on the drivers of migration including violence and the lack of economic opportunity. While reintegration efforts do not have dedicated funding, Central America Regional Security Initiative and Development Assistance funds support these programs.

We were asked to review a number of issues related to U.S. efforts to assist the reintegration of Central American migrants. This report describes (1) USAID efforts to assist the reception and reintegration of migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras back into their home countries since fiscal year 2014; and (2) what is known about the effectiveness of these efforts. In addition, we reviewed how U.S. agencies have coordinated efforts to assist the reintegration of returning migrants (see appendix II).

To address the objectives for this review, we reviewed agency program documents and funding data, and interviewed officials from U.S. government agencies including USAID, State, and IAF; host governments; and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). We conducted site visits in March 2018 in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. To determine what is known about the effectiveness of reintegration efforts from fiscal years 2014 through 2017, the most recent available information at the time of our review, we reviewed agency evaluation policies and progress reports and evaluations. We interviewed U.S. officials in Washington, D.C. We also interviewed U.S. government, host government, and nongovernment officials in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, where we also visited U.S. agency-assisted projects. For more information on our scope and methodology, see appendix I.

We conducted this performance audit from November 2017 to November 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for

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<sup>9</sup>Since 2014, the U.S. Strategy for Central America has focused on efforts to promote prosperity, improve security, and strengthen governance. Its funding is conditioned on the Northern Triangle governments addressing a range of concerns, including border security, corruption, and human rights. The Central America Regional Security Initiative, begun in 2008 and now a component of the U.S. Strategy for Central America, has funded activities to improve law enforcement capabilities, prevent crime and violence, and deter and detect border criminal activity, among other efforts, in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

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our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

The rapid increase of UAC apprehended by DHS in 2014 led to USAID's assistance for reception and reintegration efforts in Central America's Northern Triangle. USAID's efforts, carried out by its implementing partner IOM,<sup>10</sup> have focused on children and family units,<sup>11</sup> as they are considered the most vulnerable migrant populations. According to DHS, the number of UAC from any country who were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border rose from nearly 28,000 in fiscal year 2012 to more than 42,000 in fiscal year 2013, and to more than 73,000 in fiscal year 2014.<sup>12</sup> Prior to fiscal year 2012, the majority of UAC apprehended at the border were Mexican nationals. However, nearly three-fourths of UAC apprehended in fiscal year 2014 were nationals from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.<sup>13</sup> In fiscal year 2014, approximately 122,000 nationals (both children and adults) from the Northern Triangle countries were removed from the United States and returned to their home countries,<sup>14</sup> according to DHS. That number decreased to approximately 75,000 in fiscal year 2017. For the number of nationals from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras removed by DHS's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) from fiscal years 2014 through 2017, see figure 1.

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<sup>10</sup>IOM is an inter-governmental organization that works with governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental partners on migration-related issues.

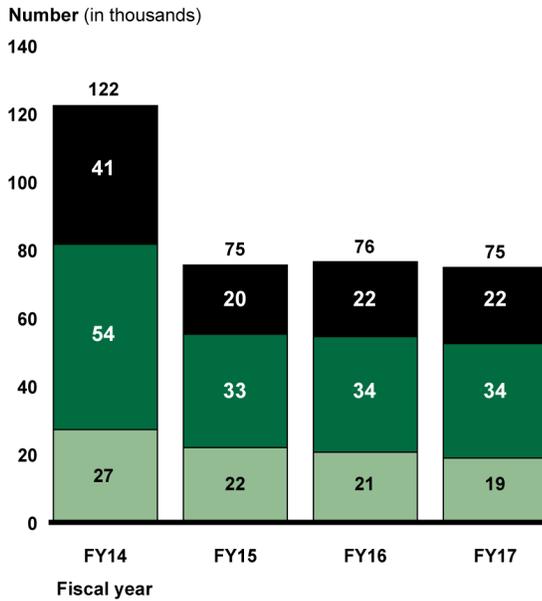
<sup>11</sup>Family units are minor children traveling with their parent(s) or legal guardian. Siblings traveling together without a parent or legal guardian are considered UAC and not family units.

<sup>12</sup>[GAO-15-707](#).

<sup>13</sup>[GAO-15-707](#).

<sup>14</sup>The number of removals reported by DHS includes individuals removed from the United States more than once.

**Figure 1: Number of Removals of Nationals of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Fiscal Years 2014 through 2017**



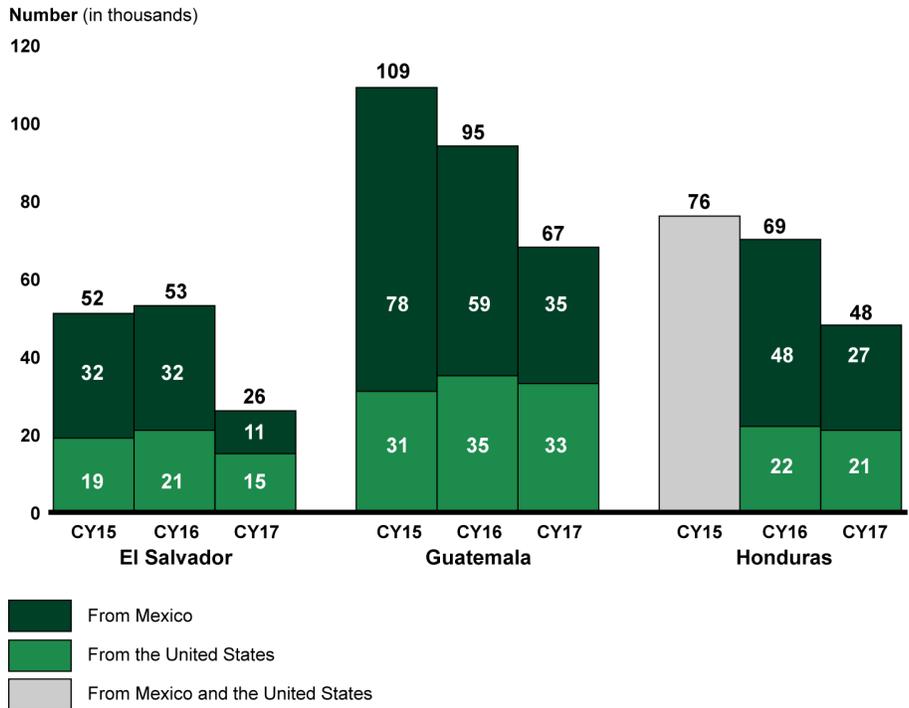
Honduras  
 Guatemala  
 El Salvador

Numbers may not add up to totals due to rounding.  
 Source: Department of Homeland Security. | GAO-19-62

Note: The number of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) removals reported by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) includes Voluntary Returns, Voluntary Departures, Withdrawals Under Docket Control, and foreign nationals processed for Expedited Removal that are turned over to ICE for detention. The number of removals reported by DHS includes individuals removed from the United States more than once.

In addition to migrants returned from the United States, the Northern Triangle countries also receive migrants returned from Mexico. In 2016 and 2017, the number of returnees from Mexico to these three countries was greater than those returning from the United States, according to information from countries' migration directorates. In 2017, however, the number of returning migrants from the United States and Mexico decreased in all three countries, as figure 2 shows.

**Figure 2: Number of Returned Migrants Reported by El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, Calendar Years 2015 through 2017**



Legend: CY = calendar year.

Numbers may not add up to totals due to rounding.

Sources: International Organization for Migration based on data from (1) El Salvador's General Directorate for Migration and Foreign Nationals, (2) Guatemala's General Directorate for Migration and Ministry of Social Welfare, and (3) Honduras' Consular and Migration Observatory. | GAO-19-62

Note: Information about migrants returning to Honduras during calendar year 2015 is not delineated between those returning from the United States and those returning from Mexico. Additionally, the number of returnees reported by the countries' migration directorates may include individuals who have returned more than once.

We have previously reported that the causes of migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to the United States are multiple and include:

- the lack of economic and job opportunities,
- gang-related violence and other insecurity issues,
- high poverty rates and poor living conditions,
- the desire for family reunification, and

- 
- perceptions of U.S. immigration policy.<sup>15</sup>

A number of U.S. agencies provide assistance to these countries to address some of these socioeconomic issues, such as violence and poverty. For example, USAID, State, and DHS have programs providing assistance in areas such as economic development, rule of law, citizen security, law enforcement, education, and community development funded through the U.S. Strategy for Central America, including the Central America Regional Security Initiative. To support efforts to prevent migration, such as targeting human smuggling organizations and developing public information campaigns, the U.S. embassies in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras coordinate through interagency working groups. For more information on these coordination activities, see appendix II.

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## USAID Provides Funding for Assistance to Reintegrate Migrants Returning to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

USAID has provided funding for short- and long-term assistance to migrants returning to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, including assisting returning migrants upon arrival at points of entry and reintegrating them into their home countries. USAID provided approximately \$27 million to IOM through three program contribution agreements to conduct these efforts. These efforts are in various stages of development in all three countries. Host governments face challenges in their efforts to reintegrate migrants, including limited resources and a lack of employment opportunities.

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## USAID Provides Funding for Short and Long-Term Assistance for Returning Migrants

USAID has provided funding for short- and long-term assistance to migrants returning to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, whether they are returning from the United States or Mexico. Short-term efforts assist returning migrants arriving at reception centers in their home countries. These efforts involve processing migrants upon arrival at the points of entry and generally providing post-arrival assistance, such as food, transportation, hygiene and school kits, and clothes within the first two days after returning (see fig. 3).<sup>16</sup> Long-term efforts focus on reintegrating migrants into their home countries. Reintegration seeks to

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<sup>15</sup>[GAO-15-362](#).

<sup>16</sup>USAID officials noted that ensuring protection of vulnerable populations, including UAC and families, is an important element of the assistance provided by USAID.

restore migrants into society and to reestablish economic, psychological, and social ties.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 3: Examples of Post-Arrival Assistance including Hygiene and School Kits, and Clothing, March 2018**



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-62

USAID has assisted migrants returning to their home countries since 2014 through three program contribution agreements, implemented by IOM.<sup>18</sup>

1. *Reception/ In-Processing and Repatriation Assistance to Returning Families and Unaccompanied Children in the Northern Triangle of Central America Agreement (also known as Post-Arrival and*

<sup>17</sup>IOM defines reintegration as the re-inclusion or reincorporation of migrants into the society of their country of origin.

