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## Key Points for Rebuilding a Better Regional Asylum System

### Recent US Immigration Policies Obstruct Mexico's Potential to Lead in Regional Refugee Protection

As the world's 10<sup>th</sup> most populous country and 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy, Mexico has always been a leader in Latin American migration issues. A party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, with refugee rights enshrined in its Constitution, Mexico has long served as a safe haven for those fleeing violence and persecution in neighboring countries. Importantly, Mexico has codified an expanded refugee definition, protecting both those fleeing individualized persecution as well as families fleeing generalized violence and human rights abuses.

With the current US administration effectively eliminating the possibility of seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border, however, Mexico's asylum system ground to a halt with overwhelming demand. **Between 2015 and 2019, asylum petitions in Mexico increased nearly 2000%**, with the largest growth in 2018 and 2019. While violence and human rights violations in Central America, Venezuela, and Cuba force thousands to flee their homes, US policies including metering, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), and the CDC Title 42 expulsions keep vulnerable families stranded in dangerous parts of Mexico. A significant proportion of the families who would have sought and received protection in the US are now forced to remain in Mexico.

Whereas Mexico has an opportunity to fulfill its historic role as a regional protection actor, it cannot shoulder this burden alone. The US, by shirking its global responsibility and violating its own refugee laws, has destabilized one of the most promising asylum systems in the region. **Currently, nearly 80,000 asylum petitions remain unprocessed in Mexico, and refugees, including many of Asylum Access' clients, wait more than a year to receive decisions**, often in dangerous and precarious living situations.

### A Biden Administration Can Rebuild the US Asylum while Strengthening Protection in Mexico

A new administration has the opportunity to both restore the US's role as a leader on refugee issues, and to support the Mexican asylum system to ensure that those who would benefit from protection in Mexico are able to receive it. We are heartened by Vice

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President Biden's commitment to ending MPP, metering, and other restrictive asylum policies. We further encourage a future Biden administration to:

1. Devote increased technical and financial assistance to bolster the Mexican asylum system and support humanitarian assistance to refugees in Mexico;
2. End all US policies which prevent refugees from seeking asylum at the border;
3. Promote a foreign policy that encourages humane, rights-based responses to migration challenges, eliminates the detention of refugees and asylum seekers in the region, and de-militarizes borders;
4. Focus on regional protection models for unaccompanied children, facilitating family reunification and ensuring that all government actions are based on the best interest of the child;
5. Withdraw from all Asylum Cooperative Agreements (ACAs);
6. Address the root causes of displacement, in particular by focusing on economic development, violence prevention, and good-governance in the Northern Triangle.

It is hard to overstate the catastrophic impact current US asylum policies have caused for refugees and asylum seekers in the region. Undoing this damage will require significant, concerted effort of governments, civil society, and multi-lateral institutions. As the largest provider of refugee legal assistance in Mexico, Asylum Access is eager to partner in these efforts to rebuild a better regional protection environment.

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