

# STILL STANDING A declaration of commitment





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#### **ABOUT USCRI**

Since 1911, the U. S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) has been a beacon of hope for refugees, immigrants, and forcibly displaced people around the world, providing compassionate support to all, regardless of their circumstances. From assisting Eastern Europeans in the early 20th century, to helping Vietnamese, Cambodians, and East Africans escaping war and persecution, to supporting unaccompanied children from Central America, USCRI has provided vital services to those in need. In 2024, this commitment reached new heights, with over 139,000 individuals supported across all 50 U.S. states, El Salvador, Honduras, Kenya, and Mexico.

In Latin America, USCRI aims to reduce obstacles to access to fundamental rights and enable the sustainable integration of migrants, refugees, and returnees. To do so, we partner with governments, universities, the private sector, and civil society organizations in El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

USCRI's 2026 Latin America Regional Funding Appeal outlines a \$1.34 million plan to support over 8,000 refugees, returnees, and displaced people in El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico. Amid tightening migration policies in the U.S and a rising number of returnees, USCRI will deliver integrated interventions across four core areas: protection, livelihoods, education, and humanitarian assistance. Initiatives include legal services, vocational training, entrepreneurship support for women, higher education pathways, and emergency cash assistance. Through multi-sector partnerships, USCRI aims to transform displacement into sustainable reintegration and inclusive community development.

#### **OUR REGIONAL FUNDING APPEAL**

While hundreds of thousands of families will be affected by the United States' crackdown on immigrants and refugees, USCRI will focus on serving over 8,000 of the most vulnerable people returned or stranded in Latin America in the coming year.

This funding appeal presents USCRI Latin America and the Caribbean's overview of funding needs for the coming year as USCRI works to respond strategically to the current humanitarian emergencies in Mexico and Central America. USCRI has reoriented its program objectives to this evolving reality and installed capacities to focus on the **protection**, **livelihoods**, **education**, **and humanitarian assistance** of refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees in El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico

FUNDING NEEDS \$1,347,286 USD	TARGET POPULATION (TP)  8,105
Strategic Objective 1	(TP) 5,701
PROTECTION	<b>\$348,086 USD</b>
Strategic Objective 2	(TP) 325
LIVELIHOODS	<b>\$349,680 USD</b>
Strategic Objective 3	(TP) 79
EDUCATION	<b>\$534,520 USD</b>
Strategic Objective 4 HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE	(TP) 2,000 <b>\$115,000 USD</b>

#### **FOREWORD**

USCRI needs \$1,347,286 USD to provide vital support to 8,105 people in Latin America. These resources will allow USCRI to serve migrants and refugees via four key strategies:

- **1. Protection:** Enabling legal pathways for international protection and integration initiatives for those stranded;
- **2. Livelihoods:** Supporting returnees to overcome the challenges of deportation through workforce development and entrepreneurship;
- **3. Education:** Building futures for refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees through higher education opportunities; and
- **4. Humanitarian Assistance:** Providing urgent support to vulnerable returnees.

USCRI operates in a field of uncertainty that seems dwarfed by the immense fear that many migrants and refugees experience in undertaking a life-changing journey due to a series of policies and executive orders in the U.S. that restrict access to legal pathways of asylum and criminalized migrants who are already part of our communities. In addition, thousands of asylum seekers are left stranded at the U.S.-Mexico Border, while many others have pending cases at the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR). People facing threats and persecution in Central America have limited access to protection. The growing number of returnees presents a challenge to communities as individuals return empty-handed and face an uncertain future. These trends are expected to continue and increase dramatically over the next year.

At the same time, dramatic funding reductions have led many humanitarian organizations to either scale back or shut down, leaving a vacuum of vital support that people need to live in dignity.

Despite these challenges, USCRI continues to serve refugees and migrants in the region. The funds requested through this appeal will enable us to address four strategic priorities, deepen collaboration with the private sector, and further embrace a whole-of-society approach in our programs that guarantee a coordinated work with communities and local authorities.



