

BTI Institute

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A Department of Homeland Security Center of Excellence

Quarterly Report: May 7, 2020

Developing a Regional Approach to Managing Migration Flows from the Northern Triangle through Mexico to the United States

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Project Overview

Project Theme — NOFO Question(s) Addressed:

How do current immigration policies in the Northern Triangle and surrounding region influence lawful and illegal migration flows? What improvements could be made to regional immigration policies to better manage regional migration flows? (Same question for labor flows and for humanitarian flows.)

Last Work Plan (Revision): May 2020

Project Period: January 2020-January 2021

Project Overview: Goals

Goals: Assess the capacity of the Mexican and Central American governments to implement current migration partnership agreements and to manage migration flows, provide asylum, and reintegrate repatriated migrants; and identify other regional approaches to managing migration effectively

Project Overview: Knowledge Gap

Knowledge Gaps Addressed:

- Political will and technical capacity of Mexico and Central American countries to manage migration (in terms of enforcement, benefits, and humanitarian protection) and reintegration
- Existing legal frameworks that support or impede migration management
- Factors shaping migration flows to the United States, particularly at sub-regional and sub-national levels

Project Overview: Objectives

Objectives:

1. Assess Mexico's capacity to manage migration flows, cooperate with the United States in combatting smuggling, provide protection for migrants where warranted, settle and integrate some migrants, and continue removing migrants to their countries of origin
2. Assess the capacity of the Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran governments to manage migration flows, address root migration causes, accommodate repatriated nationals, and enhance their asylum systems
3. Understand how Costa Rica and Panama can enhance roles in regional migration management
4. More fully understand factors driving current migration flows to better predict their intensity and impact on capacity of the Mexican and Central American governments to implement cooperative migration control strategies.
5. Recommend policy options to manage flows from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras through Mexico to the United States, as well as other flows through Central America.

Key Activities

ID	Task title	Duration	Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4		
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
T.1	Meet with project champion	12 months	X			X			X			X		X
T.2	Quantitative research on migration flows	6 months	X	X	X	X	X	X						
T.3	Interim brief on U.S.-Mexico cooperation	3 months				X	X	X						
T.4	Field research in six countries	9 months		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
T.5	Draft report for roundtable	3 months									X	X	X	
T.6	Prepare and hold roundtable on findings and policy options	3 months									X	X	X	
T.7	Publish final report	2 months											X	X
T.8	Launch of final report	2 months											X	X

Adjustments due to COVID-19

- Virtual field research: phone, Skype, Zoom
 - 19 interviews completed with informants on Mexico and Costa Rica, additional interviews completed by consultant in Guatemala
 - Currently evaluating timeline for completing field research
- **New deliverable:** Brief on how the U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration signed on June 7, 2019, as well as subsequent U.S. and Mexican policy measures, have reshaped Mexico's migration enforcement and humanitarian protection systems over the past year
- Feasibility of November roundtable unclear, but considering possibility of holding it virtually

Approach and Methodology

Objective 1: Assess Mexico's migration management capacities

1. Review of current policies and legal framework
2. Monitor migrant apprehensions and returns by Mexican authorities, as well as asylum claims received
3. Conversations with key informants during field work (currently virtual) and by phone

Objective 2: Assess El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras' migration management capacities

1. Review of current policies and legal framework
2. Conversations with key informants during field work (currently virtual) and by phone

Approach and Methodology (II)

Objective 3: Understand how Costa Rica and Panama can enhance roles in regional migration management

1. Review of current policies and U.S. cooperation
2. Conversations with key informants during field work (currently virtual) and by phone

Objective 4: Better understand U.S.-bound migration flows

1. Analyze data from International Organization for Migration (IOM), Mexico's National Immigration Institute (INM) and Refugee Commission (COMAR), DHS
2. Contextualize quantitative findings with interviews of public authorities, migrant-serving organizations, and migrants

Approach and Methodology (III)

Objective 5: Recommend policy options to U.S. government

1. Write draft of report with findings and recommendations based on field work, informant conversations, and desk research
2. Convene high-level roundtable with officials and experts from the U.S. and the region to help evaluate recommendations
3. Publish final, revised report taking into consideration input from roundtable participants

Data

- Use publicly available data on migration flows to the United States and Mexico from
 - DHS
 - Mexico's National Immigration Institute (INM)
 - Mexico's Refugee Commission (COMAR)
 - International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Conduct follow-up with government officials and service providers to obtain non-public data and verify public data
- Cross-check data through interviews with other government officials and international organizations

Results

Objective 1: Assess Mexico's migration management capacities

- Monitored migrant apprehensions and returns by Mexican authorities, as well as asylum claims received
- Conducted 18 interviews with key informants

Results (II)

