

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of GAO-21-104366 a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. has funded assistance to the Northern Triangle of Central America for many years. This assistance aims to promote prosperity, good governance, and security in the region; to address the causes of migration; and to combat transnational crime. In March 2019, the administration suspended foreign assistance funding from the Northern Triangle countries until the governments in the region agreed to take actions to reduce the number of migrants coming to the U.S. border.

GAO was asked to review the effects of the 2019 suspension and reprogramming of assistance funding to the Northern Triangle. This report (1) identifies the funding appropriated by Congress for the Northern Triangle that was suspended and reprogrammed to other countries, and how the approach to U.S. assistance to the region changed after March 2019; (2) examines the effects of suspending and reprogramming assistance funding on project implementation; and (3) examines the extent to which the suspension and reprogramming of assistance funding affected the ability of U.S. agencies to meet their foreign assistance performance targets for the region.

GAO analyzed agency funding data and performance and monitoring reports, surveyed agency project managers, and interviewed agency officials as well as selected implementing partners in the U.S. and in the Northern Triangle countries.

View [GAO-21-104366](#). For more information, contact Chelsea Kenney at (202) 512-2964 or kennyc@gao.gov.

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NORTHERN TRIANGLE OF CENTRAL AMERICA

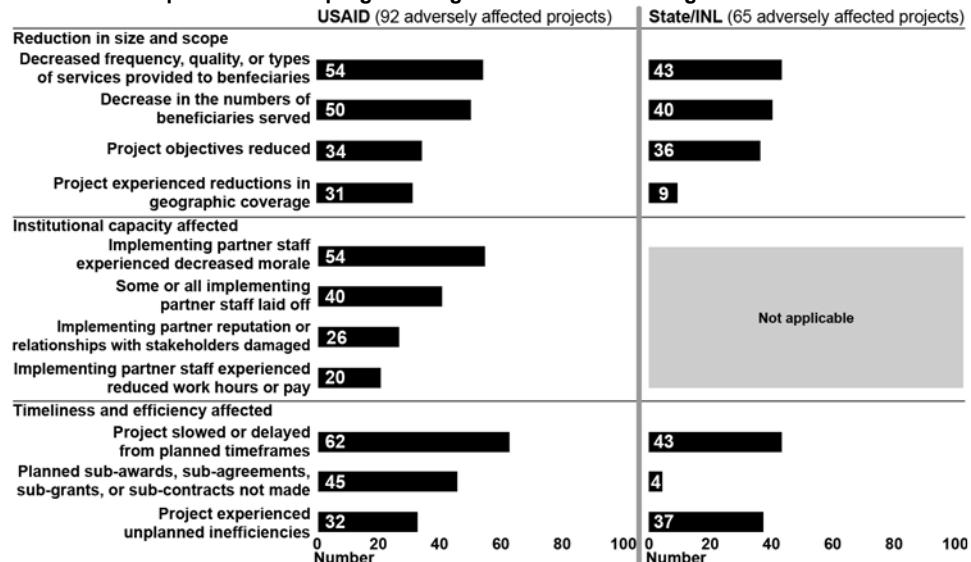
The 2019 Suspension and Reprogramming of U.S. Funding Adversely Affected Assistance Projects

What GAO Found

Starting in March 2019, the Trump administration suspended most new foreign assistance funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department of State to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—the “Northern Triangle” of Central America—for up to 14 months and reprogrammed approximately \$396 million (85 percent) of fiscal year 2018 funding to other countries. In June 2020, the administration ended the suspension of assistance funding. After the end of the suspension, USAID adjusted its assistance portfolio to implement projects that focused on deterring migration and designed new indicators to assess the relationship between its assistance projects and migration from the region. Officials from State and USAID said their overall assistance approach of promoting prosperity, good governance, and security remained the same after the suspension.

Although some previously funded projects continued operating as planned, the 2019 suspension and reprogramming of assistance funding adversely affected 92 of USAID's 114 projects and 65 of State's 168 projects. Both USAID and State reported that commonly experienced adverse effects on project implementation were delays from planned timeframes and decreased frequency, quality, or types of services provided to beneficiaries (see figure).

USAID and State/INL Northern Triangle Projects Reporting One or More Adverse Effects Due to the 2019 Suspension and Reprogramming of Assistance Funding



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (State/INL) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) survey responses. | GAO-21-104366

USAID and State reported missing some of their performance targets due to the 2019 suspension and reprogramming of assistance funding. For example, USAID reported missing 19 percent (35 of 182) of its targets in fiscal year 2019, while State reported missing 30 percent (three of 10).