#### **KEY PRIORITY 1 - PROTECTION:**

Enabling legal pathways for international protection and integration initiatives for those stranded

In January 2025, the new U.S. administration enacted a series of executive orders that heavily restricted key legal pathways for asylum seekers to access international protections. As a result, an estimated 270,000 people have been stranded in Mexico<sup>1</sup>, with limited access to essential services and legal protection.

Refugee resettlement in the United States has also plummeted since the signing of the executive order titled "Realigning the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)" at the beginning of 2025. Such action has deferred the dreams of many refugees waiting for years in derelict refugee camps, in conditions that have only worsened after significant cuts to U.S. humanitarian aid around the world.

In response, USCRI's programs reduce risks, support rights, and strengthen resilience, enabling migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico to obtain a regularized migration status and have the possibility to access employment and public services. Our protection component also enables refugees in camps a path to safety and a new life through a durable solution in Mexico.

PROTECTION		
	U.SMEXICO BORDER PROGRAM	695
5701 people \$348,086 USD	WELCOMING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM	5,000
	HABESHA PROJECT: COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS	6

<sup>1</sup> WOLA. (Feb, 2025). From the Field: The First 14 Days of Border Impacts Under the Trump Administration's Executive Orders. Retrieved from: https://www.wola.org/2025/02/from-the-field-the-first-14-days-of-border-impacts-under-the-trump-administrations-executive-orders/





#### 1.1. RESPONSE: U.S.-MEXICO BORDER PROGRAM

At the U.S.-Mexico border, migrants - especially women, children, and non-Spanish speakers who are unfamiliar with the area - are particularly at risk. With no foreseeable opportunities to enter the United States, and in many cases without prospects of returning home, regularizing their migration status in Mexico is a priority to prevent, mitigate, and reduce protection risks.

In Tijuana, USCRI operates a legal clinic to provide migrants and asylum seekers with legal counsel and representation. During visits to shelters, USCRI informs people of their rights and legal options to regularize their situation or claim asylum in Mexico.

As part of USCRI's adaptive response plan, the organization will focus on people stranded at the border, provide them with legal counseling, and, if required, pro bono legal representation. USCRI's response includes "Know Your Rights" presentations that share valuable and reliable information to ensure that migrants and asylum seekers are aware of the risks, rights, services, and options available to them in Mexico.

U.SMEXICO BORDER PROGRAM		
(05	Legal Counsel	250
695 people \$140,028 USD	Legal Representation	45
	Lifesaving Information	400





## 1.2. RESPONSE: WELCOMING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Mexico has become a key destination for asylum seekers in search of safety and opportunity. Over the last six years, more than 600,000 applications for asylum have been submitted, 70% of which have been granted asylum status. However, Mexico currently lacks the institutional infrastructure to support and integrate newcomers, leaving many to navigate new communities alone. USCRI proposes to guide Mexico in becoming a leader in welcoming and integrating displaced people.

USCRI launched the Welcoming Communities Program in partnership with Mexican universities to engage local students and staff in fostering more inclusive attitudes towards refugees. The program opens academic and social spaces to welcome displaced people, helping them feel at home and supporting their integration. It also connects refugees with essential services such as healthcare, legal assistance, and mental health support, ensuring they can navigate their new environment with dignity.

As part of USCRI's response plan, the Welcoming Communities Program will mobilize over 5,000 university students across seven cities in 2026 to engage universities and the private sector in supporting migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees. To complement these community efforts, USCRI will also develop protocols to welcome and integrate displaced people into Mexico's education system, ensuring equitable access to education for all.