<sup>18</sup>“Under a program contribution agreement, USAID makes a contribution to a Public International Organization’s (PIO) general operations, program, project, or activity, including multi-donor pooled funding arrangements. The contribution does not finance specific goods and services. Program contributions allow USAID to participate more readily in certain arrangements without the typical requirements that apply under cost-type grants to PIOs, as the lump sum disbursements under the award themselves accomplish a significant purpose of the grant.” See Section 308.3.10.2 of USAID’s Automated Directives System (ADS), Chapter 308; *Awards to Public International Organizations*, Partial Revision, April 3, 2014. Section 308.3.10.2 was in effect during the period of our review. Subsequently, on August 24, 2018, USAID published a revised version of ADS 308. Section 308.3.9.2 of the revised version refers to the types of contributions described above as project contributions and contains updated guidance, including a section addressing monitoring and evaluation for project contributions. See ADS Chapter 308; *Awards to Public International Organizations*, August 24, 2018.

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*Reception Assistance or PARA*), (July 2014–April 2016). This agreement between USAID and IOM—established in response to a rapid increase of UAC from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras arriving at the U.S. border in 2014—intended to, among other things, achieve the overall objective of contributing to the “dignified, holistic, and sustainable” return of children and families in the Northern Triangle. According to the program description, IOM viewed infrastructure improvements as a key component of the program. For example, IOM included the renovation of reception centers and shelters among the activities that might be carried out to meet one of the program goals, which related to supporting the countries’ capacities to process and assist returnees at points of entry and migrant shelters. Other goals included efforts to address topics such as providing capacity building to key government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other partners offering assistance to returning migrants, and improving migration data collection and information sharing among governments, donors, humanitarian agencies, and civil society.

2. *Northern Triangle Migration Information Initiative Agreement (NTMI)*, (September 2015–March 2018). This second agreement between USAID and IOM focused on improving the quality, reliability, and uniformity of migration information.<sup>19</sup> According to the program description, the program would address the need for improved migration information to contribute to the development of more strategic public policies among institutional counterparts involved in the reception, assistance, and reintegration of returning migrants. The program’s goal was to strengthen the governments’ capacity to manage, collect, and analyze migration information to support humanitarian action and protect vulnerable populations in the Northern Triangle countries.<sup>20</sup> This effort also involved taking steps to

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<sup>19</sup>NTMI also focuses on collecting data related to internal displacement. IOM defines internally displaced persons as those who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border and have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or residence, as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters.

<sup>20</sup>Another initiative to share migration information is the Regional Migration Observatory. At the Conference on Prosperity and Security in Miami in June 2017, the Northern Triangle countries committed to establish a Regional Migration Observatory supported by the United States. The Regional Migration Observatory is meant to provide an integrated regional approach to address migration and assistance needs through collecting information and sharing regional analysis. IOM and the host governments plan to conceptualize the observatory this year and IOM expects it to strengthen regional activities and exchange on migration. To meet this objective, the three countries will have to standardize their data and improve communication, according to IOM.

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develop and strengthen data systems to register returning migrants' information.

3. *Return and Reintegration in the Northern Triangle Agreement, (June 2016–June 2019)*. This third agreement between USAID and IOM was intended to continue to promote and ensure more humane and dignified assistance to and sustainable reintegration of migrants upon return to communities of origin by strengthening the capacities of key stakeholders to assist, care for, and protect returning UAC and migrant families in the Northern Triangle countries. According to the agreement, the program would address things such as expanding the range of government-supported opportunities for returning migrants while providing high-quality services during the reintegration process at the local level.

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**USAID Provided  
Approximately \$27 Million  
for Assistance to  
Returning Migrants, in  
Fiscal Years 2014 through  
2016**

USAID provided approximately \$27 million for assistance to IOM through the three program contribution agreements.<sup>21</sup> Once the program contribution agreement is signed and the funds are disbursed to IOM, USAID considers the funds expended for its purposes.<sup>22</sup> As of April 2018, IOM has expended all the funds for the first two agreements, \$7.6 million and \$2.5 million respectively, and \$7.1 million of \$16.8 million, or 42 percent, of the funds for the third.

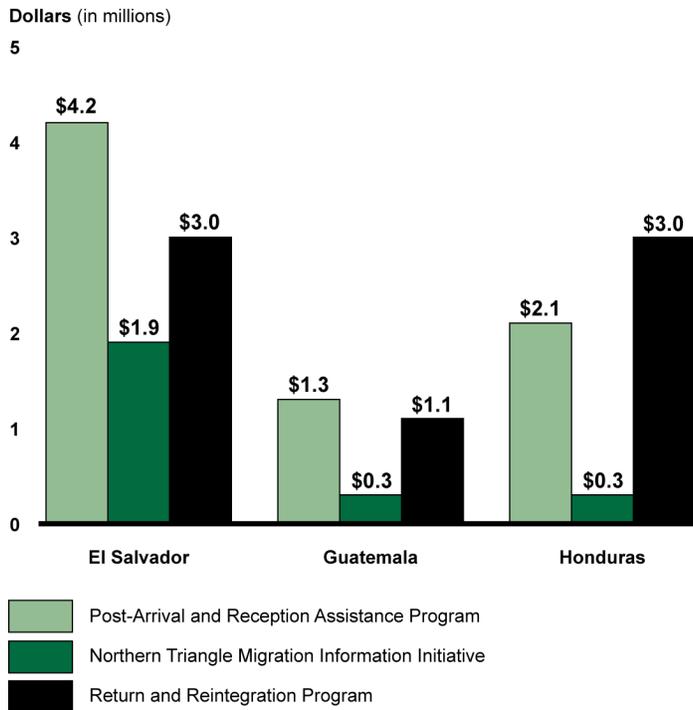
For all three agreements, from fiscal year 2014 through April 2018, IOM expended about \$9.1 million in El Salvador, about \$5.4 million in Honduras, and about \$2.7 million in Guatemala, according to IOM. (See figure 4.)

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<sup>21</sup>State provided USAID with approximately \$7.6 million for the first program contribution agreement.

<sup>22</sup>USAID and IOM signed the first agreement in September 2014, the second in September 2015, and the third in August 2016.

**Figure 4: International Organization for Migration Expenditures by Agreement and Country, Fiscal Year 2014 through April 2018**



Source: International Organization for Migration. | GAO-19-62

The IAF, an independent agency, also supports reintegration efforts.<sup>23</sup> Since 2014, IAF has provided two grants, totaling approximately \$83,000, to assist reintegration efforts. One grant went to the Asociación de Retornados Guatemaltecos (ARG), in Guatemala. ARG seeks to ease the transition of returning migrants, including helping them find employment. (See sidebar.) The grant was for \$33,500 and developed a 5-year plan focused on strengthening the organization by developing the administrative, negotiating, and fundraising skills of its members.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the IAF grant, ARG raised additional funds to support its efforts to assist returned migrants. The other IAF grant went to the Instituto Salvadoreño del Migrante, in El Salvador. The grant was for

<sup>23</sup>See 22 U.S.C. §290f.

<sup>24</sup>The ARG grant period was from September 2015 to December 2016; it was extended to December 2018, although no additional funds were provided.

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**Asociación de Retornados Guatemaltecos (ARG)**

The civil society organization Asociación de Retornados Guatemaltecos (ARG) begins its work with returning migrants from the United States at the Guatemalan Air Force Base Reception Center. Members of ARG are returned migrants themselves who started the association in 2013 because they understood the experiences of returning migrants and wanted to help people in similar situations by providing a support network. According to an ARG volunteer and our observations, at the reception center, an ARG volunteer greets every returning migrant as they come through the door. After migration authorities process the returning migrants and provide them a snack, an ARG volunteer helps them make a domestic or international telephone call to their family members. Once the migrants have received any belongings and exchanged money, ARG volunteers offer them clothing, help with various tasks—such as receiving money through wire transfers or registering them for a new identity card—and, if necessary, purchase bus tickets for them to return to their communities of origin. ARG volunteers stay until all the returning migrants are served, and, if the migrants are fearful of returning to their communities, accompany them to the Casa del Migrante, a shelter that provides protection assistance. The volunteers told us that they maintain a database to track the returned migrants, later call the returned migrants to make sure they arrived safely in their communities, and offer them assistance in getting certified in skills they may have acquired abroad, such as construction work or speaking English. ARG also connects returned migrants with vocational or training opportunities and potential scholarships.

Source: GAO analysis based on observation and interviews | GAO-19-62

\$49,740 to expand a network of migrant returnees to facilitate reintegration and provide information on locally available resources to returnees, such as credit access, government-training programs, market information, and contracting opportunities. The grantee also developed a working group to discuss with government officials and the private sector the health issues returnees face. Even though the grant has ended, the Instituto Salvadoreño del Migrante's efforts continue with funds from other donors, according to IAF.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>The Instituto Salvadoreño del Migrante grant period was from June 2014 to June 2016.

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## Efforts to Assist Returning Migrants are in Various Stages of Development in the Three Countries

Efforts to assist reception, migrant-related data collection, and reintegration are in various stages of development in all three countries. IOM, with U.S. assistance, has renovated seven reception centers and shelters in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and improved the collection of migration data to understand the characteristics of the population returning to their countries to inform decisions about allocating resources needed for reintegration. However, in all three countries the use of migration information varies and reintegration efforts are just beginning.<sup>26</sup>

### Reception Centers and Post-Arrival Assistance

El Salvador has one reception center for returning migrants; Guatemala has three reception centers and two shelters; and Honduras has three reception centers.<sup>27</sup> See figure 5 for the locations of these reception centers and shelters as well as points of entry.

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<sup>26</sup>In addition, IOM provided information technology equipment to the Tecún Umán Reception Center in Guatemala and provided hygiene, sanitation, and water upgrades to the CAMR-Omoa Reception Center in Honduras. IOM also renovated two shelters—San Vicente de Paul Children’s Home and the Children’s Centre for Immediate Protection—in El Salvador, but does not currently support these shelters. IOM also renovated the Soto Cano Reception Center in Honduras, which is no longer being used to receive returning migrants.

<sup>27</sup>Reception centers provide post arrival assistance such as hygiene kits, food, psychological and social assistance, and medical exams as needed, as well as transportation from the arrival point to a returnee’s community of origin. Shelters generally provide temporary housing and food to families and UAC until they return to their home communities or are reunited with their families or guardians.

