



# This World Refugee Day, Restore Welcome at Home

**WORLD REFUGEE DAY | JUNE 2021**



Cover: family members embrace after being reunited through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program in Boise, Idaho. May 2021. Photo Credit: Jonathan McBride/IRC

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people affected by humanitarian crises to survive, recover and rebuild their lives. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

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This World Refugee Day, the U.S. should redouble its efforts to address the regional displacement crisis in the Americas by increasing its commitments to refugee protection in three key areas:

- Address the humanitarian crisis in Northern Central America
- Expand refugee resettlement from the Western Hemisphere
- Restore a protection-forward asylum system

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Maha proudly waves the American flag after becoming a U.S. citizen.  
Photo Credit: Andrew Oberstadt/IRC

# Address the humanitarian crisis in Northern Central America

**In 2020 alone, gang and gender-based violence, poverty, insecurity, and climate change were the cause for 1.4 million people to be internally displaced across Northern Central America.**

This humanitarian crisis has only become more dire with the compounding effects of COVID-19. Pandemic lockdown-induced economic slowdowns have led to even fewer economic opportunities with an estimated 709,000 people fleeing the region in FY2019 followed by an estimated 139,000 people in FY2020. Vulnerable populations such as members of the LGBTQI+ community and women have become specific targets of violence, with one woman murdered every 6 hours in 2019. Femicides in El Salvador alone increased by 43 percent during the first quarter of 2021 and 163 femicides were reported in Honduras. In Guatemala, domestic violence reports increased by nearly 19 percent. In El Salvador, 454,000 people were displaced in 2019 by conflict and violence. In Honduras, between 2004 and 2018, 247,090 people were displaced by conflict.

The U.S. has historically been the global leader in providing humanitarian protection; now, its leadership is sorely needed to address the protracted humanitarian crises in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The following policy recommendations should form the basis of a comprehensive U.S. government (USG) response:

## **Invest in humanitarian assistance in the region.**

INGOs can partner with USG to address needs, such as: developing a robust shelter system in Northern Central American countries, providing humanitarian cash support (cash-based programs, food, and shelter), bolstering and funding case management services, and improving access to information.

## **Support opportunities for safety and protection in communities of first refuge.**

Developing protection-based programs is essential to provide life sustaining opportunities for internally displaced persons.

## **Improve regional challenges by addressing the leading root causes of migration.**

Together with a cycle of chronic violence, lack of power and resources, climate change and natural disasters have exacerbated existing regional problems. In November 2020, Hurricane Eta and Iota impacted the lives of nearly 7 million people. Hunger has increased from 2.2 million people in 2018 to close to 8 million people in 2021 stemming from ongoing extreme climate events and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Biden administration must implement a humanitarian response that includes economic development and trauma-based wrap-around services to address the impacts of climate change, violence and the support and services needed for individuals who have experienced trauma.

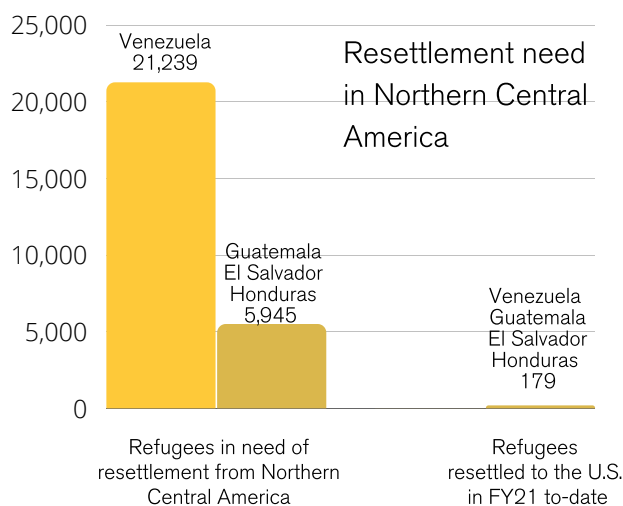


# Expand refugee resettlement from the Western hemisphere

Over the last half century, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has been a bipartisan initiative that has offered new hope to more than three million refugees. The USG has an opportunity to leverage this humanitarian program as part of its protection-forward solution to prioritize the safety of refugees in the region.

