



Stories from the CARE Learning Tour to Honduras, April 19-24, 2024



The delegation meets with participants in USAID-supported youth leadership and livelihood generation programs.

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OVERVIEW

A delegation of five senior congressional staffers traveled to Honduras with CARE to explore first-hand the root causes of migration in the region and learn about how key strategic community-based interventions backed by U.S. investments are fostering greater gender equity, expanding economic opportunity, and strengthening citizen protection.

Persistent economic and political challenges have been compounded by the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and increasingly extreme weather, causing more people in the Americas, particularly Venezuelans, Cubans, Guatemalans, Haitians, and Hondurans to migrate. In Honduras, communities are grappling with complex and overlapping factors that are driving migration. It is hard to extricate economic need from the security situation as gang extortion and violence have shuttered businesses and depressed economies. In addition to financial and physical violence, many communities live in fear and psychological trauma due to constant intimidation by gangs. Economic depression has left families without sufficient food, forced children to drop out of school, and caused much of the workforce to leave due to lack of opportunity. Additionally, high levels of discrimination, genderbased violence, and corruption—and impunity for

corruption—lead to a national malaise and sense of rootlessness or hopelessness that spurs migration.

Another major factor in Honduran migration is increasing climate disasters. In 2020, within a two-week span, Hurricanes Eta and Iota struck Honduras impacting 4 million people (40% of the population). The storms displaced nearly 1 million people and wiped out livestock and crops. The lingering effects of these two storms are evident throughout the country. Coupled with floods, droughts, rise in sea level, coastal erosion, and deforestation – climate disasters have displaced whole communities and are a major factor contributing to Hondurans leaving the country.

During their six days in Honduras, the delegation crossed the length of the country, visiting a wide range of humanitarian and development programs along the way. They first visited Honduras's border with Nicaragua where they observed how a coalition of aid organizations led by UNHCR provide an array of humanitarian services to migrants in need of food, shelter, and medical aid. The delegation then made its way north, visiting community-driven programs supported by U.S. government funded organizations like CARE and Catholic Relief Services, that are proactively

working to address the root causes of economic insecurity that has historically fueled migration. They met with smallholder farmers who are implementing agricultural practices that both build resilience to climate shocks and increase yields which ultimately provides better income and food supplies for their families. They also spent time with an all-women group of entrepreneurs who will demonstrate how a small amount of seed capital, business development support, and rights awareness trainings is all they need to jumpstart microenterprises that provide for their families and enrich entire communities. Along the way, they learned how gang violence is uprooting families and how organizations like NRC and Jovenes Contra la Violencia are providing protection services and empowering youth to advocate for safer communities. Finally, the group observed another a coordinated humanitarian response led by the UN's International Organization of Migration (IOM) and the Honduran government with funding from USAID, this time focused on ensuring that returning migrants have access to the resources they need to reestablish their lives peacefully and productively in their home country.



An open discussion following an introductory briefing led by local NGO leaders.



The Learning Tours convoy heads south to the border town of El Paraiso.



An overnight dormitory for migrant families at the Relief of Suffering Foundation (FAS) shelter.



Father Ferdinando Castriotti describes how FAS supports migrant families.



A family shares its experiences migrating north from Venezuela.

-> DAY O

TRAVEL DAY

The delegation arrived in Tegucigalpa on Friday, April 19th and the Learning Tour was officially kicked off that evening with an introductory briefing led by Maite Matheu, Country Director, CARE Honduras, Blanca Guevara, Executive Director, La Red Regional de Mujeres del Sur, and Julissa Perdomo, Executive Director of CDE MIPYME. The three NGO leaders gave the delegates an overview of the context of human rights, gender, and migration in Honduras and furthered their understanding of the unique challenges facing Hondurans, especially women and girls.

