CGI 2026 EDUCATION & THE FUTURE OF WORK -- WORKING SESSION

After the Border: *Building Workforce Pathways for Displaced Talent*

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Public attention has focused intensely on deportation, detention, border enforcement, and the human costs of migration policy. Far less is known about what happens afterward. Who are the young people returning or remaining in Mexico? What skills, work experience, education, and aspirations do they bring? And what determines whether they reconnect to opportunity or fall through the cracks?

Most conversations about migration end at the border. This one begins there.

Drawing on new research by the International Youth Foundation (IYF), this working session will examine what happens after return and how workforce systems can better respond. Conducted over six months, the study included 392 usable surveys, interviews with young people in mobility and frontline organizations, labor market analysis, and ecosystem mapping to better understand the workforce reintegration experiences of young people ages 18-35 returning to or remaining in Mexico.

The research offers a rare workforce-focused view of a population typically discussed through the lens of border management or humanitarian response. It found that many young people in mobility bring significant assets, including work experience, transferable skills, adaptability, and resilience. Yet those assets are often poorly documented, uncertified, or disconnected from labor market opportunities. In the study, nearly 80% of respondents held no certification, despite the fact that most reported skills and experience that could potentially be validated and recognized.

For many young people, return is also a pivotal workforce transition. Reintegration often coincides with critical moments in education, training, certification, and employment. When those transitions occur amid return, deportation, transit, or prolonged waiting, the risks of exclusion increase, including interrupted education, underemployment, lack of documentation, loss of networks, and limited access to opportunity.

The findings suggest that the challenge is not simply the absence of skills, support services, or job opportunities. It is the disconnection among them. Existing systems tend to focus on reception, temporary accommodation, and immediate assistance, while pathways to certification, workforce development, job placement, and long-term economic mobility remain fragmented.

The study also highlights the importance of stabilization and protection. Economic urgency, lack of documentation, weak support networks, trauma, and housing insecurity can increase vulnerability to exploitation and criminal networks, making workforce reintegration not only an economic imperative but also a protection strategy.

These findings raise a broader question with relevance far beyond Mexico: what would it take to transform reintegration from a collection of disconnected services into a coordinated pathway toward economic inclusion?

The research points to a practical opportunity. While no single institution can address the full range of challenges facing young people in mobility, the findings suggest that greater impact may come from connecting what already exists: stabilization services, skills recognition, certification, employer engagement, workforce training, and long-term support. Building on these insights, IYF is exploring how coordinated workforce pathways could help young people translate existing capabilities into economic opportunity and safer futures.

Building on IYF's research, participants will explore how governments, employers, philanthropy, education providers, and civil society can connect stabilization, skills recognition, certification, career navigation, employer engagement, training, and post-placement support into more coherent workforce pathways. The discussion will focus on practical opportunities for partnership, resource alignment, and innovation that can help test and scale solutions across different return and displacement contexts.