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# ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Dates of project: 23 April 2021 – 22 April 2026

Budget: US\$ 50 million

USAID and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recognize that many Guatemalans who migrate irregularly do so because they lack opportunities to achieve prosperous, secure, and dignified lives in their communities. The Addressing the Root Causes of Irregular Migration Project aims to connect Guatemalans to these opportunities and so contribute to reducing irregular migration. USAID and IOM also recognize that the specific causes of irregular migration vary between communities and population groups, and that it is essential to understand these causes in each context to develop appropriate responses. Accordingly, the project incorporates an agile grants mechanism to support civil society organizations to address identified drivers of irregular migration and work within three domains: (1) Economic prosperity, equality, and stability (2) Governance and quality of life and (3) Citizen security, rights, and reconciliation.

The project implements activities based on a detailed understanding of the affected communities and the specific causes of irregular migration that influence them. Consequently, activities are primarily implemented by local civil society organizations with strong community linkages and local expertise.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC APPROACH**

The project maintains geographic flexibility but prioritizes those departments of Guatemala with high rates of emigration, including the Western Highlands. For instance, the project has established field offices in Huehuetenango, San Marcos, and Quiché. The project pays special attention to three population groups: 1) Indigenous people who suffer discrimination, socio-economic exclusion, and

relative disadvantage across all sectors; 2) Women and girls, and especially indigenous women and girls, who face discrimination, exclusion, and structural disadvantage; 3) Youth, who make up a disproportionate share of irregular migrants and are especially vulnerable to violence, recruitment by criminal groups and unemployment.

## CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Guatemala has a long history of regular and irregular migration to the United States, Canada, and Mexico due to political violence and instability, lack of economic opportunities, human rights abuses and inequalities and climate change and natural disasters. Guatemala is a country of origin, transit and return for thousands of migrants each year. Between 2015 and 2020, more than 500,000 migrants were involuntarily returned to Guatemala from the United States and Mexico. Irregular cross-border movements are both dangerous and expensive, and those who take this path are at higher risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, sexual violence and other forms of exploitation, and mistreatment. The high-stakes decision to migrate irregularly is often a product of multiple factors and the interplay between these. Guatemalans largely report the lack of economic opportunities (77%) as the top factor behind their intention to migrate, followed by violence (9%) and family reasons / reunification (8%). Cross-data analysis reveals additional variables that correlate with irregular migration, such as crime victimization, corruption victimization and food insecurity.

## APPROACH AND RESULTS

The project contributes to reducing irregular migration by connecting Guatemalans to livelihood opportunities, adopting two complementary strategies: research and analysis to better understand the root causes of irregular migration through participatory approaches and specialized research; and an agile grants mechanism to support civil society organizations to address identified drivers of irregular migration.

From the project's inception to January 2023, key results include:

- 47 subgrants allocated to local implementing partners to address the drivers of irregular migration and reach 70,000 direct beneficiaries in 15 departments and 112 municipalities of Guatemala.
- 3 research projects launched to better understand the root causes of irregular migration at the hyper-local level.
- IOM field presence was established with the opening of 3 offices in Quiché, Huehuetenango, and San Marcos, besides the main office in Guatemala City.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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