→ DAY I

SETTING THE SCENE

VISIT TO HONDURAS-NICARAGUA BORDER

The next morning the delegation left the hotel at 6:30am sharp to drive down to the border town of El Paraiso to learn about the ongoing humanitarian response to the influx of refugees and migrants across Honduras's southeast border with Nicaragua. The response is coordinated by a UNHCR-led group of 39 different organizations, known as the Local Team, including UN agencies, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), and local non-profits. The Local Team's work includes border monitoring, analysis of the entry of people in mixed movements, identifying protection gaps in the field, coordinating responses, and providing and advocating for access to humanitarian services and rights. In addition, the Local Team produces quarterly situation reports that provide relevant information on key data, protection gaps and risks, and their response. These reports are crucial for decision-makers, local and national authorities, and international partners.

The delegation toured two separate shelters for migrants in the towns of El Paraiso and Danli, operated by the Relief of Suffering Foundation (FAS) and Caritas, where they were able to speak with families making their way north about their motivations for migrating and the challenges they've faced along the way. They also visited a migrant intake center operated by the Honduran government and met with representatives of Local Team organizations such as World Vision providing information, child support, and medical services in the vicinity.

BRIEFING WITH U.S. MISSION AND RECEPTION

After returning to Tegucigalpa from the border, the delegation made its way to U.S. Ambassador Laura Dogu's residence. There they were briefed by senior officials of the U.S. Mission on U.S. development and humanitarian investments in Honduras, along with other U.S. Government priorities in the region. Following the briefing, the Ambassador welcomed local government officials, NGO leaders, and other members of civil society for a reception in honor of the Learning Tours delegation.

ADDRESSING THE DRIVERS OF MIGRATION: VIOLENCE, FOOD INSECURITY, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

BREAKFAST CONVERSATION WITH NRC PROTECTION PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The delegation began its second full day of programming meeting with three participants of NRC's protection program. NRC has been working in Honduras since 2015, meeting the needs of tens of thousands affected by violence and natural disasters, including the internally displaced, people in need of international protection, deported people, and their hosts. NRC's multistage protection program provides protective care aimed at safeguarding the lives of people who are in situations of forced displacement due to violence perpetrated by armed groups, public officials and in some cases their own family members. The first level of assistance consists of an emergency response in the form of accommodation, food and transportation for people who must drop everything and flee their homes. Next, program participants are anonymously relocated to a community deemed safe and provided a stipend for three months to cover living expenses while they recover from their risk situation. In such cases where program participants are repeatedly tracked down by those seeking to do them harm, NRC helps them obtain asylum abroad. Finally, NRC works with program participants to help restore their livelihoods by providing them material resources, entrepreneurial training, and access to employment. The participants shared their personal experiences with extreme gang violence and how they are working to rebuild their lives through NRC's relocation and livelihoods program.

VISIT WITH FARMERS AND PARAVETS SUPPORTED BY USAID-FUNDED PROSPERAMOS PROGRAM

After breakfast, the delegation began making its way north, stopping first at a model farm near the town of San Jose, La Paz, supported by the CRS-implemented Prosperamos program. CRS is implementing a 36-month intervention called Prosperamos, aimed at supporting vulnerable disaster-affected households in the Northern Zone and Dry Corridor of Honduras. Households are supported to recover from recent disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Hurricanes Eta and Iota, to live in safety and dignity, and to improve their resilience to climate-related risks such as intensifying drought. Along with helping families with their immediate needs after a disaster, they also provide long-term economic support in the form of livelihood skills training. In the Dry Corridor, a region prone to drought, Prosperamos is building smallholder farmers' capacities in soil and water restoration to achieve more resilient agricultural systems. Farmers are taught climateadaptive farming techniques that help improve the quality and increase the quantity of their yield. The program also trains community leaders (mostly young men and women) as Community-Based Animal Health Workers (CAHW), known as paravets, and provides them with basic equipment in order to provide veterinary assistance to their neighbors' animals. So far, the program has reached over 15,000 agriculturalists in Honduras.

The delegates toured the farm and heard from two model producers about the climate adaptive farming techniques they've recently employed. They then met with two paravets to learn about how their training has transformed them into community leaders, and observed a demonstration of machinery provided by the program used to husk and grind corn for use in animal feed.