**Figure 5: Reception Centers and Shelters for Returning Migrants Supported by the International Organization for Migration, and Selected Points of Entry, in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras**



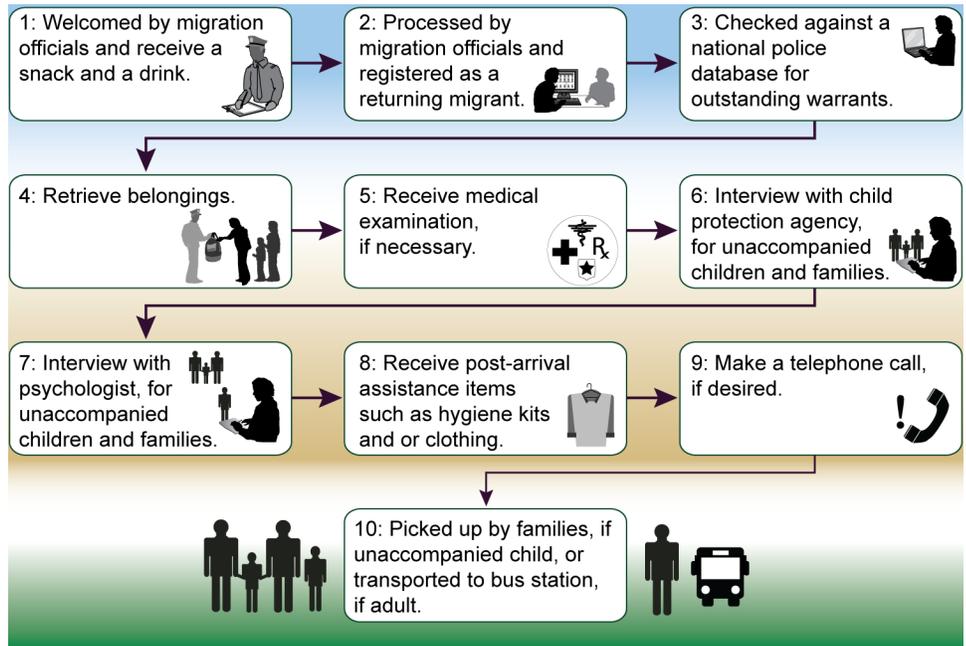
Legend: CAMR = Centro de Atención al Migrante Retornado (Assistance Center for Returned Migrants),  
 CANFM = Centro de Atención para Niñez y Familias Migrantes (Assistance Center for Migrant Children and Families),  
 DAMI = Dirección de Atención al Migrante (Directorate of Assistance to Migrants).

Source: GAO analysis based on International Organization for Migration documentation. | GAO-19-62

Note: There is no reception center at the land point of entry or the airport in El Salvador.

We observed that at the reception centers in the three countries, returning migrants go through a similar reception process. The process may differ slightly depending on the country and whether the returning person is an adult, part of a family unit, or UAC. See figure 6.

**Figure 6: General Reception Process for Returning Migrants**



Source: GAO analysis based on observation and agency documentation. | GAO-19-62

Note: Additional steps may occur and steps may not occur exactly in this order.

IOM has assisted in the renovation of the countries' reception centers and shelters and provided post-arrival assistance to returning migrants. Country-specific information on these facilities follows.

### El Salvador

El Salvador has one IOM-supported reception center, called Dirección de Atención al Migrante (DAMI), Directorate of Assistance to Migrants, but informally known as La Chacra. IOM completed its efforts to renovate the center in February 2016, and increased its capacity to receive up to 200 returning migrants at a time. The center serves adults, UAC, and family units returned by chartered bus from Mexico or on chartered flights from the United States.<sup>28</sup> Post-arrival assistance is provided at the center. See figures 7 and 8.

<sup>28</sup>All references to chartered flights refer to flights chartered by DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement from the United States to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

**Figure 7: Reception Center for Returning Migrants and Selected Points of Entry in El Salvador**



Legend: DAMI = Dirección de Atención al Migrante (Directorate of Assistance to Migrants).

Source: GAO analysis based on International Organization for Migration documentation. | GAO-19-62

**Figure 8: DAMI (La Chacra) Reception Center for Returning Migrants, San Salvador, El Salvador**



Legend: DAMI = Dirección de Atención al Migrante (Directorate of Assistance to Migrants).

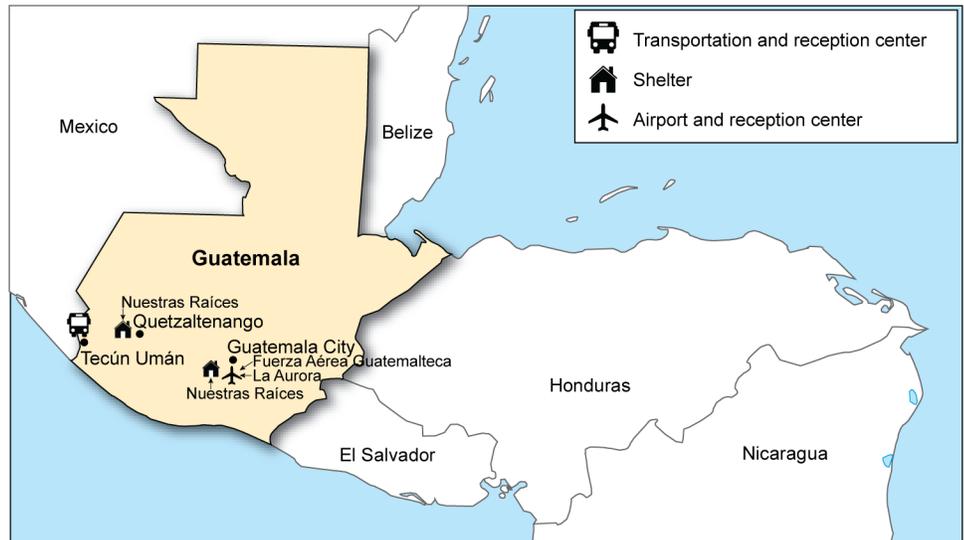
Sources: International Organization for Migration (left), GAO (right). | GAO-19-62

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## Guatemala

Guatemala has three reception centers and two shelters for returning migrants. IOM renovated the two shelters in 2015 and one of the reception centers in 2017. IOM also provided information technology equipment for one reception center and plans to renovate another reception center in 2018. See figure 9.

**Figure 9: Points of Entry, Reception Centers, and Shelters for Returning Migrants Supported by the International Organization for Migration in Guatemala**



Source: GAO analysis based on International Organization for Migration documentation. | GAO-19-62

The three reception centers include:

- Sala de Recepción de Niñas, Niños y Adolescentes Migrantes no Acompañados y Unidades Familiares (Reception Center for Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Family Units), La Aurora International Airport, Guatemala City. This center, which opened in May 2017, serves UAC and family units returning by commercial flights from Mexico or the United States. The center provides post-arrival assistance, and has areas for immigration processing, psychological and social assistance, and breast-feeding. It also has a medical clinic and a play area for children. See figure 10.

**Figure 10: Reception Center for Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Family Units, La Aurora International Airport, Guatemala City, Guatemala**



Source: International Organization for Migration. | GAO-19-62

- Centro de Recepción de Retornados de la Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca (Reception Center for Returnees at Guatemalan Air Force Base), Guatemala City. This reception center serves adults, UAC, and families returning by chartered flights from the United States, and provides post-arrival assistance to them. See figure 11. Adults traveling without children are processed separately from families. In July 2015, IOM opened a small remodeled area of the center that receives returning migrant families and provides post-arrival assistance.

**Figure 11: Guatemalan Air Force Base Reception Center, Guatemala City, Guatemala**



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-62

- Centro de Recepción de Retornados en Tecún Umán (Reception Center for Returnees at Tecún Umán), Tecún Umán. This reception center, on the border with Mexico, serves adults, UAC, and family units returning by chartered bus from Mexico. IOM has supported the center mainly by providing IT equipment in October 2016 to process returning migrants. The children go through immigration processing at Tecún Umán and are then moved to Casa Nuestras Raíces Quetzaltenango by bus, accompanied by a government social worker to ensure the protection of UAC until a parent or guardian picks them up.

The two shelters include:

- Casa Nuestras Raíces Guatemala (Our Roots Shelter, Guatemala), Guatemala City. This shelter serves UAC returning by chartered flights from Mexico and commercial or chartered flights from the United States who have been processed at either La Aurora or Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca. IOM renovated this shelter in August 2015 and

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supports post-arrival assistance for returning migrants and their relatives who come to take them home. See figure 12.

**Figure 12: Our Roots Shelter Dormitory, Guatemala City, March 2018**



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-62

- Casa Nuestras Raíces Quetzaltenango (Our Roots Shelter, Quetzaltenango), Quetzaltenango. This shelter serves UAC returning by chartered bus from Mexico. UAC are processed first at Tecún Umán and then transported to Quetzaltenango. Similar to the shelter in Guatemala City, IOM renovated this shelter in August 2015 and provides post-arrival assistance.

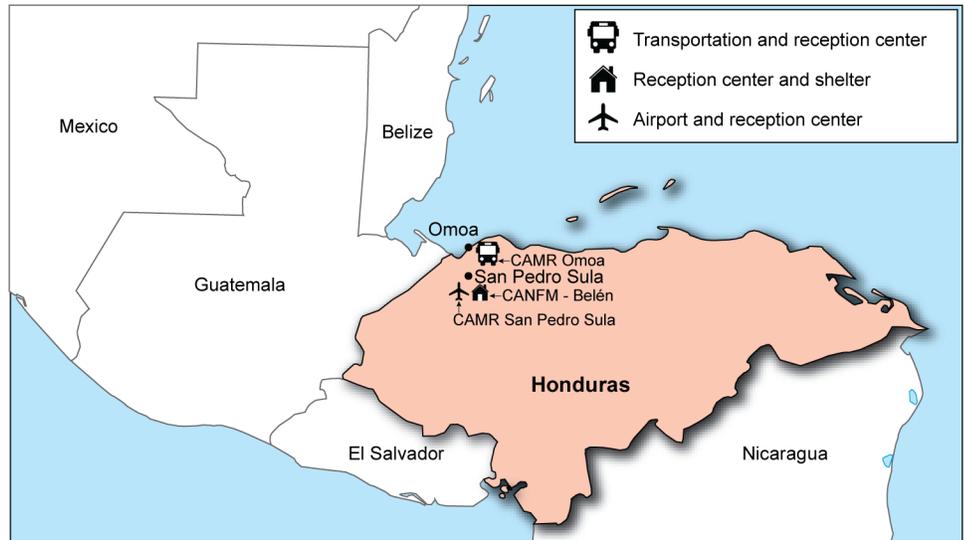
## Honduras

Honduras has three reception centers. IOM renovated two of the reception centers and upgraded the third.<sup>29</sup> See figure 13.

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<sup>29</sup>Honduras uses one of its reception centers, Belén, as a shelter when there is a need for UAC to spend the night before being picked up by a parent or guardian, according to USAID. The Omoa Assistance Center also serves as a shelter when necessary.

**Figure 13: Points of Entry and Reception Centers for Returning Migrants in Honduras**



Legend: CAMR = Assistance Center for Returned Migrants, CANFM = Assistance Center for Migrant Children and Families.

