



**USAID**  
DEL PUEBLO DE LOS ESTADOS  
UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA



# SECURITY IN GUATEMALA

## CENTRAL AMERICA STRATEGY

Central America’s security and prosperity is directly linked to the security and prosperity of the United States. Through the U.S. Strategy for Central America, USAID’s assistance addresses the security, governance, and economic drivers of illegal migration to the United States. By reducing crime and violence, addressing corruption and impunity, and providing greater economic opportunity, USAID creates the foundation for Guatemalans to be self-reliant and make their country a prosperous place to thrive, reducing the desire to illegally immigrate.

### OVERVIEW & CHALLENGES

Guatemala’s 36-year long internal armed conflict, during which there were over 200,000 deaths and rampant human-rights violations, ended in 1996 with the signing of the Peace Accords. From this declaration of peace grew the beginnings of government cooperation with an emergent civil society to address needed reforms across all sectors of Guatemalan society.

To date, the country’s democracy remains fragile and with weak government institutions. Additionally, democracy and rule of law are threatened due to limited state capacity to control violence and crime, which have reached historically high levels over the past decade. Systemic poverty and corruption have fueled crime and led to mass illegal immigration to the United States.

A majority of Guatemalans are skeptical their judicial system functions competently. Extortion is one of the most common crimes and a culture of impunity has contributed to increased criminal activity. Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most reported crime in Guatemala and perpetrators rarely face trial. Gender inequality and access to judicial services contribute to high-levels of violence against women and children. Due to Guatemala’s geographic location, bridging Central and North America, organized criminal networks transit through the country trafficking persons to Mexico, and onwards to the United States. Guatemala still suffers from high-levels of emigration, crime, social injustice, and human rights violations.

PHOTO: BENJAMIN ILKA / USAID

## USAID'S RESPONSE

Working closely with government institutions, USAID and its partners implement a wide-range of projects to address the major security issues facing Guatemalans. To reduce illegal immigration, provide citizen security, address corruption, and protect human rights, USAID's projects complement efforts by the Government of Guatemala to: 1) reduce levels of crime and violence; 2) strengthen rule of law institutions; and 3) address root causes of insecurity.

### ACCESS TO JUSTICE SERVICES

To ensure high quality and timely access to justice and in cooperation with Guatemala's security and justice sector institutions, USAID established and continues to support specialized court systems. The 24-hour court system ensures that in all criminal prosecutions, the accused has an audience before a judge within six hours of arrest, in compliance with Guatemala's Constitution. These 24-hour courts are also specialized to deal with violence against women and sexual exploitation. USAID also supported Guatemala's first court dedicated to the prosecution of wildlife trafficking and crimes against cultural property and the environment. Additionally, USAID has assisted the Government of Guatemala in establishing high-impact courts to specifically deal with high-profile crimes of official corruption, transitional justice, organized criminal networks and gangs, and narcotics trafficking.

### EXTORTION

In partnership with the Guatemalan Public Ministry, USAID established the Specialized Prosecutors Office Against Extortion in 2015. Since its inception, this office has implemented advanced investigation and case management models that have allowed the Special Prosecutor to dismantle various organized criminal networks responsible for murder and extortion. Additionally, its focus and powers have resulted in an increase number of extortion related search warrants, operations, and guilty verdicts that have contributed to greater citizen security in Guatemala.

### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In response to the high numbers of GBV cases, USAID endorsed key legislation to operate a specialized 24-hour Court for Violence Against Women and Sexual Exploitation. Since GBV is a major driver of illegal migration, USAID in partnership with the Public Ministry, support case management protocols to improve registration, protection, and provision of services to GBV victims.

### ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF MIGRANTS

To deter illegal migration, USAID works to strengthen the Guatemalan Government's capacity to prevent, detect, and prosecute trafficking in persons (TIP). In conjunction with the Public Ministry and civil society, USAID's programs support institutional strengthening to identify trafficking victims, provide appropriate assistance, and identify potential traffickers.

In addition to this, USAID funds TIP victim shelters which provide medical and psychosocial services, education, and legal support. In order to address the root causes related to illegal migration, and to reduce vulnerability to TIP, USAID programs also implement prevention activities that improve citizen awareness, knowledge, and community response to TIP.

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To learn more about USAID's work in Guatemala, please visit our website at [www.usaid.gov/guatemala](http://www.usaid.gov/guatemala)