

Foreign Assistance Cuts Undermine Efforts to Curb Migration to the U.S.

“The crisis is only going to worsen ...” — [Shelter Operator, Villahermosa, Mexico](#)

What is at Stake

In January 2025, the Administration terminated over 80% of foreign assistance to Central America, abandoning a comprehensive strategy supported by Congress including through the bipartisan U.S.–Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (incorporated into the FY21 Omnibus Appropriations measure). This shift costs taxpayers **30 times** more in migration management (see box)—while increasing regional instability and weakening U.S. influence abroad. Furthermore, the decision to cut funding was not based on evidence. Foreign assistance staff were fired and reporting systems shut down just weeks before a mid-point analysis and the Congressionally mandated annual report could be completed—disrupting input from USAID, the State Department, USDA, and other key agencies.

Cuts Eliminated Programs that Worked

For nearly a decade, Congress funded targeted programs to address the drivers of irregular migration—violence, economic exclusion, corruption, and weak governance in Northern Central America.¹ Key programs:

- Reduced youth unemployment through job training
- Strengthened local law enforcement
- Supported anti-corruption watchdogs and justice systems
- Created safer, more resilient communities

Migration-Related Costs to U.S. Taxpayers
• Terminated aid programs: \$650 million annually • Projected border security, detention and deportation increase: \$18.15 billion annually^{2,3}

Recently terminated aid programs demonstrated measurable results. For example, the Congressional Research Service found **irregular migration from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador declined for three consecutive years to 352,000 in FY2024 (half of FY2021 levels)** after the U.S. implemented targeted programming.⁴ Due to U.S. government investments in foreign assistance activities during this period, **70,000 jobs** were created or sustained in high out-migration areas, over **12,000 firms were supported** to expand local investment, over **27,000 local justice sector staff** were trained, over **150,000 returned migrants received reintegration** services, gender-based violence prevention programs reached over **27,000 people**, and in FY 2023 alone over **7,500 civilian police** were trained. These activities responded to Congress’ desire to advance economic prosperity, combat corruption, strengthen governance, and improve civilian security in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

1. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11151?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22%5C%22root+causes%5C%22%22%7D&s=1&r=1>
2. https://immigrationforum.org/article/one-big-beautiful-bill-act-immigration-provisions/#:~:text=outlays%20and%20revenues,-_Border%20Security,northern%20borders%20of%20the%20U.S.
3. [https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text/Sections 90001 & 90003](https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text/Sections%2090001%20&%2090003)

The Consequences Are Predictable—and Reversible

"Cutting the cooperation between USAID, communities, and the state strengthens armed groups."

— [NGO Leader, Colombia](#)

Without these targeted foreign assistance programs:

- Youth lose access to jobs and education, heightening risk of gang recruitment
- Law enforcement capacity shrinks as training and support disappear
- Democratic oversight collapses, opening space for corruption
- Organized crime expands
- Migration spikes
- Deported migrants return to the same unsafe conditions, often re-migrating
- China and Russia expand influence in the absence of U.S. engagement

What Congress Can Do

U.S. Congress must exercise its oversight authority to ensure that appropriated funds are used as intended—for programming, technical assistance, and local collaboration to address the drivers of migration.

Immediate Oversight Actions:

- Hold oversight hearings on how Congressional mandates to address drivers of migration are being implemented, and insist on submission of annual reporting on root causes interventions
- Request a cost-benefit analysis from the Congressional Research Service comparing enforcement and assistance programs
- Demand restoration of programs including its robust metrics and oversight

Legislative Options:

- Exercise oversight authority to ensure appropriated funds serve their intended purpose
- Mandate impact assessments before program terminations
- Establish minimum funding floors for programming and staff to address migration drivers

U.S. Interests Are on the Line

U.S. assistance in Central America helps people build safer, more stable lives at home—reducing the need to migrate and reinforcing democratic governance. Abandoning these programs is not just unwise—it weakens our border, drains taxpayer resources, and cedes ground to global adversaries. Reinstating strategic aid programs is smart security policy that protects American interests at home and abroad.

Who is AID on the Hill?

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Having served at USAID and at public, private, local, and faith-based implementing partners, AID on the Hill brings a realistic, insider perspective of how foreign assistance operates day-to-day. Our nonpartisan grassroots engagement with Congress has one goal: For U.S. foreign aid to reflect American values and remain a powerful force for global stability, economic growth, and national security.