Source: GAO analysis based on International Organization for Migration documentation. | GAO-19-62

- Centro de Atención al Migrante Retornado SPS (SPS Assistance Center for Returned Migrants), San Pedro Sula. This reception center serves adults returning by chartered flights from the United States. IOM completed renovating and equipping this center in February 2016. It provides post-arrival assistance to returning migrants.
- Centro de Atención para Niñez y Familias Migrantes Belén (Belén Assistance Center for Children and Families), San Pedro Sula. This center serves UAC and family units returning by chartered bus from Mexico or commercial flights from Mexico or the United States. IOM completed renovating and equipping the center in February 2016. Post-arrival, psychological, and medical assistance is also provided at Belén.
- Centro de Atención al Migrante Retornado Omoa (Omoa Assistance Center for Returned Migrants), Omoa. This center serves adults who are returned by chartered bus from Mexico. IOM provided hygiene, sanitation, and water upgrades to the center, and, according to IOM, plans to make electrical improvements and construct a sports field, sidewalks, and parking area; some of these efforts were started in September 2018.

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## Migration Data Collection

IOM began assisting the countries in September 2015 with the collection and use of migration data with funding from USAID through its NTMI agreement. Since September 2015, all three host governments collect and digitize migration data.<sup>30</sup> The governments use the data to understand the characteristics of the population returning to their countries so they can make decisions about allocating resources needed for reintegration, according to IOM.

To facilitate the collection of relevant information, IOM helped each government in the three countries develop its own form to gather the information needed by the various ministries involved in reception and reintegration efforts.<sup>31</sup> According to IOM, this uniform questionnaire has promoted data sharing among institutions, reduced interviewing times, and helped ensure that returning migrants are not required to provide the same information multiple times. In addition to counting the number of returned migrants and recording where they are returning from, each country now collects detailed information about each migrant.<sup>32</sup> For example, the Honduran government collects information on an individual's reason for migrating, labor skills, place of birth, and education level.

Through the NTMI agreement, IOM also provided government agencies in all three countries with information technology equipment, software, and training to collect and analyze relevant information about returning migrants. For example, IOM developed the Honduran government's data repository and official website for the agency responsible for the

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<sup>30</sup>El Salvador's migration authority is the Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería (DGME), General Directorate of Migration and Foreign Nationals. Migration authorities in Guatemala include the Dirección General de Migración (DGM), General Directorate of Migration and the Secretaría de Bienestar Social (SBS), Secretariat of Social Welfare. In Honduras, the migration authority is the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM), National Institute of Migration. In addition, the Observatorio Consular y Migratorio de Honduras (CONMIGHO), Consular and Migration Observatory, and Centro Nacional de Información del Sector Social (CENISS), National Center for Social Sector Information manage migration data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

<sup>31</sup>El Salvador currently uses a unique registry form; Honduras is in the process of implementing use of a similar form; and Guatemala uses a single form, only for unaccompanied children, according to IOM.

<sup>32</sup>In addition to information about returning migrants, IOM is working with the host governments to collect information on internally displaced persons and violence against children to enable informed policy making.

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registration and publication of data on returning migrants.<sup>33</sup> In Guatemala, IOM is helping the migration directorate implement a system to use fingerprints to identify returning migrants who had migrated previously and returned, providing information on recidivism.<sup>34</sup> IOM has also trained personnel involved with migrant programs in all three countries on how to use and analyze this information.

## Reintegration Efforts

El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras are at different stages in establishing reintegration efforts, and each government has different priorities, according to IOM. While some reintegration efforts began earlier, IOM's main reintegration efforts began under the third contribution agreement with USAID in 2016, focusing on expanding the range of government-supported opportunities for returning migrants while providing high-quality services during the reintegration process at the local level. Reintegration efforts in all three countries seek to support returnees with resources in their home communities, including psychological and social services, vocational and employment training, employment opportunities, and upgrades to public spaces. Civil society organizations support some of these reintegration efforts. USAID, through its agreements with IOM, assists these reintegration efforts in a context in which the three host countries experience challenges, such as limited resources and employment opportunities, which affect implementation.

### Reintegration Efforts in El Salvador

El Salvador is furthest along in establishing reintegration efforts, at both the national and municipal levels. These efforts focus on the entire spectrum of returnees—children, adolescents, and adults—by providing education, psychological, and social assistance to children and families, and reintegration information to adults. At the national level, IOM has been working since November 2015 with the government of El Salvador's Assistance Centers for Returned Migrant Children and Adolescents<sup>35</sup> and its information centers that support reintegration services for adults, called

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<sup>33</sup>Observatorio Consular y Migratorio de Honduras. The current website is <http://conmigho.wixsite.com/subscym-conmigho>.

<sup>34</sup>The returning migrant registration systems in El Salvador and Honduras are linked to the countries' national registries and can track the number of times a returning migrant has previously returned based on the migrant's national identification number. However, neither country currently collects statistics on this proxy for recidivism.

<sup>35</sup>Centro de Atención a la Niñez, Adolescencia, y Familia (CANAF).

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Ventanillas de Atención al Migrante, Migrant Assistance Windows (commonly known as Ventanillas).

The Assistance Centers for Returned Migrant Children and Adolescents are located in four municipalities,<sup>36</sup> all of which have high numbers of returning migrants, including children and adolescents. These centers provide returning migrant children and families with social services and case management to facilitate their economic and social reintegration. These services include psychological and social assistance and crisis intervention; legal assistance, including safety and protection; health services, including nutrition and immunizations; educational support to ensure children and adolescents are incorporated into the formal education system; and referral services.

The Ventanillas are information centers supporting reintegration in the five municipalities with the highest number of returning migrants.<sup>37</sup> Each center has one person who is responsible for providing assistance to returned migrants such as employment assistance, school enrollment, training opportunities, and lines of credit. IOM equipped the centers with office furniture and such items as storage cabinets, water coolers, air conditioners, and telephones.

At the municipal level, IOM is also assisting other government initiatives in four communities that have high numbers of returned migrants and which the government has prioritized under its Plan El Salvador Seguro (Safe El Salvador Plan).<sup>38</sup> Specifically, IOM is working with municipal governments and community organizations to:

- improve public spaces with small scale infrastructure projects;
- raise awareness and knowledge of migration and reintegration at the community level among local governments, communities, and community leaders; and
- provide psychological and social assistance.

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<sup>36</sup>The four municipalities with Assistance Centers for Returned Migrant Children and Adolescents are: (1) Santa Ana, (2) San Miguel, (3) San Vicente, and (4) Usulután.

<sup>37</sup>The municipalities with Ventanillas are: (1) Chalatenango, (2) Santa Ana, (3) San Miguel, (4) San Salvador, and (5) Usulután.

<sup>38</sup>At the municipal level, IOM is supporting initiatives in (1) Mejicanos, (2) San Miguel, (3) Usulután, and (4) Zacatecoluca.

The infrastructure projects are meant to create safe, public spaces to build social cohesion within communities. For example, in two areas in Zacatecoluca that we visited, IOM supported an effort to rebuild a sports complex, which included basketball and soccer fields, and a playground and community center. In Usulután, IOM supported the renovation of the municipal gym (see fig. 14). In January 2018, IOM also began providing technical assistance to the Zacatecoluca municipal government to help it obtain feedback from the community on services needed and working with local service providers to facilitate assistance to beneficiaries, among other things.

**Figure 14: International Organization for Migration Renovated Soccer Field, Municipal Gym, and Playground in Usulután and Zacatecoluca, El Salvador, March 2018**



Sources (left to right): Mayor's Office of Zacatecoluca, GAO, GAO. | GAO-19-62

### Reintegration Efforts in Guatemala

Guatemala also has government reintegration efforts at both the national and municipal levels. The current reintegration activity underway is the municipal level Centro de Formación Quédate (Stay Here Vocational Training Center), supported by IOM. Implemented by the Secretariat for Social Welfare, this technical and vocational center provides certified vocational courses and alternative education opportunities for youth, including returned UAC and host community adolescents.<sup>39</sup> While the Secretariat for Social Welfare began operations at the center in 2015, IOM's support started in July 2018. In addition, Guatemala's President and First Lady launched a national strategy in March 2017 that aims to prevent migration and to care for returning Guatemalan migrants and their

<sup>39</sup>Secretaría de Bienestar Social, Secretariat of Social Welfare (SBS).

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families.<sup>40</sup> The strategy's goal is to consolidate all government agencies' activities and create a comprehensive system for returning migrants, including children.

### **Reintegration Efforts in Honduras**

Honduras, with support from IOM, has focused at the national level on improving and maintaining its reception centers, and at the municipal level on opening reintegration assistance centers.<sup>41</sup> In addition, the Honduran First Lady has concentrated on UAC and their needs, such as prioritizing secure reunification. Honduras' effort to link returned migrants, specifically families and UAC, with government services in the municipalities are focused on reintegration assistance centers. There are nine centers, with plans to open seven more by the end of 2018.<sup>42</sup> The Belén Assistance Center, discussed earlier in this report, refers returning migrants to the reintegration assistance centers, according to a center official. The reintegration assistance centers then obtain information from the returning migrants about assistance they are seeking and send it to one of 12 government agencies, such as the Ministries of Development and Social Inclusion, Education or Health, and the Women's National Institute.

In addition to assisting government-sponsored reintegration efforts, IOM supports civil society organizations in Honduras that provide reintegration services.<sup>43</sup> In Honduras, we visited three civil society organizations whose programs work directly with returned UAC.

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<sup>40</sup>This effort involved several agencies including: SBS, Secretaría de Obras Sociales de la Esposa del Presidente (Secretariat of Social Works of the First Lady, or SOSEP), Ministry of Development, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Education.

<sup>41</sup>Unidades Municipales de Atención al Retornados (Municipal Units of Assistance to Returnees), also known as UMARs.

<sup>42</sup>As of July 2018, IOM indicated the 9 centers are in (1) Choloma, (2) La Ceiba, (3) Lempira, (4) Intibucá, (5) Olancho, (6) Santa Barbara, (7) San Pedro Sula, (8) Tegucigalpa, and (9) Tocoa.

<sup>43</sup>IOM also works with civil society organizations in Guatemala. For example, IOM supports the Avina Foundation's Guatemala Includes You Initiative, which provides information regarding reintegration services, among other things. According to IOM, it does not work directly with civil society organizations in El Salvador although it coordinates its activities with entities such as United Nations Human Rights Commission and works with community groups known as adescos.

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- *Casa Alianza.* Casa Alianza provides reintegration support including psychological and social assistance, child protection services, and children’s rights advocacy for returnees as well as internally displaced persons. The organization worked in the Belén Assistance Center from 2014 to 2017 with returning UAC, according to Casa Alianza officials.
  - *Mennonite Committee for Social Action.*<sup>44</sup> This organization’s Support for Returned Migrants Program began in 2014 and has various components including: (1) vocational training, (2) psychological assistance, (3) complementary workshops on life skills, and (4) humanitarian assistance. The program focuses on youth between ages 15 and 25 returning to the San Pedro Sula area.
  - *Collaboration and Effort Association.*<sup>45</sup> This program in Tegucigalpa focuses on providing returned children a safe place to live, teaching them responsibility and cooperation, and supporting their education. Many of the adolescents are returned UAC, and all beneficiaries must themselves help run the association’s programs.

