



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of International Justice and Peace

**Background on Root Causes of Migration
2020**

“At this time, we think of the many migrants, the many refugees, of their sufferings, of their life, often without work, without documents, with such grief. And we can together say a prayer for the migrants and the refugees who live in the worst and most difficult situations.”

--Pope Francis, January 20, 2014

BACKGROUND: Since 2011, the United States has seen an unprecedented increase in unaccompanied children and families migrating into the country, predominately at the border with Mexico. Several USCCB delegations (from the International and Migration committees) have visited the region since the high-point in 2014, and have found that a series of interrelated factors have contributed to this dramatic increase in migration; a “perfect storm” of root causes has coalesced to create this phenomenon. ***Migration push factors include:*** violence exacerbated by gangs, the drug trade and economic desperation; unemployment; the lack of quality education and access to education; and the resulting inability for individuals to support themselves and their families in their home countries/local communities. The desire to reunify with family in the United States, in part driven by these forces, also has contributed to this increase in migration.

USCCB POSITION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: Following the constant teaching of the Holy See, the bishops of the United States have long supported the right of all persons to remain in their homeland and to find there the means to support themselves and their families in dignity. The choice to migrate, often perilous and of last resort, should be driven by choice, not absolute necessity. It is therefore imperative to foster sustainable and equitable development in sending nations, especially Mexico and the countries of Central America. Addressing root causes must be part of the solution to solving the present immigration crisis, so that migrants can remain in their homelands and support their families in dignity. This will require a long-term, multi-pronged effort that addresses many factors, including: human security, development, corruption, the rule of law, as well as the adjustment of aspects of our trade relationships.

To address this situation, USCCB has proposed the following policy recommendations for adoption by the U.S. government:

Trade policy must reflect principles of just development. There should be a general reduction in subsidies, tariffs, and quotas that severely constrict the ability of poorer countries to market their own products and sustain their own agriculture. It is imperative that trade agreements contribute to economic and social development at home and abroad, particularly for poor and vulnerable workers and their families. For more information on USCCB’s trade policy, see our backgrounder on Trade.

Foreign assistance efforts must support the identification and promotion of key public policy innovations for poverty reduction and inclusive development in the region. The U.S. Government

should focus its foreign assistance programs to expand its partnerships with local governments, the private sector, and civil society to identify and develop public policy innovations in the region that demonstrate substantive impacts on poverty reduction, social inclusion and disaster risk reduction.

The creation of employment opportunities in Mexico and Central America would help to reduce poverty and would mitigate the incentive for many migrants to look for employment in the United States. The implementation of economic policies in these countries that create living-wage jobs is vital, especially for Latin Americans without advanced skills. Investments in health, housing and educational systems in these nations must be improved to provide the basis for enhanced employment opportunities for workers.

Civil Society, Judicial and Rule-of-Law Reforms. The objectives of sustainable economic development, human security, respect for human rights, as well as hemispheric security, to a large extent hinge on these countries having a well-functioning judiciary that defends the rule of law. U.S. Government assistance in this area has strengthened civil societies in the region, and this in turn helps hold governments accountable to their people and for the assistance provided by the United States.

Governments must act to protect human rights, including the right to religious freedom. The U.S. Government can support civil society in the nations of Latin America and elsewhere by supporting the work of the Church and other religious organizations that are major participants and willing partners in efforts to promote human development.

Governments should recognize the importance of preserving the environment and the rights of indigenous populations. Economic development and opportunity must be fostered by the U.S. Government in a context that preserves and protects the environment. This is a crucial component of economic sustainability.

External economic factors, including excessive levels of foreign debt, must be addressed. U.S. Government policies at both the national and international level must address the role of excessive debt as a destabilizing element in the economy of a nation.

Efforts must also continue to address the epidemic of violence, as well as its underlying causes, in Central America and in the border regions. U.S. Government policies must reflect the importance of controlling the illicit drug trade, the centrality of curbing corruption at every level of national life, and the need to curtail the illegal arms trade, weapons and human trafficking, as well as the resultant violence that accompanies these illicit activities. The region is currently suffering under the despotic scourge of transnational criminal organizations with hemispheric theaters of operations: they not only destabilize the governments in the region through corruption and complicity, but cause untold suffering, especially among the most vulnerable.

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