VISIT TO MISKA CULINARY SCHOOL FOR YOUTH

The final stop of the day was the city of La Esperanza, home of the MISKA culinary school for youth supported by DAI and the local municipal government as part of DAI's Honduras Local Governance program (HLG). The HLG program works to enhance basic service delivery provision through increased citizen influence and improved governance in municipalities with high rates of migration and violence, in both urban and rural areas. The program ensures that health, education, and other critical services are expanded and made sustainable as part of a holistic effort to strengthen governance at the national and local levels. In La Esperanza, DAI has partnered with CASM and the municipal government to provide support to MISKA, Honduras's first culinary school for youth. MISKA, launched in 2021, trains youth who are highly prone to migration to become professional chefs. Much of the regional population belongs to the indigenous Lenca community and as such MISKA instructors have played an important role encouraging students to explore and preserve traditional indigenous cuisines and their ingredients. DAI and the Municipal Office of Youth and Children offer entrepreneurship training for students interested in starting their own restaurants, as well as soft skills training and job placement support for those seeking to find employment as cooks. With support from DAI, the local government has begun to take a more active role in ensuring youth in the region have access to economic opportunity.

With MISKA students as their guides, the delegates tried their hand at preparing local foods, spoke with students about their journey to MISKA and their future career prospects in Honduras, and finally were treated to a traditional Lenca dance while they sampled students' preparations inspired by indigenous recipes.



Jose Antonio, a smallholder farmer, explains the benefits of climate adaptive farming techniques.



Belkis, a paravet, demonstrates a cornhusking machine provided by CRS.



The delegation listens as a group of MISKA students describe the local ingredients used in their traditional chowder recipes.



A traditional dance of the indigenous Lenca people.

ADDRESSING THE DRIVERS OF MIGRATION CONTINUED: FOOD INSECURITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

VISIT TO MCGOVERN-DOLE SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM

On Monday morning, the delegation arrived at a nearby public primary school where they were greeted by children from grades 1-5. The school is supported by the USDA-funded McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (MGD). The MGD program, implemented by CRS in Honduras, is a school feeding project in all (2,390) public schools across the Departments of Intibucá and La Paz. The program aims to end hunger, improve school enrollment, and boost academic performance by providing students with free and nutritious school lunches made with locally sourced ingredients. McGovern-Dole lunches are a powerful incentive for parents to send their children - especially girls - to school regularly. Parents play an active role in the program, with mothers from the community taking turns preparing meals and contributing supplemental ingredients such as meat, eggs, and vegetables. They are compensated for their contributions under the Local and Regional Procurement program which funds local and regional food commodities procured through McGovern-Dole. Additionally, CRS works with local NGOs and local Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health officials to train teachers, establish school libraries, and build infrastructure for clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. So far, under the McGovern- Dole program, CRS has been able to reach around 95,000 students and train over 1,300 teachers. After touring the school, the delegation sat down with parents to learn about how they work together to prepare fresh cooked meals. They then tried an assortment of items typically served to students, including papusas and empanadas made from nutritious, locally sourced ingredients.



Elementary students line up for school lunch.



A community volunteer shows how cooking duties are assigned.



A program participants shares how she started her baking business.



John Stout learns how tilapia is cleaned and prepared for cooking.

MEETING WITH CARE AND CARGILL-SUPPORTED WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Continuing north, the group traveled two hours to the city of Siguatepeque, where they met with participants in CARE's Nourish the Future program. The Nourishing the Future program partners with the Cargill Foundation and local governments to improve livelihoods, income generation, and gender equity for smallholder producers, microentrepreneurs, and their families in Honduras. A key aspect of the program is empowering women to start or expand their own microenterprise by providing them with training in business development, seed capital, and access to markets. To date, the program has supported over 330 microentrepreneurs operating a range of businesses including beauty salons, clothing stores, and bakeries. A group of women entrepreneurs in Siguatepeque have also come together to form a savings group to foster healthy saving habits while also providing access to affordable credit. The delegation observed a demonstration of a savings group meeting, and then had an opportunity to mingle with the women and learn about their small business ventures.