### **Host Government Challenges Affect Reintegration Efforts**

USAID, through its agreements with IOM, is providing assistance to host countries where various challenges affect reintegration efforts. Some of these challenges affecting host countries, such as limited employment opportunities and resource constraints, are long-standing in nature.

- *Limited resources:* With limited resources dedicated to reintegration efforts, the centers can connect few returning migrants with the appropriate government services. For example, at a Ventanilla we visited in El Salvador, just one official—who has no vehicle—is responsible for providing services to all returning migrants in an area roughly one-fifth the country’s overall size and containing roughly one-fifth of its returning migrants. Similarly, at the Honduran reintegration assistance center we visited, there was only one staff member and no psychologist. As of July 2018, the Honduran government had opened 9 of the 16 planned reintegration assistance centers; it plans to open the remaining ones by the end of 2018.
- *Few training and employment opportunities:* There are limited training and employment opportunities for returning migrants. One of the

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<sup>44</sup>Comisión de Acción Social Menonita, CASM.

<sup>45</sup>Asociación Colaboración y Esfuerzo, ACOES.

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primary reasons cited for migration is the lack of employment opportunities in the countries. Additionally, the employment opportunities that are available may not fit the migrants' skills. For example, only migrants with sufficient English skills can be placed in call centers. At the same time, the training programs being offered at a particular time may not interest the migrant. Further, the few opportunities available may not be offered in the locations where migrants can readily access them. Finally, an official from a multilateral organization working in the region raised the concern that many of the training opportunities offer similar skills, such as training to be a barber, beautician, or mechanic, and the market can support only so many people in these professions.

- *Need for individualized services:* Each returning migrant has a different set of needs, skills, and interests, but providing customized assistance takes time and resources. Staff at reintegration assistance centers we visited told us that they try to match a migrant with the services or opportunities they need. For example, a returning migrant may be a single mother with good English skills and referred to services and opportunities based on that profile. Additionally, according to U.S. and Honduran government officials, large-scale reintegration efforts encounter the challenge of reintegrating migrants with different and individualized profiles.
- *Voluntary nature of seeking and finding assistance:* Receiving reintegration assistance and services depends in part on the initiative and desire of the returning migrant. Returning migrants must seek assistance to receive reintegration services, and so must be aware of and connect with the reintegration assistance centers. In El Salvador, only about 7 percent of returning migrants requested help from the reintegration assistance centers in 2017; of those who requested assistance, however, 91 percent received it, according to El Salvador's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In both El Salvador and Honduras, the reintegration assistance offered by the government is publicized at the reception centers where migrants are processed upon their return.<sup>46</sup> However, in El Salvador, a government official told us that migrants may not have the patience to wait to receive information after traveling and going through the reception process.

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<sup>46</sup>The government of Guatemala offers reintegration assistance to returned adolescents in one municipality through Centro de Formación Quédate.

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**Termination of TPS May Increase the Need for Reception and Reintegration Services in El Salvador and Honduras**

With the Secretary of Homeland Security's decisions to terminate TPS in the United States for nationals of El Salvador and Honduras, as of September 9, 2019, and January 5, 2020, respectively, both countries face the possibility of a significant influx of returnees—as many as 262,500 Salvadorans and 86,000 Hondurans, along with their U.S. citizen children. Reintegration efforts may also be complicated by the different backgrounds and needs of returning migrants who benefited from TPS. According to State officials, returning migrants who had TPS are likely to be older with more skills and education than those who left the country more recently. Successful strategies to reintegrate former TPS beneficiaries will be different than those that are currently in place. TPS beneficiaries may also have children who are U.S. citizens with different needs than UAC.

During our country visits in March 2018, State officials indicated that official planning for the return of former TPS beneficiaries was either just beginning, as in El Salvador, or had not begun, as in Honduras because an official decision on the termination of TPS for Hondurans had not yet occurred. U.S. officials, though, were meeting with their counterparts to discuss the challenges of reintegrating TPS beneficiaries. In both El Salvador and Honduras, U.S. officials have encouraged the government to address the challenges of reintegrating former TPS beneficiaries. For example, in February 2018, USAID's mission in El Salvador convened a one-day conference on current efforts to prevent migration and to plan for the return of migrants with TPS. At the same time, U.S. government officials also stated that some or most TPS beneficiaries might choose to stay in the United States without lawful status, attempt to adjust their status, or move to a third country rather than return to their home countries.

Source: GAO analysis based on DHS data, and USAID and State interviews. | GAO-19-62

- *Leadership turn-over and guidance:* Elections in the three countries, and the subsequent turnover of government officials, also affect implementation, according to IOM. Furthermore, in Guatemala leadership turn-over in key agencies has affected what the government can achieve in terms of reintegration of returning migrants, according to IOM officials. Both the Secretariat of Social Welfare<sup>47</sup> and the Directorate of Migration<sup>48</sup> have had various leaders over the past few years. The government of Guatemala has not yet determined which institution is responsible for reintegration activities and a national plan has not yet been developed, which complicates reintegration efforts, according to IOM.

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<sup>47</sup>Secretaría de Bienestar Social (SBS).

<sup>48</sup>Dirección General de Migración (DGM).

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## USAID Assessed Reception and Data Collection Efforts, Which Were Improved, but Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to be Determined

USAID assessed the effectiveness of its reception and migrant-related data collection efforts through site visits, meetings with IOM, and report reviews. This assistance has improved the capacity of the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to provide reception services to returning migrants and to collect and utilize migration information. USAID has not yet assessed the effectiveness of reintegration efforts conducted to date, but plans to sign an agreement by the end of December 2018 for a new reintegration program which will include a monitoring and evaluation component.

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## USAID Assessed the Effectiveness of its Reception and Data Collection Efforts through Program Monitoring and Report Reviews

Beginning in October 2014, after signing the first agreement with IOM, USAID monitored program implementation and assessed the effectiveness of IOM's efforts to assist returning migrants and improve migration information through site visits, regular meetings with IOM, and review of IOM reports.<sup>49</sup> USAID and IOM officials noted that USAID's periodic site visits to IOM projects and frequent communications between the two parties helped USAID track progress and results, and make needed adjustments in a timely manner.<sup>50</sup> In a memorandum approving the third

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<sup>49</sup>During the period of our review, USAID's program contribution agreements with public international organizations (PIOs), including IOM, were guided by USAID's Automated Directive System, Chapter 308; *Awards to Public International Organizations*, Partial Revision, April 3, 2014. According to USAID officials, the program contribution agreements with IOM discussed in this report do not contain the same types of formal monitoring or evaluation plans that may be included in other types of agreements with PIOs. Officials also noted that grants with PIOs typically follow the policies of the PIO, rather than those of USAID. ADS 308 was revised, effective August 24, 2018, and the updated version contains new guidance regarding monitoring and evaluation for these types of agreements. In addition, in September 2018, USAID's Inspector General issued a report on USAID's oversight of awards with PIOs. The report included multiple recommendations to improve USAID's processes for risk management and strengthen oversight of PIO awards. USAID agreed with the recommendations and noted it is taking steps to strengthen its oversight of PIO awards. See U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Inspector General, *Insufficient Oversight of Public International Organizations Puts U.S. Foreign Assistance Programs at Risk*, 8-000-18-003-P (Washington, D.C.: September 25, 2018).

<sup>50</sup>Because the programs were regional, the USAID mission in El Salvador was responsible for overall administration, management, and oversight, with input from the USAID missions in Guatemala and Honduras.

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program, USAID’s mission in Honduras stated that IOM “responded quickly and satisfactorily to any concerns.”<sup>51</sup> IOM, in consultation with USAID, adapted activities as needed for each country, such as by rebidding a contract to renovate a reception center in Guatemala City in response to corruption allegations. During our site visit in March 2018, we observed USAID officials’ familiarity with specific details related to IOM’s activities and the close working relationship between USAID and IOM staff.

In addition, USAID regularly reviewed the activity and progress reports provided by IOM, which included weekly, monthly, and quarterly reports. According to USAID officials, these activity and progress reports served as the basis for conversations with IOM about program progress and assessment. The reports included information such as an overview of achievements, activity updates by country, and challenges and actions taken. For example, the reports detailed information such as the number of returning migrants provided with post-arrival assistance, including food or hygiene kits, as well as progress on larger projects such as constructing small-scale, community-based infrastructure or renovating reception centers. IOM also explained challenges encountered and plans for overcoming them, such as building strong relationships with new key government personnel when there was turnover in Guatemala and Honduras. IOM also provided information to USAID through periodic, two-page information sheets that summarized its activities in a certain geographical area, such as a municipality in El Salvador, or with a certain program, such as NTMI in Honduras.

As part of the agreements with USAID, IOM agreed to conduct mid-term and final evaluations of the three programs. IOM produced written mid-term and final evaluations for the first program (PARA) based on reviews of documents, field visits, and interviews with government counterparts and USAID, among others. The final evaluation highlighted the program’s achievements, challenges, effective practices, lessons learned, and recommendations. For example, it noted IOM’s strong working relationship with USAID and host government agencies, as well as the need to conduct high-quality assessments in each country during program design. Instead of a written mid-term evaluation for the second program (NTMI), IOM held an internal workshop, which a USAID

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<sup>51</sup>USAID mission in Honduras, Activity Approval Memo, “Approval of IOM Repatriation activity and amendments to Development Objective 1 Project Approval Document,” June, 6, 2016.

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representative attended. According to IOM officials, IOM plans to present USAID with a mid-term evaluation for the Return and Reintegration program and a final evaluation for the NTMI program, although both have been delayed due to staffing issues.<sup>52</sup>

USAID also assessed IOM's programs during internal USAID meetings. For example, according to USAID officials, when USAID considered IOM's requests for no-cost extensions for the PARA and NTMI agreements, USAID assessed the progress and challenges of the activities implemented as part of the agreements and whether they were fulfilling their goals. USAID also discussed the effectiveness of IOM's programs at a strategic level during portfolio reviews and program performance reports, according to USAID officials. USAID officials told us that because the first program with IOM was productive and had good results, USAID also funded the second and third programs through program contribution agreements. In the memorandum approving the third program, USAID's mission in Honduras stated that "IOM has been a very effective partner in the first Program Contribution" and noted that IOM collaborated with USAID, the host governments, and other donors to design the follow-on program focused on reintegration efforts.<sup>53</sup> The memo also stated that IOM has "sound management systems and controls, and has long been an effective partner" of the U.S. government.

