



Photo credit: Victor Medina

## U.S.-MEXICO FORUM 2025

# Rethinking U.S.-Mexico Cooperation on Migration

Migration and migrants are central to the health of our economies, especially during a period of recovery. The change of administration in the United States opens opportunities for a new approach to managing regional migration that emphasizes cooperation between the Mexican and U.S. governments. This bilateral cooperation is key to managing regional migration flows and can foster a safe, orderly, and regular flow of migrants between the two countries and throughout the larger region that includes Central America.

To date the U.S.-Mexico collaboration around migration has focused almost exclusively on more robust enforcement and reducing access to asylum in the United States, especially for Central Americans passing through Mexico. Although couched in collaborative terms, the policy decisions have been largely dictated by the U.S. government — with the Mexican government largely following suit, though sometimes changing the terms of collaboration based on long-held policy principles.

A different approach to collaboration between the two governments could emphasize enforcement in tandem with efforts to open legal pathways for asylum and citizenship, ensure protection closer to home, and invest in changing the conditions that spur irregular migration. And this collaboration could be extended to domestic efforts in each country to promote the regularization and integration of migrants. Both the U.S. and Mexican governments have an interest in developing sustainable strategies for managing migration, ensuring migrants have a positive impact on their new homes, and addressing the long-term conditions that drive migration.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Regularizing and Integrating Immigrants:** The Biden Administration and the U.S. Congress should prioritize regularizing migrants already living in the country such with programs such as DACA and TPS. Mexico should enact policies that support the integration or reintegration of migrants to the Mexican society.
- **Providing Opportunities for Labor Migration:** The U.S. needs to work closely with governments in Central America to reform the seasonal worker programs to encourage hiring workers in Mexico and Central America. Mexico should facilitate access to work-based visas for employers that want to recruit workers in Central America. Both countries should provide access to visas, which will create opportunities for more legal migration.
- **Ensuring Robust Humanitarian Protection Mechanisms:** It is crucial for both countries to ensure a broad spectrum of international humanitarian protection mechanisms to those in need of such protection, including but not limited to asylum. The U.S. should redesign its asylum system at the border in a way that ensures timely and fair decision-making including ending the use of Title 42 expulsions and end the Trump-era Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), allowing those currently in the program to have their immigration hearings expedited. Mexico needs to strengthen its asylum system with the support of the U.S. government.
- **Developing Rules-Based Enforcement Strategies:** Professionalize border enforcement protocols in both nations to ensure safety, order, legality, and the minimum use of force. The U.S. should develop alternatives to detention except for high-risk criminal response and enact less restrictive settings to monitor migrants who have pending immigration cases and take added precautions in the treatment of minors including family registries with the help of neutral NGOs or faith-based groups. Mexico should develop a strategy to institutionalize the INM's functioning. The U.S. National Guard should be professionalized in dealing with migrant issues if it will continue to play a role in border control.
- **Investing in Development and Rule of Law:** Jointly, Lopez Obrador and Biden should design a Development Plan for Central America. The two governments have a window of opportunity to lead an international campaign to ensure long-term changes in Central America that will help generate development and to build rule of law, including an ambitious campaign against corruption that empowers local civil society.