VISIT TO TILAPIA FARMING COOPERATIVE

The final site visit of the day took the delegation to a tilapia farming cooperative in the Lake Yojoa region of Honduras. The cooperative is also supported

by the Nourish the Future program. Another key component of the program is to promote more prosperous, sustainable and resilient farming communities through a community development approach. CARE supports smallholder farmers with trainings on climate-smart agricultural practices, educates them on market access, business management, and financial services. Additionally CARE builds the capacity of producers to more effectively negotiate contracts and comply with quality standards for sale to Cargill and local markets. Since 2020 CARE has offered such support to a cooperative of 19 tilapia farmers. While each farmer has his or her own tilapia pond, the farmers come together to market and sell their produce as a group. CARE has provided numerous trainings to the cooperative on various topics, including how to manage water temperature and pH levels, basic accounting skills, and achieving gender equality in the household and in business. After touring the farm, delegates practiced their fishing skills and then sat down with members of the cooperative over a fresh tilapia dinner. Cooperative members shared their personal experiences migrating to the U.S., describing how they no longer feel a need to migrate given the earning potential of the tilapia farm.



COUNTERING VIOLENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

MEETING WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED BY UNHCR IN COLONIA ALFONSO LACAYO

After reaching San Pedro Sula the previous evening, the delegation began its final full day in country with a visit to Colonia Alfonso Lacayo (CAL). CAL is a neighborhood located within a heavily gang-controlled suburb of San Pedro Sula called the Rivera Hernandez Sector. It is home to the Garífuna community, an Afro-Honduran indigenous population. Due to the unique cultural status of the neighborhood, CAL enjoys "neutral" status, free of the direct control of organized crime syndicates. Residents' movement outside of CAL is, however, restricted by the "invisible borders" demarcating the gang-controlled areas surrounding their neighborhood. Members of the community, including, children, youth and women still experience attempts at forced recruitment into gangs, while economic opportunities for Garífunas in the area are few and far between.

Since 2021, UNHCR has supported a community center operated by community leaders within CAL. The community center, along with UNHCR offers programs for youth and adults focused on entrepreneurship, vocational skills, and promoting Garifuna culture. Because of the neutrality of CAL, the community center opens its doors to other community organizations that may not have a safe place to meet in their own neighborhoods. After a focus group discussion with members of the Garifuna community group, the delegation met with another community organization called Jovenes Contra la Violencia that made the trip to CAL from another heavily gang-controlled suburb of San Pedro Sula for the visit.

Jovenes Contra la Violencia (JCV) is a youth-led grassroots organization focused on preventing violence in high-risk communities. Since its founding in 2011, JCV has developed a network of about 400 volunteers nationwide. They bring together children, adolescents, and community leaders through a variety of community activities, sports, and coaching sessions, including their Leadership Academy (Escuela de Liderazgo) and Let's Get Back Together (Volvamos A la Mesa) programs. UNHCR helps facilitate forums for dialogue between JCV youth and government officials at the municipal and national levels. Since its inception, JCV has assisted about 10,000 young people, with many alumni becoming lawyers, social workers, and civil servants.

LUNCH CONVERSATION WITH DAI AND CASM-SUPPORTED YOUTH

The group then stopped for lunch with two youth who have benefitted, respectively, from CASM's returning migrant job placement and youth leadership program and the DAI Creando program's entrepreneurship and soft skills trainings. The group heard from Fabian Andrés Zelaya Sandoval, an entrepreneur in livestock and agriculture, and Luis Miguel López Serrano, who once was involved with organized crime but now has become a small business owner and community leader educating youth about the challenges of the migration journey.

MEETING WITH CARE-LED SUPPORT GROUP FOR GBV SURVIVORS

For the final visit of the day, the delegation joined a CARE-facilitated support group for GBV survivors. CARE's Women Weaving Lives Free of Violence is a community-based program to strengthen protection services and access to livelihoods for women and girls in Honduras. Since 2022, the project has worked to i) prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and respond to women's protection needs with through programming to affect both individual and community-based behavior change, and ii) provide complementary economic empowerment and livelihoods support to cement the gains women make in reducing their vulnerability to GBV and to help them re-establish their lives. Activities undertaken as part of the CARE program include communication actions on the prevention of GBV in humanitarian contexts, training community leaders on creating an environment of trust for GBV survivors, and conducting case management and referrals for GBV cases. Another key component of the program is the provision of safe spaces within communities where survivors can gather for mutual support as well as receive protection and counseling services from CARE staff. The delegates participated in a number of activities used in the support group aimed at facilitating safe conversations around personal experiences with GBV and recovery.



