



“Asylum Cooperative Agreements” Fact Sheet

From July to October of 2019, the U.S. signed “asylum cooperative agreements” with [El Salvador](#), [Guatemala](#), and [Honduras](#) (“the Northern Triangle countries”) that would allow the U.S. to send asylum seekers to these countries and bar them from applying for protection in the U.S. In mid-November, the Department of Homeland Security issued an interim final rule seeking to implement these agreements, including through the creation of unprecedented and unlawful procedures that risk the return of children and families to persecution and other harm.

These agreements violate the Immigration and Nationality Act ([INA](#)) because the Northern Triangle countries (1) cannot ensure that asylum seekers are not threatened due to their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion and (2) cannot provide “access to a full and fair procedure for determining a claim to asylum or equivalent temporary protection.” Additionally, (3) the Northern Triangle countries cannot manage an influx of asylum seekers, particularly children and families, who are uniquely vulnerable and may require greater protections and resources. Although unaccompanied children are exempt from the agreements, they nevertheless may confront challenges in accessing protection in the U.S. due to confusion in the region and the U.S. about these agreements and related policies, as has occurred during the implementation of the Remain in Mexico policy.

The administration must rescind these agreements and the interim final rule that seeks to implement them.

Asylum Seekers Are in Danger in Northern Triangle Countries

- In the Northern Triangle, gangs target children for violence and forced recruitment, and police and other [security forces](#) often assume [children](#) are affiliated with gangs and violently target them. [Women](#) and [LGBT persons](#) also face higher risks of violence.
- All three countries rank in the top ten highest homicide rates [worldwide](#) and experience extreme [corruption](#) and [food insecurity](#). Unsurprisingly, from 2015 to 2017, over 75,000 of the Northern Triangle’s own citizens filed for asylum in the U.S. Around the world, asylum seekers are fleeing in search of protection. At the close of 2018, approximately [3.5 million people worldwide](#) were awaiting a decision on their asylum claims.
- The U.S. has noted the danger in the region. In 2019, the State Department advised Americans to reconsider traveling to [Honduras](#) and to exercise increased caution in [El Salvador](#) and [Guatemala](#).
- An influx of migrants to the Northern Triangle may increase the existing dangers migrants face. In [Mexico](#), local communities responded to a similar influx with xenophobia and harassment.

Northern Triangle Countries Have Inadequate Infrastructure to Process Asylum Claims

- The Northern Triangle countries do not have enough asylum officers; for instance, El Salvador has only [one](#) and Guatemala has only [eight](#). This insufficient infrastructure results in delayed processing times. In 2018, Guatemala received 262 requests for asylum, and approved only 20; 234 are still pending. In 2018, El Salvador had 70 asylum seekers and refugees, and Honduras had 80. At the end of 2018, hundreds of thousands of people were [internally displaced](#) in the Northern Triangle



countries as a result of natural disasters, conflict and violence, including approximately 242,000 people in Guatemala, 190,000 people in Honduras, and 250,700 people in El Salvador.

- Civil society organizations that provide shelter and other direct services to individuals in the Northern Triangle have expressed deep concern about the ability of Northern Triangle countries to provide safe haven and about their own resources and capacity to address increased needs that will result from the agreements. The U.S. has provided little information about plans for implementing the agreements, leaving organizations further unprepared for an influx of asylum seekers.

Northern Triangle Countries Cannot Integrate or Support Vulnerable Populations

- The region struggles to provide [jobs](#), [healthcare](#), and [education](#) to its own citizens and will similarly struggle to provide these necessary opportunities to asylum seekers and refugees, including children and families who will heavily rely on the government for housing, education, and medical care.
- Child protection and integration systems in these countries are inadequate for children already in need of protection within the Northern Triangle. These countries lack functioning foster care systems, and rely on state-run collective institutions and care facilities that may be overcrowded and [dangerous](#).
- These “asylum cooperative agreements” are unsafe and unlawful. The administration must rescind them.

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