Information in this document reflects the status as of July 28, 2025, and will be updated as new developments occur. For questions or to schedule a discussion to learn more, you can reach us at congressaidletters@gmail.com.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: The Administration has said that the most critical lifesaving programs globally have not been cut. Isn't this true in Central America?

A: While some development assistance programs in Guatemala continue, the few remaining programs in Central America (as well as the rest of the Latin America and Caribbean region) are largely focused on humanitarian assistance, which serves as crisis response, rather than addressing the structural issues that cause persistent migration.

Q: What metrics and oversight existed to facilitate Congressional oversight?

A: An example of annual reporting provided to Congress can be found here: <https://reliefweb.int/report/el-salvador/us-strategy-address-roots-causes-migration-central-america-fy-2023-results-and-three-year-trends>

Q: What types of programs in Northern Central America were eliminated by the Trump Administration?

A: Since the implementation of the Congressionally mandated 5-year Root Causes Strategy began in 2021, USAID, State Department, and USDA foreign assistance programs achieved the following results:

Job Creation and Innovation Increases Economic Opportunity at Home

- **70,000+ jobs created or sustained** in high out-migration areas,
- **12,000+ private firms supported** to expand investment and increase employment in Northern Central America
- **60,000+ learners reached** with vocational training aligned to local labor market needs, including **30,000 youth** from high out-migration municipalities
- **130,000+ farmers helped** to utilize innovative technologies, raising \$100+ million in private sector finance

Anti-Corruption Efforts Builds Trust in Government

- **10,500+ government officials trained** on accountability systems and ethical standards
- **150+ corruption cases investigated** in Honduras, identifying \$430+ million in potentially embezzled funds
- **27,000+ local justice sector staff trained** from FY 2021-2023 to strengthen judicial systems
- **36 courts improved** in Guatemala and Honduras, reducing processing times by over 80% and giving people greater confidence that perpetrators are held accountable
- **Hundreds of journalists supported** to improve investigative reporting on corruption

Crime Prevention Diverts At-Risk Youth, Bolstering Security and Stability

- **7,674 civilian police trained** across Central America in fiscal year 2023

- **4,000+ suspected criminals arrested** by State-supported police units
- **120,000+ at-risk youth accessed** training and services through community-based crime prevention, including, conflict management, and employment and livelihoods training, decreasing their susceptibility to criminal recruitment

Strengthened Human Rights and Rule of Law

- **2,000+ government officials, employers, and workers** increased knowledge of labor rights
- **150,000+ returned migrants supported** with reintegration services in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras
- **27,000+ people reached** through Gender-Based Violence prevention programs
- **3,000+ human rights defenders supported** to report violations and advocate for protection

Climate Resilience Programs Enable People to Stay in Their Communities

- **14,000+ people trained** in climate-resilient practices in Guatemala/Honduras since 2021
- **\$600,000+ raised** in non-U.S. government finance for climate adaptation, helping communities build resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change effects that exacerbate irregular migration

Q: You are saying migration decreased over the last three years. Why am I seeing elsewhere that migration at the border increased?

A: In Latin America and the Caribbean, Congress directed foreign assistance funding towards drivers of migration in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras due to prior year surges from these countries. Since increasing targeted programming, irregular migration from Northern Central America has steadily declined. However, there has been evidence of rises in irregular migration from Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Haiti, where similar programming was greatly restricted. However, prior to aid cuts, efforts to work with third countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador on humanitarian relief and long-term reintegration options, paired with legal parole status in the U.S. showed promise. For example, since 2017, over 7 million Venezuelans have fled their country, with Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador receiving the vast majority. However, through USAID technical assistance efforts supported Colombia to issue Temporary Protection Permits, giving Venezuelans legal status and work rights. In Peru, the USAID supported ‘Chance to Grow’ initiative provided support to 2,300 migrants, leading to 418 job placements and 123 businesses. USAID was a critical actor in both humanitarian relief and long-term reintegration, aiming to reduce onward migration, including to the U.S.

Q: Isn’t it true that previous administration was letting in migrants?

A: Many U.S. businesses rely on temporary migrant labor to do jobs they cannot fill with American workers. In response to these demands and U.S. economic interests, there was an aligned effort by multiple federal agencies to improve vetting and access to temporary legal pathways for migrant workers and parolees. These programs are also impacted, also affecting U.S. companies’ ability to obtain and retain critical legal labor.