The delegation sits in on a meeting of a CARE-facilitated support group for gender-based violence (GBV) survivors.



An educational game about how to prevent GBV.

-> DAY 5

REINTEGRATING RETURNING MIGRANTS

TOUR OF CENTRO BELEN CENTER FOR RETURNING MIGRANTS

The final stop on the Learning Tour was to the IOM-supported Centro Belen center for returning migrants. Migrant families or unaccompanied minors who are deported to Honduras are directly transported to the center. Upon arrival, returning migrants' biometric information is recorded and logged in a government database tracking migration in and out of the country. The center offers a wide range of services, including medical care, mental health counseling, temporary shelter, food, and GBV and child protection services. Migrants seeking to return to their home community are provided travel vouchers to the nearest city en route to their final destination. For whom returning home is not an option, an attempt is made to find them a place to live in and a means to earn a livelihood in and around San Pedro Sula. The center is part of IOM's Comprehensive Responses on Migration in Central America (IRM) program. IRM aims to contribute to safe, orderly, and regular migration in Central America by addressing gaps in fundamental aspects of migrants' needs for sustainable reintegration and integration. In Honduras, the IRM program has provided humanitarian assistance and reintegration support to 51,199 returnees.

-> POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY THEMES

People are on the move for diverse, but fundamental reasons. Even within a given national context, there are many non-exclusive push-pull factors causing mobility like armed conflict, political turmoil, socioeconomic collapse, and/or gender-based violence. Simplistic solutions or rhetoric and policies that seek to deter human mobility will not override the reality that people move when their basic needs for protection, shelter, livelihoods, or food are not being met.

Human mobility is not a problem, it is a right.

The right to migrate and seek asylum in a third country is protected in International Law and reinforced by regional and national mechanisms. Instead of implementing policies to prevent freedom of movement, policy approaches should promote "rootedness" – the fostering of communities that people want to live in – through investments into core areas of society like inclusive economic development, climate adaptation, governance, and gender equality. To achieve this, regional, and international policy cooperation is key, especially as states are increasingly thrust into overlapping roles of host, destination, and transit country for people on the move from the Americas and beyond.

Comprehensive strategies must address humanitarian needs holistically. Addressing the root causes of mobility is critical for creating long-term change, but for the millions in the Americas already in need of life-saving assistance, there isn't time to wait for long term solutions. To meet urgent needs, short- and medium-term approaches must be scaled up and facilitate durable solutions. This includes regularization of asylum pathways, access to social protection in host countries, and services for people on the move. At the same time, deteriorating pressures on social protection systems are impacting communities in host countries and those who remain in countries of origin; access to rights and services must be universal and account for their needs.

Civil society is a vital partner, but they can't work alone. Across the region, civil society is highly developed and often fills the role of the state in supporting migrants, displaced people, returnees, and vulnerable host populations. In some cases, like Haiti, there is simply no state framework to address key issues like the reintegration of deportees, leaving NGOs and faith communities to fill the gaps where they can, with limited resources. In other places like Guatemala, there may be positive policies in place, but



Students at the MISKA culinary school in La Esperanza, Honduras.

they are not funded, implemented, or enforced. Real progress will be a product of collaboration between civil society, government, and affected populations.

Rights-based and compassion-centered approaches are key. Policies and rhetoric about migration and displacement need to reinforce the dignity and humanity of all people on the move and must uphold rights enshrined in international and national laws. Border management strategies and policies related to people's right to asylum should be approached first and foremost from a human security perspective. Moreover, not all migrants are treated equally. Women, BIPOC, LGBTQI+, and other marginalized people are particularly vulnerable to mistreatment and discrimination and require focused interventions to ensure their needs are met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Scale-up humanitarian aid and comprehensive development assistance with a focus on nexus programming. Across the Americas, humanitarian needs have tripled in just three years. People and communities need immediate, flexible assistance to cover their basic needs and sustainable mechanisms to build resilience against future shocks. Fostering rootedness, requires sustained investments beyond the economic sphere, including youth, climate adaption, good governance, and gender equity.