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## U.S. Assistance Has Helped Improve Reception Centers and Data Collection

### Reception Center Improvements

With U.S. assistance, IOM improved the capacity of the Northern Triangle governments to provide reception services to returning migrants and to collect migration information. With U.S. assistance, IOM renovated the region's seven reception centers and shelters currently in use and provided post-arrival assistance such as hygiene kits and medical services. The final evaluation for IOM's first program indicated that IOM

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<sup>52</sup>IOM has begun conducting the final evaluation for the NTMI program and expects to begin the mid-term evaluation for the *Return and Reintegration* program by the end of November 2018.

<sup>53</sup>USAID, Approval of IOM Repatriation activity.

designed the renovations in consultation with the host government agencies to meet their needs and to provide a welcoming space for returning migrants. During our site visit in March 2018, we visited five reception centers and one shelter in the three countries, including the Belén Assistance Center in Honduras, which we had visited in March 2015, prior to its renovation.<sup>54</sup> The Belén Assistance Center renovations were extensive, including the dining areas, kitchen, bathrooms, dormitories, play spaces, clinics, and counseling areas as well as a conference room used for facilitating meetings and workshops among government entities and partners. We observed the improved facilities as well as the processing of returning migrants (see fig. 15).

**Figure 15: Belén Assistance Center for Children and Families in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, in 2015 and After Renovations by the International Organization for Migration, March 2018**



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-62

<sup>54</sup>GAO-15-707.

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Likewise, IOM extensively renovated the Casa Nuestras Raíces Shelters in Guatemala City and Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, including the kitchen, bathrooms, dormitories, play spaces, clinics, and counseling areas.

In addition to improving infrastructure, IOM provided the governments with post-arrival assistance such as hygiene kits, clothing, meals, buses, and medical, psychological, and social support for returning migrants. For example, from 2014 through 2017 in all three countries, IOM reported that it supplied in total:

- nearly 60,000 hygiene kits,
- nearly 34,000 items of clothing, and
- more than 75,000 meals to returning migrants.

In fiscal year 2017, IOM provided post-arrival assistance to over 29,000 returning migrants, according to IOM. Additionally, IOM provided the host governments with 12 buses to transport returning migrants from the airport to the reception center and from the reception center to the bus station to return to their communities. U.S. and host government officials in the three countries noted that, with USAID and IOM's assistance, the reception of returnees has improved. For example, IOM expanded and renovated the DAMI Reception Center in San Salvador, adding separate areas for the various ministries involved so that returning migrants can receive specialized services such as a medical examination, psychological and social assistance, and the beginning of job placement assistance. The center also provides integrated child protection and social services. During our site visits to the reception centers and shelter in Guatemala City and San Pedro Sula in March 2018, we observed staff distributing food to returning migrants upon their arrival.

Through technical assistance and other support, IOM also helped build the capacity of host government institutions as it relates to the reception process and their ability to provide better reception services. For example, IOM worked with government agencies to develop protocols and procedures for receiving returned migrants and trained reception staff on issues such as human rights. At the reception centers in all three countries, multiple government agencies are now working together to assist returning migrants, according to IOM.

## Migration-Related Data Improvements

With IOM's support, the governments of the Northern Triangle have improved their capacity to collect data about returning migrants. According to USAID, the technical assistance and support provided by

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IOM through the NTMI agreement strengthened the governments' capacity to collect, manage, analyze, and share migration information. Prior to these USAID-assisted efforts, data on returning migrants was limited in all three countries and the information produced was not readily available for use by other government agencies, according to USAID. Since 2015, with IOM equipment and training, all three countries have moved toward uniform, more detailed data collection systems. In Honduras, for instance, technical assistance from IOM enabled the creation of a single data repository, which provides migration data for all agencies to use.

IOM has trained staff of the countries' migration directorates to use the registration systems for returning migrants and has trained personnel of other government agencies on how to analyze and use the data produced by the migration directorates. Each government now knows the number of migrants returning to the country—information that was not available previously. (See fig. 2 earlier in this report.) In addition, the governments now have such information as:

- the causes of migration reported by returnees;<sup>55</sup>
- the location from which the migrants are returning; and
- the location to which they are returning.

For example, in El Salvador, approximately 27 percent of children and adolescent migrants returning in 2017 said they left because of violence, approximately 27 percent left to reunify with families, and approximately 43 percent left for economic reasons, according to IOM's analysis of information from El Salvador's Directorate of Migration. Additionally, according to USAID officials, IOM trained the staff at El Salvador's General Directorate of Statistics and Census<sup>56</sup> and the agency is now conducting its own surveys of migrants.

According to USAID and IOM officials, the Northern Triangle governments are using the expanded information about returning migrants to make informed decisions, design public policies, and develop programs to provide reintegration assistance. Prior to USAID and IOM entering into

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<sup>55</sup>While the migration directorate in El Salvador collects information on the reasons adults and UAC report they migrated, the migration authorities in Guatemala and Honduras currently collect this information for only UAC.

<sup>56</sup>Dirección General de Estadística y Censos also known as DIGESTYC.

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the NTMI agreement, no official statistics were available that allowed for evidence-based decisions or public policy design. Now, during the registration process in Honduras, for instance, returning migrants are asked what trade they would like to learn, which can inform host government planning. With information about the reasons migrants left the country, governments can also refer migrants to existing programs or create programs to address those issues, such as developing training and employment opportunities. According to IOM and USAID officials, examples of how governments use this information include the following.<sup>57</sup>

- In El Salvador, multiple government institutions use returning migrant information to design specific programs for this population and redirect programming if necessary. The Ministry of Labor, for instance, uses this information to design entrepreneurship programs. Relevant migration information is also shared with committees of the Alliance for Prosperity Plan.<sup>58</sup>
- In Honduras, returning migrant information is used by government institutions for planning, budgeting, and monitoring reception, assistance, and reintegration activities. For instance, the First Lady of Honduras' Task Force for Child Migrants<sup>59</sup> bases its strategy for the reception centers on returning migrant data.

Detailed information on returning migrants in these countries has also been useful for U.S. government officials and has informed USAID's strategy and programming. According to a USAID official in Guatemala, the new information has been integral to USAID's ability to evaluate migration issues in a more informed manner. For example, USAID officials in Guatemala told us that much of their programming is based in the Western Highlands because they now have data showing most migrants come from this area of the country. In addition, USAID's mission in El Salvador convened a conference in February 2018 to discuss the termination of Temporary Protected Status for Salvadorans and used information gathered by El Salvador's Directorate of Migration about

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<sup>57</sup>The government of Guatemala offers reintegration assistance to returned adolescents in one municipality through Centro de Formación Quédete.

<sup>58</sup>The Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle is an initiative of the governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to stimulate the productive sector to create economic opportunities, build human capital, improve public safety and access to the legal system, and strengthen institutions.

<sup>59</sup>Fuerza de Tarea para la Niñez Migrante.

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reasons for migration and returnees' profiles to discuss possible reintegration strategies for this population.

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## USAID Has Not Yet Assessed the Effectiveness of its Reintegration Efforts

USAID has not assessed the effectiveness of reintegration efforts conducted to date. Reintegration is a long-term process and many of the reintegration assistance programs are just beginning. Specifically, El Salvador began opening five information centers supporting reintegration in November 2015, Honduras opened nine reintegration assistance centers in 2017 and early 2018, and Guatemala's one center began assisting returned adolescents in July 2018. Given the number of returning migrants and the nascent reintegration services, relatively few have benefited from services offered by these centers. For example, in El Salvador, only about 1,700 of nearly 26,500 returning migrants were connected with government reintegration services through the centers in 2017.

In addition, determining the effectiveness of reintegration efforts is challenging because of the difficulties of tracking migrants once they return to their communities and of accounting for the various external factors that influence an individual's decision to migrate again. USAID, IOM, and host government officials cited the challenges of tracking and following up with returned migrants once they leave the reception centers. Although the countries are beginning to offer reintegration assistance, through the information and municipal assistance centers in El Salvador and Honduras, there are currently no systems in place to track migrants when they return to their communities. U.S. government officials also noted there are multiple external factors that may influence an individual's decision to migrate again, some of which cannot be addressed through reintegration assistance programs. For example, the desire to reunify with family may affect an individual's decision, as well as the country's economic conditions and levels of violence and insecurity.

Although USAID has not yet assessed the effectiveness of reintegration efforts, it plans to monitor and evaluate efforts. As part of the third program, IOM plans to evaluate each country's reintegration assistance projects. In addition, by the end of December 2018, USAID expects to sign a 3-year agreement with a Public International Organization (PIO) for a new program which will, among other things, continue assisting the host governments' efforts to reintegrate returning migrants. According to the USAID memorandum describing the new program, it will be underpinned by a monitoring and evaluation plan, and is expected to result in, among other things, a strengthened focus on monitoring and evaluation systems

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to track reintegration at the community level. Additionally, according to the memorandum, the new program will use a cost-type agreement which is structured such that the PIO will be reimbursed or advanced funds for costs of goods and services to achieve the agreement purpose.<sup>60</sup>

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We are not making any recommendations in this report. We provided a draft of this report to DHS, IAF, State, and USAID. All the agencies provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. USAID and IAF provided written comments which we have reprinted in appendices III and IV.

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As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report's date. At that time, we will send copies to the appropriate congressional committees and the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, the President of the Inter-American Foundation, and the Secretaries of Homeland Security and State. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix V.

If you or your staff has any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7141 or [groverj@gao.gov](mailto:groverj@gao.gov).



Jennifer Grover  
Director, International Affairs and Trade

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<sup>60</sup>See ADS Chapter 308; *Awards to Public International Organizations*, August 24, 2018, for information about cost-type PIO agreements. The Action Memorandum for the Mission Director was signed on June 4, 2018, and its attachments describe the planned program. USAID went through its internal process of receiving concurrence for the project's approval from its missions in Guatemala and Honduras in May 2018; it will be managed by the USAID mission in El Salvador. A PIO pre-award determination was made in June 2018, and USAID expects to sign the agreement by the end of December 2018.

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# Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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This report examines (1) the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) efforts to assist the reception and reintegration of migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras into their home countries since fiscal year 2014; and (2) what is known about the effectiveness of these efforts. In addition, we reviewed how U.S. agencies have coordinated efforts to assist the reintegration of returning migrants.

To examine USAID's efforts to assist the reception and reintegration of returning migrants from fiscal year 2014 through fiscal year 2017 in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, we reviewed USAID's three program contribution agreements with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). We also reviewed grant agreements for Inter-American Foundation (IAF) projects in El Salvador and Guatemala. In addition, we obtained data from USAID, the Department of State (State), and IAF on agency funding to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. We assessed the reliability of USAID expenditures by reviewing expenditure data from USAID's Phoenix system for the three contribution agreements. We determined these data to be sufficiently reliable for reporting the amount of funding U.S. agencies expended on reintegration programs. We also reviewed IOM expenditure data from fiscal year 2014 through April 2018. We determined these data were sufficiently reliable to illustrate the general scale of IOM's expenditures. Additionally, we reviewed IOM program reporting documents detailing the status of the projects, including weekly, biweekly, and monthly progress reports and project presentations related to renovations, information management, and reintegration efforts.