#### WELCOMING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

5000 people \$97,440 USD

**Community Mobilization: 5,000** 

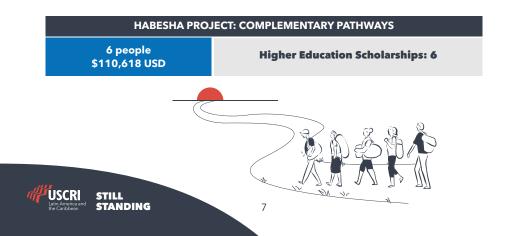


## 1.3. RESPONSE: COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

Welcome Corps on Campus, which enabled U.S. universities to sponsor the resettlement of refugee students, was terminated in late February 2025 as part of broader reforms to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). This cancellation not only removes access to higher education for many young refugees but also eliminates their chance to resettle in a safe country where their protection needs can be met. At the same time, Kakuma Refugee Camp—home to students who had been accepted into Welcome Corps on Campus—is experiencing severe cuts in humanitarian aid, especially from the World Food Programme (WFP) and key NGOs providing essential services.

For the past decade, USCRI's Habesha Project: Complementary Pathways has provided refugee youth with opportunities to resettle through higher education in Mexico. The initiative not only ensures access to university but also offers a chance to leave refugee camps and build a bright future through durable solutions. Partnering with leading Mexican universities, the Habesha Project has awarded full scholarships and comprehensive support–including school supplies, healthcare, and other living expenses—to refugees from Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Somalia, and more. Many Habesha Project graduates have become accomplished professionals with permanent residence or Mexican citizenship.

As part of USCRI's response plan, the Habesha Project will support six prospective refugee students from Kakuma whose opportunities to study in the U.S. were halted with the termination of Welcome Corps on Campus. The Habesha Project will cover scholarships, travel expenses, living allowances, medical insurance, and other essential costs for these students. Through this initiative, these students will gain access to international protection in a safe third country, enabling them to pursue higher education.





#### **KEY PRIORITY 2 - LIVELIHOODS:**

Supporting returnees to overcome the challenges of deportation through workforce development and entrepreneurship

The U.S. administration's increasingly restrictive migration policies have led to a surge in deportations and forced returns of nationals from Central America. By mid-2025, approximately 13,500 Hondurans had been deported. Meanwhile, the imminent termination of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for about 72,000 Honduran nationals threatens to expose thousands more to deportation, removing protections that have allowed many to live in the United States. Moreover, El Salvador received 85 deportation flights in the first half of the year, with 22 flights arriving in June alone.

In response, USCRI's programs aim to support women and youth returnees in El Salvador and Honduras to overcome the challenges of deportation and build livelihoods through income-generating initiatives that enhance their capacities for entrepreneurship and job placement.

LIVELIHOODS		
325 returnees	El Salvador	250
\$349,680 USD	Honduras	75











#### 2.1. RESPONSE: REDII EL SALVADOR

In 2025, El Salvador recorded a notable increase in returnees, receiving **14,437 individuals through forced returns**. These returnees face severe socioeconomic challenges: endemic poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to viable economic opportunities, all exacerbated by recurrent climate shocks and structural inequality. With weakened reintegration programs and scarce formal employment options, many risk falling into cycles of vulnerability and irregular migration, underscoring the urgent need for sustained support and strategic interventions.

USCRI's **REDII program** in El Salvador supports youth returnees through vocational training and pathways to employment or entrepreneurship, fostering **sustainable reintegration**. Over the past decade, USCRI El Salvador has served more than **1,200 youth returnees**, reinvigorating local economies in high-migration areas.

As part of USCRI's response plan, **REDII El Salvador** will offer technical training and job placement support to **250 youth returnees**, carefully selected based on vulnerability and need, in San Salvador, Usulután, and Chalatenango. Participants will gain the skills to secure formal employment or launch income-generating ventures, supporting their **sustainable reintegration** and enabling them to rebuild resilient, independent livelihoods.

REDII - EL SALVADOR		
250 youth returnees	Vocational Training	200
\$227,744 USD	Job placements	50





#### **2.2. RESPONSE: REDII HONDURAS**

In recent years, the number of returnee women in Honduras has increased considerably. These women face critical reintegration challenges shaped by **entrenched gender inequality, limited access to formal employment, and pervasive poverty**—faced by 56% of the general population. With fragile reintegration systems and few economic opportunities, returnees, especially women, are at heightened risk of exploitation, displacement, and new cycles of irregular migration.