The U.S. has been a global leader in humanitarian response through the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) and Migration Refugee Assistance (MRA) accounts and Food for Peace emergency programs. Funding to these accounts must be robust to meet rising global needs and maintain sectoral and geographic flexibility to meet the needs of families in crises. While working to address emergencies, the U.S. must break down silos between humanitarian and development programming to address challenges at the root.

- This starts with robust funding for several accounts through FY25 appropriations:
 - International Disaster Assistance \$5.27 hillion
 - o Migration Refugee Assistance \$5.2 billion
 - o Food for Peace Title II \$2 billion
 - McGovern-Dole Food for Education \$2.65 million

Lead with local knowledge. International programs are most successful when they are built on local knowledge, context and expertise and led by those close to the participating communities The U.S. should provide flexible funding to local and community-based organizations, especially those led by marginalized communities and women led groups and networks. This supports the accountability of local power structures and ensures that programs provide assistance and promote rootedness that are designed and implemented optimally to suit local realities led by local leaders.

Cosponsor the Locally Led Development and <u>Humanitarian Response Act</u>

- Authorizes USAID to accept applications or proposals in languages other than English and direct USAID to assess options to provide support and translation services for local languages;
- Authorizes USAID to increase the de minimis indirect cost rate to 15% for local entities receiving USAID assistance awards;
- Authorizes USAID to allow a 180-day delay for local entities to register in the System for Award Management;
- Authorizes USAID to award contracts or other acquisition instruments in which competition is limited to local entities if doing so would result in cost savings, strengthen local capacity, or enable more sustainable programs;
- Authorizes USAID to allow foreign entities to use national or international generally accepted accounting principles for contracts or grants awarded;

Uphold people's right to move. The U.S. and other states should improve asylum processes and enact border management practices that ensure all people on the move receive equitable, humane treatment, in line with International Law. This should be achieved through regularized, human security-based approaches including the provision of temporary or humanitarian visas.

One such option is cosponsoring the Climate <u>Displaced Persons Act</u> which would create formal protections for climate-displaced persons (CDPs). CDPs are individuals who have been forcibly displaced by climate change or climate-induced disruptions, such as sea-level rise, glacial outburst floods, desertification or

Ensure robust funding for International Disaster Assistance (\$5.27 billion), Migration, Refugee Assistance (\$5.2 billion), Food for Peace (\$2.3 billion), and McGovern Dole (\$265 million) in FY 25 and the inclusion of humanitarian assistance in emergency supplemental packages.

Cosponsor the Climate Displaced Persons Act

- Create formal protections for climatedisplaced persons (CDPs). CDPs are individuals who have been forcibly displaced by climate change or climate-induced disruptions, such as sea-level rise, glacial outburst floods, desertification or fires.
- Creates a new migration pathway for CDPs. Eligibility for admission requires that an applicant demonstrate, among other things:
 - 1) they were forced to leave their "habitual home" because of a climate-related environmental disaster or the effects of a climate-related environmental disaster, and
 - 2) they can neither return to their habitual home because it is uninhabitable nor safely integrate into their new place of residence.
- Fixes the numerical floor on admissions of climate displaced persons at no fewer than 100,000 each fiscal year. Importantly, the CDPA's provisions require data collection on the most climate-vulnerable countries and the use of that data to ensure the equitable allocation of visas for this pathway.
- Direct the Secretary of State, in coordination with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator, to devise a Global Climate Resilience Strategy. The Global Climate Resilience Strategy would require the State Department to create a Coordinator of Climate Resilience position, responsible for all federal efforts to address the effects of events caused by climate change.

We are deeply grateful to the many people who generously gave of their time to make this visit to Honduras a success.



Elementary students.

