Report to Congress on the
Methodology and Benchmarks Used for Monitoring and Evaluating Programs
Seeking to Address the Root Causes of Migration in the Northern Triangle
Section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related
Programs Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. K, P.L.117-328) and
House Report 117-401

Consistent with Section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. K, P.L.117-328) and House Report 117-401, the Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) prepared this report on the methodology and benchmarks used for monitoring and evaluating programs seeking to address the root causes of migration in the Northern Triangle.

Introduction
State and USAID have collaborated with other departments and agencies to craft an interagency monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework for the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America (Root Causes Strategy, or RCS).

The RCS MEL Framework lays the groundwork for generating a body of evidence needed for tracking changes in the root causes of migration associated with RCS implementation – including, to the extent feasible, changes in migration itself – and for understanding how or why those changes are taking place. State and USAID, along with interagency partners, intend to use this body of evidence to guide strategic and programmatic decision making and to provide results data to Congress, public and private stakeholders, and the public.

The RCS MEL Framework applies lessons learned from past interagency strategy-level MEL efforts and points to use of state-of-the-art MEL tools and practices,

such as those outlined in existing legislation, policy, and guidance.[1] It reflects the complexity inherent in the RCS and its implementation in dynamic, often challenging environments, and in collaboration with host governments, private sector and civil society, and other donors. Importantly, the RCS MEL Framework also accounts for the short, medium, and long-term time horizons established in the RCS.[2]

The RCS MEL Framework was the basis for selecting the performance and country commitment (context) metrics (or indicators) that State and USAID used to report on progress in the first annual interagency RCS results report to Congress in July 2022, consistent with section 352(f) of the United States – Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act (Div. FF, P.L. 116-260).[3] The data will be collected annually, and State and USAID expect to provide the second annual RCS results report to Congress in June 2023.

Key elements of the RCS MEL Framework are summarized below.

Monitoring
Monitoring is the ongoing and systematic tracking of data and information relevant to policies, strategies, programs, projects, and/or activities. Monitoring of both performance and context helps decision makers and stakeholders determine whether desired results are occurring as expected during program, project, or activity implementation. Monitoring often relies on indicators – quantifiable measures of a characteristic or condition of people, institutions, systems, or processes – that may change over time. Relevant benchmarks or comparison points that assist with analyzing and interpreting monitoring data include annual and multi-year targets, previous years' results, and historical or regional averages.

State and USAID, in collaboration with other U.S. government departments and

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[1] For example, the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, the Foreign Assistance Transparency and Accountability Act, and related guidance issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) set standards and definitions for evaluation and learning. See M-21-27, Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans (June 30, 2021), available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/M-21-27.pdf, and *Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for Federal Departments and Agencies that Administer United States Foreign Assistance*, OMB M-18-04 (January 2018).

[2] For the purposes of the RCS MEL Framework, the Department and USAID have defined short-term as 1-2 years, medium-term as 3-5 years, and long-term as 6-10+ years.

[3] https://www.state.gov/u-s-efforts-to-address-the-root-causes-of-irregular-migration-in-central-america/

agencies, have linked three types of metrics or indicators to short, medium, and long-term results for RCS pillars and strategic objectives. They are:

- **Performance metrics** for monitoring the results of programs administered by the U.S. government and its implementers, compared to pre-established annual and multi-year targets and historical benchmarks. The metrics seek to identify outcomes, versus outputs, related to our policy goals. The performance metrics selected for monitoring and assessing RCS results are drawn from hundreds of agencies and program-specific performance indicators. Data for these metrics are typically collected and reported by implementers. Examples include:
    - Jobs and sales of supported private sector firms;
    - Youth reached through primary and secondary education support;
    - Youth completing vocational training and those obtaining new employment;
    - Private and public funds leveraged for agricultural producers;
    - Individuals, including children, reached through nutrition programs;
    - Justice sector personnel trained;
    - Anti-corruption training;
    - Training and support for human rights and labor rights defenders and journalists;
    - Civilian police and security officials trained;
    - Arrests of suspected criminals;
    - Value of illicit items seized; and
    - Individuals reached with gender-based violence prevention and response services.