During our March 2018 site visit, we interviewed USAID, State, IAF, and IOM officials in all three countries regarding the status of the projects being implemented under the contribution agreements or grants, and we met with host government officials to discuss these projects. We interviewed representatives from nongovernmental organizations in the three countries to learn about how their work supports reintegration. We conducted five site visits to reception centers, one in El Salvador, two in Guatemala, and two in Honduras, where we observed the reception process, and we visited one shelter in Guatemala City, Guatemala. We selected the locations to visit based on the location of the majority of reception centers and shelters in the countries. In Honduras, we met with unaccompanied children (UAC) at three centers operated by different nongovernmental organizations with IOM support, where we discussed their reasons for making the journey to the U.S., and how the programs were assisting their reintegration. Spanish-speaking GAO staff primarily conducted the interviews and GAO contracted for interpreters with State

to help facilitate the interviews, when necessary. We also interviewed USAID, State, and IAF officials in the United States who are responsible for these programs.

To determine the number of migrants returned to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, we reviewed and tabulated IOM data from calendar year 2015 to 2017. We did not review 2014 data because IOM's effort had not yet begun. To determine the number of people removed from the United States, we reviewed and tabulated Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. We assessed the reliability of IOM migration data on the number of returnees, and DHS data on people removed, by reviewing documents and interviewing knowledgeable agency officials and host government officials about how the data were produced, selected, and checked for accuracy. We determined the IOM data to be sufficiently reliable to provide background information on the number of migrants returning to the three countries. We determined the DHS data was sufficiently reliable for reporting on number of removals of migrants from the United States to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. The data for the number of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) beneficiaries is from DHS reporting in the Federal Register, which is sufficiently reliable for reporting the approximate number of TPS beneficiaries.<sup>1</sup>

To examine how USAID assessed the effectiveness of its assistance for reintegration efforts in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, from fiscal years 2014 through 2017, we reviewed IOM's contribution agreements, USAID's evaluation policies for the agreements, country strategy documents for each country, and regional planning documents. We also interviewed USAID officials. To gather migration related information and requirements, we reviewed the U.S. Strategy for Central America, the associated quarterly reporting cables, and State's Justification

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; Termination of the Designation of El Salvador for Temporary Protected Status, 83 Fed. Reg. 2,654-2,656 (Jan. 18, 2018); and Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; Termination of the Designation of Honduras for Temporary Protected Status, 83 Fed. Reg. 26,074-26,076 (June 5, 2018). The estimates provided in the federal register include eligible individuals without nationality who last habitually resided in El Salvador or Honduras and hold TPS under that country's designation.

Memoranda for releasing foreign assistance to Central America.<sup>2</sup> During our March 2018 site visit, we also interviewed USAID and IOM officials at overseas locations regarding their evaluation requirements and policy and how they monitored and evaluated the projects. We reviewed IOM's reported progress towards achieving its goals by reviewing its mid-term and final evaluation reports for the first contribution agreement, and other reporting documentation containing progress updates for the other two contribution agreements.

During our site visit to El Salvador, we visited renovation projects that IOM supported, including two playgrounds, a municipal gymnasium, and a community center in Zacatecoluca and Usulután. In addition, we visited several reintegration initiatives, including an Assistance Center for Returned Migrant Children and Adolescents and, one municipal information center supporting reintegration center, both in El Salvador,<sup>3</sup> and one municipal reintegration assistance center in Honduras.<sup>4</sup> We selected reception and reintegration initiatives to visit based on proximity to San Salvador and San Pedro Sula. We also met with U.S. embassy officials, including the U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala and acting chiefs of mission in El Salvador and Honduras, to obtain their views on U.S. assistance for returning migrants and to understand what efforts were underway to address the impact of termination of Temporary Protected Status for El Salvadoran and Honduran beneficiaries. We also interviewed IOM officials in El Salvador on the host nation's ability to reintegrate Temporary Protected Status beneficiaries, and reviewed documents regarding El Salvador and Honduras by DHS and State on this topic.

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<sup>2</sup>The memoranda we reviewed were created in response to requirements in the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Div. K, § 7045 (a)(3)(B), Dec. 18, 2015; and the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-31, Div. J, § 7045(a)(4)(B), May 5, 2017 pertaining to funds made available for assistance for countries in Central America to implement the United States Strategy for Engagement in Central America. According to USAID officials, the U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America is now referred to as the U.S. Strategy for Central America, which is the title we use when referring to the strategy elsewhere in this report.

<sup>3</sup>Ventanillas de Atención al Migrante.

<sup>4</sup>Unidad Municipal de Atención al Retornado (Municipal Units for Assistance to Returnees).

To examine interagency coordination, we obtained information on how USAID, State, DHS, and IAF headquarters offices with responsibility for overseeing assistance for reception and reintegration activities and country team operations in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have been coordinating with each other and with host country partners. During our March 2018 site visit, we interviewed USAID and IOM representatives at overseas locations to discuss their coordination efforts. We also interviewed USAID, State, and DHS officials in the United States who are responsible for these programs to obtain their views on interagency coordination. In addition, we obtained related information from IAF officials on coordination by email.

We conducted this performance audit from November 2017 to November 2018, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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# Appendix II: U.S. Agencies Coordinate on Reception and Reintegration Efforts for Migrants Returning to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

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## Interagency Coordination on Reception and Reintegration Efforts Takes Place in All Three Countries

Interagency coordination on reception and reintegration efforts takes place at U.S. embassies among the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of State (State), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and others, in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. These efforts occur on a formal basis as part of interagency working groups focused on migration at the U.S. embassies in El Salvador and Honduras and on an ad hoc basis in Guatemala, where no formal migration working group exists. Additionally, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) coordinates its reintegration efforts with USAID's missions in El Salvador and Guatemala, where it funds such projects.

The migration working group at the U.S. embassy in El Salvador, according to group officials, coordinates the efforts of the various U.S. agencies working on migration issues, in support of the U.S. embassy's overall goal of curbing illegal migration to the United States. Members of the working group come from USAID; State, including various sections such as Political, Consular, and Public Affairs; DHS components, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; and others as appropriate. According to these officials, the working group's purpose is to have all the agencies at the U.S. embassy support and work together on migration-related issues, share information, and avoid duplication of effort. These officials told us the working group also responds to issues raised by State headquarters. For example, State officials in Washington asked the working group to assess the potential impact of former beneficiaries of Temporary Protected Status in the United States returning to El Salvador.

The migration working group at the U.S. embassy in Honduras initially focused on addressing the rapid increase of unaccompanied children (UAC) from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras arriving at the U.S. border in 2014, according to group officials. Members of the working group include individuals from USAID, State, DHS, and others as appropriate. In September 2017, the working group, according to these officials, shifted its focus to reintegration, as well as issues related to internally displaced persons. Officials told us that the working group has spun off other working groups, including one to address the issue of beneficiaries with Temporary Protected Status returning to Honduras.

The U.S. embassy in Guatemala had no formal inter-agency migration working group, in March 2018 when we visited, but it had several others, including a law enforcement working group that meets once a week.<sup>1</sup> According to the working group, the Ambassador meets with them if any sensitive issues regarding migration arise. In addition, it has an economic and political working group focused on the ports and trade that regularly discusses what is occurring at the ports of entry. Among these working groups, migration is discussed at the U.S. embassy as needed, according to embassy officials we spoke with who participate in these groups. Members of the working groups include individuals from USAID, State, DHS, and others as appropriate.

IAF also coordinates its reintegration efforts with all three U.S. embassies, to ensure that (1) its projects are aligned with U.S. foreign policy objectives and (2) its grantees are appropriate. State provides feedback on IAF proposed grants and the relevant U.S. embassies provide their approval. According to IAF officials, for each fiscal year since 2016 IAF has presented a detailed proposal to USAID's Latin American and Caribbean Bureau, outlining its programming and funding objectives, and monitoring and evaluation plan in the Northern Triangle countries.<sup>2</sup> The proposals are intended to facilitate USAID's transfer of funds to IAF, ensuring that community-led projects are included in the efforts it supports to advance the U.S. Strategy for Central America.<sup>3</sup>

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### **USAID Coordinates with Foreign Partners Mainly through the International Organization for Migration**

USAID coordinates its assistance for reception and reintegration efforts with foreign partners, including host governments and international organizations, through the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which is the primary implementing partner for these efforts. USAID officials told us, however, they engage with both the host government and other national and multilateral organizations when it identifies a constructive opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup>In June 2018, the U.S. embassy in Guatemala established an interagency migration working group to strengthen efforts and coordination related to migration issues in Guatemala, according to USAID.

<sup>2</sup>Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador are sometimes referred to as the Northern Triangle countries.

<sup>3</sup>The U.S. Strategy for Central America focuses on efforts to promote prosperity, improve security, and strengthen governance; funding is conditioned on the Northern Triangle governments addressing a range of concerns, including border security, corruption, and human rights.

Specifically, USAID's three program contribution agreements with IOM addressed the benefits of partnerships and coordination with counterparts in government, civil society, multilateral organizations, and the private sector. Additionally, IOM noted it would engage with various stakeholders to coordinate responses and avoid duplication. For example, according to IOM, in 2014, it had already met with various private sector counterparts, such as Americares, and the civil society organizations Glasswing International and World Vision, to identify potential activities to build upon USAID-funded assistance before the initiation of the first program contribution agreement.

IOM also coordinated with various civil society, multilateral, and private sector organizations in the three countries in its implementation of the program contribution agreements. For example, in Guatemala, IOM officials stated that their coordination with the United Nations Population Fund enabled IOM to provide computer hardware, while the United Nations provided computer software to the Ministry of Foreign Relations to register UAC, thus avoiding duplication. IOM also coordinated with civil society organizations such as:

- Fundación Cristosal, in El Salvador, which is working to implement a new registration system of victims of internal displacement.<sup>4</sup>
- Fundación Avina, in Guatemala, which assists returnees with social and labor reintegration.
- Scalibrini Missionary Sisters, in Honduras, which operates the reception center at San Pedro Sula and provides returnees bus tickets back to their communities of origin, if needed and also phone calls to reach their family members upon their arrival.

During our site visit to Honduras in March 2018, we attended a roundtable meeting with representatives from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees, where these representatives discussed coordination and efforts to avoid duplication at reception centers. For example, officials at the meeting stated that during the post-election protests in Honduras in late 2017 and early 2018, returning children and families could not access the Centro de Atención para Niñez y Familias Migrantes Belén (Belén Assistance Center for Children and Families) to be processed by IOM, so they were processed by the Honduran Red

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<sup>4</sup>Fundación Cristosal also receives funding from USAID.

