

WORLD

Curbing migration at the source

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U.S. aid dollars have made a difference in El Salvador. Up until this past spring, multiple U.S. departments were funding programs to prevent violence in schools, stop illegal drug trafficking, teach agricultural techniques, and increase government transparency. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reported that between 2015 and 2017, “El Salvador saw a 61 percent reduction [in homicides] in the municipalities in which USAID operates,” compared to 42 percent nationwide.

When President Donald Trump announced on March 30 he was cutting off hundreds of millions of dollars in aid for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, critics warned the decision could exacerbate gang violence, poverty, and government instability in the region. Last week, the Trump administration said the aid squeeze appeared to have worked, and funding would restart for Central America’s so-called Northern Triangle.

While aid was shut off, the U.S. government negotiated a handful of agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras so that migrants can seek asylum in those countries as they arrive in them rather than continuing to the United States and applying for protection at the U.S. southern border. If the migrants do show up at the border, the United States can deport them back to the Northern Triangle to apply for asylum there.

Under the agreements, the United States will send immigration officials to mentor the Central American governments on improving asylum programs, and the governments will share biometric data to identify human traffickers. The U.S. Department of Labor also agreed to provide better visa options for migrants to work in the United States without exploitation. After the three countries signed the agreements, the U.S. State Department agreed to send \$432 million for projects and grants that had been frozen. The administration touts the changes as a win-win for the Northern Triangle, which gets to resume receiving beneficial aid, and the United States, which expects the flow of migrants at its southern border to decrease.

The Northern Triangle countries remain extremely dangerous, and some caution they cannot protect their own citizens, much less run effective asylum programs. “The idea that we would consider these countries safe is laughable,” Ursula Ojeda, a migrant rights and justice policy adviser at the Women’s Refugee Commission, told Vox. “People will suffer and people will die.”

Ariel G. Ruiz Soto, an associate policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, warned of unintended consequences of the agreements that “could lead migrants to further avoid detection and assistance by government authorities, exposing them to more dangerous routes and conditions and exploitation by human smugglers.” He added, “Developing the region’s asylum systems is important and necessary. But it is difficult to see how these agreements alone will reduce migration flows from the region over the long term if country conditions remain unchanged.”

Earlier this week, the Trump administration announced a reprieve for nearly 265,000 Salvadorans with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), allowing them to live and work in the United States. TPS offers a temporary refuge to foreign nationals from countries facing wars or severe natural disasters. The United States granted the status to Salvadorans after a 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck the country in 2001, killing about 1,100 people. Another 1.3 million lost their homes.

In 2018, the United States announced the end of TPS for people from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Sudan, but a U.S. District Court blocked the move. The administration is still fighting in court to end TPS, but it has agreed to extend it for Salvadorans at least until Jan. 4, 2021, and for one year after the court case is resolved. Salvadoran Foreign Minister Alexandra Hill welcomed the extension as a way to give Salvadorans with TPS “breathing room” to find a permanent solution toward residency or citizenship.

Johnson & Johnson had to go back to court after a judge said he accidentally added three extra zeroes to part of the drugmaker’s settlement cost in an opioid case.

Oklahoma Judge Thad Balkman in August ordered Johnson & Johnson and its subsidiaries to pay a total of \$572 million to the state of Oklahoma for the role it played in the opioid crisis. The company appealed the amount, and Balkman admitted earlier this month that he miscalculated part of the judgment. He had ordered Johnson & Johnson to pay \$107,683,000 instead of \$107,683 toward certain education programs.

“That will be the last time I use that calculator,” Balkman said after the hearing.

The judge’s new order will likely lower Johnson’s and Johnson’s overall payment to \$465 million. Oklahoma originally asked for \$17.2 billion. —*Rachel Lynn Aldrich*

The U.S. Justice Department on Monday proposed new rules to gather DNA from anyone arrested on suspicion of illegal immigration. Before the change, officials only gathered DNA samples from illegal immigrants who also faced charges on separate criminal offenses. The government will add the samples collected under the new rule to the FBI database.

Critics worry the DNA collection violates the migrants’ privacy and could be misused.

“Fingerprints and current biometrics are more than sufficient to identify criminals and keep them out of the United States,” said Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the Libertarian think tank Cato Institute. “Collecting DNA is expensive, will be done poorly, and doesn’t make Americans any safer.” —*R.L.A.*