



A Hemispheric Approach to Migration Management for USAID’s Latin America & the Caribbean Bureau (USAID/LAC)

Why our approach must evolve

USAID/LAC is evolving its approach to migration because migration patterns in the hemisphere are changing. These changes go far beyond the high numbers of U.S. border encounters in the headlines.

- Today’s migration is *from a much broader and evolving set of countries*. According to data from Custom and Border Protection (CBP), so far in FY 2022, 42 percent of people encountered at the Southwest U.S. border are neither from Mexico nor from Northern Central America (NCA). From FY 2015–2019 this was only 4–9 percent. The vast majority of these ‘new’ encounters are from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): citizens of Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Colombia, Brazil, Haiti and others.
- Today’s migration is *more likely to be “secondary migration”* than in previous years—people who had already been displaced outside their country of birth, and for various reasons departed once again migrating onward. According to the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM’s) Displacement Tracking Matrix, [forty six percent](#) of Venezuelans surveyed crossing the Darién Gap in June and July of this year had departed from a place of residence outside Venezuela.
- Today’s migration has at times been managed with *ad hoc policy innovation*. The three largest mobility crises in the last decade—Venezuelans in Colombia, Syrians in Turkey, Ukrainians in Europe—are mostly being addressed through regularization schemes distinct from the granting of formal refugee status.

What USAID/LAC can do

These new realities require us to identify resources for and institutionalize new areas of action. We need to continue addressing the root causes of migration and supporting dignified returns and sustainable reintegration. But we must also support less traditional areas of action:

- *integration of migrants*—enabling them to work in, live in, and contribute to the countries and communities where they already arrived, reducing their need for onward migration
- *legal labor pathways*—alternatives to irregular pathways for would-be migrants built by matching labor supply to unmet demand, in conditions of safety and dignity

Integration is crucial to support migrants’ access to jobs, health care, education, and financial systems in the countries where they currently reside. Integration can reduce the likelihood of onward migration. In the LAC region, such onward migration may mean transiting the Darien Gap or dangerous maritime journeys. Often, routes of irregular migration are extremely dangerous for the health and safety of the migrants. Countries need sustained support and funding to integrate migrants as successful socio-economic integration requires a long-term commitment to the stabilization and inclusion of these populations, as well as support for receptor communities.

Integration is also a durable solution to address internal migration/displacement, which could then serve as a means to reduce the need for eventual out-migration. Internal migrants who are not presented with an immediate durable solution (e.g. return home, local integration, or stable relocation) often cycle between various stages of the “displacement continuum”, in which the drivers of internal displacement contribute to cross-border movement, creating and perpetuating a cycle of increasing vulnerability. For large-scale movements, the effects of its success or failure are felt regionwide, and so individual countries and communities should not have to face the challenge alone. With over seven million migrants and refugees within the LAC region, integration is a tool that—when used effectively—can substantially deter mass onward movements of people, and better manage the burden of supporting these migrants with countries across the region.

Building legal labor pathways is necessary because development does not halt migration. Important waves of emigration typically go hand-in-hand with *rising* economic development, as they did in Italy a century ago and in Mexico 30 years ago. Countries in the region that choose to create legal labor pathways may need support, including capacity development of local government systems, well-crafted regulation, support for public-private networks, and in some cases concrete demand-side incentives. Without substantial support, legal pathways cannot be instituted quickly enough to address shifting migration pressures. It should be recognized, however, that even at scale, labor pathways are unlikely to substantially detract from large-scale irregular movements. This tool must be utilized in conjunction with other approaches.

The relative importance of both *integration* and *legal labor pathways* calls for an expansion of the scope of our focus from *root causes* in NCA to a hemispheric approach that encompasses multiple facets of migration management. Work to address root causes of migration is crucial and central, but must be complemented by a more comprehensive approach in order to fully implement the Administration’s [Collaborative Migration Management Strategy](#).

Why now is the moment

The LAC region has just reached unprecedented consensus in support of this approach. The [Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection](#), endorsed by 21 countries in June, 2022 at the Ninth Summit of the Americas, was a historic signal of unity and resolve to effectively manage irregular migration across the hemisphere. This agreement brought together leaders of the Western Hemisphere around a bold new plan centered on responsibility-sharing and economic support for countries most affected by increased migration flows, whether as countries of destination, transit, or return.

Several LAC countries have already [committed](#) to initiatives to support *integration* and *legal labor pathways* for migrants in the region. **Ecuador** and **Belize** announced major new programs to regularize the status of migrants residing in those countries. **Costa Rica** announced intentions to develop and implement a new temporary status program for specific nationalities. **Mexico** committed to major expansions of temporary work visa programs for Guatemala to be extended, in the medium term, to Honduras and El Salvador. This emerging regional consensus signals a new day for hemispheric cooperation on managing migration sustainably.

Tools and best practices for a new approach

To support legal labor pathways in the region, USAID/LAC will expand its work with the interagency, partner governments, the private sector, and international organizations to facilitate access to U.S. temporary work visas for Northern Central America (NCA), [as ordered by the President](#), as well as provide support for the development of labor pathways to other countries such as Canada and Spain. USAID will also offer to share best practices and lessons learned to support the implementation of Mexico's commitments to expand its own legal labor pathways for citizens of NCA.

To support migrant integration across the region, USAID/LAC, in coordination with other key U.S. Government agencies, will support partner countries to enact global best practices. These begin with legal measures—creating a status for lawful presence, and enabling access to formal employment, education, healthcare, and financial services.

Beyond laws, best practice also requires administrative actions—such as building a single national migrant registry and creating fiscal mechanisms for national support of receptor communities. It requires service provision—such as facilitating migrants' access to wide areas of national territory (without geographic restrictions on internal mobility) and targeting active labor market policies toward areas where migrants concentrate. It also requires international coordination—such as utilizing ministry-level working groups like the action packages under the Los Angeles Declaration to share experiences, innovations, and data. All of these policies serve hemisphere-wide interests.