



# A Better Way Forward

## *A New Approach to Regional Migration and Border Security*

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The United States is at a crossroads with border security. Attempts to reduce unauthorized migration through increased enforcement and new asylum restrictions have failed to sustainably control our nation's borders. Since 2014, a series of stopgap policies have resulted in cyclical crises that have strained American cities and reduced public trust in the immigration system. Despite attempts by three presidential administrations, our current system has proven incapable of efficiently screening and processing asylum seekers with a legal claim to stay in the United States and deporting migrants who lack a legal basis to stay. This system has forced American cities to manage the arrival of asylum seekers with limited federal support and made the United States dependent on other countries to manage our border in the face of record high global displacement. The U.S. Government's failure to modernize the asylum system and expand both temporary and permanent legal pathways to the United States has ensured that no President has the appropriate tools to secure the border.

**Our nation's immigration laws have failed to keep up with the dramatic rise in global displacement. Americans deserve better.**

**FWD.us believes that U.S. policymakers need an ambitious, integrated policy response to the complicated drivers of unauthorized migration—one that does not merely react once people have reached our border, but instead addresses the forces and processes that draw people to the border in the first place.** Unlike other major democracies facing the threat of population decline, the United States is in a fortunate position to benefit from the desire of so many immigrants seeking to live, find safety, or work in this country. Crafting solutions to reduce unauthorized migration by increasing legal channels for future migrants, modernizing asylum processing, and enhancing security operations along the border will give the United States the ability to harness the economic benefits of migration without the accompanying political backlash dividing communities at home and abroad.

The 2024 presidential election revealed immigration and border security to be decisive issues for the American electorate. Now policymakers in both parties have a choice: they can maintain the same failed policy frameworks of the past and rely on other countries to prevent the next border crisis, or they can choose to embrace and scale up modern, evidence-based policy interventions that are more effective at preventing unauthorized migration and increasing border security. **If either political party hopes to truly secure the southern border**, policymakers must widen the aperture of the current policy debate, learn from the past decade of policies that failed to manage unauthorized migration, and build political support for a more effective set of solutions that allows the United States to benefit from a modern immigration system.

A secure border should have the infrastructure and personnel capable of facilitating trade and travel, disrupting illegal smuggling activity, while also processing asylum seekers through an orderly appointment process. Until a new approach is taken, the sheer logistics of trying to manage increasingly high numbers of migrants at the border through outdated asylum processes and border infrastructure will break down our immigration system further, cause strain on receiving communities in the United States, and shrink the political space for much-needed reforms to the broader immigration system. Policymakers should consider the solutions outlined in this framework to finally build a system capable of relieving long-term pressure on the asylum system, reducing the number of unauthorized migrants at our southern border, and providing the government flexibility to respond to short-term migration emergencies. **This paper recommends a better way forward with six major policy interventions:**

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To reduce unauthorized migration, U.S. policymakers should prioritize the six pillars below, which should be implemented together to avoid past government failures. Prior efforts to address the complex challenge of irregular migration at our southern border have shown us that focusing on deterrence, asylum restrictions, or any single policy intervention without an integrated foreign and domestic policy approach provides only temporary decreases in unauthorized migration. Without the focused implementation of each pillar, the southern border will continue to be overwhelmed in the same manner it has been for the past decade.

## 1 Reduce Irregular Cross-Border Movement in the Region

Successful migration management requires a targeted and strategic foreign policy response. The United States must address the drivers of displacement in order to decrease the number of migrants seeking to make irregular cross-border movements.

## 2 Expand Access to Humanitarian and Labor Pathways Closer to Countries of Origin

The United States must work domestically and diplomatically to provide irregular migrants access to jobs and humanitarian protection throughout the region, helping them avoid crossing multiple countries to find work or safety. This strategy should prioritize the protection of people lacking any existing legal protections or job opportunities, as opposed to people who have already gained some temporary protections in a receiving country.

## 3 Increase Legal Pathways to the United States

The U.S. Government must identify and create new legal pathways that fulfill key U.S. interests, incentivize irregular migrants to use immigration pathways outside of the U.S. asylum system, and provide accessible immigration options away from the dangerous land-based route to the United States.

## 4 Modernize Border Security Infrastructure and Asylum Processing

The United States requires a modern border infrastructure that is fully equipped to intercept security threats at ports of entry, facilitate lawful trade and travel, receive asylum seekers through an orderly appointment process, and protect border communities from security threats.

## 5 Reform the U.S. Asylum System

Until we achieve a fast and fair adjudication process for asylum seekers, the asylum system will continue to be overwhelmed and public opinion will continue to turn against it. The U.S. Government must modernize asylum law, clear the immigration court backlog, and address the inefficiencies in our systems.

## 6 Develop a Federal Resettlement Process for Asylum Seekers

The U.S. Government can ensure that once the United States accepts an asylum seeker, they are given work authorization to support themselves economically. Accepted asylum seekers can then be matched with a community that has resources to support them, to prevent displacement of American workers and other community residents.