

Central America's Immigrant and Refugee Crisis: Limiting Unauthorized Migration through the Alliance for Prosperity and Reintegration Efforts

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Problem Statement

- Mexican apprehensions at the Southwest border are falling. Starting in 2013, however, apprehensions of Central Americans from the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) have risen to match the Mexican flow (see the first chart below). Apprehensions of Central Americans have also risen in Mexico (see the second chart).
- Many Central American migrants are children, families, or adults seeking asylum, and so are not amenable to the wide range of consequences that the Border Patrol can impose. They may have valid asylum claims, as violence remains high in the region (see the last chart). But the asylum process is lengthy due to USCIS and immigration court backlogs, allowing many recent migrants to remain in the U.S. and providing incentives for more migrants to come.
- A key challenge for DHS and especially CBP is that this new flow from the Northern Triangle may be more difficult to deter and many migrants in the flow, once deported, may return as recidivist illegal entrants.

Project beneficiaries and end users

- DHS's Office of Strategy, Policy and Plans (in particular staff responsible for Mexico and Central America) requested this study via RFP in 2016, and staff there are the project's champions.
- DHS, Office of Immigration Statistics
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, including policy staff engaged in reintegration planning
- U.S. Border Patrol, Strategic Planning and Analysis
- U.S. Department of State: Western Hemisphere Affairs (Mexico and Central America desks), Intelligence and Research, and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
- U.S. Agency for International Development, Central America and Mexico

GAINS desired

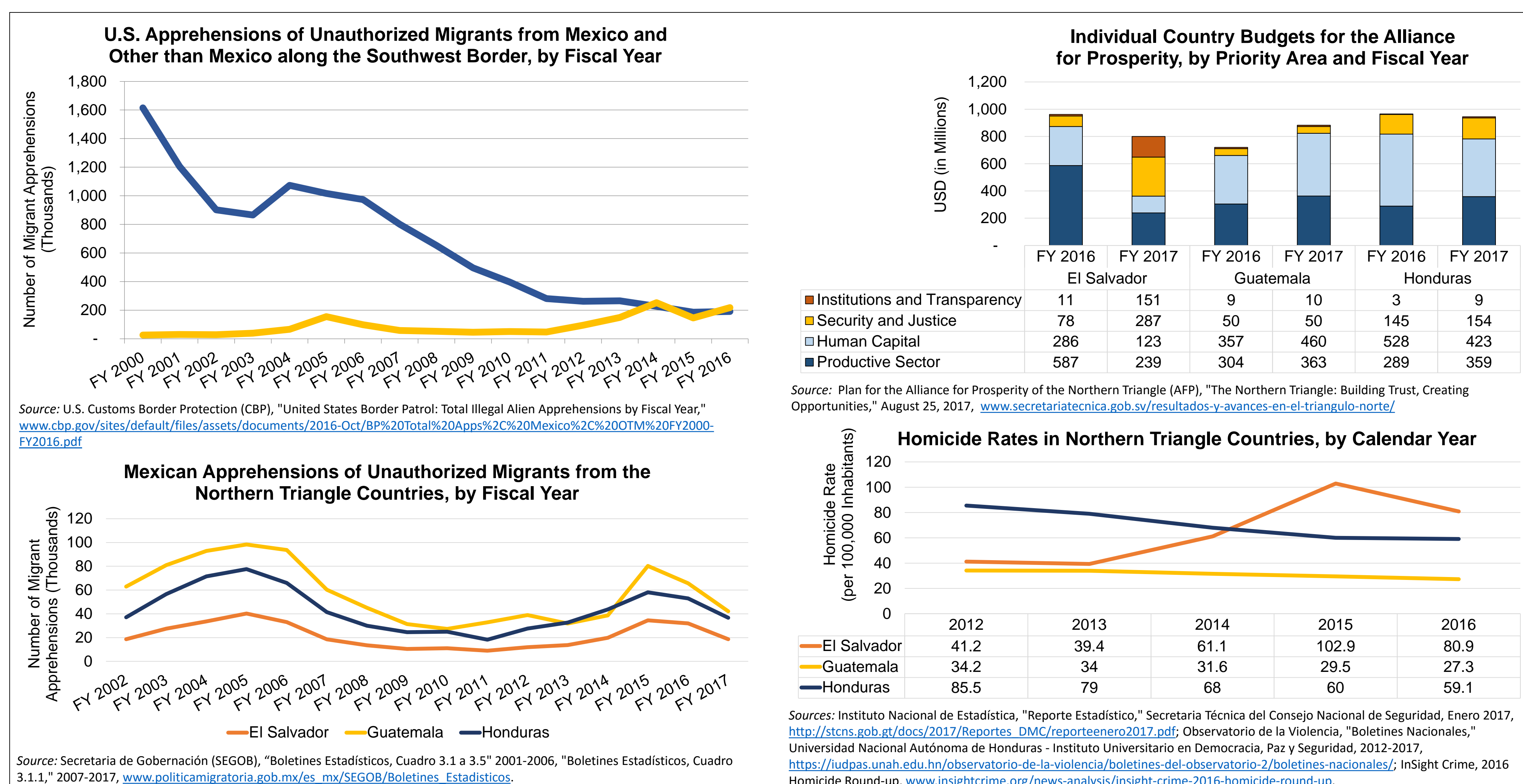
- Understanding of long-term migration pressures from the region, including economic development patterns, violence and security, and family and social ties.
- Knowledge of Alliance for Prosperity (AfP, see the third chart) and other investments in the region's development and potential impacts on long-term migration trends to the United States.
- Review of reintegration challenges for repatriated migrants in the Northern Triangle and programs that can successfully address these challenges, in order to reduce incentives for return migration.
- Review of promising reintegration programs in Mexico that could be adapted to the Northern Triangle countries.
- Development of recommendations for cost-effective U.S. investments to reduce migration pressures from the region.