Through the **REDII program**, USCRI supports the economic reintegration of women returning to Honduras - who are selected based on vulnerability, by providing skills development, technical training, and job placement support, equipping them with tools to pursue entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods. USCRI stands alongside these women from their most challenging moments toward long-term stability and community contribution.

As part of USCRI's response plan, USCRI Honduras will implement a **program that supports 75 women returnees** in launching their microenterprises. The program will provide tailored resources—from business planning to market access—to nurture **sustainable entrepreneurship** and foster both individual and community resilience through reintegration.

REDII HONDURAS		
75 women	Entrepreneurship Training	50
\$121,937 USD	Seed Capital	25



#### **KEY PRIORITY 3 - EDUCATION:**

Building futures for refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees through higher education opportunities

In a global context where only 7% of refugees have access to higher education compared to 42% of non-refugees, the suspension of resettlement and complementary pathways to the U.S. has further limited opportunities for forcibly displaced youth. In Mexico, refugees already enrolled in universities face significant barriers-financial, social, and academic-that threaten their ability to continue their studies, compounded by documentation and resource constraints. In Central America, youth returnees who aspire to continue their education encounter limited opportunities, financial barriers, and problems with degree recognition, increasing the risk of repeated irregular migration.

In response, USCRI's programs aim to expand and sustain higher education opportunities for refugees and returnees, supporting them to continue their academic journeys, complete their studies, and further their professional and personal development. USCRI seeks to reframe return into a pathway for empowerment, rather than a source of vulnerability and despair. Through these actions, USCRI aims to foster resilience and the long-term integration of displaced youth, contributing to stronger, more inclusive communities.

EDUCATION		
79 people	HABESHA PROJECT: COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS	28
\$534.520 USD	HABESHA AMERICAS	31
4001,020000	HABESHA CENTRAL AMERICA	20

















## 3.1. RESPONSE: HABESHA PROJECT, COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

Once in Mexico and enrolled in university, refugee students encounter significant financial pressures to cover both living and academic expenses. Prolonged asylum procedures often delay access to full rights and formal employment, further exacerbating their financial strain. Refugee students must adapt to a new academic environment—often in a different language and educational system. These challenges can jeopardize their ability to complete their studies. Sustained financial, legal, academic, and psychosocial support is essential to help them overcome these barriers and succeed in their higher education journey.

Aligned with the Global Compact on Refugees, USCRI's Habesha Project: Complementary Pathways provides long-term solutions to displacement through higher education in Mexico for young refugees from around the world. By mobilizing resources and building a network of leading universities, the project creates complementary pathways through scholarships and comprehensive support services, enabling students to pursue their academic goals.

In 2026, 30 refugee students will continue their higher education journeys through ongoing scholarship programs, with 12 students expected to graduate and transition into professional or further academic opportunities. Additionally, 16 students will receive follow-up support to help them navigate challenges and remain on track with their studies.

HABESHA PROJECT: COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS		
28 people	Continuing Students	16
\$205,297 USD	Graduating Students	12



## 3.2. RESPONSE: HABESHA AMERICAS

In recent years, Mexico has become a primary country of refuge, where many displaced youths have stayed in hopes of building a better future. Nevertheless, they face limited options to pursue higher education owing to financial barriers, challenges in the recognition of documentation from their home countries, and the overstretched capacity of local systems to integrate refugee students.

Habesha Americas expands access to higher education for young refugees already residing in Mexico. The program provides scholarships, living allowance, medical insurance, and mentoring to help them continue their university studies.

In 2026, the program will support 17 refugee students in continuing their studies, while 8 are expected to graduate and transition into employment or further education. Additionally, 6 new students will join the program, starting their higher education journeys with a foundation for success.

