

## The Fight against Violence & Malnutrition in Guatemala



A local health worker in Guatemala measures four year-old Marcos, who is nearly five inches less than the lowest recommended height for his age.

Photo credit: Global Post/Arturo Godoy

Megan McAdams, a Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, recently wrote [an analysis](#) on how the Guatemalan government might reduce the rampant crime and violence that plagues the country. McAdams suggests that the new regime focus on the larger issues of education and employment and not on the short-term benefits of augmenting the police force to improve security.

The average schooling of Guatemalan citizens is just four years. Throughout the region, poor public education has given rise to widespread youth unemployment, fueling the mounting problem of gang violence.

Improving access to education and providing meaningful job opportunities for graduates could promote equality on a national scale and reduce crime by keeping youth in school and employed.

Another [recent article](#) on Guatemala tackles a different but equally pressing concern in the region: malnutrition. Last week, President Otto Pérez Molina launched a plan called Zero Hunger (Hambre Cero), aimed at beating the

chronic malnutrition suffered by one out of two Guatemalan children under five. The President announced that the program is to reach more than one million children, with a goal of reducing the malnutrition rate to 10 percent by the end of his term in 2016. The program includes the promotion of business networks for small farmers, the production of tortillas with fortified flour, and cash transfer programs granting stipends to low-income families.

Social activists and experts have criticized the plan, arguing that any approach to fighting poverty and malnutrition must address the underlying causes.

“The offensive against malnutrition should focus on the causes, like the lack of land among *campesinos*, or the imposition of an export-oriented model that relegates and discourages production of food for national consumption,” said Rony Palacios of the National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty in Guatemala.