Cross at the Centro de Atención al Migrante Omoa (Omoa Assistance Center for Migrants). The organizations worked together and consistently communicated to ensure that there were no gaps in coverage for the returning UAC and families, according to officials at the meeting.

USAID officials told us that IOM programs helped strengthen the relationship between the U.S. government and the host country governments. The host government agency must formally request IOM's assistance before IOM will provide support, and IOM officials said this letter of request is important to ensure institutional support for and cooperation with IOM's programs. Additionally, IOM, USAID, and the host government agencies worked together to improve reception and reintegration services for returning migrants. For example, in Honduras in March 2018, USAID, IOM, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,<sup>5</sup> and the National Center for Social Sector Information<sup>6</sup> met to discuss what additional information they would like to obtain about returning migrants and how to analyze the data.

The program contribution agreements also called for the establishment of coordination committees to facilitate coordination and consultation among its members. According to the agreements, the committees were to share information as needed to provide assistance, evaluate the effectiveness of the assistance, and otherwise share relevant information. The committee meetings, according to IOM officials, were held regionally among representatives of IOM and the USAID missions under the first program contribution agreement, *Repatriation Assistance to Returning Families and Unaccompanied Children in the Northern Triangle of Central America*, when the efforts were beginning and there was a sense of urgency due the rapid influx of UAC at the U.S. border from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. When the third program contribution agreement, *Return and Reintegration in the Northern Triangle*, began in 2016, the meetings between IOM and USAID were held bilaterally in each country.

The coordination committee played an important role during the beginning of the first program contribution agreement because, according to USAID officials, it facilitated interaction with the host governments, helped with coordination, and established working relationships between USAID and

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<sup>5</sup>Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores y Cooperación Internacional.

<sup>6</sup>Centro Nacional de Información del Sector Social.

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**Appendix II: U.S. Agencies Coordinate on Reception and Reintegration Efforts for Migrants Returning to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras**

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IOM. Once the program and relationships were established by the time of the third contribution agreement, coordination had evolved, according to USAID officials. IOM officials said that although committee meetings occur on an ad hoc basis under the third program contribution agreement, coordination is stronger. For example, USAID and IOM coordinate closely on strategic decisions, such as IOM's decision to rebid the contract to renovate and expand the reception center at the Guatemalan Air Force Base,<sup>7</sup> after allegations of corruption arose surrounding the initial contractor.

Finally, USAID interacts in various ways with IOM, outside of the formal terms of the contribution agreements. According to IOM and USAID officials,

- USAID and IOM engage in regular discussions about the programs' progress and implementation challenges, to help IOM make decisions and redefine plans of action if necessary.
- USAID is involved in IOM's strategic decisions, and IOM regularly consults USAID for feedback and recommendations regarding programming.
- USAID and IOM participated in forums such as conferences and a workshop where lessons learned and best practices were discussed.

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<sup>7</sup>Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca.

# Appendix III: Comments from the U.S. Agency for International Development



Jenny Grover  
Director, International Affairs and Trade  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20226

Re: CENTRAL AMERICA: USAID Assists Migrants Returning to their Home Countries, but Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to Be Determined (GAO-19-62)

Dear Ms. Grover:

I am pleased to provide the formal response of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to the draft report of the U. S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) entitled, "CENTRAL AMERICA: USAID Assists Migrants Returning to their Home Countries, but Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to Be Determined" (GAO-19-62).

While the GAO did not make any recommendations in the report, USAID appreciates the recognition of our work to assist the Governments of the nations of the Northern Triangle of Central America in their reception and reintegration of returnees, in large part, as a means to reduce the likelihood of repeat migration. The root causes of illegal migration are multiple and complex. USAID monitors migration trends at regional and national levels by using information from survey and focus groups conducted by the U.S. Department of State, and apprehension and repatriation data made available by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Government of Mexico, and through our partnership with the International Organization for Migration. Going forward, we are making out-migration a specific metric for measuring the success of all of our relevant programs in the Northern Triangle.

I am transmitting this letter and the enclosed USAID comments for incorporation as an appendix to the GAO's final report. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your draft report, and for the courtesies extended by your staff while conducting this engagement. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the complete and thorough evaluation of our programming and reintegration efforts in the Northern Triangle.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Angelique M. Crumbly".

Angelique M. Crumbly  
Acting Assistant Administrator  
Bureau for Management

Enclosure: a/s

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**COMMENTS BY THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
(USAID) ON THE U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE (GAO) DRAFT REPORT  
– CENTRAL AMERICA: USAID Assists Migrants Returning to their Home Countries, but  
Effectiveness of Reintegration Efforts Remains to Be Determined (GAO-19-62)**

This report contains no recommendation for USAID's action.

USAID's Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean and staff in the Agency's three Northern Triangle Missions in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras reviewed the draft report for sensitivity and accuracy to determine if technical corrections are necessary. We will submit a compilation of technical comments shortly after the transmittal of this memo.

While the GAO did not make any recommendation in its report, USAID appreciates the recognition of our work to assist the Governments of the Northern Triangle in their reception and reintegration of returnees, in large part, as a means to reduce the likelihood of repeat migration. The root causes of illegal migration are multiple and complex. USAID monitors migration trends at regional and national levels by using information from survey and focus groups conducted by the U.S. Department of State, and apprehension and repatriation data made available by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Government of Mexico, and through our partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Going forward, we are making out-migration a specific metric for measuring the success of all of our relevant programs in the Northern Triangle.

**USAID programs focus on addressing the drivers of illegal immigration:**

Through the U.S. Strategy for Central America, USAID is providing assistance to the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador to achieve the Administration's policy goals of deterring illegal immigration to the United States and countering transnational crime. Together with the Northern Triangle Governments, faith-based organizations, the private sector, and civil society, USAID's efforts help to foster an environment where families can envision their futures in their home countries. Our programs are carefully calibrated to address the underlying causes of illegal immigration: insecurity caused by gangs and narcotics trafficking, lack of economic opportunity, food insecurity, and poor governance. We are beginning to see the fruit of our efforts. In El Salvador, homicide rates in neighborhoods that benefit from USAID programs dropped 66 percent from 2015 to 2017, and apprehensions of Salvadoran migrants at our border are down 39 percent from Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. In the Honduran communities where USAID works, communities experienced a 54 percent reduction in homicides from 2014 to 2017. With regard to economic opportunity, in El Salvador, USAID has helped to create more than 26,500 new jobs, and assisted smallholder farmers to increase sales by \$147 million. Through Feed the Future and agricultural development programs in Guatemala, the Agency has helped to create more than 78,000 new jobs, and generated \$160 million in sales. In Honduras, USAID investments in agriculture have lifted nearly 90,000 people out of extreme poverty since 2011.

USAID's work closely aligns with the [Plan for the Alliance for Prosperity](#), a regional strategy drafted and endorsed by the Governments of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. For

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2016 and 2017, these Governments pledged \$5.4 billion for the Alliance for Prosperity. By strengthening anti-corruption institutions and watchdogs in the region, USAID is helping to ensure citizens can hold their Governments accountable.

**In Preparation for the Termination of Temporary Protective Status:**

With regard to the increased levels of returnees from the United States and Mexico and the termination of Temporary Protective Status for Honduras and El Salvador, mentioned on pages 3-5 and 26-27 of the GAO's report, USAID has held a series of workshops in the region to analyze and evaluate available data, assess current efforts to prevent migration, identify best practices in repatriation, including in Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia, and assist host-country Governments to initiate action plans. These workshops took place in Guatemala (December 2017), Honduras (January 2018), and El Salvador (February and May 2018).

**Measuring the Effectiveness of USAID's programs:**

With respect to monitoring performance, the GAO found that USAID, in collaboration with the IOM, "assessed the effectiveness of its reception and migrant-related data collection efforts through site visits, meetings with IOM, and report reviews," among other methods. In the Agency's view, this approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning throughout implementation of our three program-contribution agreements with IOM demonstrates our commitment to adaptive management, defined in USAID operational policy as "an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context," which ensures accountability for U.S. taxpayer funds. Indeed, the GAO report notes that these efforts contributed to improved management of reception centers and the availability and quality of data on migration. As noted in the GAO report, in August 2018, USAID updated the Agency's operational policy with respect to Public International Organization (PIO) awards. In accordance with the updated policy, USAID is working with the IOM to incorporate collaborative monitoring, evaluation, and learning principles and practices into our award agreement (expected by December 2018) and project-planning documents. A specific component of the new award will focus on building the capacity of partner-government agencies and officials to assess and manage adaptively reintegration efforts funded by USAID and IOM. Incorporating these principles and practices into the award agreement—and ultimately implementation—will not only provide further assurance that we are investing U.S. taxpayer resources efficiently and effectively, but also will support Northern Triangle Governments to manage and finance efforts to reintegrate their citizens into their communities.

The root causes of illegal migration are multiple and complex. As part of the U.S. Strategy's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan, USAID tracks migration trends at regional and national levels by using information from survey and focus groups conducted by the U.S. Department of State, and apprehension and repatriation data made available by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Government of Mexico, and through our partnership with the IOM. With regard to USAID assistance, we are making out-migration a specific metric for measuring the success of all of our relevant programs in the Northern Triangle. This includes working with implementing partners to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative information on perceptions of migration, people's intentions to migrate, and the motives behind

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these intentions. This information will enable the Agency to identify more precisely key push factors that are driving out-migration, and to adapt programs when warranted, such as by shifting geographic or programmatic focus. To complement the monitoring data generated by USAID surveys, and by our implementing partners, we continue to work with our field Missions to design and commission external evaluations and assessments that include questions related to migration, when appropriate. These ongoing and upcoming evaluations and assessments will help us understand how our programs can reduce out-migration.

# Appendix IV: Comments from the Inter-American Foundation



## Inter-American Foundation

An Independent Agency of the U.S. Government

October 26, 2018

Jenny Grover  
Director of International Affairs and Trade  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G St., NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Grover:

On behalf of the Inter-American Foundation, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this GAO Report. Although we do not have any substantive comments to the Report, I do wish to thank your team for its professionalism and collegiality in working with us throughout this entire process. I also appreciate the dedication of GAO resources to examine this important area of U.S. development work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paloma Adams-Allen".

Paloma Adams-Allen  
President and CEO

1331 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W. | Suite 1200 North | Washington, D.C. 20004 | Tel: (202) 360-4530 | Fax: (202) 803-6124 | [www.iaf.gov](http://www.iaf.gov)

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# Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact:

Jennifer Grover, (202) 512-7141 or [groverj@gao.gov](mailto:groverj@gao.gov)

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## Acknowledgments:

In addition to the contact named above, Judith Williams (Assistant Director), Joe Carney (Assistant Director), Julie Hirshen (Analyst-in-Charge), Kathryn Bassion, Neil Doherty, Daniela Rudstein, Aldo Salerno, Michael Silver, and K. Nicole Willems made key contributions to this report.

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