HABESHA AMERICAS		
31 people	New Students	6
\$108,021 USD	Continuing Students	17
\$100,021 035	Graduating Students	8







## 3.3. RESPONSE: HABESHA CENTRAL AMERICA

Among young returnees from Central America, many aspire to pursue higher education but face formidable challenges. Entrenched poverty and widespread income inequality severely limit educational access. Only a small fraction of students from the poorest households reaches university level, while the country struggles with low high school graduation rates and high dropout rates in older cohorts. These barriers push young returnees, and often their families, into cycles of underemployment or repeated irregular migration as they reenter communities with limited pathways to success.

In response, USCRI has prepared a plan to provide youth returnees in El Salvador and Honduras with opportunities to resume their higher education, promoting social and economic reintegration while empowering them to pursue their aspirations in their home communities. In 2026, the Habesha Central America program will support 10 youth returnees in El Salvador and 10 in Honduras to access higher education opportunities. While modest in scale, the initiative aims to open new pathways for returnees to build promising futures, transforming deportation from a setback into a launchpad for educational advancement.

HABESHA CENTRAL AMERICA		
20 people	El Salvador	10
\$221,202 USD	Honduras	10





## **KEY PRIORITY 4 - HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE:**

#### Providing urgent support to vulnerable returnees

As migration dynamics become increasingly complex in Central America, governments are grappling with how to provide meaningful reception support amid financial and institutional limitations, such as shortages in staff and infrastructure. Since February 2025, El Salvador has initiated its "Bienvenido a Casa" program, which connects newly returned individuals with essential services, including transportation, health screenings, hygiene kits, Wi-Fi access, and psychological support upon arrival.

In Honduras, the government has launched the "Hermano, Hermana, Vuelve a Casa" initiative, offering returnees modest cash aid, food vouchers, seed funding for entrepreneurship, and pathways to employment through training and job placement services.

Humanitarian agencies and civil society organizations relying heavily on U.S. foreign aid have been critical in filling the gap between limited state resources and the pressing needs of returnees. Yet, with drastic cuts in U.S. humanitarian assistance, funding for reintegration services faces increasing uncertainty. In response, USCRI is preparing a targeted humanitarian assistance initiative designed to ease the immediate financial burdens on returnees in both El Salvador and Honduras, promoting safe and dignified returns.





## 4.1. RESPONSE: CASH TRANSFERS FOR IMMEDIATE NEEDS AFTER DEPORTATION

In El Salvador, GAMI, the national authority in charge of articulating national institutions for the reception of Salvadorans returning to the country, is facing financial constraints to provide timely services to a growing number of people. While government efforts are significant, many experts agree that, at present, El Salvador cannot receive returnees adequately and assure them a dignified life.<sup>2</sup> In Honduras, the government has not released data on the program's outcomes; however, a funding gap is anticipated in the coming months due to the rising number of deportations from the United States.

Within this context, USCRI is preparing an emergency cash assistance program that will be implemented in collaboration with the national authorities of both countries. Cash assistance has proven to be an effective approach to delivering aid, as the most flexible assistance that enables recipients to prioritize and meet their most immediate needs. This type of assistance is usually preferred by recipients and offers greater dignity and choice.<sup>3</sup>

In 2026, USCRI El Salvador and Honduras will deliver direct financial support to 2,000 returnees through gift cards to recent arrivals. These gift cards will be distributed at reception centers in coordination with government authorities and community partners.

CASH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM		
2,000 people	El Salvador	1,000
\$115,000 USD	Honduras	1,000

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>El Mundo. (July 2025). Expertos urgen plan integral de atención para salvadoreños deportados desde Estados Unidos. Retrieved from: https://diario.elmundo.sv/politica/expertos-urgen-plan-integral-de-atencion-para-salvadorenos-deportados-desde-estados-unidos

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Calp Network. What are the benefits of Cash and Voucher Assistance in humanitarian action?