## Increase resettlement slots for the region.

The Biden administration should increase the regional admissions cap from 5,000 refugees to 15,000 to recognize the profound unmet resettlement need in the region. While projected refugee resettlement needs increased 3 percent globally from 2020 to 2021, needs in Latin America jumped 489 percent. The UN Refugee Agency estimates that there are 29,195 refugees from the Americas in need of resettlement this year, including 21,239 refugees from Venezuela and 5,945 refugees from the Northern Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. So far this fiscal year, just 179 refugees from the Americas were resettled to the U.S., including just 3 refugees from Venezuela and 144 refugees from Northern Central America.



## Fix family reunification processing for refugees.

Many refugee families are separated in the chaos of humanitarian emergencies. The USRAP provides a critical way for refugee families to reunite: after being resettled to the U.S., refugees can apply to have their refugee family members join them. Under the Trump administration, family reunification pathways were ground to a near halt by policies and practices that hampered application processing. USG should devote special attention to these systems and take rapid measures to increase the processing rate for family reunification applications.

## Increase resettlement capacity in the region.

USG should coordinate with the UN Refugee Agency to expand referral operations in the region. National and local NGOs are well positioned to refer persons with acute protection needs who might face barriers to access, such as LGBTQI individuals and persons in remote locations. The State Department should remind its embassies that they have the authority to make referrals and should use this authority to the full extent possible. USG should also create a remote, roving Resettlement Support Center (RSC) that can be deployed to this and other crises for rapid response and intensive processing.

## **Support a regional approach to refugee resettlement.**

USG should leverage its commitments to resettle refugees from the Americas to encourage other countries to expand their resettlement programs and should work with countries in the region to establish Protection Transfer Arrangement (PTA) programs, which allow for refugee claims to be processed in a safe host country. USG should also provide support in the form of technical capacity through initiatives like the Latin America Resettlement and Integration Technical Assistance (LARITA) program, which has already provided support in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay.

# **Restore a protection-forward asylum system**

The Biden administration has committed to reversing anti-asylum policies and rebuilding a safe, humane and orderly asylum system. Current detention and expulsion policies implemented by USG have failed to reflect promised protections outlined in domestic and international laws for vulnerable individuals who have a legal right to seek asylum.

## **End Title 42, under the pretext of public health concerns.**

On March 20, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an order, under the pretext of public health, that permitted the Department of Homeland Security to expel individuals arriving at the U.S. southern border (referred to as Title 42). USG's continued use of Title 42 has forced adults and families to wait in Mexico, return to life-threatening situations, or attempt to enter between ports of entry in search of protection. In recent processing of families and children at the U.S. southern border, USG has demonstrated that the U.S. can implement safe measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The continued use of Title 42 is in direct conflict with the administration's promises of upholding the right to seek asylum and in violation of international refugee conventions to which the US is a signatory. USG should center its policies on increasing protection capacity to combat a growing humanitarian crisis, including by investing in personal protective equipment at U.S. ports of entry and COVID-19 testing to mitigate health risks.

**The development of a fair and credible asylum system that welcomes asylum seekers is dependent on the ability for individuals fleeing persecution to have the right to access protection without government-sanctioned inhumane practices, barriers, and bans.**

## **Invest in community-based case management programs.**

A protection-forward approach for the reception of asylum seekers should include providing support services and not detention for individuals awaiting the adjudication of their asylum claim. An effective case management model for asylum seekers should provide opportunities for asylum seekers to meet their essential needs, while also providing access to information, wrap-around services, and legal assistance as they navigate the asylum legal process. An investment in community-centered programming should draw on the expertise of non-governmental organizations and provide necessary funding to provide wrap-around support services and assistance for legal representation. Moreover, utilizing the



Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program as a model, the development of a child-centered case management program is also necessary to promote the welfare and well-being of vulnerable Unaccompanied Children. A case management model with a rights-based approach focused on best practices and not as solely an alternative to detention will aid in ensuring compliance and support services for asylum seekers.



A family rests after safely seeking asylum in the United States.  
Photo Credit: Joshua Morganstein/IRC