



## CENTRAL AMERICA' S NORTHERN TRIANGLE: SECURITY AND MIGRATION

### THINGS TO PONDER:

- How will increased asylum seekers from Central America affect Canada?
- How can Federal, Provincial and Municipal levels of government collaborate to assist with the migration issues in Canada?
- What policies are needed to end violence in the Northern Triangle, and how can Canada contribute through multi-lateral and other action?

### SESSION PANELISTS

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### BACKGROUND

Known as the 'Northern Triangle of Central America', El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala have faced multiple challenges in the past years, including gang violence and rampant crime. These problems, along with other multifaceted issues have triggered a flow of migrants and asylum seekers to North America.

Central America has one of the highest rates of reported homicidal and criminal violence in Latin America – and indeed the world. The annual global homicide rate was approximately 5 per 100,000 people in 2014, while in El Salvador it was approximately 64 per 100,000 people<sup>1</sup>. More recently, in Honduras over 400 children under age 18 were killed in the first half of 2014, most thought to be the victims of gang violence. As a result of these and other risks to their lives and safety, children and families have been forced to embark on a treacherous journey north. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)'s most recent report, 48% of the displaced children interviewed for their study shared experiences of how they had been personally affected by the augmented violence

<sup>1</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5?end=2014&start=2002>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/56fc26d27.html>



in the region due to organized criminal actors, including drug cartels and gangs, or by State actors.<sup>2</sup>

For many of these people, the violence they leave behind does not end once they leave their country. Along their journey north, migrants and refugees can be preyed upon by criminal organizations, sometimes with the tacit approval or complicity of national authorities, and can be subjected to violence and other abuses —abduction, theft, extortion, torture, and rape<sup>3</sup>. Other barriers can occur, both natural and bureaucratic. On their flight to the United States many immigrants leaving the Northern Triangle are detained by Mexican and United States immigration agents. In the past two years almost 80,000 children have been detained.<sup>4</sup>

The unexpected influx of migrants from the Northern Triangle triggered a national debate in the United States about immigration and border policy, as well as an examination of the factors compelling thousands of children to undertake such a dangerous journey. In 2007, under president George W. Bush's administration, a Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) was set up as part of the United States Strategy for Engagement in Central America. CARSI responds to threats and helps build capacity of law enforcement and the justice sector. Between 2008 and 2015, under President Obama's administration, the United States gave over \$1 billion through this initiative. Further discussions between Mexico and the United States, as well as with the three countries in the Northern Triangle continued, focused around addressing drug trafficking flowing through Central America and security.<sup>5</sup>

However, recent policy changes in the United States, including the suspension of a rescue program for refugee victims of gang violence could greatly impact the lives of thousands of young Central Americans. Moreover, these changes to U.S. policy are beginning to spillover into Canada, as the recent influx of Haitian asylum seekers has demonstrated. Data from the Immigration and Refugee Board shows that in the first three months of 2017, 158 Salvadorans filed claims for asylum in Canada, compared with 244 in all of 2016.<sup>6</sup> There is potential for this increase to become a wave if issues in the Northern Triangle are left unchecked. On June 16, 2017, the Government of Canada announced it would contribute more than \$7.3 million to help enhance regional stability and address security challenges in Central America, particularly in the Northern Triangle.

The root cause forcing people to leave their homes are varied, and often interlinked. In recent decades Canada has been more inclusive and accepting in terms of immigration

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/56fc26d27.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.msf.ca/sites/canada/files/msf\\_forced-to-flee-central-americas-northern-triangle.pdf](https://www.msf.ca/sites/canada/files/msf_forced-to-flee-central-americas-northern-triangle.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/02/central-america-young-refugees-cam-trump-travel-ban>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/.../el-salvadorans-seen-as.../article36088888/>



policy. However, could a new wave of migrants put pressure on this policy? Moreover, what role should Canada play in assisting the humanitarian crisis in Central America in order to help mitigate the root causes?

## SUGGESTED READING

Want to know more about security, migration and the Northern triangle? Check these out:

- Conference on Prosperity and Security in Central America  
<https://www.dhs.gov/prosperitysecuritycon>
- Northern Triangle of Central America Situation Supplementary Appeal – UNHCR  
<http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/13944>
- Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle  
[https://cuellar.house.gov/uploadedfiles/plan\\_of\\_the\\_alliance\\_for\\_prosperity\\_in\\_the\\_northern\\_triangle-\\_a\\_road\\_ma....pdf](https://cuellar.house.gov/uploadedfiles/plan_of_the_alliance_for_prosperity_in_the_northern_triangle-_a_road_ma....pdf)
- Security Projects in Central America – Government of Canada  
[https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/backgrounder\\_-\\_securityprojectsincentralamerica.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/backgrounder_-_securityprojectsincentralamerica.html)

## REFERENCES

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- Central America's Violent Northern Triangle – Council on Foreign Relations  
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>
- Children on the Run – UNHCR  
<http://www.unhcr.org/56fc26d27.html>
- El Salvadorans Seen as Next Possible Wave of Border Crossers  
<https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/el-salvadorans-seen-as-potential-source-of-next-wave-of-border-crossers/article36088888/?ref=http://www.theglobeandmail.com&>
- Canada Contributes to Improving Security in Central America – Government of Canada  
[https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/canada\\_contributestoimprovingsecurityincentralamerica.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/06/canada_contributestoimprovingsecurityincentralamerica.html)
- Thousands of Central Americans at Risk as Refugee Ban Halts Key Program  
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/02/central-america-young-refugees-cam-trump-travel-ban>