Retrieved from: https://www.calpnetwork.org/cash-and-voucher-assistance/benefits-of-cash-and-voucher-assistance/















#### **FUNDING NEEDS**

2026		\$1,347,286 USD
PROTECTION	Enabling legal pathways for international protection and integration initiatives for those stranded	\$348,086
Displaced people apply for legal status, protection, or asylum through pro bono legal support in Mexico		\$140,028
Structural barriers to integration in Mexico are reduced through community mobilization and development of university protocols		\$97,440
Young refugees access complementary education pathways to Mexico		\$110,618
LIVELIHOODS	Supporting returnees to overcome the challenges of deportation through workforce development and entrepreneurship	\$349,680
Youth returnees in El Salvador demonstrate improved employability through training and employment access		\$227,744
Returnee women in Honduras demonstrate improved employability through training and employment access		\$121,937
EDUCATION	Building futures for refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees through higher education opportunities	\$534,520
Refugee students in Mexico have continued access to higher education through complementary pathways		\$205,297
Refugee students in Mexico have continued access to higher education		\$108,021
Youth returnees in El Salvador access higher education opportunities		\$110,601
Youth returnees in Honduras access higher education opportunities		\$110,601
Humanitarian Assistance	Providing urgent support to vulnerable returnees	\$115,000
Returnees in Central America receive emergency cash assistance		\$115,000

#### **GLOSSARY**

**Migrants:** people who move from their usual place of residence to another, within or outside their country, mainly for economic, social, or family reasons. Unlike refugees, they are not necessarily fleeing persecution or violence but are seeking better life opportunities.

**Forcibly displaced persons:** individuals forced to leave their home or community due to armed conflict, widespread violence, human rights violations, or disasters. This term includes both internally displaced persons (within their own country) and those who cross international borders.

**Returnees:** people who return to their country of origin after having migrated or been displaced. Return can be voluntary, assisted, or forced (for example, following deportation). Their reintegration often involves economic, social, and security challenges.

**International protection:** a set of rules and mechanisms designed to safeguard the rights and security of people who cannot obtain adequate protection from their country of origin. It includes asylum, refugee status, resettlement, and other forms of complementary protection.

**Resettlement:** the process by which refugees are transferred, with international support, from a country where they sought protection to a third country that agrees to receive them permanently. It seeks to guarantee their safety and offer them a new opportunity in life.

**Refugees:** people who have fled their country because they face persecution, violence, conflict, or serious human rights violations. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, they are entitled to international protection, including non-refoulement.

**Asylum seekers:** people who have requested international protection in another country and are awaiting a decision on their application for asylum or refugee status. During the process, they enjoy certain basic protection rights.

**Safe third country:** a legal concept that means an asylum seeker can be sent to a country other than their country of origin if that third country is considered safe and guarantees access to effective international protection.

**Complementary pathways:** mechanisms other than asylum or traditional resettlement that allow people in need of international protection to access safety and opportunities in another country. They include educational scholarships, work programs, or family reunification.



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For over 100 years, USCRI has been there to protect, empower, and integrate migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees, wherever the need is greatest. Even as bridges of solidarity grow thinner, our journey must continue, and we are still standing alongside those in need. Today, with your partnership and support, we can ensure that every step leads to opportunity, resilience, and lasting change across Latin America and the Caribbean.

To contribute or explore partnership opportunities, please contact:

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#### **STILL STANDING**

Even when migration pathways falter and support systems weaken, migrants, refugees, and returnees are Still Standing. USCRI stands with them, offering unwavering support for their safety, new opportunities, and a future in which they can live with dignity and hope. This enduring dedication is the foundation of our 2026 Latin America Regional Funding Appeal, which outlines USCRI's strategic priorities in Latin America and the Caribbean and the financial resources required to fulfill these objectives. As we continue our mission to protect the rights and meet the needs of the people we serve, we remain committed to addressing the evolving challenges while harnessing the transformative potential of migration to build communities of opportunity across the region.



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