PAINS at present

- Ongoing violence and economic deprivation that reduce the quality of life in the Northern Triangle.
- Large and unpredictable unauthorized migration flows from Northern Triangle to the United States.
- Substantial investments in Northern Triangle country development with uncertain prospects and cost effectiveness.
- Minimal investments in reintegration programs and no knowledge about their effectiveness.
- No long-term strategy for reducing migration pressures from the region.

Project products & services

- Policy briefs on AfP, other development initiatives, and reintegration programs in the Northern Triangle.
- Recommendations for U.S. investment strategies to reduce initial and return migration from the region.
- Transitioned through a roundtable meeting at MPI and briefings for relevant federal champions and advocates.



Key Accomplishments:

- Meetings with DHS, CBP, ICE, USDOS and AID to obtain buy-in and input on study methods, exchange knowledge.
- Literature review on migration trends, push factors, status of women, and reintegration challenges in the region.
- Roundtable at MPI with U.S. government, regional government, academic, and civil society representatives at MPI to discuss migration pressures in the region (held in September 2017).
- Discussions with regional government, academics, and civil society representatives (in person in Washington, D.C., and over the phone with stakeholders in the region).
- Leveraging of additional funding from CAMMINA and the Ford Foundation to support these elements of the "policy scan" for the project, and to support project planning.

Next Steps:

- Two consultants (one a Mexican national and the other a Guatemalan national) will visit Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras and meet with key informants in three sectors: government, academia, and civil society.
- The consultants will hold focus groups of repatriated and returning migrants, recruited via the three sectors.
- MPI will incorporate findings from policy scan, key informant interview and focus group findings into interim report.
- MPI will write policy briefs about AfP accomplishments and reintegration programs.
- A roundtable of U.S. government project advocates and stakeholders from the region will be convened.
- MPI will disseminate the reports broadly and brief project advocates and other policymakers.