- **Country commitment metrics** for assessing partner country commitment to achieving the objectives of the RCS, often using historical, regional, and peer-group averages for comparison (i.e., benchmarks). These may also be described as context indicators. Examples include:
    - Decrease in intentions to migrate;
    - Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita growth;
    - Youth unemployment;
    - World Justice Project Rule of Law Index;
    - Business Creation Environment (World Bank Enterprise Surveys);
    - Atlas of Economic Complexity (Harvard University), Export

       Sophistication;
- o Social Protection Coverage (International Labor Organization);
- o Bertelsmann Environmental Policy Index;
- o Severe Food Insecurity (Food and Agriculture Organization);
- o Diagonal Accountability and Liberal Democracy Indices (Varieties of Democracy);
- o World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders);
- o National homicide rate; and
- o Public perceptions and experiences related to safety, trust in police, and trust in judicial system.

- **Operational metrics** for monitoring *how* the RCS is being implemented, set against pre-identified annual and multi-year targets and historical benchmarks. Examples include:
  - o Sex (or gender) and age disaggregates for all metrics counting persons (targets and results);
  - o Reporting and use of geo-referenced activity location and results data;
  - o Amount of funding awarded to local organizations;
  - o Use of migration data to plan, geographically focus, implement, assess, and adjust activities; and
  - o Coordination among departments, agencies, or implementers in the same geographic area or among focus demographic groups.

Migration Data

There is no single source of complete migration data. Publicly reported aggregate border enforcement data by nationality are not sufficiently granular for RCS planning or implementation. To remedy this gap, State and USAID have developed a suite of migration data from multiple sources to support successful RCS implementation through:
- Strategic and programmatic planning (e.g., identification of areas of sub-national geographic and/or demographic focus);
- Estimating statistical relationships between migrant flows and social, economic, environmental, political, and other factors driving irregular migration, as well as the demographic characteristics of communities, households, and individuals;
- Monitoring subnational changes (i.e., at department and municipal levels) and

shifting programs as needed; and

- Assessing, to the extent feasible, department or municipal-level effects of the collective efforts of the U.S. government, partner governments, private sector, and civil society to address the root causes of migration.

Data sources include U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data[4] on sub-national origins and demographic characteristics of encountered Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans[5]; International Organization for Migration[6] and host government returnee data; and perception surveys, among others.

Evaluations, studies, and assessments
State, USAID, and other departments and agencies commission independent, third-party evaluations of programs contributing to RCS objectives, as well as studies and assessments.

As defined by the Evidence Act and related guidance issued by OMB, "evaluation" is "an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and efficiency." While each department/agency may have its own definitions, evaluations are categorized as formative, impact, and process/implementation evaluations.[7] Studies and assessments are distinct from evaluations. For example, USAID defines assessment as "a forward-looking examination of country or sector context to inform strategic planning or project or activity design, or an informal review of a strategy, project, or activity."

These evaluations, studies, and assessments provide critical insight into medium

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[4] See, for example, spotlight sections on intentions to emigrate and key drivers of emigration: Lupu, Noam, Mariana Rodríguez, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister (Eds.) 2021. Pulse of Democracy. Nashville, TN: LAPOP, available at https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/ab2021/2021_LAPOP_AmericasBarometer_2021_Pulse_of_Democracy.pdf

[5] On a limited basis beginning in 2015, USAID began receiving and analyzing origin data provided by CBP for unaccompanied child migrants to identify the departments and municipalities in Central America with high rates of out-migration. Since then, USAID has notably expanded this effort. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by USAID and CBP in March 2020 grants USAID regular access to additional data collected from Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Honduran migrants encountered by CBP officials at the U.S.-Mexico border. Importantly, the dataset includes de-identified data on migrants' city and country of birth and permanent residence. USAID does not share information on its program beneficiaries with CBP under this, or any other, agreement.

[6] Returnee data are available at https://infounitnca.iom.int/en/c-a-north-returns/

[7] See M-21-27, Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans (June 30, 2021), available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/M-21-27.pdf

and long-term results, help explain the factors contributing to or hindering achievement of those results, and typically provide recommendations for course corrections for ongoing strategies and programs, as well as evidence for design of new programs. In addition, the State and USAID plan to work with departments and agencies to synthesize evidence across programs, countries, or sectors, and to disseminate this evidence internally and externally.