Objective 1 Preliminary Findings

- Mexican migration enforcement increased significantly after the U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration, resulting in remarkable decreases in illegal migration flows
 - In FY 2019, Mexican authorities apprehended 164,000 Northern Triangle migrants and returned 128,000, representing increases of 50 percent and 28 percent, respectively, compared to FY 2018
 - Between June and August, Mexico received approximately 30,000 migrants from U.S.—more than triple the number it received in first five months of MPP
- Enforcement cooperation by Mexican authorities continues into 2020, agreeing to accept migrant returns from U.S. under COVID-19 measures
- With international support, the Mexican government has made significant investments in its refugee agency to help process the dramatic increase in asylum applications over the past year
- Mexico continues efforts to extend employment visas to Salvadoran and Honduran migrants

Results (III)

Objective 2: Assess El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras' migration management capacities

- Monitored migrant returns from the United States to Guatemala for processing of possible asylum claims, under the ACA
- Consultant conducting phone interviews with key informants in Guatemala

Preliminary Findings

- 900+ Honduran and Salvadoran asylum seekers received by Guatemala under ACA before March 2020 suspension
- Despite periodic suspensions of deportation flights from U.S., Guatemala has continued to accept land deportations from Mexico
- Fear of COVID-19 transmission has led some Guatemalan communities to stigmatize deportees, complicating reintegration efforts

Results (IV)

Objective 3: Understand how Costa Rica and Panama can enhance roles in regional migration management

- Flows of non-Mexican, non-Central American nationals through these countries monitored based on nationality-specific data from US and Mexico; next step to search for data from Costa Rica and Panama
- Gathered information on factors driving migration from outside the hemisphere
- Identified potential contacts as key informants; will begin reaching out to contacts by end of May

Results (V)

Objective 3 Preliminary Findings

- Of total non-Mexican, non-Central American migrants apprehended by CBP in FY 2019 (77,276), 62% from Latin America, 18% from Caribbean, 17% from Asia and 2% from Africa
 - However, apprehensions of Africans increased 600% from FY 2018, while apprehensions of Asians increased only 3%
 - Most travel through Panama and Costa Rica, with some exceptions (e.g., Cubans flying into Nicaragua)
- Mobility through Panama and Costa Rica is essentially halted in face of COVID-19

Results (VI)

Objective 4: Better understand current U.S.-bound migration flows

- Initiated identification of new data sources monitoring U.S.-bound migration
- Began analysis of Mexico's Migration Survey on its Northern and Southern Borders (EMIF-Norte y Sur)

Objective 5: Recommend policy options to U.S. government

- Action on this objective is forthcoming

Milestones Achieved

- Milestones are in progress
 - Identified stakeholders in Mexico with potential access to additional data sources
 - Field work interviews are ongoing

Deliverables

- Quantitative data incorporated into a new report, due out in June, and deciding whether to publish a separate memo
- New interim deliverable evaluating changes to Mexico's migration enforcement and humanitarian protection systems one year after the U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration
 - Publication set for June 2020, and will be accompanied by a public webinar
- Final report may be delayed due to obstacles to carrying out field work, arising from COVID-19

Performance Metrics

- Performance metrics cannot yet be applied to objectives or deliverables, as they are all still in progress

Transition

End-users of research

- U.S. government
 - DHS: Office of Policy; CBP; ICE
 - Department of State
 - Congress
 - USAID
 - Embassy personnel in key countries
- International organizations (e.g., UNHCR, IOM, IDB)
- Latin American government representatives
- Key academics and NGOs in the countries of study and the United States

Transition (II)

- Main issues the knowledge gap is causing (end-user “pains”)
 - Lack of detailed knowledge of political will and technical capacity of Mexico and Central American countries hinders development of practical, implementable, effective regional migration management strategies
 - Lack of knowledge of national legal frameworks can cause unforeseen legal obstacles or impede use of beneficial legal tools
 - Without an understanding of factors driving migration from specific sub-regional or sub-national areas, U.S. efforts to address root causes may not be as effectively targeted as possible

Transition (III)

- Main outcomes and benefits for end-users (the “gains”)
 - Specific understandings of where political will and technical capacity exists and can be built on and where it is lacking in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, as well as Costa Rica and Panama
 - Understanding of where and why disparate migrant flows are originating and how to best target them

Programmatic Risks and Mitigation Plans

- Risks identified in work plan were:
 - Rapidly changing circumstances
 - Inability to meet with stakeholders in the region
- Currently facing both these challenges
- Corrective actions we have taken include
 - modifying interview format (virtual rather than in person)
 - gathering information about how migration patterns and enforcement mechanisms regionally are changing in the face of the coronavirus
- Uncertain circumstances globally make it difficult to pinpoint revisions needed in objectives, deliverables, timeline